St. Thomas Aquinas
Catholic School
Preschool Program

PARENT-STUDENT HANDBOOK
2019-2020

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STA Parents and Families,

Welcome to Preschool at St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School. You are now a part of the Crusader family! As we begin our 30th school year we look to continue a tradition of providing a high quality, Catholic education to prepare students for success in our 21st century economy. We encourage each of you to strive for personal, academic and spiritual excellence as you explore and meet new challenges each day. Take full advantage of your education through a cooperative effort between you and the school to meet the high standards of excellence at St. Thomas Aquinas School.

Our preschool is an example of the dedication to accommodate the needs of today’s family. We offer a variety of services in childcare from two year olds to pre-kindergarten. Our professional staff believes that through our curriculum and the use of learning centers, students will be an active participant in age appropriate activities to master early childhood principles.

Our teachers will provide a Christian environment to help promote good self-esteem and a healthy attitude toward others. Every child is a unique gift from God and it is our responsibility to aid in the development of his or her special personality.

We provide a safe, healthy and clean environment to help enrich and strengthen a child’s quest for independence and self-confidence. Our center is open to everyone, regardless of national origin, religion, gender or race. All of God’s children are deserving of a loving, caring environment. The cooperation and understanding of parents and staff will determine the success of your child’s experience.

Sincerely,

Mr. Pavgouzas
Principal
St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School
Mission Statement

St Thomas Aquinas Catholic School offers a Preschool program that is dedicated to the ongoing development of creative thinkers and building positive self-esteem in an effective, developmentally appropriate learning environment.

Philosophy

It is the philosophy of the St Thomas Aquinas Preschool Program that children are encouraged to learn and grow by providing a foundation of developmentally appropriate experiences where all children can succeed in a safe and nurturing environment. We believe that each child is a unique individual and that all children can learn. Recognizing the uniqueness of each child, we will foster an environment that nurtures the whole child. Faith, knowledge, and community are enhanced in an atmosphere of love and trust through developmentally appropriate activities.

Our preschool programs provide inclusive settings that recognize children's varied abilities, interests, needs and learning styles.

We believe children learn best through meaningful play. Our play-based, child centered program reflects the integration of physical, cognitive, social, emotional, language, self-help and aesthetic learning areas for the total development of the child. Meaningful play encourages curiosity, discovery and problem solving which allows for individual growth and the development of a positive self-image.

We recognize that parents are the child's first teachers. Children learn best when parents are involved in their child's educational program. The primary bridge between the home and school is the involvement of the family and community.

The statement and beliefs in this philosophy reflect the position of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).
STA Preschool Policies and Procedures

Objectives of the STA Preschool Program

1. **To provide a two year old program that stimulates communication skills and language development.**
   To meet this goal we focus on language development through the sharing of stories, nursery rhymes, and music activities. We continue to encourage the children to explore their world through the use of their five senses through active participation in daily learning activities. We teach our two year olds to self-help skills such as beginning to wash their own hands, button and zip, etc. We provide many gross and fine motor activities that improve body control.
   Class size is capped at 15 children, with a teacher and an assistant.

2. **In these formative years (3-4 year olds), we cultivate the habits of heart and mind that carry through a lifetime:** an appetite for learning, a curiosity about the world, compassion for others, and confidence in individual abilities.

We believe that it is the responsibility of the Preschool program to:
1. Teach children to seek God's love and witness Jesus' presence in their daily lives.
2. Encourage an appreciation of the uniqueness of each person as a child of God.
3. Encourage sensitivity, gentleness, and respect in relating to one another.
4. Provide daily opportunities for children to explore a variety of problem solving techniques.
5. Guide, protect, and encourage children to learn at their own rates.
6. Provide activities that are flexible for both large and small groups.
7. Provide materials for learning that relate to each age group.
8. Provide information to parents concerning the welfare of the child and activities in the school environment.
9. Meet once a year with parents to discuss their child's progress.

**VPK or Voluntary Prekindergarten** gives children a jump start by preparing them for school and enhancing their pre-reading, pre-math, language and social skills. By developing the skills children need to become strong readers and students at an early age, children are more likely to be successful in school.

VPK classrooms offer high-quality programs that include high literacy standards, developmentally appropriate curricula, manageable class sizes, and qualified teachers.

