

St. Thomas Early Learning Center

Family Handbook

Revised September 2016



Our Mission

Saint Thomas Early Learning Center (STELC) is a parish day school serving preschool through kindergarten students. The school is an outreach of Saint Thomas Church and ministry to our community. As a Christian school, we worship and learn of God in Scripture and nature, as well as through our common humanity. We do not rush children, but rather we seek to make each year so rich and full that growth and progress are truly appropriate to the age and the individual.

Episcopal Identity

As embodiments of the Christian faith, Episcopal schools are created to be communities that honor, celebrate and worship God as the center of life. They are created as models of God's love and grace. They are created to serve God in Christ in all persons, regardless of origin, background, ability, or religion. They are created to "strive for justice and peace among all people and [to] respect the dignity of every human being." Episcopal schools seek to integrate religious and spiritual formation into the overall curriculum and life of the school community. They are clear, yet graceful, about how they articulate and express their basic identities, especially in their religious curricula and traditions.

They invite all who attend and work in them – Episcopalians and non-Episcopalians, Christians, and non-Christians, people of no faith tradition – both to seek clarity about their own beliefs and religions and to honor those traditions more fully and faithfully in their own lives.

Episcopal schools exist not merely to educate, but to demonstrate and proclaim the unique worth and beauty of all human beings as creations of a loving, and empowering God.

By weaving these principles into the very fabric of school life, Episcopal schools are built on the foundation of a Christian love that guides and challenges all who attend to build lives of genuine meaning, purpose and service in the world they will inherit.

Principle qualities that distinguish a school as Episcopal"

School History

Saint Thomas Early Learning Center opened its doors in 1964. At that time, it comprised one kindergarten class and one teacher. The Rev. William Oxley, Rector of St. Thomas Church, noticed the lack of publicly funded kindergarten and perceived a need for a developmentally appropriate kindergarten. Over the years, pre-kindergarten and beginners classes were added, and in 1990, first grade was also added. In 1989, Valerie Woodcock became Head of School and the Rev. Ben Aurand became Rector at Saint Thomas and Chaplain to the school, also serving as Chair of the STELC Board.

In the fall of 2001, Laura Calvin became the third Head of School of St. Thomas ELC. The Rev. William Fowler joined the school as school Chaplain and Rector of St. Thomas Episcopal Church in the fall of 2005. Lisa Hines became Chaplain and Rector in 2008. The Rev. Rhoda Montgomery assumed leadership of the church in 2010. Mary Skow directed the school from 2010 to 2012. During this time the school returned to its early learning roots, ending its first grade program. Beth Lawrence became Head of School in 2012. The school has continued to provide a sound developmental education to approximately 125 children each year.

School Governance

Episcopal schools in general exist at the good pleasure, by and under the ultimate authority of the Episcopal Diocese of Texas and its Bishop. STELC lies under the general canon and more specifically under the authority of the Rector (who also functions as Chair of the Board of Trustees) and the Vestry of Saint Thomas Church.

The school is governed by a Board of Trustees appointed and charged by the Vestry to develop the overall policies and safeguard the integrity of the school and to provide the Head of School with advice, direction and active support as needed. The Board acts as final arbitrator in the due process proceedings of students and staff.

The Board is composed of nine members. A minimum of 60% of the Board are active members of St. Thomas Episcopal Church. Trustees serve three year terms and can serve two consecutive terms. One member of the Vestry serves as a liaison between the Board and Vestry. The Rector and Head of School (HOS) serve as ex officio board members.

Accreditations, Licensing, and Certifications:

- Licensed by the **Texas Department of Family & Protective Services**. A current DPRS licensing report is posted for review upstairs on the bulletin board in the STELC office and online at www.dfps.state.tx.us
- **National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)**. STELC is the **only** accredited NAEYC school in Bryan/College Station.
- **National Arbor Day Foundation's** certification as a **Nature Explore Classroom**.
- **Southern Association of Episcopal Schools (SAES)**

Admissions & Tuition

Admissions Policy

STELC considers all applicants equally and fairly and does not discriminate on the basis of race, sex, religion or national origin. To be enrolled, a child must be the following age by September 1st of the school year:

Beginners-Age 3 by September 1st

Pre-Kindergarten-Age 4 by September 1st

Kindergarten-Age 5 by September 1st

Admissions Procedure

Enrollment paperwork is sent to children on our waitlist and currently enrolled children in late Fall. Once Enrollment forms are returned, children currently enrolled at STELC are given enrollment priority; followed by children of active members of St. Thomas Episcopal Church; children with siblings currently enrolled at STELC are considered third; children of former STELC families are considered fourth. Date of original inquiry, adherence to application deadlines, and date of application are taken into consideration when space is limited.

