



## St. Monica Early Learning Center Most Commonly Asked Questions:

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

### Academics

1. What are Centers?
  - Centers are 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. This way, student materials stay somewhat contained in a designated area, and children become familiar with where things go when it is time to clean up. We expect that the room can be cleaned in under 9 minutes. This period lasts 2 hours a day and gives students the opportunities they need to negotiate, cooperate, interact, and grow with children their age.
2. What is the specialist or special classes offered to the youngest St. Monica students?
  - PreK students attend weekly music and P.E. out of the classroom. Handwriting, phonics, and math are taught during the day through classroom routines.
3. What are the benefits of the open art center?
  - Your children will bring home wonderfully creative artwork they make at school using items from the "junk bucket." 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, spatial awareness, planning and executing, artistic representation, fine motor exercise, and ultimately trains them to think "outside the box," a skill that we value at St. Monica.
4. What are academic groups?
  - A small group is one of the day's core academic periods (though not the only one). Students must sit with a teacher in groups of 3-4 to complete a writing task, phonics, and math each week.
  - Whole group academics are held once a day in the 3/4 class and twice daily in the 4.6/5 class. These periods are for our whole group instruction with the Slingerland and Saxon-K programs.
5. How often do you change the dramatic play, and do you allow dress up?
  - Dramatic play themes change 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 typically change the theme every 3-4 weeks. Some of our dramatic play themes have use costumes; however, we do not use hats.
6. Do you do any crafts?
  - We do 1-3 religion crafts a month to reinforce and assess recent religion lessons' knowledge. Crafting allows children to practice following multiple steps and directions to get to a result.

## School Community

7. Preschool doors open at 8:00 AM daily. Full-day class is dismissed from the classroom at 3:00 PM (2:00 PM Wed.). Early Release students are dismissed from the classroom at noon before lunch is served after school care is available to preschool students and runs from the end of class until 6 PM.
8. How often do they have religion classes?
  - All PreK students attend the First Friday Mass and Holy days of obligation during the school week with their classroom teachers. Twenty minutes of weekly religion lessons are taught using the Archdiocese recommended curriculum, God Made Me and God Made the World. These are 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 students also participate in Catechesis of the Good Shepherd with weekly visits to the Atrium, a quiet and reverent space for young children to learn about God's love and practice self-control and internal prayers. This visit starts with weekly 15 minutes sessions and will increase slowly to 90 minutes by Spring.
9. 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 making better choices next time. Time outs are only used if misbehavior is reoccurring or could cause harm to other children.
10. 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, do their daily jobs, wash hands, get a chair, pencils, journals, and greet the teacher. 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.
11. How do you communicate with your parents?
  - A monthly classroom calendar is sent out, giving important information. 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 have pressing concerns or curiosities. Parent-teacher conferences are held in October and for those entering kindergarten, an optional conference in the Spring.
  - All students have a parent mailbox that sits outside of the classroom. Families need to check these cubbies daily for communication.
12. 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 of small gifts.

13. 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 39 students come together to build a sense of community. They are together for service projects, some religious activities, Mass, Wednesday recess, and library.

14. Do PreK students wear uniforms?

- Yes, they do. Uniform information can be found on our school website. Girls wear 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

15. Potty training: all students must be fully potty trained before entering the program in August.

Children must be able to dress and undress themselves, get themselves onto and from an adult-sized toilet, wipe themselves and wash their hands.

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

- Parents may pack a lunch from home or order from our hot lunch program, The Lunch Ladies. After registering, you will be able to create an online account for hot lunch ordering.

17. 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.

18. 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, a ball field, observation materials, and gardening. Students are outside for an hour daily.

19. Who provides the snack, how is it offered?

- Each parent is assigned a week to provide a snack for the whole program, both classrooms. You are encouraged to shop with your child, so they can feel proud to bring a snack in and share it 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.

20. 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 can store what it learned to recall the new information later. Resting gives the brain time to grow and become stronger, which is why preschool-aged children are recommended 10 hours of sleep every night.