**Highlights of the VPK Program**
FREE for all children who live in Florida and who turn 4 years of age by September 1st. No registration fee.

Parents may choose a participating private child care or public school provider. Early language and literacy focus.

VPK stands for the Voluntary Prekindergarten Education Program. If you live in Florida, and your child turns 4 years of age by September 1, your child is eligible to participate in Florida’s FREE Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) education program at St Thomas Aquinas Catholic School. To obtain an Osceola County VPK certificate go to: www.elcosceola.com VPK School Readiness - Register Now Button

Admission

The St Thomas Aquinas Preschool Program admits students of any race, color, national and ethnic origin to all the rights, privileges, programs, and activities generally accorded or made available to students. The STA program does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, or ethnic origin in administration of educational policies, admissions policies, or other school-administered programs. There is no entrance exam for the STA program. If parents have educational, social-emotional or developmental concerns about their child they should discuss these concerns with the administration before the child’s first day of class. It is important that a positive and appropriate learning environment be established for each child.

Potty Training Policy

Children enrolled in PK3 and PK4 at STA must be potty trained before attending preschool. Children must be wearing underwear with very few accidents. A child having accidents daily would not be considered potty trained. Please note that wearing pull-ups isn’t considered being potty trained.

Why do children have to be potty trained before they begin preschool? There are strict standards for changing and disposing of wet or soiled diapers. The classrooms are not equipped for diaper changing. When an adult is busy changing a child’s diaper or soiled clothing, it is taking away from learning time for all students and it removes one adult from the direct supervision of and interaction with the rest of the class.

We do understand that even potty-trained children will occasionally have toileting accidents. By definition, “accidents” are unusual incidents and should happen infrequently. In these instances, the teachers will help children to change their clothes, encouraging independence as much as possible.

A potty-trained child is a child who can do the following:
1. Communicate to the teachers that he/she needs to go to the restroom before they need to go. 2. Alert him/herself to stop what he/she is doing, to go and use the bathroom. 3. Pull down his/her clothes and get them back up without assistance. 4. Wipe him/herself after using the toilet. (With minimal assistance for 3 year olds.) 5. Get on/off the toilet by him/herself. 6. Wash and dry hands. 7. Postpone going if they must wait for someone who is in the bathroom or if we are away from the classroom. 8. Awaken during nap time should they need to use the bathroom.

We certainly will ask your child many times throughout the day and always before nap time if they need to use the bathroom. A teacher will assist children as needed, but children should be able to complete toileting activities independently. This is an issue which protects all concerned. It is not uncommon for a child who is fully toilet trained to have a setback when he/she is in a new environment. Preschool Staff
are aware of this and will assist the children when necessary. Please send a complete change of clothes appropriate for the season. These will be left at school in case of accidents and returned at the end of the school year. Parents will be notified if a child has a toileting accident.

If your child is not completely potty trained as described above when preschool starts, the following options are available:

1. You may withdraw your child from preschool and place their name at the top of our waiting list. Registration and supply fees are non-refundable; however, if your child is re-enrolled in our program at a later date during the same school year, you will not need to pay these fees again. If you choose this option, we cannot guarantee that a space will be available.
2. You may pay 1/2 tuition to hold your child’s spot (for up to two months) until potty training has been completed.

Withdrawal

If it is necessary to withdraw a student during the school year, parents should advise the school as early as possible of the anticipated date of withdrawal. Parents must complete a Diocesan Withdrawal Form and settle all accounts before student records may be transferred. No official records are ever handed to parents. The school must have at least five (5) days advance notice to insure the timely processing of records and accounts. All original records will be transferred directly to the child’s new school upon the request of that school.

Tuition and Fees

Children between the ages of twenty-four (24) months and four years old are eligible for admission in the STA Preschool Program. An annual registration fee is due once the administrator has accepted your child for admittance except for VPK ½ day, which does not have a registration fee.

Tuition rates are determined annually by the pastor and principal and approved by the school board. Supply fees and registration fees are not included in the tuition. Tuition and special fees are determined through information gathered in developing the annual budget for the school year. Tuition, fees and fundraising are the major sources of revenue for meeting the expenses of running the school. Generally, tuition and fees account for approximately three-quarters of the actual cost of educating a child at STA school; the balance must be met through fundraising and other special sources. St. Thomas Aquinas Schools employs the FACTS Tuition Management Service to handle its tuition collection. In order to facilitate the collection of tuition and to assist parents in their monthly, personal budgeting, several payment options are available.