Tuition contracts are issued during the winter with a firm deadline for receipt. Contracts not received by the required date of return are void and the student's spot is released.

Required Documentation

STELC is licensed as a child care center by the State of Texas. Child care licensing REQUIRES records of children to be maintained by our school. Documentation includes:

- a signed statement from a physician indicating a child is fit to participate in school (required annually)
- required immunizations
- vision/hearing test results (students age 4 and newly enrolled students age 5)
- **complete** application on file
- signed general liability waiver (included in application packet)

In order to be enrolled at STELC, students MUST have this documentation provided prior to the first day of regular classes.

Payment of Tuition

Tuition can be remitted to STELC by payment in full in the office (due by the first day of school) OR by utilizing FACTS tuition management. Monthly and twice yearly payments are managed through **FACTS only**. There is an annual per family fee associated with using FACTS.

For more information regarding FACTS, visit the school website at www.stthomaseclc.org.

Tuition Assistance

STELC offers limited tuition assistance each year. Tuition assistance applications are available in the late Fall from the STELC office. The finance committee of the STELC Board of Directors reviews applications.

Withdrawal

Once a tuition contract is signed and returned, families are obligated to fulfill the financial obligations of said contract. If a family wishes to withdraw a child, for any reason, notification must be given to the Head of School in writing with 30 days notice.

Communication

Families receive communication from the Head of School and teachers electronically and in written form. Your child's teacher will keep you informed of general classroom happenings during the year. A weekly school-wide email newsletter will keep you informed of school-wide events.

Concerns and Conflict Resolution

Teachers are the first level of contact in issues regarding classroom happenings and individual needs. The Head of School/office should be contacted only after the teacher is notified of an issue. Drop off and pick up time is a busy time of day for teachers, please refrain from engaging them in serious matters during this time period unless it is an emergency so their focus can be on their students.

Conferences

Formal parent/teacher conferences are held twice a year. In December/January teachers will make arrangements for mid-year conferences followed by end of year conferences in May. Teachers are available for additional conversations and informal conferences can be made with teachers at any time during the school year.

Children with Special Needs

Communication with parents of students with special needs is very important at STELC. Maintaining up to date treatment and behavioral plans are imperative to ensuring the success and safety of our STELC students. Parents are requested to provide records and treatment plans from the time of original diagnosis through the end of their time at STELC to ensure continuity of care and treatment.

STELC has experience working with local school districts and other child development professionals for testing and assessment at the parent's request.

Should a child benefit from extra one on one attention during the day at STELC, the teacher, family, and Head of School will develop a plan for the student. If an additional STELC staff member is required to shadow their student, the expense is managed by the family.

Assessment

STELC conducts general developmental assessments for each student in each class. Methods used are observations, checklists, rating scales, and work sampling. Results are available to families by speaking with a child's teacher. At the end of the year, copies of assessments are given to the STELC office where they are kept in a child's file for two years. STELC will not release these documents unless a signed release is received in the office.

Discipline

Discipline must be:

Individualized and consistent for each child; Appropriate to the child's level of understanding; and Directed toward teaching the child acceptable behavior and self-control.

A caregiver may use positive methods of discipline and guidance that encourage self-esteem, self-control, and self-direction, which include at least the following:

Using praise and encouragement of good behavior instead of focusing only upon unacceptable behavior; reminding a child of behavior expectations daily by using clear, positive statements; Redirecting behavior using positive statements; and Using brief supervised separation or time out from the group, when appropriate for the child's age and development, which is limited to no more than one minute per year of the child's age.

There must be no harsh, cruel or unusual treatment of any child.

The following types of discipline and guidance are prohibited:

Corporal punishment or threats of corporal punishment; Punishment associated with food, withholding or threatening to withhold food; naps or toilet training; Pinching, shaking or biting a child; Hitting a child with a hand or instrument; Putting anything in or on a child's mouth; Humiliating, ridiculing, rejecting or yelling at a child; Subjecting a child to harsh, abusive or profane language; Placing a child in a locked or dark room, bathroom, or closet with the door closed; and Requiring a child to remain silent or inactive for inappropriately long periods of time for the child's age.

(Texas Administrative Code, Title 40, Chapters 746 and 747, Subchapters L, Discipline and Guidance)

STELC employees receive training regarding the prevention and signs of child abuse. If parents have concerns a child is being abused, it should be reported to the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services at 1-800-252-5400 .

