



Early Education Program Standards and Benchmarks 2025

MISSION AND CATHOLIC IDENTITY

STANDARD 1: An excellent Catholic early education program is driven and guided by a clearly communicated mission that embraces a Catholic identity that includes gospel values, a focus on the Eucharist, and a commitment to communal faith formation, academic excellence, missionary discipleship, and service.

1.1 The director ensures that the mission statement, vision statement, and philosophy statement includes a commitment to Catholic Identity.

1.2 The director uses the mission statement as the foundation for all planning.

1.3 The director regularly clarifies and reviews the foundational statements (mission, vision, and philosophy), gathering input from stakeholders. This is included in the annual review of the program's effectiveness.

1.4 The foundational statements are visible in public places and contained in official documents (such as handbooks).

1.5 The foundational statements are included on all staff meeting agendas.

STANDARD 2: An excellent Catholic early education program adhering to mission provides an exemplary academic program for religious education and catechesis in the Catholic faith, set within a total academic curriculum that integrates faith, culture, and life.

2.1 Religious education curriculum and instruction meets the religious education requirements and standards of the diocese.

2.2 Religious instruction and materials are an appropriate part of the program.

2.3 Staff members who teach religion meet diocesan requirements for catechetical preparation.

2.4 Catholic culture and faith are expressed through a variety of learning experiences, materials, and displays.

2.5 The church's social teachings are developmentally appropriate elements of the program.

STANDARD 3: An excellent Catholic early education program adhering to mission provides opportunities both within and outside the classroom for Christ-centered student faith formation, participation in liturgical and communal prayer, and action in service of missionary discipleship and social justice.

3.1 Children are offered regular opportunities to learn about and experience the nature and importance of prayer.

3.2 The early education program participates in Christian service programs to promote the understanding of service and social justice.

3.3 Every student experiences role models of faith and service among the staff. Staff treats colleagues, children and their families with equal respect and consideration regardless of race, religion, family background, or culture.

STANDARD 4: An excellent Catholic early education program adhering to mission provides opportunities for Christ-centered adult faith formation and action in service of missionary discipleship and social justice.

4.1 The staff are provided spiritual experiences on a regular basis.

4.2 The early education program staff assists parents in their role as the primary educators of their children. The director and teachers support the parents as they make decisions and advocate for their children.

4.3 Every staff member visibly supports the faith life of the early education program community.

GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP

STANDARD 5: An excellent Catholic early education program has a collaborative governance structure for development and oversight of the early education program's fidelity to mission, academic excellence, and operational vitality.

5.1 The program has a clearly defined governance structure, complete with job descriptions. (Schools with EEPs must include responsibilities of the director versus the principal, if the job is divided.)

5.2.a. The director systematizes the policies of the early education program's operations to ensure fidelity to mission, and continuity and sustainability through leadership successions. Staff and parent handbooks contain policies and details regarding operations, expectations, and responsibilities.

5.2.b. The program has a leadership and staff retention and succession plan in place.

5.3 The director maintains a constructive and beneficial relationship with the bishop and the superintendent that is marked by mutual trust, close cooperation, and continuing dialogue.

5.4 The director maintains a constructive and beneficial relationship with the pastor and the school principal, if the parish has a school, that is marked by mutual trust, close cooperation, and continuing dialogue.

5.5 The pastor (or school principal or superintendent, where applicable) ensures an annual evaluation of the early education program's director is completed.

STANDARD 6: An excellent Catholic early education program has a qualified director to realize and implement the early education program's mission and vision.

6.1 The Director is on site and meets state and diocesan requirements for early education program leadership preparation and licensing. The Director:

- a. Is a minimum of 21 years of age
- b. Holds a director's credential from Florida DCF or an FLDOE administrator's certificate
- c. Has obtained a minimum of 9 credit hours of college course work in administration, leadership or management
- d. Has obtained a minimum of 24 credit hours of specialized college course work in early education, child development, elementary education or special education.
- e. Has a minimum of 2 years of experience as a lead teacher or director of a program with children whose ages are represented in the early education program for which the director has oversight

OR

- 1. Within the first year of hire has completed the DCF 40 hour introductory course in child care and 5 hours of early literacy and language development; **AND**
- 2. Within the second year of hire has completed the DCF 5-hour course on Implementing the Florida Standards in the Preschool Classrooms: 3 Year Old to Kindergarten, the DCF 5-hour course on Implementing the Florida Standards in the Infant and Toddler Classrooms: Birth through 2 Years Old (if the program has children under age three), and the DCF 2-hour course on Developmentally Appropriate Classroom Management.

6.2 The director assumes responsibility of the day to day operations of the program, maintains program policies, and monitors the program's compliance with applicable requirements, including health and safety, consulting with the diocese and experts.

6.3 The director takes responsibility for the development and oversight of personnel, including hiring, professional growth, faith formation and formal assessment of staff in compliance with diocesan policy. The formal assessment takes place annually. The director completes classroom observations and walk-throughs on a regular basis. Staff members complete annual self-evaluations. The director assists the teachers in creating individual professional development plans (IPDPs). IPDPs are updated annually.

6.4.a. The director has plans in place for the use of qualified substitute teachers to ensure the integrity of the program, including maintaining the staff student ratios at all times.

6.4.b. In the case of a VPK program, the director has an additional teacher or substitute with the VPK endorsement who could fill in long term (two weeks or more), if needed.

6.5.a. The director designates a qualified person to assume leadership and responsibility of the early education program in the event of the Director's absence. The person shall be at least 21 years of age.

6.5.b. In the case of a VPK program, a second person on staff has a VPK director credential.

