

PRESCHOOL PROTOCOL

Western Catholic Educational Association

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To be used in conjunction with Improving Student Learning 2012
(ISL 2012)

Western Catholic Educational Association
Catholic Schools Accrediting Commission

December 2014

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INTRODUCTION

Catholic schools have a long history and rich tradition of providing excellent education in schools beginning with early learning programs. Each school is able to structure their early learning/preschool programs to meet the needs of their families and the communities that they serve. Catholic schools provide a safe and caring early childhood/preschool education in a loving, faith-based environment. Each early learning /preschool program goes through a rigorous evaluation process and is recognized by the Diocesan Catholic Schools Department and licensed by each individual State. The learning environment meets nationally recognized criteria for high quality early childhood programs such as those set forth by WCEA and/or NAEYC.

GENERAL CAVEATS

Stand-Alone Preschool Programs

Preschool Programs functioning as solely parish ministries, or independent programs, servicing children ages 2-5, should reflect on these discussion points and develop a full Self Study to attain accreditation from the Western Catholic Educational Association (WCEA) using Improving Student Learning (ISL) 2012.

Preschool Programs Connected to an Elementary School

Preschool programs functioning as part of an elementary school structure will discuss the best approach to addressing these questions with the school administration. Preschool information may be developed as a separate document to the elementary school Self Study or may be fully integrated and incorporated into the elementary school's document.

IMPORTANT NOTES

Receiving accreditation from WCEA does not replace a preschool program's adherence to federal, state, or local licensing regulations and Title XXII guidelines.

Directors should also review and integrate curricular guidelines and expectations from their individual dioceses and states for preschool programs.

OUTLINE FOR THE WRITTEN SELF STUDY DOCUMENT

- Section A1: School Community Profile
 - A2: How the Self Study was conducted
- Section B1: Involvement of All Shareholders
 - B2: Use of Prior Accreditation Findings (not required for initial WCEA Accreditation)
- Section C 1-8: Quality of the Preschool's Program
- Section 4: Improving Student Learning Action Plan

Preschools should follow directions in the ISL 2012 (rev. 9/13) protocol to develop responses for all sections of the Self Study. The full protocol and templates may be accessed at westwcea.org.

The following discussion questions have been specifically developed to guide conversation and analysis of the unique programming requirements for a preschool program.

QUALITY OF THE PRESCHOOL PROGRAM (within ISL, Category 3)

Organization for Student Learning

1. Catholic Identity

Catholic schools participate in the Church's evangelizing mission of bringing the Gospel to the world. They are a "privileged environment in which Christian education is intentionally carried out . . . Catholic schools, partner with parents in the formation of girls and boys, who will be good citizens of this world, enriching society with the Gospel values, but who will also be citizens of the world to come. Catholic schools foster the growth of good Catholic human beings who love God and neighbor, and thus fulfill their destiny of becoming saints." *The Holy See's Teaching on Catholic Schools, by Archbishop J. Michael Miller, C.S.B.*

Using the (8) Catholic Identity Standards,

1. The preschool has a mission statement and philosophy statement which indicate the integration of the Roman Catholic Faith in all aspects of school life.
2. The preschool provides regular opportunities for the school community to experience prayer.
3. The preschool uses Religion resources and instruction that is faithful to the Roman Catholic Church teachings and meets the requirements set forth by the USCCB.
4. The Local Ordinary approves those who teach the Catholic Faith (Canon 805) and there is ongoing formation for catechetical and instructional competence
5. The preschool maintains an active partnership with parents whose fundamental concern is the spiritual and academic education of their children (Canon 796).
6. The preschool has a service-oriented outreach to the Church and the civic community that is age-appropriate.
7. The preschool uses signs, sacramentals, traditions, and rituals of the Roman Catholic Church.
8. All preschool personnel are actively engaged in bringing the Good News of Jesus into the total educational experience.

2. Defining the School's Purpose

There is a statement of philosophy about education in the Catholic preschool setting that reflects the concept of the evangelizing mission of the Church, the developmental appropriateness of each child, and the need to provide for parent participation and parent education. This statement is congruent with the philosophy of the diocesan Catholic elementary school system of which the preschool is a member. This philosophy clearly states that parents are the primary educators of their children; administrators and faculty partner with parents in meeting the faith development and pre-academic needs of their children. Goals and objectives prepared for the preschool program relate directly to the preschool mission and philosophy and are reviewed annually.

