

January 2019

Dear St. Jerome ECC 2019-20 Four-Year Old Families,

Fourteen years ago, St. Jerome Early Childhood Center took a leap of faith and made the decision to participate in the state's four-year-old Voluntary PreKindergarten program, which allows four-year olds to attend a half day program (540 hours) at no cost to families. At the present time, the state continues to encourage private providers, including faith-based programs, to participate in the VPK program. If for some reason, any restriction would be placed upon the Catholicity of our program, this would restrict us from further participation in the VPK program.

Additionally, each year we revisit our decision to remain a VPK provider, as the state funds allotted per child continue to fall grossly below the actual tuition cost needed to meet our expenses. The state will not set the per child rate for 2019-20 until July. With these budget limitations out of our control, we face a challenging dilemma with regards to participating in the VPK program. As a non-profit, self-supporting entity, we cannot operate if funds fall below our expenses. To clarify any misconceptions, centers do not 'make a profit' by participating in VPK. Some full-day centers offset their losses by accepting only full-day children, thus ensuring income. St. Jerome ECC does not require four-year olds to participate in Extended Day nor do we charge a registration fee for using the Extended Day program, as many programs do.

With this in mind, we rely heavily on the generosity of our families – both financially and with their service of volunteer time. Working together, we can offset this economic shortfall to continue to offer the **BEST** early childhood program for our children and families. St. Jerome ECC plans to remain a nationally accredited early childhood program, with quality, credentialed, faith-filled educators as the hallmark of our program. We are currently the only nationally accredited (NAEYC), Catholic early childhood programs in Pinellas County. St. Jerome ECC was voted the Best Pre-school in Pinellas County by the TBNWeekly Newspapers.

St. Jerome ECC's Annual School Readiness Rate is consistently high when our preschool children are assessed in kindergarten. Both public and Catholic schools continually praise our efforts in preparing our children for kindergarten.

At St. Jerome ECC, our greatest asset is our experienced, dedicated teaching staff. Because of their educational backgrounds and years of teaching experience, we insist on compensating them justly. Over 80% percent of our budget is dedicated to salaries. We will not compromise our program by lowering this standard. Our staff are educational professionals, with greater experience and education than the state currently requires (or pays) for the four-year old VPK program.

St. Jerome ECC has taken several steps to remain in the VPK program to assist our families with a 'no-cost' four-year old program. We have streamlined our expenses and looked for creative ways to provide materials and services. We have a number of fundraisers that we ask all of our EC families to participate in. We also offer a 'Wish-list' for families and/or businesses to contribute specific items of need. Families are encouraged to consult with their employer's HR department with regards to Matching Gifts. St. Jerome ECC is a non-profit, 501-c-3 entity, with which many employers will match employee contributions and/or employee volunteer hours.

Several years ago, St. Jerome ECC initiated a pledge drive inviting the four-year old families to choose an option that best suits your ability to support the actual cost of the quality early childhood program you have chosen for your child. On the pledge card enclosed, we have suggested various pledge levels and payment options for your prayerful consideration. It is our hope that all four-year old families will participate in the pledge drive, paying a portion of the actual cost to attend a NAEYC accredited, quality, faith-based early childhood program. The cost for your child would be over \$5,000 for the school year, if not for the VPK program. The difference between the state's amount per child (approximately \$2,500) and our current tuition is \$2,500.

Families may choose a greater or lesser pledge amount than those suggested, based on your abilities. This pledge request is not meant as a mandatory obligation, but rather a hopeful invitation.

‘From everyone who has been given much, much will be required, and from the one who has been entrusted with much, even more will be asked.’ Luke 12:48

As you plan for the upcoming school year for your four-year old, please be aware of the following:

- Re-enrollment for currently enrolled children and siblings begins on Monday, January 28th. Enrollment for new families begins on Wednesday, January 30th. Families seeking a space in our EC4/VPK program should be prepared to register at that time. All application paperwork, including the Child Certificate of Eligibility issued by the State of Florida, must be submitted to complete your application process and secure a space for your child in our program. *Note: If you have not received your Certificate of Eligibility yet, we will accept your application confirmation.
- **Parents must obtain the Certificate of Eligibility by going online to <http://elcpinellas.net/register-for-vpk/> to complete the application process. You must have the ability scan the required documents to complete the VPK Application Process. It may take several days to receive your certificate via your email address.** Check your junk mail also and submit the signed certificate to school upon receipt.
- Your child’s four-year old VPK program (540 hours) will not require tuition for the 2019-20 school year. Children must meet the age requirements set by the state – four years of age on or before Sept. 1, 2019.
- In addition to our 3.5 hour VPK day (540 hours/year), we have built in several “Non-VPK days” in our school year calendar. These days are not part of VPK, but Four Year Old families have the option of registering and paying appropriate fees for these additional days.
- Those families who are enrolled in our current 2018-19 school year and who are current with all tuition/fees will be the first eligible to enroll for the upcoming school year.
- Currently, children who are eligible for VPK and have birthdays between February 2 and September 1 may defer their VPK year if the parents feel the child is not ready for the 4 year old VPK program.
- A \$100 deposit secures your child’s space in our school. Beginning with our scheduled VPK start date, \$20 will be deducted from that deposit for each non-attended day until your child begins the VPK program. Following the first scheduled attendance day, with your child in attendance, you may: 1. Apply the deposit to upcoming Extended Day, Pledge or Fun Friday fees; 2. Donate your deposit to your child’s classroom; 3. Submit a written request for a refund.
- Families participating in the VPK Program must sign, submit, and abide by the attached VPK Parent Agreement/Attendance Policy with your reenrollment/application materials.

Let me express my deepest gratitude in advance for your commitment to St. Jerome ECC. Your support ensures that the priceless legacy of a St. Jerome Early Childhood Center education will continue to benefit the children of today and tomorrow. If you have any questions or concerns about registration for the upcoming school year, please contact the ECC office prior to your registration period.

Additionally, we ask all those enrolling to recommend St. Jerome ECC to friends, as we will have space in our two, three and four-year old classes for incoming children. We look forward to having you and your family with us in the year ahead. May God continue to bless the work we do in His Name.

Sincerely in Christ,

Denise Roach, Administrator
St. Jerome Early Childhood Center

CC: Rev. Thomas Morgan, Pastor, St. Jerome Catholic Church