6.6 The director holds regular staff meetings to support the professional development plan, to build strong relationships, to promote communication, and for the operational vitality of the program. The director communicates with staff in person daily and via newsletters and/or electronic means throughout the week.

6.7 The director engages in ongoing training and self-evaluation to ensure the continued execution of responsibilities.

- a. Obtains a minimum of 45 clock hours during the first year of employment, especially as it relates to Florida requirements.
- b. Obtains an additional 10 clock hours (24 clock hours for Gold Seal programs) per year of continuing professional learning, provided by a qualified entity in such areas as approved by the diocese, including administration, behavior management, child abuse reporting and compliance, child care center management, child development, communication skills, curriculum, cultural sensitivity, evaluation, health & safety, inclusion (meeting child's needs), language & literacy, mathematical thinking, medication administration, modeling of Gospel values, nutrition, parent partnership, personnel development and management, social-emotional development

6.8 The program has at least one membership in an early education association at the local, state, and/or national level. The director, teachers, and/or instructional support staff attend early education conferences when feasible. (In Gold Seal programs, directors, teachers, and instructional support staff all have memberships in early education associations and attend conferences when available.)

ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

STANDARD 7: An excellent Catholic early education program has a clearly articulated program with curriculum aligned with relevant standards, and implemented through effective instruction. Curriculum is enhanced with gospel values and Catholic identity.

7.1 The curriculum standards, instruction, and materials meet diocesan requirements and follow the standards in the Florida Early Learning and Developmental Standards from the Division of Early Learning. The curriculum standards guide the development of lesson plans. Over the course of the year the lesson plans address all of the objectives within the domains of physical development, approaches to learning, social and emotional development, language and literacy, mathematical thinking, scientific inquiry, social studies, and creative expression through the arts.

- a. Diocesan approved formal curriculum materials are in use. All teachers and assistants receive ongoing training in its use.
- b. These materials and the Florida standards are used as the framework for lesson plans. The lesson plans focus on activities and not worksheets.
- c. Lesson plans and activities include opportunities for language and literacy development, such as looking at books, listening to stories, and singing songs.
- d. Lesson plans and activities include opportunities for mathematical thinking, such as counting, measuring, and making patterns.
- e. Lesson plans and activities include scientific inquiry, such as the use of sand and water tables, outdoor exploration, and motion exploration.
- f. Lesson plans and activities include opportunities for physical development, such as active play, personal care routines, gross motor perception, and fine motor development.
- g. Lesson plans and activities include opportunities for approaches to learning, such as eagerness, curiosity, persistence, creativity, and inventiveness.

- h. Lesson plans and activities include opportunities for social and emotional development, such as emotional functioning, managing emotions, building and maintaining relationships, and sense of identity and belonging.
- i. Lesson plans and activities include opportunities for social studies, such as culture, individuals and groups, spaces, places, and environment, time, civic ideals, economics, and technology.
- j. Lesson plans and activities include opportunities for creative expression through the arts, such as sensory art, music, creative movement, imaginative play, and appreciation of the arts.

7.2.a. All age groups have a daily schedule. This schedule provides time and support for transitions, includes both indoor and outdoor experiences, and is responsive to a child's need to rest or be active.

7.2.b. Activities are age appropriate and include choice and spontaneity, quiet and active play, individual and group options, opportunities for fine and gross motor skill development, teacher-initiated and child-initiated tasks, play-based learning centers, and limited age-appropriate electronic media use that is education based for 3 and 4-year-old children only.

7.2.c. The arrival and morning routine foster independence.

7.3 Instruction is designed to engage and motivate all children, addressing the diverse needs and capabilities of each child.

- a. Teachers have clearly defined goals for each child. Activities are prolonged for children who show interest and adapted for individual children based on goals and to enhance their learning.
- b. Curiosity and independence are encouraged. Teachers use this to pose problems and facilitate growth of new skills.
- c. Teachers use scaffolding, feedback loops, encouragement, affirmations, and prompting thought process techniques to assist children as they learn key curriculum concepts.
- d. Children have opportunities to create, analyze, and make connections during intentional experiences to master key curriculum concepts.
- e. Teachers use a balance of individual, small group, and whole class (circle time) instruction, with a focus on learning centers.
- f. Teachers and assistants are engaged with the children during both indoor and outdoor activities.

7.4.a. Staff create classroom environments that help children extend their learning and includes the display of recent children's works. Displays are at children's eye level. Classrooms and classroom materials are arranged to stimulate learning and to encourage exploration and experimentation by both large and small groups of children. Children can easily access materials from easy to reach open shelving. The daily routine encourages children to become independent and to accept personal responsibility.

7.4.b. Children use play-based learning centers daily. These are arranged to separate active and quiet play activities and allow for normal noise levels and conversation. Children use the centers individually or in small groups to learn to play/work together. Children have choice regarding the centers. The materials in the centers are changed at least seasonally.

7.4.c. There are a rich variety of classroom materials that are age appropriate and aligned to the formal curriculum in use. Children are able to use materials for art, dance, dramatic play, exploration, music, problem solving, and science. The materials promote fine and gross motor development.

7.5 a. Children with any special needs, such as allergies, medical conditions, learning differences, etc., have their needs met as fully as possible.

7.5.b. The child support team approach is used to meet with parents and teachers to create an individualized plan addressing the specific needs. Meetings continue throughout the implementation.

7.5.c. If it is determined that the child would benefit from an outside professional evaluation, the director begins that process and follows up on the necessary next steps.

7.5.d. The program has materials, furnishings, and experiences to meet the child's needs or the items are adapted.

