



**ST. MATTHEW'S**  
**Early Learning Center**

# **HANDBOOK**

## **2025-2026**

[elc@stmattsaints.org](mailto:elc@stmattsaints.org)

## **Welcome to St. Matthew's Early Learning Center**

### **I. About the Center**

The Early Learning Center is part of St. Matthew's Catholic School, located at 602 South Main Street in Kalispell, Montana. The Early Learning Center is an extension of the K-8 education program.

### **Mission Statement for St. Matthew's Early Learning Center**

At St. Matthew's Early Learning Center, we are dedicated to nurturing each child's unique, God-given gifts. Our staff works tirelessly to create a supportive and loving environment that sparks a lifelong love for learning. We understand the profound impact of early childhood experiences and the crucial role they play in shaping young minds. With this in mind, we engage with children at their level, offering intentional learning opportunities through play, faith, and beyond. Our mission is to educate the whole child while actively serving and strengthening our community.

Children at St. Matthew's Early Learning Center enjoy a rich, well-rounded experience, participating in weekly classes in Art, Library, Music, Spanish, and Physical Education, and attending school Mass every Wednesday morning.

### **Program Objectives & Core Values:**

- We provide a loving, Christian environment where each child is recognized as a creation of God, nurtured through song, stories, and play.
- Opportunities are given for learning in key areas such as math, science, language development, reading, self-help skills, and social interactions.
- We foster curiosity, critical thinking, and problem-solving in a safe and welcoming space.
- Creativity and self-expression are encouraged through music, art, and dramatic play, allowing children to explore and develop their individual talents.
- Our curriculum connects children with the wider community through field trips, guest speakers, and engaging, age-appropriate lessons.
- We support parents in their academic and developmental goals by providing a nurturing, beautiful learning environment and a team of dedicated, knowledgeable staff passionate about offering a comprehensive, academic, and creative program.

## II. Admissions & Enrollment

### Enrollment Procedures:

To enroll a child at St. Matthew's Early Learning Center, parents must complete the following steps before the child's first day of school:

1. Complete the **online St. Matthew's Catholic School Registration**.
2. Submit the **DPHHS Forms**.
3. Complete the **online FACTS tuition payment agreement**.
4. Provide **current immunization records**.

All required documentation must be submitted before the child's first day.

### Fees & Billing:

Parents will enroll in our **online FACTS tuition payment program** for easy and secure tuition processing.

### 2025-2026 Tuition (9 months):

- **Returning Family Non-Refundable Registration Fee:** \$120.00
- **New Family Non-Refundable Registration Fee:** \$225.00

### ELC 3, ELC 4, ELC 5 (7:30 AM - 3:15 PM)

- **5-Day Program (Monday-Friday):** \$8,300.00
- **ELC 3**
  - **3-Day Program (Monday, Wednesday, Friday):** \$6,050.00
  - **2-Day Program (Tuesday, Thursday):** \$4,032.00

### After School Care:

- **Monday-Friday:** \$175.00 per month
- **Specific days (3:30-5:30 PM):** \$20.00 per day

*Please note: The After School Care Program is not a drop-in service. Advance registration is required on the Enrollment Form.*

St. Matthew's Early Learning Center is a full-day program, and fees are not prorated for absences due to illness, vacation, school holidays, or other reasons.

## School Holidays/Closures\*

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● One week before school year begins (End of August)</li><li>● Labor Day</li><li>● 3rd Thursday/Friday in October, MEA Professional Development Days</li><li>● November 1, All Saints Day</li><li>● Thanksgiving Break</li><li>● Christmas Break</li><li>● Snow Days or any other days determined by St. Matthew's Catholic School and/or School District #5</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday</li><li>● Presidents' Day</li><li>● Spring Break</li><li>● Good Friday &amp; Easter Monday</li><li>● Memorial Day</li><li>● One week after the Last Day of School for Summer set-up (June)</li><li>● Independence Day</li></ul>
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**\*These dates are subject to change. Please check our calendar each month for updates.**

### Withdrawal Policy:

If circumstances such as moving, change of employment, or other personal reasons require you to withdraw your child from St. Matthew's Early Learning Center, a **two-week notice** is required. This notice allows the Early Learning Center time to gather your child's belongings and complete any necessary paperwork or financial arrangements.