Parking Lot and Drop Off/Pick Up (Drive Slowly, Pay attention, Watch for Children)

Drop Off

Families may utilize the carpool drop off lane OR park their vehicle and walk their child to class. **Under NO circumstance** should a vehicle in the carpool lane be left unattended while a parent walks their child to class or visits with other parents. If a child is unable to walk unassisted, parents will be required to park their vehicle and walk their child to class.

Pick Up

Parents must park in the parking lot and walk to the designated pick up area. **Under NO circumstance** should a parent park in the carpool lane and get out of their vehicle.

Children wait with their teachers and classmates outside in their designated pick up area. Children are handed off to parents ONLY by STELC staff members. Parents should wait until an STELC staff member releases their child before taking them. This ensures proper child headcounts and safety.

Playdates/Carpool/Alternate Pick Up

If your child will be leaving STELC with someone other than who is listed on your authorized pickup list, please notify your child's teacher in writing. If you need to add someone to the authorized pickup list, please notify the office in writing.

Late Pick-Up

If you are more than 15 minutes late, efforts will be made to reach you and those on your emergency contact list. Consistent late pickups will result in paying additional fees. Your child will be moved to either the Lunch

Bunch room or the Office and supervised until you arrive. Please contact the office if you know you will be late.

Cell Phone Use

Cell phone use during pickup and drop off is strongly discouraged. Cell phones take away your ability to be fully present with your child during these important transitions. Please do not talk or text while dropping off or picking up your children.

Cell phone use while driving in the parking lot is strictly prohibited.

General Information

Absences

STELC does not have a formal attendance policy, we strongly encourage consistent attendance to foster a child's sense of belonging and bonding with their peers and teachers. Please keep your child's teacher informed of possible absences, late arrivals, or early dismissals. If your child is ill, please notify the school office by phone (979)696-1728 or email info@stthomasehc.org.

Accidents at School

All classrooms contain first aid kits. Minor scrapes and bruises will be treated at school and parents will be notified at pick up time. Depending on the nature of the accident, an incident report may be filled out, given to the parent and a copy kept in the office. If a child seems particularly upset, parents will be notified. If an accident requires more attention than the school can provide, 911 will be contacted. In the event a parent cannot be reached, the school will contact the emergency contacts in the student's file. All children attending STELC are covered by a general accident policy during school hours.

Behaviors

Teachers will address challenging behaviors using positive support strategies. When behaviors such as biting or causing injury to a classmate persist past one incidence, the parent will be required to pick up the child from school immediately. Continued engagement in the injuring behavior may result in a child being excused from STELC.

Behaviors that exhibit themselves in extreme despair or disruption may result in teachers and families working together with professionals (at the family's expense) to develop individual plans to address behaviors.

Under some circumstances, children exhibiting challenging behavior may require an immediate parental response.

Birthdays

Birthdays are celebrated at STELC with a simple birthday snack. Please discuss specific arrangements with teachers. STELC provides simple and nutritious snacks daily, so keep this in mind when planning your child's birthday snack.

We often have children with food allergies. Please discuss restrictions with your child's teacher.

Please do NOT bring goody bags, gifts, balloons, etc. They will not be distributed. Snacks, drinks, and napkins are all that is necessary.

Summer birthdays are celebrated in the Spring.

Class Parties

Classroom parties, organized by parents, are held during the year to celebrate holidays and other special occasions. Consult your classroom teacher regarding appropriate activities and food. Keep in mind, that simple is often better for young children during busy holiday times. Siblings **should stay at home so your full attention can be given to the children in the classroom.**

Classroom Pets

Many of the classrooms have pets for the children to enjoy. The animals are kept in cages and cared for by the teachers and students, giving the children the opportunity to observe the animals and learn the responsibility of having a pet. If your child has any pet allergies, please let your teacher know and appropriate action will be taken.

Communicable Diseases

St. Thomas Early Learning Center will notify parents if children have been exposed to a communicable disease following the guidelines provided by the Texas Department of Family & Protective Services and the Brazos County Health Department.

Technology Use Policy

Technology is occasionally used in the classroom to meet educational objectives under the direction of staff.

Custody, Separation, and/or Divorce Issues

St. Thomas Early Learning Center recognizes that families can be thrown into crisis as a result of separation or divorce. Teachers and staff will respond with compassion and discretion, and work to maintain a safe, loving and consistent environment for your child at school. Each case is unique, so the specifics of each family's situation should be discussed with the classroom teacher and the Head of School.