7.6.a. Teacher-child interaction is designed to promote and support social-emotional growth. Individual attention is given to all children throughout the day. Appropriate behavior is modeled, comfort is given and redirection is used. Children learn to play and work with other children under the guidance of their teachers. They are given opportunities and taught how to build friendships and respect each other. Teachers watch for withdrawn, bullied, or excluded students. Students help make plans and activities, when developmentally appropriate.

7.6.b. Children have opportunities to begin to develop the affective dimension of learning skills and virtues, such as a sense of belonging, self-confidence, responsibility, enjoyment, perseverance, patience, kindness, etc.

7.6.c. Children have opportunities to learn how to cooperate, resolve conflicts, regulate emotions, listen, and share.

7.6.d. Teachers and assistants interact individually with each child every day. Children are greeted by name. Eye contact is made throughout the day and clear support language is used.

7.6.e. In classrooms with infants and toddlers, teachers are responsive to all of their needs. Teachers talk to the children face to face, especially during care routines.

7.7 The director directs the development and continuous improvement of the curriculum and instruction. The director reviews lesson plans weekly.

7.8 The teachers meet diocesan, state, and/or national requirements for early education program employment, preparation, and credentials. Each teacher:

- a. is at least 21 years of age
- b. has a minimum of a CDA or a Florida Child Care Professional Credential
- c. has appropriate training and experience to carry out his/her role in the early education program; participates in training and professional learning during the first year of employment, this includes, but is not limited to: specific requirements of the school and appropriate to the age of children taught, behavior management, child abuse reporting and compliance, child development, communication skills, curriculum, cultural sensitivity, evaluation, health & safety, inclusion

(meeting child's needs), language & literacy, mathematical thinking, medication administration, modeling of Gospel values, nutrition, parent partnership, social-emotional development

- d. within the first year of employment, completes: the DCF 40 hour introductory course in child care, 5 hours of early literacy and language development, and 8 hours of training in serving children with disabilities
- e. completes at least 10 hours (24 hours for Gold Seal programs) of professional learning annually, this includes, but is not limited to: specific requirements of the school and appropriate to the age of children taught, behavior management, child abuse reporting and compliance, child development, communication skills, curriculum, cultural sensitivity, evaluation, health & safety, inclusion (meeting child's needs), language & literacy, mathematical thinking, medication administration, modeling of Gospel values, nutrition, parent partnership, social-emotional development

7.9 The instructional support staff meets diocesan, state, and/or national requirements for early education program employment, preparation, and credentials. Each staff member:

- a. is at least 18 years of age
- b. has at least a high school diploma or a GED
- c. has appropriate training and experience to carry out his/her role in the early education program; participates in training and professional learning during the first year of employment, this includes, but is not limited to: specific requirements of the school and appropriate to the age of children taught, behavior management, child abuse reporting and compliance, child development, communication skills, curriculum, cultural sensitivity, evaluation, health & safety, inclusion (meeting child's needs), language & literacy, mathematical thinking, medication administration, modeling of Gospel values, nutrition, parent partnership, social-emotional development
- d. To take effect August 2027: Within the first year of employment, completes: the DCF 40 hour introductory course in child care, 5 hours of early literacy and language development, and 8 hours of training in serving children with disabilities. (Current instructional support staff must meet this by August 2027, as well.)
- e. completes at least 10 hours (24 hours for Gold Seal programs) of professional learning annually, this includes, but is not limited to: specific requirements of the school and appropriate to the age of children taught, behavior management, child abuse reporting and compliance, child development, communication skills, curriculum, cultural sensitivity, evaluation, health & safety, inclusion (meeting child's needs), language & literacy, mathematical thinking, medication administration, modeling of Gospel values, nutrition, parent partnership, social-emotional development

7.10 The volunteers meet diocesan and state requirements for early education program volunteers. Each volunteer:

- a. is at least 16 years of age
- b. is always in the line of sight of the supervising personnel and are not included in staff student ratio.
- c. volunteers less than 10 hours per month (if volunteers exceed the 10 hours per month, they are required to meet all of the instructional support staff requirements)

7.11 New teachers will be assigned a mentor. Any staff member serving as a mentor or supervising other teachers must be approved by the diocese. (In Gold Seal programs these mentors or supervisors must have clinical education training on his/her college transcript and/or participate in the FCC province clinical education training program. *Clinical ed training courses must include topics in mentoring, adult supervision, use of curriculum, assessment, and leadership development at a minimum.)

STANDARD 8: An excellent Catholic early education program uses developmentally appropriate assessment methods to screen for the development of the child, document student learning and to review program effectiveness.

8.1 Age appropriate research based developmental screening is completed within 30 calendar days after the child is enrolled in the program.

8.2.a. Ongoing assessment of children's progress takes place and is used to plan activities for individual children and for groups of children.

8.2.b. The assessment is both formal and informal. It includes observations.

8.2.c. Results of these assessments are used to update individual student goals, changing adding to the curriculum, as needed.

8.3 Information regarding developmental screening, assessment, and observations are shared with the parents at orientation/initial meetings and in the handbook. Parents of the children in the program receive communication regarding their child's developmental progress at least twice per year. Parent conferences are held at least twice a year. Summaries of the results of child observation forms used during scheduled observations of the child are shared with parents, and parents are encouraged to participate in the goal-setting process for the child.

8.4.a. Significant changes in a child's pattern of behavior and/or physical condition are reported to the parents, documented, and placed in the child's file. If this notification happens electronically, the director must document the parent's receipt of the notice.

8.4.b. If these changes or concerns are related to the child's developmental progress, the teacher and program personnel meet with parents to discuss the observations, recommendations, and next steps.

STANDARD 9: An excellent Catholic early education program provides opportunities and services aligned with the mission which enrich the program and support the development of student and family life.