Criteria Explications

- the mission and philosophy of the preschool program are Christ-centered and presented in a comprehensive written statement
- the goals and objectives of the program are consistent with the mission of the diocese and the preschool's stated philosophy
- the preschool mission, philosophy, goals, and objectives are consistent with diocesan and local elementary school expectations, policies and documents
- procedures for the review and update of the preschool goals and objectives are adopted and scheduled for implementation on a specific timeline

- faculty, parents, and community members are included in the review procedures
- a process for presenting and explaining the mission, philosophy, goals and objectives to the school-community is prepared and included as an on-going event
- an evaluation of progress in moving toward goals and in meeting objectives is conducted and documented in an annual report to the diocesan WCEA Elementary Commissioner, according to the timeline and annual expectations of the local elementary schools.

3. Organization for Student Learning

If the preschool is part of a larger school structure, that organization includes the preschool program as an integral component. If the preschool is a stand-alone entity, its organizational structure needs to be clearly defined. Goals and objectives for the preschool program are in alignment with those goals and objectives for the local elementary school grade sequence. The relationships among the governing body, administration, staff, parents and children are clearly defined as are the responsibilities and limits of authority.

Criteria Explications

- organizational charts and descriptions show the preschool as an integral part of the wider school community, the parish or the diocesan system
- procedures for admission, classroom organization, staffing, record-keeping, parent participation and parent education are clearly articulated and disseminated, at a minimum through formally articulated handbooks for staff and for parents
- preschool staff adhere to the policies of the diocese/parish/school, including all background checks and Safe Environment policies
- preschool program provides a parent handbook delineating policies and procedures, expectations and opportunities for family information and interaction
- school improvement processes involve preschool staff in a continuous cycle of organizational, curricular and professional development
- roles and responsibilities for all staff are clearly defined
- procedures for personnel supervision and evaluation are clearly articulated and implemented
- a positive school climate is fostered throughout the entire school program
- staff is appropriately included in decision-making processes

4. Staff

The preschool teachers have appropriate certificates or credentials in Catholic faith formation and early childhood education, and are trained in child development as required by state or local licensing. They work with the total school faculty to create a faith-filled environment in which effective catechesis and learning takes place. Preschool teachers are aware of the need for parent participation and are adept at classroom management techniques that utilize parents in a positive manner. Staff-parent interactions revolve around the concept that the child's learning and family are intimately associated. Teachers avail themselves of professional development activities and employ creative instructional practices.

Criteria Explications

- adult-child ratios vary depending upon the age of the children, type of program activity, special needs and licensing policies of the state and diocese
- preschool staff are in compliance with diocesan expectations for faith formation and catechesis, as well as background checks and Safe Environment policies
- teachers are well-trained in early childhood educational practices and possess appropriate certificates or credentials consistent with the requirements of the elementary school, diocese, and the state
- there is appropriate use of developmentally appropriate instructional strategies, activities, materials
- teachers interact verbally with children in a calm, courteous, respectful, friendly manner
- teachers use positive techniques of guidance or redirection and refrain from inappropriate discipline measures
- certificated and classified staff have positive attitudes about cultural values and utilize culturally appropriate strategies/activities
- teachers display creativity in teaching
- teachers are knowledgeable about program enrichment sources such as businesses, community workers/groups, government agencies
- a professional working relationship exists among all of the school staff, at all grade levels
- all staff participate in professional development activities
- there is continued communication and interaction with parents
- teachers involve parents in the educational process
- the education of parents about the preschool mission, philosophy and procedures is a part of the overall preschool program plans
- custodial and maintenance staffs are adequate for the school's program

Curriculum and Instruction

5. Curriculum and Instructional Methodology

The written curriculum includes task/behavior descriptions, specific objectives and activities, and references to materials and resources that relate directly to the stated preschool goals that derive from the preschool philosophy which is congruent with accepted concepts of how young children learn as defined by Early Childhood Guidance documents. The curriculum is child-centered and focuses upon age-appropriate learning activities in the following areas: faith formation, cognitive skills, social skills, social interaction, social behavior, language development, physical development, self-concept development, creative expression, routine personal tasks, and self-health/safety. Development of Catholic traditions and basic prayers are integrated in the daily program. Knowledge of and appreciation for the arts are included as basic elements in daily activities. Enrichment activities for all curricular areas are provided. Family activities and routine living tasks are central themes in daily activities. The evaluation of each child's progress is ongoing and a specific part of the curricular documentation.