Please note that **enrollment deposits are non-refundable**.

## III. Your Child's Care

### Outdoor Play & Weather Policy:

Weather permitting, we strive to provide outdoor play for the children every day. In the event of severe weather, we will offer indoor gross motor time in the school gym or another available school space.

The Early Learning Center follows the **Child Care Weather Watch** guidelines set forth by the Montana Department of Health and Human Services (DPHHS) Early Childhood Family Support Division (ECFSD) to ensure the safety and well-being of all children.

<https://dphhs.mt.gov/assets/ecfsd/childcarelicensing/WeatherWatch.pdf>

### Discipline Policy:

At St. Matthew's Early Learning Center, we are committed to fostering a nurturing environment for all children. No child will be subjected to corporal punishment or verbal abuse. Yelling,

spanking, or threatening to spank is never used as a form of discipline. Instead, we use positive reinforcement, redirection, and other proactive behavior management strategies to guide children.

If a disciplinary issue is deemed harmful to students and/or staff, parents will be contacted and asked to pick up their child. For ongoing discipline concerns, St. Matthew's reserves the right to discontinue a child's enrollment if necessary.

**Biting Policy:** If a child bites two or more times in a single day, the child's parents will be contacted, and the child must be picked up immediately. This policy is in place to prevent further incidents and to help calm the child who is biting.

We also ask that all discipline matters involving the children be handled in accordance with our policy. If a parent has concerns regarding another child's behavior, we encourage you to address the issue directly with the appropriate teacher. For the safety and privacy of all involved, **parents are not permitted to approach another child or their parents** about a discipline concern without a director or teacher present.

### **General Information / Clothing Guidelines**

To support our active learning environment, we encourage students to wear play clothes. Our activities often involve hands-on, creative learning, which can sometimes get messy!

#### **Weather-Appropriate Clothing:**

- **Cold Weather:** Students should come dressed for cooler weather with coats, hats, gloves, boots, and snow pants.
- **Warm Weather:** Please ensure your child is dressed for warmer temperatures with appropriate spring or summer wear.

#### **Footwear:**

- **Indoor Shoes:** During the winter months, students must have indoor shoes to wear inside the building, separate from their outdoor boots. *Please note: Slippers are not considered indoor shoes.*
- **Gym Shoes:** All students are required to have regular tennis shoes for gym time. These must be closed-toed shoes for safety.

**Extra Set of Clothes:** Please send an extra set of clothing in case of accidents or messy activities. A complete set should include:

- Shirt
- Pants
- Underpants
- Socks

### **Rest/Nap Time**

All classes provide a designated rest/nap time in the afternoon, following lunch. During this time, children are encouraged to remain calm and quiet. Most students are typically awake by 2:30 PM.

**Drop-off and Pick-up Timing:** We kindly ask that children **not be dropped off or picked up between 12:30 PM and 2:30 PM**. This is a busy period where we transition from lunch to recess and then to rest/nap time. It can be disruptive to both students entering the classroom and those trying to nap.

**Rest Time Supplies:** Parents are asked to provide the following items for rest time:

- Blanket
- Small pillow
- Comfort item (e.g., stuffed animal)

**Sanitation Reminder:**

To ensure cleanliness, all rest time items must be taken home every Friday for washing.

## **IV. Keeping Your Child Safe & Healthy**

### **Health and Safety**

At the Early Learning Center, we are committed to providing a safe and healthy environment for all children. While we take great care in maintaining cleanliness and encouraging frequent handwashing, germs are an ongoing challenge when working with young children. To help prevent the spread of illness, we ask that parents **keep their sick children at home**. If your child shows any of the following symptoms, please do not bring them to school:

- Fever of 100 degrees or higher
- Diarrhea
- Vomiting
- Undiagnosed rash
- Red eyes with discharge
- Bacterial infections (e.g., strep throat)

If your child develops any of these symptoms while at school, we will contact you and ask you to pick them up immediately. If we are unable to reach you, we will call one of your approved emergency contacts.

