

Best Beginnings Preschool

Documentation of Standards

1. Mission

- 1.1. Best Beginnings has a high degree of congruence between the stated mission, the philosophy of the school as an educational institution, and its actual program.
- a. Mission Statement: The mission of Best Beginnings Preschool is to provide a nurturing environment for growing and teaching children ages 3 through 5. Both our mission statement and our educational philosophy can be referenced in our brochure (Appendix A), Parent Handbook (Appendix B), Teacher Handbook (Appendix C) and on our website at www.bestbeginningspreschool.com.
 - b. Educational Philosophy: At Best Beginnings, we believe that children learn best when learning is interesting, creative and fun. Each child comes to preschool with a wide range of skills and interests. Our goal at Best Beginnings is to create an environment that allows the unique qualities of each child to flourish. Best Beginnings adheres to and incorporates into its teaching philosophy the program standards set forth by the National Association for the Education of Young Children, NAEYC (Appendix K).

2. Episcopal Character

Best Beginnings Preschool requests an exemption from Standard Two. The following proposal puts forth a rationale on why the exemption is being sought. A letter from the Vestry stating its approval of said exemption is included.

There are so many elements that pertain to "The Episcopal Character" practiced at Best Beginnings, that one should not infer that our request for an exemption in any way diminishes our commitment to teach, share and demonstrate the human values of kindness, caring, compassion, respect and empathy that are such an integral part of the climate of our preschool.

Best Beginnings was founded in 1991 as an educational preschool, using developmentally appropriate practices as a way to teach young children ages 3 to 5. When the idea of a preschool was first broached with the then Rector, Father Peter Snow, it was decided to offer a secular curriculum that would ensure that any family attending the preschool would be welcome. The goal was to create a preschool that would fulfill a community need and provide a service to the growing Eastside community. Father Snow felt that the Holy Cross Sunday School program provided parents the opportunity to more deeply

explore the Christian faith and its values. As one of the many "outreach" programs of Holy Cross, Best Beginnings opened in 1991, free of any religious teachings that would make anyone without a specific faith or from another faith tradition feel unwelcome. The formal recognition and ongoing support by the Diocese of this preschool model can be found in Appendix T.

Because we serve so many families with different cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds, keeping this open door policy has provided a unique learning experience for the children. Neither our name, nor any of our public documents (brochure, website etc.) describe Best Beginnings as an Episcopal school, only as an outreach program of Holy Cross.

The request for an exemption applies specifically to direct Episcopal instruction as part of our curriculum, and chapel time (2.1 a,c., 2.2 a, b, c, d, e., 2.3 a, b, c). In all other areas (2.1 b,d,e, 2.3 d,e, 2.4 a,b,c, 2.5 a,b) we demonstrate and strive to model the "Episcopal Character."

2.1 Structure and Organization

b. Documents supporting the relationship between Best Beginnings and Holy Cross may be found in the Bylaws (Appendix D).

d. Best Beginnings and the Holy Cross Youth Formation Program share use of the Education Building on different days. Arrangements for shared space and joint financial obligations between Holy Cross and Best Beginnings are described in the Bylaws (Appendix D).

e. Invitation to school events are extended to the Vestry and Rector. Information pertaining to on-going events at the preschool is listed in the monthly church calendar and Holy Cross staff-planning calendar. Special events are advertised on small posters displayed in the fellowship hall and school, announced in *The Messenger* and *The Cross*, and website postings.

2.3 Welcoming to All Students

d. The demographics of the Eastside have significantly changed over the last 10 years. More and more families of varying cultural, religious and ethnic diversity have become part of our community. By continuing to offer a secular curriculum the diversity of the people coming to our school has enriched us all. The school's non-discrimination policy is included in the school brochure (Appendix A) and posted on the website. In addition, the Preschool has a scholarship fund for families in need. This fund is a line item in the budget and is referenced in our Financial Procedures & Policies and on the Fund Balance Sheet (Appendix I).

e. We build mutual support in a variety of ways. The Rector and Preschool Director talk almost daily about mutual concerns. There is truly a sense of mutual cooperation and trust between the school and the church. Best Beginnings shares the weekly classroom space with the Sunday school program. Best Beginnings provides the chairs, tables, carpets for all to use. The Sunday School and Preschool maintain separate supplies but are always willing to share as needed. There is a close working relationship between the Preschool Director, Bookkeeper and the Holy Cross Church Administrator. The Church copy machine is available for Best Beginnings use. The two administrative staffs, and the Rectors meet at least once a year for just a fun outside activity.