The payment plans include:
• A single annual payment before the start of school with a 2% discount
• 10, 11 monthly, weekly, and bi-weekly installments through FACTS Management, Inc.
These are automatic payments drafted from your checking account.
There is a “set-up fee” for this service.
The annual payment is due to the school by August 9. If the student is voluntarily withdrawn by the family for any reason, this registration payment is not refundable. Tuition terms are specified in the registration packet and available through the school office. Any questions should be directed to the Principal.

### Attendance

Children may attend the school anytime between 7:00 am and 6:00 pm, Monday through Friday.

**Preschool:** The pre-school gate opens at 7:40 a.m., and parents of Pre-K students only may park in the back lot and walk the Pre-K students to their classroom. No child is to simply be allowed to leave the car on his or her own and must be accompanied by a parent or older student. Older siblings or “carpoolers,” who arrive with preschoolers may also use that gate to enter school. All non-Pre-K students are to proceed to the classroom.

**Arrival:** All parents must walk their child to the classroom. Upon arrival in the at the classroom door, parents MUST record the arrival time and sign the classroom attendance sheet (required by DCF).

For a late arrival, after 7:55 am, the child must be signed-in at the front office and will require a tardy slip to enter the classroom.

Never leave your child alone inside or outside of a building including in an unattended in a vehicle.

**Dismissal & Pick-Up:**

At dismissal parents MUST pick their child from the classroom and record the departing time and sign the classroom attendance sheet (required by DCF).

**Preschool Eleven O’clock or Noon Dismissal**

For eleven o’clock or noon time dismissal, parents are to park in the back parking lot and walk to the gate to pick up your child. You are asked to please avoid coming through the office unless the gate is already closed. The gate closes at 11:00 and 12:10 p.m. for safety reasons.

**Authorized pick-up:**

At registration parent(s) indicate authorized persons to drop-off and pick-up children. When someone other than the parent(s) or “persons authorized to pick up the child” (listed in school database) is to pick up your child, parents must provide written notification (email/note) to the teacher providing the person’s full name.

The teacher will require proof of identification (Driver’s License or state-issued ID) before releasing your child to that person.

In the event of an emergency, parent(s) may contact the school office to give verbal permission for their child to go home with another person.

Because STA wants to ensure every child’s safety, if a staff member has reasonable cause to suspect the adult picking up may be under the influence of alcohol, drugs or is physically impaired in any way that
may endanger a child, the staff member has the obligation to refuse to release the child. If so, the staff member will contact another adult from the child’s Emergency Form.

**Illness**

Germs spread quickly in a preschool environment. All children and staff stay healthier when sick persons stay at home. Common sense must prevail in the case of colds, which can range from a mild case of sniffles to a full-blown sinus infection or deep cough. If your child is not well enough to participate in ALL aspects of the daily schedule, please keep them home from school.

The Emergency Form information is used to contact parents or an authorized adult if your child develops symptoms of an illness while in school.

- Ill/sick children are supervised in the clinic (in school front office) until he/she can be picked up
- If one or more of the following symptoms is present:
  - Temperature higher than 100°F
  - Sustained loss of appetite/nausea/vomiting
  - Red, pink, or crusted eyes
  - Stomach ache
  - Earache
  - Diarrhea
  - Rash/infection of skin
  - Pale or flushed face
  - Headache
  - Thick or greenish mucus from nose
  - Persistent cough
  - Loss of energy/decrease in activity/falling asleep
  - Sore throat

**24 HOUR RULE**

A child who has shown signs of illness in the previous 24 hours may not attend class.