9.1 The director plans and implements regularly scheduled parent programs for all parents. Opportunities for parent involvement in the program are promoted, as are community programs and events. There are specific gatherings for parents to get to know each other, as well as times to support the early education program.

9.2.a. To enrich and extend the curriculum, the program includes guest speakers and programs and field trips when appropriate. Policies are in place that are in alignment with DCF and diocesan requirements.

9.2.b. Each year the director contacts community resources in the arts, including but not limited to theaters, museums, musicians, and artists, to come to the early education program and/or to send information to parents regarding the events.

9.3.a. The director oversees the disciplinary policies and procedures. These are communicated to the parents. Corporal punishment or legally questionable practices are prohibited. Discipline methods are not severe, humiliating, or frightening to children or associated with food, rest, and/or toileting. Children are not denied opportunities for physical activity as a form of punishment.

9.3.b. Teachers infuse the Catholic culture into the classroom and behavior management. As appropriate, children help make classroom rules. Rules are implemented in a consistent and kind way. Redirection and individual responses are used. Positive responses and programs are used. Teachers are alert for potential issues.

9.3.c. Children have a routine with a balance of activities to lessen any potential disruptive behavior.

9.4 The director and staff strive to form a strong partnership with parents. This is accomplished through open communication, policies, and programs.

- a. The director arranges for an orientation or meets with families once they have registered. Teachers also meet with families soon after the child has been registered. Details of the program are shared with families and families are encouraged to share information with the teacher and director. These conversations continue at arrival, departure, and conferences.
- b. Parents receive a handbook with all of the details and expectations of the program. They also receive newsletters, emails, and/or texts from the director on a regular basis.
- c. The director has created a welcoming environment from the outside of the building to through the entrance and into the classrooms. Parents have a specific means to sign their child in and out each day.
- d. A parent bulletin board is prominent and contains items such as calendars, menus, and announcements. There is a general board of information, along with specific classroom parent information boards. (If parents do not enter the school or center, a digital bulletin board with this information is provided.)
- e. Teachers communicate with parents daily through formal and/or informal means. For children under age three this includes a daily paper or electronic report with at least information regarding meals and diapering/toileting.

OPERATIONAL VITALITY

STANDARD 10: An excellent Catholic early education program develops, carries forward, and monitors a feasible three- to five-year financial plan that includes both current and projected budgets.

10.1 The director, in collaboration with the pastor or superintendent (and the principal, where applicable), ensures that appropriately developed financial plans and budgets are implemented using current and effective business practices, as approved by the diocese, as a means of providing good stewardship of resources and program stability. The finance committee reviews the financial plans in parish early education programs. The budget is submitted to the diocese for audit and approval.

10.2 Financial plans include the delineation of costs for key target areas such as instruction, administration, professional development, facilities, equipment, technology, program enhancement, benchmarked compensation/salary scales, and other health benefits and retirement costs, and other planned projects. The financial plans are projected out 3 to 5 years, based on the current annual operating budget.

10.3 Current and projected budgets include a statement of the actual and projected revenue sources and a statement of actual and projected expenditures including the actual cost per child. The budget to actual is reviewed on a monthly basis by the director and bookkeeper.

10.4 Annually published financial reports include information on the operation of the early education program.

10.5 The director provides families access to information about appropriate state and local programs that assist parents with early education costs.

10.6 The parish maintains adequate liability and accident insurance (including insurance on any vehicle that transports children).

STANDARD 11: An excellent Catholic early education program operates in accord with published human resources/personnel policies, developed in compliance with (arch) diocesan policies and provide clarity for responsibilities, expectations and accountability.

11.1 The director ensures that the early education program is in compliance with the diocesan human resources policies and the DCF policies regarding appropriate staffing.

11.2 The early education program complies with diocesan human resource standards for position descriptions including staff responsibilities and qualifications; hiring; compensation; and benefits, as well as standards for professional development, accountability, succession planning and retirement.

11.3 The early education program complies with diocesan human resource standards and ensures that competitive and just salaries, benefits, and professional growth opportunities are provided for all staff.

11.4 The director maintains a confidential file on each employee according to diocesan and DCF policies. A master file checklist is used to ensure it contains at least employment application, employment history check, level 2 background screening documentation, DCF credentials (and/or transcript), attestation of Moral Character, catechist certification data, ethics training documentation (and child abuse/neglect statement), safe environment training certificate/documentation, signed receipt of staff handbook, log of professional learning activities and certificates, signed observations, and signed evaluations.

11.5 All staff members receive a copy of the employee handbook and written policies. Receipt of these by staff members has been documented. The staff members are instructed at least annually on employee policies.

11.6 New staff member (and substitute) orientation includes, but is not limited to: all policies and procedures, staff handbook and expectations, ethics, abuse reporting, health, safety, & emergency procedures, parent handbook and expectations, how to assess children and report findings according to the program's procedures, assignment of a mentor, observations of experienced teachers, classroom management

11.7 New staff members are on probation for the first six months while the director assesses his/her fit in the program, ability to work with young children, and overall health

STANDARD 12: An excellent Catholic early education program develops and maintains a facilities, equipment, and technology management plan designed to continuously support the implementation of the educational mission of the early education program.

12.1 The early education program's facilities, equipment, and technology management plan includes objectives to support the delivery of the educational program of the early education program and accessibility for all children.