Criteria Explications

- the curriculum is Christ- and child-centered and developmentally appropriate
- the curriculum document is specific and referenced to the mission, philosophy and goals
- the curriculum is balanced and includes faith formation, as well as cognitive, social, language development, physical, creative and routine activities
- the curriculum, integrated and experiential, is based upon the children's needs and interests
- children have time to play alone, with other children, or interact with adults
- children are encouraged to think, reason, question, develop ideas, solve problems and experiment
- children are encouraged to make choices and display independence
- spiritual, intellectual and physical development is fostered with a variety of approaches that reflect the needs of the children
- the curriculum specifically includes multicultural concepts and activities
- curricular activities encourage good habits of health, nutrition, grooming and safety
- development of Catholic traditions and basic prayers are fully integrated throughout the curriculum
- knowledge of and appreciation for the arts are included as basic elements in daily activities with hands-on art, music and drama opportunities
- the curriculum allows for structured and spontaneous activities that can be added to an emerging program
- daily schedules derive from the curriculum document and balance the following: indoor/outdoor, quiet/active, individual/large group/small group, large muscle/small muscle, child initiated/staff initiated
- transitions from one activity to another are specific and are included as learning strategies
- routine personal tasks such as grooming, washing, toileting, dressing, eating and sleeping are included
- evaluation of the progress of the children is included in the instructional plan and is a regular on-going part of the teachers' activities

Support for Student Personal and Academic Growth

6. Support Services

The needs, interests and aptitudes of the children are determined and program objectives for the children relate to those needs, interests and aptitudes. Preschool administrators should determine the appropriate time and level of involvement for liturgical or para-liturgical activities. Special services and referrals to community or private agencies are available as needed. School-site administrators support the implementation of the program.

Criteria Explications

- ample opportunities for celebrating Catholic traditions exist
- assessments of needs and interests by staff are used to set goals for the children
- assessment information is collected throughout the year to monitor children's progress and to modify goals
- parish and local elementary school personnel, including administrators, are resources for and advocates of the program
- community resources such as local parishes, social services, mental services, mental health agencies, counseling services, crisis centers, clinics, recreational and youth organizations are used for program support
- special needs identification lists and plans for remediation are prepared by teachers and parents cooperatively
- translators are available, as necessary, to communicate with parents

7. Health and Safety

The health and safety of the children are a paramount concern and there is compliance with all legal and health requirements including, but not limited to, immunizations. Adults must be physically and psychologically capable of serving children of this age group. Each child has a health evaluation by accepted medical personnel and detailed health records maintained in the classroom/school. Provisions are made for the safe conduct of the children from home to school, from one area of the school facility to another, and from school to home.

Criteria Explications

- there is compliance with all state, legal and health requirements
- adults are free of any physical or psychological conditions that might adversely affect children
- staff have pre-employment physical examinations, tuberculosis tests, and other communicable disease tests
- every child has a written health record, report of health evaluation six months prior to enrollment, and records of required immunizations
- emergency contact information is on file and available to staff
- staff are alerted to children's medical problems and trained in appropriate procedures to provide assistance
- there are provisions for notification of parents of children who are ill
- staff are qualified to administer first aid, including CPR
- location of first aid supplies is clearly identified and supplies are available in sufficient quantities
- vehicles used for transportation have appropriate car seats and restraint devices, as required by law
- evacuation plans are posted; staff and children know the evacuation plans and safety with regularly scheduled drills

- safe arrival and departure procedures are employed, as outlined in the parent handbook
- children are released only to authorized adults
- areas in and around the school plant allow for safe movement of the children
- suspected incidents of abuse or neglect are reported
- children's clothes are appropriate for program activities and weather
- equipment and materials are clean and serviceable
- building, classroom and outdoor area are maintained in clean and safe condition
- hand-washing facilities are available for adults and children, and are used, as necessary, for personal cleanliness

8. Food Services and Nutrition

Food services meet the special nutritional requirements of preschool children and promote healthy habits of nutrition. Guidelines disseminated by the United States Department of Agriculture, local and state ordinances serve as the framework for the food services program.

Criteria Explications

- food provided meets the nutritional requirements for the children as recommended by the United States Department of Agriculture
- food preparation and facilities meet all health standards
- food handlers are free of any communicable disease or condition
- food is stored, prepared and served under sanitary conditions
- eating areas and utensils are appropriate for the size and development level of the children
- food served reflects the cultural diversity of the children
- meal times are pleasant social events
- meal times are used as nutritional learning activities
- children learn habits of cleanliness as part of the nutritional learning activities

9. Parent Participation

Parents are the primary educators of their children and partner with the school in the faith development of their children. Parents are encouraged to be participants in the many activities of the preschool program. Parent participation fosters, in the home, the continuance of and support for the preschool program practices.