**Fever free:** A child should be fever free for 24 hours, without the use of fever reducing medicine.

**Antibiotic timeline:** A child should be on antibiotics for at least 24 hours before returning to school.

Parents must notify the school office immediately if a child:

- Is diagnosed with a communicable disease. Notification to classroom families, respecting affected child/family confidentiality, may be important for parents to be on the lookout for symptoms in their own child.
- Has allergies, so precautions can be taken in the classroom
- Has been diagnosed with a head LICE infestation. Licensing requires cleaning and removal of materials (dress-up clothing, etc.) within a classroom that has a lice infestation. A child who has head lice will not be permitted to return until treatment has been accomplished. The treatment shall include the removal of all lice, lice eggs and egg cases. We also implement additional procedures, such as head checks if necessary.
- Is taking medication, since medicine may impact a child’s behavior.
- Prescription drugs will be dispensed as per the instruction from the doctor. All medications must be in original containers. No medications will be dispensed without a completed and signed medication form. Over the counter medication can only be dispensed according to the
recommended dosage, unless written release from a doctor accompanies it. Medicines such as Tylenol and Triaminic cold, etc. will not be dispensed without a note from a physician, NO EXCEPTIONS

All staff members at the Center are First Aid and CPR Certified and can be considered as non-medical first responders. In the event of a serious injury, 911 will be called immediately. The principal or staff member in charge will also call you immediately. Your child’s records will go with them to the hospital if they need to be transported by ambulance to the hospital. This is another reason for parents to keep our records current including phone numbers, allergies, immunizations, etc.

Communication

Communication between the home and school is vital to a successful program.

- **School-Wide (Non-emergency) Information** is communicated with parents in a number of ways:
  - Email,
  - Telephone, Text
  - St Thomas Aquinas Catholic School website,
  - Parent Orientation Back-to-School Night
  - Notices sent home in children’s folders

Classroom Information:

- Weekly newsletters are sent via school folder to parents. Weekly
- Lesson plans are posted in the classroom.

Child-Specific Information:

- During arrival and dismissal, staff members must devote full attention to all of the children. Please keep teacher-parent conversations brief. If you need to communicate specific information, a written note or email is preferred.
- If, at any time, you have special concerns, please contact your child’s teacher using email, a note, or call the office to leave a message. During school hours, teachers cannot accept phone calls. If you have a message for a teacher during school hours, please call or email the office, and we will relay the message. The teacher will respond as soon as possible.
- If you wish to talk to the teacher at length, you can email the teacher to request a phone conference or, if needed, arrange a time to meet in person.
- Please do not discuss problems or concerns in the presence of your child or other parents.
- Please communicate with the teacher regarding any changes at home or within the family (i.e., parent on a trip, family member in the hospital, sick grandparent). These changes can impact your child’s behavior, and it is useful for staff to be aware of such developments. We will always respect your privacy.
- **If your child is going to be out of school for any reason, please contact the school office.** For illnesses, this is especially important if we need to inform families of any communicable disease symptoms while maintaining confidentiality. In addition, teachers and children miss a child when they are absent, so they want to know that the child is okay.
Confidentiality

Confidentiality plays a vital role in promoting respect for every individual and fostering a strong community. St Thomas Aquinas Catholic School takes confidentiality very seriously and makes every effort to protect each family’s privacy. Communication between staff and parents about children is to be confidential at all times. Our preschool recommends that conversations about a child, behavior, or an incident be conducted in private, away from the child and other members of the community. If a parent has a question or concern, we suggest that this parent first contact the teacher via email or in person to arrange a time to discuss.

Classroom Supplies

Dress
- **Pre-k-2 yr. olds** should be dressed for active and participatory play. We do not want a child’s creativity hampered because of the clothing he/she is wearing.
- **Pre-k – 3 & 4 yr. olds** are required to wear the Pre-k uniform - maroon t-shirts and navy blue gym shorts with the new STA logo. This will be the uniform for both boys and girls.
- **All children** should wear sturdy, protective shoes (no sandals or Crocs®), which will enable him/her to run and climb with ease.
- Children play outside most days, so please dress your child appropriately.

Extra Clothes
At all times, each child should have at least one set of seasonal clothes that fit, pants, shirt, underwear, socks, that remain in the classroom for emergencies.

Please label each item that your child brings to school including the lunch box, backpack, cups, bags, clothing, blankets, sweatshirts, jackets, etc.

Only a small travel size pillow and small travel size blanket will be accepted to use at naptime. All large size items will be sent home.