- a. The physical environment of the program provides sufficient lighting, good ventilation, and a comfortable temperature. Natural light is available in at least some of the indoor areas that children use.
- b. Classrooms are suitable for the age and activities of the children in the program. The floor space meets or exceeds a minimum thirty-five square feet of usable space per child.
- c. Children are provided with individual spaces, such as cubbies, in which they can store their work and personal belongings.
- d. The facilities include appropriate office space, area for staff meetings, a place for staff to take breaks, and suitable storage space.
- e. To accommodate the children's various play activities, the outdoor physical environment includes seventy-five square feet per child on the playground at any given time. Playground equipment is varied, designed to fit the size of the children, and sufficient for the number of children on the playground at the same time. The playground is designed and equipped to provide optimal learning experiences for children to play alone or in small groups. It is in good repair, shaded, clean, and free from hazards. It is within a 4-foot (or higher) fence. The equipment is well anchored and at least 6 feet from the fence and any hard surface.
- f. These outdoor play areas allow for and promote gross motor activities*, dramatic play, manipulative play, art activities, block play, and the exploration of the natural environment. The staff members are capable of keeping all children within their sightline at all times. *Gross motor activities allow opportunities for the children to balance, catch, climb, crawl, hop, pull, ride, run, slide, throw, etc.

12.2 The early education program's budget supports facilities, equipment, and technology management with specific funds for capital improvements, depreciation, and replacement.

12.3 The early education program's purchasing, and physical and technological improvements are, by design, done in alignment with the mission and the early education program's planning and curricular goals, and consistent with environmental stewardship.

12.4 The early education program's facilities and equipment management plan includes preventative and proactive measures, as well as day to day maintenance and janitorial actions to keep the facility and grounds clean and safe.

STANDARD 13: An excellent Catholic early education program develops and implements a comprehensive strategy for institutional advancement based on a compelling mission through communications, marketing, enrollment management, and development.

13.1 The communications/marketing plan includes the implementation of contemporary marketing strategies designed to reach targeted audiences. The program uses an app or electronic means to communicate with parents regularly. The director advocates for the program throughout the community.

13.2 The program has an electronic SIS or app for enrollment and data collection. The director reviews and analyzes the enrollment management plan annually. This includes currently enrolled children, children who have left the program, and possible attendees.

13.3 Strategic planning occurs on a regular basis (3-5 years) with annual updates.

13.4 Parents of the children in the program receive a parent handbook that includes but is not limited to (1) the philosophy statement regarding the care and education of young children attending the program, including what discipline techniques will be used (2) policies regarding holidays, illnesses, hours of operation, fees, refunds, enrollment, and termination procedures; and (3) an explanation of the program's day-to-day functioning. Parents/guardian sign a statement acknowledging that they understand and support the program's policies as outlined in the parent handbook.

13.5 Clear enrollment policies and procedures are stated in writing.

13.6 The director and/or teachers facilitate smooth transitions to the next level for the children and families, including transition to other programs and schools

13.7 Policies regarding the enrollment and termination of enrollment protect children's rights as outlined in the Americans with Disabilities Act.

STANDARD 14: An excellent Catholic early education program operates in compliance with all diocesan and applicable state, and local policies.

14.1 The early education program shall develop a written plan for mandated diocesan, county, and state health procedures; provide a safe and secure environment to prevent illness, accidents, threats or abuse; deal with emergencies should they occur; and educate children concerning safe and healthy practices.

- a. The early education program has a written safety and security plan which shall include a section on emergency procedures to address such matters as natural disasters, environmental hazards, dangerous weather, violent incidents, and evidence of evacuation drills (a minimum of monthly fire drills, regular tornado drills, and regular safety/lockdown/evacuation drills). Emergency evacuation route maps are prominently posted in the same place in each room. The emergency plan is posted in each classroom. Staff participate in annual training on the plan. *Evacuation/fire drills should occur at various times of the day and using alternate exits.
- b. The early education program is in compliance with provincial and diocesan safe environmental policies. All volunteers and staff members (this includes substitutes) undergo Level II background screening, fingerprinting and training, prior to working with children. Both VECHS, completed for the diocese, and the DCF Clearing house are used for background screening. References are checked prior to hiring. Volunteers work under the supervision of qualified staff members.

- c. The early education program is in compliance with the Florida Catholic Conference Health and Safety Checklist.**
- d. The early education program has a written policy that complies with the requirements of civil authorities for administering and storing medications. It has been distributed to the parents of the children in the program. A detailed medical log is maintained that includes a record of all medications given to children, the time the medication was given, and the person administering the medication.
- e. The director collaborates with the local department of health, hospitals, and/or local businesses to offer visual, auditory, speech, language development, physical development, cognitive development, and other health screening assessments for parents to use for their children each year.
- f. At least one credentialed staff member per 20 children is present at all times.
- g. For programs seeking Gold Seal Accreditation, the minimum staff student ratio is maintained at all times (does not include volunteers) with total group size not to exceed
 - i. Under 12 months – 1:4 /group size 8;
 - ii. 12 months to 23 months – 1:4 / group size 8;
 - iii. 24 months to 35 months – 1:6 / group size 12;
 - iv. 36 months to 47 months – 1:9 / group size 18;
 - v. 48 months to 59 months – 1:10 / group size 20;
- h. The minimum staff student ratio is maintained at all times (does not include volunteers) with total group size not to exceed
 - vi. Under 12 months – 1:4 /group size 8;
 - vii. 12 months to 23 months – 1:6 / group size 12;
 - viii. 24 months to 35 months – 1:11 / group size 22;
 - ix. 36 months to 47 months – 1:15 / group size 30;
 - x. 48 months to 59 months – 1:20 / group size 30; (VPK 1:11 / group size 20)
- i. When mixed age groups of infants and toddlers are in the same room, the child-staff ratio is maintained according to the youngest child in the room.
- j. To maintain continuity and build relationships, one main teacher is assigned to each classroom/group of children. The program has a policy for when children are moved to the next level. Part of that policy is to keep children with the same teacher for at least 9 months, especially the infants and toddlers. Transitions are kept to a minimum, both during the day and the program year. These policies, implementation, and exceptions must have diocesan approval.