2.4 Educational Excellence

- a. Overviews of our classes summarize the teaching methods based on inquiry learning (Appendix P).
- b. Our theme-based curriculum encourages exploration in the areas of art, large and fine motor skills, music, cooking, drama, science and kindergarten readiness. All of our teachers work hard to instill a sense of personal responsibility, caring and appreciation for others while at all times being mindful of building a strong sense of self esteem in each child. This principal is inherent in the day-to-day happenings at the Preschool and is communicated to staff and parents in the brochure (Appendix A) the Parent Handbook (Appendix B) and the Staff Handbook (Appendix C).
- c. Each staff member is provided with an annual allowance for professional development and can be referenced on the Salary Sheet in the Staff Handbook (Appendix, p. 17). Ongoing staff development is also provided at our regular monthly staff meetings through guest speakers addressing topics such as autism spectrum, speech and language development, and fine motor skill development. Teachers are encouraged to attend professional development offered through the surrounding school districts as well.

2.5 Outreach Projects

- a. Best Beginning students participate in a number of service learning projects as relevant to preschool population. These include: "Hopelink, Roaring into March" food drive, trips to Clean Green Farms - planting and harvesting of pumpkins, with donations going to Clean Green Farms.
- b. Staff and preschool families support Holy Cross outreach through purchases of poinsettias and wreaths (a Holy Cross youth fundraiser).

In requesting this exemption, please rest assured that as part of the outreach program of Holy Cross, the entire staff at Best Beginnings demonstrates, models and teaches the core values of all humankind.

3. Governance

3.1. Best Beginnings Preschool has a different governance structure than that envisioned by Standard 3, yet we believe the structure clearly addresses the intent of the standard. The By-Laws (Appendix D) defining the relationship between the Church of the Holy Cross and Best Beginnings describe the alternative approach used by the Preschool to govern the fiduciary, strategic and generative tasks of the school.

- a. The Preschool itself, with full support of the Advisory Board and Vestry, assumes the responsibility for the majority of the tasks of operation.
- b. The Preschool operates on a standard 9-month school calendar year in conjunction with the two districts it primarily serves, Lake Washington and Northshore School Districts. The Preschool operates free of mid year interruptions other than scheduled school breaks.

3.2 As stated in 3.1, the Board of Best Beginnings does reflect the expertise and the diversity to achieve the mission, vision and goals of the school.

- a. The Advisory Board is made up of two permanent members, the Preschool Director and the Rector. A plan for year-long commitment on a rotating basis for the remainder of the Board is addressed in the Advisory Board section of the By-laws (Appendix D).
- b. The composition and role of the Advisory Board are addressed in the Bylaws. The Advisory Board and Vestry have determined that the size and scope of the preschool merits this level of oversight and involvement by the Board.
- c. The Rector shall serve as the chair of the Advisory Board and is stated as such in the Bylaws (Appendix D).

3.3 a-i.

Best Beginnings is a small school of 170 families. Children attend the preschool a maximum of 12 hours per week. The preschool is self-supporting and the day-to-day operations are separate from the Church of the Holy Cross. Therefore, the composition of the Advisory Board, the structure of that Board and the Board's relationship to the school has been designed to ensure good oversight but not micromanagement. The Advisory Board and the Vestry have determined that the day-to-day operations, financial obligations, maintenance of facilities and educational materials and all contractual agreements shall be the responsibility of the Preschool Director.

There is daily communication between the Rector and church office staff with the Preschool. The Church Administrator has full access to all financial details and that information is provided to the Vestry on a monthly basis. With this structure in

place, as well as the Advisory Board, we believe that the intent of this oversight is being met.