**Return to School:** Children may return to school once they meet the following criteria:

- They have been fever-free for 24 hours
- They have not vomited or had diarrhea within the last 24 hours
- They have completed the required time on antibiotics, as prescribed by their doctor

### **Please Inform Us**

If your child is staying home due to illness, please notify the school as soon as possible. This helps us ensure the safety and well-being of all students.

### **Medication Policy**

Medications will be administered according to the guidelines outlined in the **Medication Authorization Form**. For **Over-the-Counter (OTC) Medication**, the guidelines are specified on the signed **OTC Medication Authorization Form**.

#### **Prescription Medication:**

All prescribed medications must be provided in the original container with your child's name clearly labeled on it.

#### **OTC Medication:**

Parents must bring in any OTC medications with their child's name clearly written on the packaging.

### **Lunch & Snacks**

Parents are responsible for providing a **water bottle, healthy morning snack, lunch, and afternoon snack** for their child each day. Please refer to the attached **Nutrition Guidelines AR 37.95.215** from the Department of Health and Human Services Early Childhood and Family Support Division. The Early Learning Center does not provide food.

#### **School Lunch Program:**

The ELC participates in the **St. Matthew's School Lunch Program**. All families are required to fill out the **Free and Reduced Lunch Program** form.

#### **Lunch Prices:**

- Hot Lunch (includes Milk and Salad Bar): \$3.00
- Milk Only: \$0.60
- Salad Bar Only: \$1.20

*Note: Prices are subject to change.*

### **Toilet-Training Policy**

Children attending St. Matthew's Early Learning Center are expected to be **fully toilet-trained**. This includes the ability to:

- Verbalize the need to use the bathroom in enough time to get to the restroom.
- Clean themselves after using the potty.

- Pull up and down their pants without assistance.

We understand that occasional accidents happen. However, if a child experiences more than **two accidents in a day**, we will contact you to pick up your child. St. Matthew's Early Learning Center reserves the right to discontinue enrollment if the child is not deemed fully potty-trained by staff.

## **Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse**

In accordance with Montana Code, it is mandatory for the Director of the child care center and any employee of a registered or licensed day care to immediately report suspected child abuse or neglect. Reports are made to the **Child Abuse Hotline (1-866-820-5437)** through the Children & Family Services Division of the Department of Public Health and Human Services.

1. **Parent Concerns**
2. If you have concerns regarding your child's experience, please first address them with your child's **Lead Teacher**. Be clear about your expectations for resolution. If the issue is not resolved in a timely manner, please schedule an appointment with the **Director**. For certain concerns, the Director may ask for a written summary of the issue.
3. **Medication Policy:**  
Medications will only be administered by a parent unless a **Medication Authorization Form** is completed, current, and on file at the Early Learning Center.
4. **Contagious Illness Notification:**  
In the event of exposure to a contagious illness, parents will be notified **in person, by phone, and/or by email**.

## **V. St. Matthew's Community**

### **St. Matthew's Catholic School App (Optional)**

Download the **St. Matthew's Catholic School App** to stay informed with push notifications about upcoming events, school closures, late starts, and early releases. Opt in to ensure you never miss important updates!

### **Contact Information**

It is crucial that parents keep their contact information up-to-date. In case of an accidental injury, the Early Learning Center staff will first attempt to contact the parent. If we cannot reach the parent, we will then call the emergency contacts provided.

### **Accident Protocol:**

- **Minor Accidents:** The Early Learning Center staff will administer first aid and inform parents at the end of the day with a written **Accident/Incident Report**.



- **Serious Emergencies:** In the case of a serious emergency, the Early Learning Center staff will contact emergency response units immediately.

Please ensure that your contact information is always current to help us respond effectively in case of an emergency.

## **Non-Discrimination Policy**

St. Matthew's Early Learning Center is committed to providing equal access to its programs and services, and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, or handicapped conditions.

*In accordance with Federal Law and U.S. Department of Agriculture policy, this institution is prohibited from discriminating on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, or disability.*

**To file a complaint of discrimination**, you may contact:

- **USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights**
- **Room 326-W, Whitten Building**
- **1400 Independence Avenue, SW**
- **Washington D.C. 20250-9710**
- **Phone: 202-720-5964 (voice TDD)**

The USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

## **Parent Volunteers**

We welcome and encourage parent participation at St. Matthew's Early Learning Center! From time to time, we may ask parents to assist with various activities, and we especially invite parents to share their culture, language, customs, or job-related skills. Your involvement not only enriches the learning experience but also shows your child that you are engaged in their education.