14.2 The early education program maintains health records that include immunization data, any screenings, and early education program-entry medical examinations in accordance with the policies of the State of Florida, the diocese, and DCF. Current emergency information is maintained for each child enrolled in the program, including expected attendance, parent contact information, people authorized to take the child off the premises, allergies, and other important health information. A record of injury, illness, and medication administration is kept in the file.

14.3 The early education program shall publish, implement, and display statements of nondiscrimination of children and personnel in accordance with federal law and regulations.

14.4 The early education program shall develop an academic calendar and supporting attendance policies that are sufficient to the operation of a quality instructional program where applicable.

14.5 The age of the child is the primary appropriate entrance requirement for prekindergarten 3 and 4. The child must be age 3 or 4, respectively, on or before September 1 of the entering school year.

14.6 The early education program shall maintain records for children containing information, procedures, and confidentiality as required by law and as necessary for the operation of a quality educational program. All records contain names, address, phone numbers of parents or guardians. The child's file contains developmental milestones/history, progress reports, parent conference reports. The health file may be a separate file and contain information described in 14.2. (Closed early education programs will follow diocesan procedures regarding these records.)

14.7 The program has an open-door policy regarding visits by parents on the program's premises including in their child's classroom. Policies concerning parent involvement (e.g., visiting, observing, and volunteering) are in place to ensure the partnership between home and program is maintained. Visitation must be in compliance with diocesan security policies for schools. Parents always have telephone access to the program.

14.8 The director is familiar with community services and resources regarding children with specific needs and provides this information to parents. The director and staff work collaboratively with community agencies in providing information as needed. The director consults and collaborates with the diocese and the FCC to ensure the program is in compliance with all state and local regulations, to provide outside resources to families, and to advocate for early education needs.

****FCC HEALTH & SAFETY CHECKLIST****

HEALTH / FIRST AID / ABUSE

H1 The program has developed policies and procedures to protect the staff and children from blood-borne pathogens by developing a blood-borne exposure control plan and by providing annual in-service to the staff regarding protective procedures. As a result, the staff use universal precautions when encountering children's body fluids.

H2 All teachers have first aid certification, infant/child CPR certification, including training in rescue breathing and management of blocked airways. At least one staff member with these credentials is present with the children at all times.

H3 A written notice of accidents and/or illnesses is kept on file, a copy is given to the parents/guardians of the children in the program on the day it happens, and the program has evidence of receipt.

H4 Teachers observe each child daily, noting any health concerns. A record of these observations is maintained. Staff are alerted to special health conditions of children and are equipped, when applicable, to handle such concerns.

H5 The staff is trained to recognize signs of child abuse and neglect. They know the laws and procedures for reporting to the appropriate agency. All communications with authorities are documented and placed in a confidential file.

H6 Exemplary abuse prevention is practiced throughout the early education program. For example, a minimum of two teachers (or teacher and assistant) are assigned to a group of children. Viewing windows allow for visual access into the classrooms, bathroom doors are left open, and random walk-throughs are practiced throughout the day.

H7 Children or any other person suspected of having a communicable disease is removed from the program or placed in an isolated area. The isolated area is properly ventilated and heated/cooled. It contains a cot and materials that are cleaned after each use.

H8 A child who has an easily transmittable condition is not permitted in the facility until treatment has been completed and verified.

H9 Child care personnel notify local county health department immediately of any suspected outbreak of communicable disease and follow the health department's direction.

H10 A fully equipped first aid kit is kept on premises. At a minimum, this includes: soap, hand sanitizer, adhesive bandages, disposable gloves, cotton balls or applicators, sterile gauze pads or rolls, adhesive tape, digital thermometer, tweezers, pre-moistened wipes, scissors, bottled water (for cleaning wounds or eyes), and a current resource guide on first aid and CPR procedures

H11 The director works with the diocesan Office of Catholic Schools to make sure there is a health or medical consultant available for questions, advice, and to review policies and procedures as needed.

SAFETY

S1 Safe arrival and departure procedures have been developed that ensure all children in the program are accounted for throughout the day and released only to authorized adults. Procedures include signing the student in & out each day. Children are supervised by sight at all times, and transition of children from one teacher to another or from one area to another is accounted for to ensure the supervision and whereabouts of children at all times.

S2 When inclement weather or air pollution prevents children from playing outdoors, alternative activities are planned to ensure large-motor exercise and to foster large-motor development. The equipment used for this meets national safety standards. Students are always supervised when using it. The alternative activities plan is posted, included on the schedule, or included in lesson plans.

S3 a. Fire extinguishers (in non-gold seal programs, these are within 75 feet of all spaces occupied by children) and fire alarms are installed in each classroom and throughout the facility. These are tagged and serviced annually. Carbon monoxide detectors (in buildings with fossil-fuel burning heater or appliance or other feature, fixture or element that emits carbon monoxide) and smoke detectors and are installed, a minimum of 10 feet from all sleeping rooms, and checked on a monthly basis. This log, along with documentation of battery changes, is kept on the premises.

S3.b. All staff members are trained annually in the use of fire extinguishers.

S4 Local fire authorities conduct an annual fire inspection of the facility.

S5 All chemicals, medicines, and other “dangerous if swallowed” materials are stored in their original containers. All potentially dangerous products (including staff personal items) are stored in a locked area. An MSD (Material Safety Data) sheet is strategically placed near harmful chemicals. Art and craft supplies are nontoxic.