Lunch and Snacks
Hot lunch is served Monday through Friday. A monthly menu is provided to parents. Parents are HIGHLY encouraged to order lunch through our on-line web site and it needs to be ordered at least three days in advance. No refunds will be given if the child is absent.
Students are always welcome to bring their own lunch any day of the week. All food brought to school should have nutritional value. Students have no access to heat up food. Gum, candy and soft drinks (soda) are not permitted other than on special occasions when supplied by the school. **Snack** is provided in the Pre-k 2 & 3 class.
If your child brings their own snack - AM/PM Snack should be in two separate containers marked with their child’s names, as well as AM for the morning snack and PM for the afternoon snack.

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**Positive Discipline Policy**

STA’s commitment to an age-appropriate and play-based curriculum ensures that activities are safe, child-centered and promote positive social interactions. Teachers carefully craft the environment, communicate and enforce clear boundaries and expectations for behavior, and use nonverbal cues and/or redirect a child’s behavior to foster success. Self-control, respect for others and a positive self-esteem are our goals.

When a problem arises, the teacher relies on modeling appropriate behavior, teaching peacemaking skills, and presenting stories or scenarios that reinforce the desired behavior. Nurturing these social skills helps children grow as successful, lifelong learners. Children learn to make suitable choices and develop techniques for regaining self-control when they feel frustrated. Instructive and individually appropriate consequences help to strengthen the child’s self-control and self-esteem.

**Biting**

Biting does happen in a preschool situation, especially with young children who do not have the verbal skills to express their feelings. Children’s feelings are related to environmental factors, as well as internal emotions, such as frustration, tiredness, overstimulation, seeking attention, etc. Our teachers work to create a positive, peaceful and nurturing environment that encourages children to maintain self-control. Parents are informed of biting incidents and whether their child was bit or is the biter.

**Discipline**

When a child experiences a particularly challenging time, the school encourages parents and teachers to work together and develop appropriate strategies. If a specific circumstance needs attention, the teacher follows these procedures:
1. The teacher observes and documents a child’s behavior, and addresses the behavior with the child. Techniques such as reminders, breathing, or the Safe Spot are used to address the behaviors and reinforce good choices.

2. The teacher discusses the child’s behavior with the parent and informs him/her of learning-based strategies the teacher is implementing. The teacher may discuss options with the School Administration, or school Guidance Counselor.

3. The teacher will follow up with the parent(s) about how the strategies are influencing the behavior.

4. If concern persists, a conference may be held with the teacher, parent, and school administration to discuss options to help the child further develop appropriate social skills.

5. Staff members make every reasonable effort to work with the child and his/her family to resolve behavioral concerns. At any time, an individual plan of action may be implemented, depending on the severity of the concern. Additional support from outside resources may be implemented if necessary. The individual plan of action may include removal of a child from the classroom and/or calling the parent to take the child home. Repeated, severe behaviors may result in STA excluding a child from attending.

**Curriculum**

‘Let’s learn with the Letter People’ was chosen for the preschoolers based on the developmentally appropriate approach to learning. The philosophy behind The Letter People is that young children learn best by doing. Learning isn’t just repeating what someone else says; it requires active thinking and experimenting to find out how things work and to learn firsthand about the world we live in.

In their early years, children explore the world around them by using all of their senses (touching, tasting, listening, smelling, and looking.) In using real materials such as blocks and trying out their ideas, children learn about size, shape and color and notice relationships between things.

**Goals of ‘The Letter People’**

The most important goal of our early childhood curriculum is to help children become enthusiastic learners. This means encouraging children to be active and creative explorers who are not afraid to try out their ideas and to think their own thoughts. Our goal is to help children become independent, self-confident, inquisitive learners.

We’re teaching children how to learn, not just in preschool, but all throughout their lives. We’re allowing them to learn at their own pace and in the ways that are best for them. We’re giving them good habits and attitudes, particularly a positive sense of themselves, which will make a difference throughout their lives.
The curriculum identifies goals in all areas of development:

- **Social:** to help children feel comfortable in school, trust their new environment, make friends and feel they are a part of the group.
- **Emotional:** to help children experience pride and self-confidence, develop independence and self-control, and have a positive attitude toward life.
- **Cognitive:** to help children become confident learners by letting them try out their own ideas and experience success, and by helping them acquire learning skills such as the ability to solve problems, ask questions, and use words to describe their ideas, observations and feelings.
- **Physical:** to help children increase their large and small muscle skills and feel confident about what their bodies can do.