3.4. The Rector employs & supervises the head of the school.

a & b. The Rector, in consultation with the Advisory Board, is responsible for hiring the Preschool Director. The process and responsibility for hiring the Preschool Director, as well as the day-to-day relationship between the board and Rector and the Preschool Director are addressed in the Bylaws (Appendix D).

c. The Preschool Director has a written contract (Appendix E).

d. Protocols for addressing conflict can be found in the Holy Cross Personnel Policy Manual (Appendix F, p. 39).

e. Administrative changes and transitions are addressed in the Preschool Director's contract (Appendix E).

4. Faculty/Staff

4.1 All Best Beginnings staff are qualified for positions and responsibilities by education and experience and engaged in ongoing professional development. Currently, Best Beginnings employs 16 staff. Personnel files for staff are kept in the staff office. The Director's personnel information is kept at the offices of Holy Cross.

a. Qualifications for all teachers and assistant teachers are referenced in the Staff Handbook (Appendix C, p. 7 & 8)

b. A copy of our employment application is included in Appendix G. A criminal background check is required for all staff and is referenced in both the Staff Handbook (Appendix C, p. 15) and the Holy Cross Policies & Procedures Manual (Appendix F, p. 9).

c. Non-discrimination policies can be referenced in our brochure (Appendix A), the Parent Handbook (Appendix C, p. 15) and the Holy Cross Policies & Procedures Manual (Appendix F, p. 11).

d. All staff members are provided with an orientation with the director and a copy of the Staff Handbook (Appendix C).

e. Each staff member is provided with an annual allowance for professional development and can be referenced on the Salary Sheet in the Staff Handbook (Appendix, p. 17). Ongoing staff development is also provided at our regular monthly staff meetings through guest speakers addressing topics such as autism spectrum, speech and language development, and fine motor skill development. Teachers are encouraged to attend professional development offered through the surrounding school districts as well.

f. Each staff member signs an annual contract and is given a salary sheet that outlines their annual compensation.

- g. Annual evaluations are completed for all preschool staff (Appendix H).
- h. Expectations of appropriate staff conduct with students are outlined in the Staff Handbook (Appendix C, p. 11 & 14).
- i. Staff meetings are held on a monthly basis where teachers are kept informed of our registration status and the impact it will have on specific class offerings (Appendix C, p. 20).
- j. During staff meetings time is allocated for classroom planning and evaluation of programs.
- k. All members of the Best Beginnings staff receive training from the Christian Education Director of Holy Cross on Safe Guarding God's Children. Each staff member holds a current first aid/CPR certificate through prevention MD.

4.2 School operations are in compliance with relevant local, state and federal laws and regulations.

- a. Best Beginnings adheres to state & federal regulations as listed in our Staff Handbook (Appendix C, p. 12-15) as well as the Holy Cross Policies & Procedures Manual (Appendix F). Students are on campus a maximum of four hours. Thus, the Preschool is not licensed by the state as a daycare and is thereby not subject to state guidelines. Best Beginnings operates under a business license issued by the State of Washington (Appendix L).

5. Finances

5.1 Best Beginnings has sound financial planning and management policies and procedures in place, including a formal budget-making process, along with appropriate Advisory Board oversight.

- a. We are a dba business operating under The Church of the Holy Cross and therefore fall under their tax-exempt status.
- b. We employ sound accounting methods and practices as prescribed by GAAP in recording and summarizing transactions and preparing financial statements.
- c. We use the same accounting software that Holy Cross uses - Church Database Management (CDM). All tuition and funds received by the school are recorded in CDM and are under the direct control of the Director and Bookkeeper.
- d. Our budgetary revenues are under \$500,000. The Holy Cross Vestry is provided with a balance sheet and monthly comparison report biannually. They review and respond accordingly.
- e. Best Beginnings is listed as an Additional Insured on the Holy Cross insurance policy.
- f. We record all donations/gifts properly in CDM and provide all donors with tax identification information according to IRS requirements.