Distracting Objects/What to Leave at Home

Bringing toys and unessential items to school is not allowed. Many classes incorporate sharing times into their day. Please follow your teacher's guidelines regarding acceptable sharing items. No toy guns, knives or other war toys are allowed at school. Weapons, drugs and alcohol are not allowed. Electronic devices of any kind are not allowed.

Dress Code

Children are very active and often very messy! Their exploration and play will not be curtailed to keep clothing from getting dirty. Please send your child to school in clothes that will allow them to freely participate in all school activities without the worry of ruining an item. Smocks are offered but not all washable paint is actually washable, and sometimes non washable art supplies are used. Water and sand are common fixtures on the playground. Beginner and PreKindergarten children should always have a spare change of clothes in their classroom cubbies. Tennis shoes or other closed toe shoe (no slick soles) make the best footwear. Strap on sandals are okay but flip flops need to stay at home.

Drugs and Alcohol on Campus

Drugs and alcohol are not allowed on campus during school hours.

Field Trips

Kindergarteners take many field trips throughout the year. At the beginning of the year, parents are asked to sign up to help drive and chaperone these trips. The following guidelines are followed:

- leave younger siblings at home so that you may keep your full attention on the Early Learning Center students.
- Drivers must have a copy of their driver's license and proof of insurance on file in the school office before departing from the school.
- fire extinguisher and first aid kit, available from the school office and given to you by your child's teacher.
- Children must be single-belted and in booster seats if applicable.

Teachers will ask all Kindergarteners wear STELC or tie dye t-shirts on field trip days.

Fire Drills

As required by state law, school buildings are inspected annually by the Fire Marshal. Monthly fire drills are conducted and evacuation routes are posted in all classrooms.

Food Allergies

Please discuss any allergies your child may have with his or her teacher so an appropriate plan may be put into place. All efforts will be made to remove any known allergens from snacks distributed at school. If EPI-pens or other medication are required in the case of accidental exposure, please talk to your child's teacher. Please notify the office, in writing, of food allergies or any food sensitivities we should be aware of.

Homework and Makeup work

Homework expectations for Kindergarten will be made clear to students and parents during the early days of school and orientation. Please coordinate with your child's teacher the makeup of any work due to absences.

Illnesses

Please notify the school office when your child misses school due to illness. **Students must be symptom-free and fever-free (without the use of fever-reducer) for twenty-four hours before returning to school after an illness.** If a child becomes ill at school, he or she will be taken to the school office and a parent notified to pick them up. If a child is hospitalized, please let their teacher know so arrangements can be made for visits and get well messages.

Immunization and Vision and Hearing Test Records

STELC must have current immunization and vision and hearing test (for 4 year olds and newly admitted 5 year olds) records on file in the school office. These forms are sent out in the school registration packets and are to be completely filled out and returned by the first day of school.

Lost and found

Lost and found items are placed in a box in STELC office. Items of significant value are kept in the office. Periodically, unclaimed items will be donated to charity.

Lunch

Children enrolled in Lunch Bunch and full-day Kindergarteners bring their own lunches from home each day. Please send nutritious lunches that will meet your child's daily food needs. Children must eat only what they have brought from home and may not share their food with others. Please label all lunch boxes and containers with your child's name. Due to Health Department restrictions, we are unable to heat any food in the microwave. It is not the responsibility of St. Thomas Early Learning Center to serve lunches that meet nutritional requirements of children—it is the responsibility of parents.

Medications

It is the policy of St. Thomas Early Learning Center to not administer medications to children. The school reserves the right to require parents to administer their children's medications. Children are not allowed to administer their own medication while at school. If the medication is one that has to be administered immediately for an allergic reaction (e.g. an EPIpen or Benadryl), then the medicine, with instructions for administering, is kept with your child's classroom first aid box. A notice explaining your child's allergy and instructions in the event of exposure will be posted in the classroom.

Teachers are not permitted to apply sunblock or insect repellent to children. Parents can apply these prior to school drop off.

Playground & Meadow

During school hours of 11:30-4:30, the playground & meadow are reserved for the use of the children attending school. Children using the playground before and after school must be supervised by a parent.

School Calendar

STELC generally follows the College Station Independent School District calendar. The school calendar is posted at www.stthomasec.org. STELC operates from late August to late May. The school day is 8:30-11:30 with optional additional programs running until 4:30pm daily. The school office is closed the entire month of July.