## **Volunteer Requirements:**

All parents interested in volunteering must:

- Complete a **Volunteer Form**
- Complete the **online Virtus Training**

*Note:* Parents may not visit for extended periods or drive children (other than their own) on field trips unless **Virtus Training** has been completed.

## **Field Trips**

The Early Learning Center frequently takes "Walking Field Trips" around our school neighborhood to explore and enjoy nature. At the beginning of the school year, parents sign a **Walking Field Trip Permission Slip** that covers all of these outings. Parents will receive email notifications with details about upcoming walking trips.

For **non-walking field trips**, parents will be informed in advance and encouraged to participate. Permission slips and driver release forms will be provided prior to these trips. A signed permission slip is required for your child to participate.

## **VI. Attendance Policies**

### **Sign In/Sign Out**

Parents are required to **drop off** and **pick up** their child at the Early Learning Center and sign them in and out using the iPad with their **5-digit family code**. Please **do not share your code**. If your code is lost or forgotten, contact the ELC Director for assistance.

If the iPad is not working, parents must use the **Montana DPHHS sign-in/sign-out form** until the iPad is functioning again. It is essential that staff members are aware when a child leaves the facility.

### **Authorized Pick-Up:**

Children will only be released to individuals listed on the **Authorization Form**. If someone else will be picking up your child, please notify the teachers in advance.

For anyone unfamiliar to the staff, **identification must be shown** before a child can be released. This applies to all individuals, including parents or family members who may be unfamiliar to us.

**Please note:** Minors are not permitted to pick up children.

### **Termination of Child Care**

St. Matthew's Early Learning Center reserves the right to discontinue enrollment if it is determined that the current academic or classroom arrangement is not benefiting the child, the school, or the family.

We understand that as a parent, you are deeply concerned about your child's well-being. As a school, we must also consider the welfare of all children in our program. While it is not our goal to exclude any child or family, we are committed to ensuring that every child receives the best care and education possible.

It is our priority to work collaboratively with families to support their child's growth and development.

## **VII. Other**

## **School Day**

The school day begins at **8:15 AM**, with drop-off starting as early as **7:30 AM**, and ends at **3:15 PM**. Please ensure that your child arrives on time for drop-off and is picked up promptly. Late arrivals or early pick-ups can be disruptive, not only for the child entering or leaving the classroom but also for the class as a whole.

## **Toys**

Students are not permitted to bring toys from home, except on designated "**Show-and-Share**" **Days**. Toys can become a distraction in the classroom, and we cannot be held responsible for any loss or damage of items brought to school.

## **St. Matthew's Early Learning Center Summer Session**

St. Matthew's Early Learning Center operates year-round, offering a full-day Summer Session during June, July, and August. The Summer Session serves children ages 3-5 years old and 6-year-olds entering Kindergarten or 1st Grade.

### **Summer Session Hours:**

- Operating Hours: 7:30 AM – 3:15 PM
- Extended Care: 3:30 PM – 5:30 PM

Activities are planned around a weekly theme, providing fun and engaging experiences for the children.

### **Summer 2025 Tuition & Fees**

- FACTS Registration Fee: \$22.00
- Supply Fee: \$150.00

### **Tuition Rates (7:15 AM - 3:15 PM):**

- June 16-20, 23-27, 30-July 3 (Closed July 4): \$693.75
- July 7-11, 14-18, 21-25, 28-August 1: \$925.00
- August 4-8, 11-15, 18-22: \$693.75

### **After-School Care (3:30 - 5:30 PM):**

- 5-Day (Monday-Friday): \$175.00 per month
- Specific Days: \$20.00 per day

*Please note:* Fees are not prorated, and the Summer Session is a full-day program offered on a monthly basis (June-August).

Policies: All policies from the Early Learning Center Handbook apply to the Summer Session. St. Matthew's reserves the right to make changes to the Early Learning Center Handbook.