S6 An inside temperature of 65 to 82°F is maintained at all times. Hot water heaters are set for 110°F or less if the heated water is accessible to children.

S7 Electrical outlets in the wall are covered to prevent children from being shocked by electricity.

S8 Smoking is not permitted on the premises. Narcotics, alcohol, and other impairing drugs are not permitted on the premises. Firearms or weapons are not permitted within any building or vehicle or on any person on the premises, excluding law enforcement officers.

S9 The EEP does not use a vehicle to transport children.

S10 Parents are notified of field trips and transport their own children for any field trips.

S11 A current attendance record accompanies staff out of the building during playtime, a drill, or an actual evacuation and is used to account for all children.

S12 A current report or documentation (for new builds, renovation, or after a natural disaster) is on file demonstrating that the buildings have been assessed for lead, radon, radiation, asbestos, fiberglass, and any other hazard from friable material. Documentation is available demonstrating that all issues have been addressed. The following counties are currently exempt from mandatory radon testing: Baker Bay Bradford Clay Collier Escambia Flagler Franklin Glades Hendry Lafayette Lake Lee Monroe Okeechobee Orange Santa Rosa Wakulla Washington. If the school/center is in a county on this list, radon testing is

not required. If the school/center is in a county not on this list, then radon testing is required at the time of the build and five years later. If the second test is clear, then nothing further is needed unless changes are made to the building structure.

S13 Documentation regarding how the facility and grounds is kept free from harmful animals, inspect pests, and poisonous plants is kept. Poisonous or harmful plants are not in areas accessible to children. Use of pesticides and herbicides is according to manufacturer's instructions (using least hazardous means) and not during times children are present, but for the most part the program uses methods that prevent and reduce unwanted pests (IPM).

HEALTH AND SAFETY MATERIALS PROVIDED TO PARENTS

M1 Each April and September parents are provided the Distracted Adult Flyer and the program has documented receipt.

M2 The Rilya Wilson Act Flyer is posted. It is given to parents, as appropriate.

M3 Each April and September parents are provided the Influenza Brochure and the program has documented receipt.

EMERGENCY

E1 A plan is in place to contact parents/guardians in case of an emergency closing, and the parents/guardians have been made aware of the plan.

E2 Emergency phone numbers and 911 are posted by readily accessible telephones that have 911 access in order to allow for quick reference in contacting the fire department, police department, poison center, rescue squad, and Florida Abuse Hotline. The EEP address and contact information are included.

CLEANLINESS

C1 Parents/guardians are encouraged to provide a change of clothing for their children to keep on the program's premises in the case of an accident. The program maintains a supply of generic clothing in varying sizes to ensure children are provided with a change of clothing in case of an emergency.

C2 Infant and toddler bedding is washed at a minimum of twice per week and more often when soiled, and it is used by only one child between washings. Bedding is washed a minimum of once per week and more often when soiled, and it is used by only one child between washings.

C3 The spaces are kept in good repair and are safe, with no dangerous issues such as missing or rusty parts, sharp edges, splinters, protruding parts, or raised fasteners. The facilities are cleaned on a daily basis, including sanitizing the bathrooms and removing trash. The facilities are free of mold and offensive odors.

C4 Classrooms, equipment, and toys are clean, sanitized, and well maintained. Surfaces are cleaned and sanitized daily. Equipment and toys are working and do not have dangerous issues such as cracks, pinch points, peeling paint, or sharp points. Toys are cleaned and sanitized weekly. Items that can be mouthed are cleaned and sanitized at least daily.

C5 The facility is maintained to alleviate allergen issues, including dustmites.

ENVIRONMENT

ENV1 The physical environment includes not only appropriate furnishings, such as tables at appropriate height to allow forearms to rest on them and chairs that allow children's feet to touch the floor, but also appropriate room flooring and soft areas that are comforting to children.

ENV2 Through routine daily documented inspections and resulting timely repairs, the outdoor play area is well maintained to prevent children from being injured by broken equipment, sharp edges, and rusty parts. All areas have appropriate fall zones (and materials) according to the manufacturer's recommendations. If sandboxes are used, they are covered when not in use, designed to drain, and are refilled as necessary, and are part of the daily inspection

ENV3 Safe and sanitary bedding that includes individual beds, cots, cribs, playpens, mattresses or floor mats are provided for each child and positioned at least 18 inches apart (36 inches apart for Gold Seal programs). Mats are at least one-inch thick and covered with an impermeable surface. These items are cleaned weekly.

ENV4 Children up to 1 year of age are in their own crib, port-a-crib or playpen.

ENV5 Child care personnel ensure that young infants who are not capable of rolling over on their own are positioned on their back on a firm surface when napping and sleeping.

ENV6 Double or multi-deck cribs, cots or beds are not used.

ENV7 If cribs are used, bar spacing does not exceed 2 3/8 inches and all cribs meet Title 16, Parts 1219 and 1220 Code of Federal Regulations (anti-loosening devices on crib hardware, durable mattress supports, no traditional drop-side cribs and others). Infants are placed on their back for sleep, unless ordered otherwise by a physician. Soft items are not allowed in the infant's crib. If a blanket it used it is tucked around the mattress and not drawn up higher than the chest. The infant's head is always uncovered during sleep.

ENV8 Employees, volunteers and children wash their hands with soap and running water, drying thoroughly, immediately following personal hygiene procedures for themselves, or when assisting others (including diapering), after outdoor play, and before preparing food or administering medication, before and after sand/water table play, and before and after meals. Handwashing is scheduled at the beginning and end of the day, before and after meals/snacks, and after outdoor play. Children are taught how to wash their hands and are monitored.