Severe Weather

In the case of severe weather, please check the school Facebook page and stay tuned to local media outlets for announcements of school closures or delays. If College Station ISD is closed or delayed, STELC will also be closed or delayed. If CSISD delays classes until 10 a.m. or later, students who typically attend Lunch Bunch on that day may report to Lunch Bunch at 11:30. If severe weather occurs during the school day, every precaution will be made to keep your child safe. Shelter in place and severe weather drills are conducted quarterly throughout the year. Children are not allowed outside when lightning is present in the area.

Snacks

Nutritious snacks with water and juice are provided each day. Please talk to your child's teacher regarding any food allergies or sensitivities. Teachers welcome children bringing special snacks for their classmates from home; please consult with your classroom teacher regarding allergies.

Student Records

Student records are kept in a secure file cabinet to safeguard each child's privacy. When a student leaves the STELC, these records are retained in an inactive file. Evaluations and records of academic performance are forwarded only upon request of a parent. After two years, former student records are destroyed.

Visitors

All visitors must check-in with the office upon arrival at the school. Parents may visit the school at any time and are encouraged to come observe once per semester.

Water Play

During warm weather, students are permitted to play with water, buckets, funnels, etc in our sandbox. Splash/wading pools and sprinklers may be used. Parents can choose to permit or not permit their child to participate in these staff supervised activities.

Weapons and Gangs on campus

Weapons of any kind are not allowed on campus. St. Thomas ELC is a gang free school zone.

Emergency Preparedness

Because of its proximity to Texas A&M University, STELC receives Code Maroon alerts. In the event of an emergency on the TAMU campus or nearby we will receive notification. Depending on the type of emergency, students will either remain locked in their classrooms with their teacher and assistant or will be escorted to gather as a large group in the Parish Hall at St. Thomas Episcopal Church. In the event of a tornado or weather event, students will gather depending on their classroom location:

Beginners: Bathroom hall of Oxley building

Pre-K in Red Brick House: Large bathroom in classroom

Kindergarten: Bathroom hall of Woodcock building

Pre-K in Ministry Center: Hallway of ministry center

In the case of an emergency in which the entire school/church campus must be evacuated, parents will be notified and will have 1 hour to pick up their children from the St. Thomas Campus.

After 1 hour children will be brought (weather permitting) to Brison Park (400 Dexter). If weather does NOT permit, students will walk with their teachers to the TAMU Hillel Center at 800 George Bush Drive (979)703-1856. Teachers will bring with them an attendance roster, emergency contact information, and medical information for all students. Teachers will complete face to name checks upon arrival and departure and in 15 minute intervals until all parents arrive. Teachers and staff will communicate with Child Care Licensing and local authorities upon arrival at the TAMU Hillel Center

Extra copies of this handbook and copies of the Texas Department of Family & Protective Services Minimum Standard Rules are available in the school office. Please contact the Head of School if you have questions about our policies and procedures. A notice of any changes made to this handbook during the school year will be sent home with your child.

Classroom Management & Support Statement of Policy

by St. Thomas Early Learning Center

In an attempt to teach and serve all students at St. Thomas Early Learning Center, the following procedures are in place concerning all classes and the management of those programs (including Beginner's, Pre-Kindergarten, and Kindergarten).

1. All students are taught respect for themselves, others, for their classroom and their environment. We strive to teach each child in the manner that fits their individual needs.
2. Classroom expectations and rules are formed in the early weeks of school, for the safety of all children. Teachers establish boundaries and expectations for behaviors and the learning environment, both in and outside the classroom.
3. If a teacher has concerns about a child's behaviors and/or our abilities to effectively teach a child, she will document those concerns, and note times of progress and/or challenges.
4. If a teacher has further concerns that a child's behaviors are outside the boundaries of normal limits and expectations, or if she feels that the child is unable to learn effectively in the classroom – for whatever reasons- she will discuss her thoughts and notes with the child's parents.
5. If the teacher continues to have concerns, a conference will be called with the child's parents and with the Head of School.
6. It is possible that additional assessments may be requested.
7. It is possible that the Head of School may request a pediatrician's assessment.
8. It is possible that an additional teacher's aide may be needed to assist with the child's behavioral challenges. The child's parents will be responsible for this aide's compensation.
9. If the Head of School and teacher feel that the needs of a child cannot be met at St. Thomas Early Learning Center, the school has the right to withdraw the child from this school and release the parents from their financial responsibilities as stated in the Parent Handbook. It is never the hope of the school that this withdrawal occurs, and this action will be taken only if all other avenues have been attempted unsuccessfully.
10. The length of time this process will vary depending on each individual situation.