Criteria Explications

- parents receive an orientation to the program
- parents must comply with diocesan regulations for background checks and Safe Environment training

- parents, as necessary, are included in training activities in preparation for their participation in program activities with children
- teachers discuss specific program activities with parents
- parents work under the direction of the teacher to provide learning experiences and supervision of the children
- parents help prepare material for program activities
- parents assist on study trips and in outdoor play
- parents assist with the food service activities
- teachers and parents develop a continuity for parent participation in program activities
- parents are asked to support the faith formation of their children within the Catholic traditions at home and within the school program
- parents are encouraged to use program learning activities with their children at home
- parents are asked to work with their children at home in preparation for special events
- parents are encouraged to read to their children at home and to share enriching experiences with them

10. Parent Participation

Parents are ambassadors for the program and the school. Thus, there needs to be a well-defined program of parent education that enhances parents' knowledge and capabilities in early childhood development and education.

Criteria Explanations

- conferences are held to discuss children's progress
- parents are informed about the program through newsletters, notes, notices of events, conferences, websites or other electronic communication
- meetings for parent groups are scheduled to discuss the program, learn about agency assistance, hear guest speakers
- parents are invited to attend performances or events presented by the children
- special evening or Saturday classes for parents are provided, as needed, to teach English, coping skills and/or basic community life skills

Resource Management and Development

11. Classroom and School Facilities

The learning environment reflects the Catholic tradition. It enables staff members to implement the preschool program at an optimum level with classrooms, school structures, materials, and grounds that are safe and appropriate for the preschool children. Space, both indoor and outdoor, fosters interaction of the children with each other, with adults, and with the learning materials.

Criteria Explications

- religious symbols are prominent throughout the preschool rooms, as well as outdoor areas
- indoor and outdoor facilities meet all state licensing and diocesan policies, and are safe, comfortable, clean
- outdoor space is used as an extension of the indoor areas for learning activities
- outdoor areas are suitable for climbing, running, playing games and for using wheeled toys, building play structures
- arrangements of space allow individual, small group and large group activities
- age-appropriate materials and equipment are accessible to the children
- soft components such as cushions, rugs, mats, grass are included as part of the room furnishings/play areas
- sound-absorbing materials are used to reduce noise
- personal storage space is provided and is accessible to the children
- toilets, washing facilities, and drinking water are accessible to the children, in compliance with licensing and other government ordinances

12. Finance

There is financial support that provides a quality educational program that includes the necessary staff, provision for parent involvement and education, instructional resources, physical facilities appropriate to the children served, and other support services necessary to achieve the objectives of the school. The budget development process involves those who are responsible for implementing the school's programs and services.

Criteria Explications

- the preschool budget is part of the total parish and/or school's budgeting process and practices
- the budget includes provision for all elements of the preschool program
- preschool teachers, as members of the school faculty, provide program information to the administrators during the budget development process
- teachers may have some discretion with funds expended for food, instructional materials, and supplies

APPENDICES

Stand-alone preschools will use Appendix A1, 2, 3, 4, and 8, B 1 and 2; C1, 2, 5 and 6 to acquire survey data; D to record meetings; E Writing Template; F Action Plan Template; G 1 and 2 to assess their Catholic Identity; and J Annual Progress Report from the ISL 2012 rev 9/13 protocol.

APPENDIX A School Profile

- Appendix A1: School Profile
- Appendix A2: Enrollment Data Analysis
- Appendix A3: Teaching Staff Profiles
- Appendix A4: Support Staff Profiles
- Appendix A8: Staff Development Program

APPENDIX B Data Analysis

- Appendix B1: Enrollment Trends
- Appendix B2: Tuition Trends (*add a response to include information tuition funding from state or federal child care funds*)

APPENDIX C Surveys (*adjust questions as appropriate for local situation*)

- Appendix C1: Staff Survey
- Appendix C2: Parent Survey
- Appendix C5: Pastor Survey
- Appendix C6 sections 1-6: Faith Experience Survey

APPENDIX D - use to record ALL meetings pertaining to accreditation

APPENDIX E - use as writing template to put in writing Self Study information

APPENDIX F - use to articulate formal goals and steps for Action Plan developed as a result of the Self Study process

APPENDIX G 1 & 2: Faith Experience Survey (*adjust questions as appropriate for local situation*)

APPENDIX J - use in subsequent years to report progress on the Action Plan