ENV9 Toilets and sinks are accessible, in good working condition, clean and sanitized. Platforms and stools have surfaces that can be easily cleaned and sanitized. Potty chairs are cleaned and sanitized after each use. Bathrooms have barriers to prevent entry by unattended infants and toddlers up to 24 months.

ENV10 Running water, toilet paper, soap, trashcans, and disposable towels or working hand drying machines are available and within reach of children.

ENV11 At least one bathing facility is available (permanent or portable and at least 6 inches deep).

ENV12 Diapering procedures are posted at the diaper changing area. Diaper-changing area has impermeable surface and is cleaned with sanitizing solution or disinfected after each use. If paper liners are used, they must cover the changing surface and be changed after each child.

ENV13 There is an ample supply of clean diapers, clothing and linens at all times. Staff check diapers regularly and which are changed or removed promptly when soiled or wet.

ENV14 Diaper-changing area(s) are physically separated from food preparation, food service and feeding area(s).

ENV15 Diapers, disposable or cloth, are placed in separate, covered, lined containers not accessible to children.

ENV16 Soiled diapers are placed in containers that are emptied and sanitized when containers are full and at least once daily.

ENV17 A sink with running water is available in the room where infants are in care (and within an arm's length or the changing table in Gold Seal programs).

ENV18 Adults remove their shoes in the infant/toddler play/crawling areas. Children remove their shoes or cover them.

ENV19 Any body of water on the property has at least a four foot fence and childproof gates. Children are closely supervised when using water in buckets, sinks, tables, etc.

ENV20 Classrooms and spaces are constantly monitored for choking hazards and the hazard is removed, especially in areas where infants, toddlers, and two year old children are.

ENV21 The director has permission from the diocese for any classroom or visiting pets. There is documentation from veterinarian regarding immunization and that the animals are suitable for contact with children. Reptiles are not allowed as classroom pets.

FOOD / KITCHEN

F1 Kitchen equipment is monitored by civil authorities, where applicable, to ensure healthy and sanitary conditions.

F2 The program has well developed food and nutrition policies, including encouraging families to follow USDA MyPlate, if food is brought from home. Food that is brought from home is labeled with child's first and last name and date and stored appropriately. If needed, it is supplemented with food that the program keeps on hand. The policies are discussed with parents and the program documents parents' receipt.

F3 The children are encouraged to serve themselves and assist with cleanup, within age-appropriate levels of ability.

F4 Infants and toddlers are held when bottle-fed and not placed with bottles into cribs at any time. Bottles are not propped. Children do not carry bottles/cups with them when they crawl or walk. Staff have a comfortable place (rocking/gliding chair, when possible) to feed infants. It is set up in a way to avoid injury to children on the floor.

F5 Feeding times and amount of food consumed are recorded and made available to parents/guardians of infants, and toddlers, and children with special feeding needs on a daily basis.

F6 Safe drinking water is available to children at all times, including during outdoor play.

F7 Meals and snacks provided by the facility meet daily nutritional needs of children according to the USDA MyPlate. Copies of the USDA My Plate can be found at the website <http://www.choosemyplate.gov>. The written menus are provided to parents (posted and/or emailed). Menus are kept for inspection purposes. Schedules show 2-3 hours between snacks and meals. Any menu substitutions must be noted and provided to parents.

F8 Special food restrictions, including food allergies, are shared with child care personnel and posted in a conspicuous location.

F9 Formula is prepared according to manufacturer's instructions. All breast milk and infant formula remaining in bottles after feeding are discarded within one hour.

F10 The temperature of heated foods and bottles is tested before giving to children to prevent injury. Foods and liquids above 110 degrees is kept out of reach of children. Bottles are warmed with water or appropriate bottle warmers (not microwave ovens).

F11 Facility provides sufficient seating so that children are seated at tables for meals.

F12 Staff sit with children at mealtime, modeling appropriate behavior. Mealtime is a relaxed learning experience. Schedules are arranged so that the same staff members are feeding infants and are familiar with them. Feeding is not used in place of other means of comfort.

F13 Any food intended to be shared is commercially prepared and packaged or are whole fruits. Parents are notified in advance when children are given special treats.

F14 If the program does not participate in the USDA Food Program, it documents that a qualified individual reviews the food program for nutritional content, serving size, food service operations, food safety, special feeding needs, and procedures for food brought from home. The qualified individual could be a registered dietitian or public health nutritionist who completes the inspections at least twice a year.

F15 Staff is careful regarding choking hazards when serving and feeding children. Food is cut into no larger than 1/4 inch squares for infants and 1/2 inch squares for toddlers and two-year-old children.

F16 Staff does not offer children younger than four the following foods: hot dogs, whole grapes, nuts, popcorn, raw peas, hard pretzels, spoonful of peanut butter, chunks of raw carrots or meat larger than can be swallowed whole.

F17 Mothers are provided a comfortable place to breastfeed. Expressed breast milk is stored in ready to feed sanitary containers correctly labeled. It is refrigerated for no more than 48 hours, unless it had been previously frozen. It is gently mixed before the feeding.

F18 The staff work with families to set up feeding schedules, following health care provider's guidelines. Cow's milk is not given to children under 12 months. Only whole milk is given to toddlers up through 24 month old children. Children are switched to cups as soon as families and staff determine it is developmentally appropriate. Children under 6 months are not given solid foods. No more than 4 ounces of juice are given to a child daily.

F19 If children over age one, receive two or more meals (breakfast and lunch or lunch and snack), toothbrushing/gum cleaning takes place. Infants gums are wiped with a disposable tissue after each feeding.