The activities planned for the children, the way the environment is organized including toy and material selection, plans for the daily schedule and how we talk with the children are all designed to accomplish the goals of the curriculum and give each child a successful start in school. Age-appropriate weekly themes have been designed for children to learn and interact with each other. Each week the weekly theme and lesson plans are posted in the classroom.

**Examples of “A Day in the Life of a Preschooler”**

**Toddler Daily Schedule**

7:00 am-8:00: Greet each child and parent/self-directed activities in activity centers.

8:00 am- 8:30 am Cleanup time-Opening prayer and songs

8:30 am –Story time

9:00 am – Snack time

9:15 am – Circle Time

9:30 am - Playground

10:00 am – 11:00 am - Planned Center time: self-directed activities for some children, teacher - directed activities for others.

11:00am - Routines before lunch (toileting, washing hands)

11:15 am - Lunch

12:00-12:30pm – Gym / play

12:30 - Get ready for nap – potty / hand washing
12:45 - 2:15 - Naptime

2:15 – 3:00pm – Planned quiet play time. Routines (cleaning up from nap, toileting, washing hands)

3:10 – School dismissal

3:15 - snack

Late afternoon- 3:30 pm-6:00 pm Extend child care

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**Parent Forms**

**STATEMENT OF RESPONSIBILITY**

I have read and received a copy of the St. Thomas Aquinas Pre-school Handbook. I agree to abide by all requirements, policies, and financial responsibilities contained therein. I understand that failure to abide by the handbook may result in dismissal of my child. I accept responsibility for payment of all fees applied to my account. I understand that any unpaid balance on my account may result in legal actions being brought against me to collect said fee. I will be held accountable to pay reasonable fees for making such collection.
DISCIPLINE POLICY

I have read and understand the discipline/expulsion policy as stated in the St. Thomas Aquinas Pre-
school Handbook. I agree to abide by all requirements and policies stated therein. I authorize consent
for child care personnel to have access to my child’s records.

Parent Signature: __________________________ Date: ________________

PHOTOGRAPHY AND IMAGE ASSIGNMENT, WAIVER, AND RELEASE

As you review this photo release form, please do so with regard to any particular considerations of photos of your child being
available on-line or in print.

I, _________________________, for valuable consideration received, and for being allowed access to
Diocesan property, activities, or events, expressly assign to St. Thomas Aquinas Pre-school and the
Diocese of Orlando, and to all of their current, former, and future agents and related entities
(collectively, “the Diocese”), all rights, title and interest in, and to, the use of my and my child/ward’s
image or likeness, including, but not limited to all videotape recordings, photographs, or audio
recordings of, or made by, me and/or my child/ward on Diocesan property, during a Diocesan-
sponsored event, or for any other Diocesan purpose (“the Property”). The Diocese shall have, without
my consent, the right to assign its rights in the Property, in whole or in part, to any entity, parish, or
school within the Diocese of Orlando.

I hereby irrevocably grant the Diocese perpetually and exclusively, the right to use and incorporate
(alone or together with other materials), in whole or in part, the Property, in any Diocesan publication,
news release, or for any other purpose. Further, I hereby authorize the reproduction, sale, lease, copyright, exhibition, broadcast and/or distribution of the Property without limitation for any purpose whatsoever, and I further waive all rights to any compensation for my and/or my child/ward’s appearance or participation in the Property.

I hereby waive any claims against and release the Diocese, its current, former, and future religious, employees, volunteers, agents, and successors and assigns from and against any and all claims, demands, actions, causes of actions, suits, costs, expenses, liabilities, and damages whatsoever that I and/or my child/ward may have against the Diocese in connection with the Property or the use of the Property.

This release shall not obligate the Diocese to use the Property or to use any of the rights granted hereunder, or to exhibit, distribute, or exploit the Property. I acknowledge that the Diocese cannot control all photographic access to its properties, and that my child/ward’s name may be printed with photos/images in various publications, including non-Diocesan publications.

I represent that I am eighteen years of age or older, and that I have read and understand the terms of this Assignment, Waiver, and Release.

Signature: ____________________________________________________________

Date: ____________________________

Witness: _____________________________________________________________

Name(s) of minor child(ren)/ward(s) ______________________________________

_________________________________________