- g. Budgeting and financial procedures can be referenced in our Financial Procedures and Policies (Appendix I). In additions we are providing sample financial reports (Appendix J)
- h. The Preschool has set aside a "Building Fund" to support the long-range financial and growth projections made by Holy Cross. Holy Cross is in the process of raising funds for the expansion/remodel of its current campus. These plans include the expansion of the Education Building that the preschool resides in and will include additional classroom space for the preschool. The Preschool Director and the Advisory Board are working together towards these long-range plans.
- i. Best Beginnings currently has no short or long-term debt and does not foresee any such debt in the future.
- j. A contingency fund is in place. Our policy is to have 4 months of salary and overhead expenses set aside at all times.

6. Health & Safety

Best Beginnings creates a safe and healthy environment in which students grow and thrive. The education building is professionally cleaned and maintained daily. Storage for classroom supplies is well organized and plentiful. Student medication plans are addressed in our Authorization for Administration of Medication. (Appendix M). Policies for illness of both students and staff, communicable diseases and accident forms are addressed in the Health and Safety Policy (Appendix J), as well as the Parent and Staff Handbooks (Appendix B & C). A child's health history is found in their student file on their Enrollment Form (Appendix N). Children do not nap at our preschool. There is no food preparation at Best Beginnings, as snacks are provided by parents. All items identified in items a - e are addressed in detail in our Health & Safety Policies and Procedures (Appendix K), as well as in our Parent and Staff Handbooks (Appendix B & C).

7. Facilities

7.1 Best Beginnings maintains facilities that are conducive to education, and meet applicable health, fire, building and licensing codes of the city, county and state.

- a. Pictures of entryway, hallways, classrooms, closets & sheds can be referenced in Appendix O.
- b. The Preschool oversees the security of facility. Doors to the education building are locked at all times with the exception of the main entrance. This door is unlocked at the start of the school day and the end of the school day but locked at all other times. Staff members carry keys on their person at all times. A doorbell system is in place at the main entry to alert the staff to visitors.

c. The Preschool receives daily cleaning and maintenance. Lynnwood Cleaning Services is contracted to clean the education building on a nightly basis. Cleaning services include: sweeping and mopping of floors, carpets are vacuumed, bathrooms are cleaned and surface areas throughout the classrooms are sanitized.

8. Programs

8.1 The Preschool has a written curriculum, taught through developmentally appropriate instruction that reflects the school's stated mission, purposes and educational goals.

8.1A. Best Beginnings Preschool serves children ages 3 - 5.

a-g. Class overviews for our 3's, 4's and Pre-K classes are included in Appendix P.

These overviews address the areas of curriculum, domains of learning, play, gross & fine motor development, group size and all other areas related to providing a positive preschool experience as referenced in items a through g.

8.2 Best Beginnings program structure provides all organizational basics essential to the successful operation of the school.

a. The Preschool follows a typical public school calendar operating September through June. A copy of our current school calendar can be found in Appendix Q.

b. The daily schedule for all classes can be referenced in the individual class overviews in Appendix P.

c. The preschool has adequate storage for classroom supplies in each classroom. All paint and art supplies are stored in the art closet and the outside shed. Best Beginnings teaching materials are current, accurate and of high quality. We have current subscriptions to both NAEYC magazine and Mailbox Monthly Curriculum Guides. In addition, teachers are strongly encouraged to participate in continuing education opportunities throughout the year.

d. Best Beginnings currently offers ten classroom options. Four classes for 3 year olds with a teacher/student ratio are 1:7; five classes for 4 year olds and one Pre-K class with a teacher/student ration of 1:8.

e. School closure due to catastrophic events and inclement weather can be referenced in our Parent Handbook (Appendix B, page 11 & 12). The Preschool Director is responsible for informing the staff of any emergency plan and/or changes in schedule. Teachers will inform parents via email and a notice will be placed on our website.

8.3 Program content, student placement and instructional variations are considered in the design of programs for different ages. Children are placed in class based on age guidelines (the age of 3 or 4 by August 31st). The curriculum for a specific age group is

consistent throughout the school but is adapted to the skill level of each individual class.

8.3.A.

g. The class overviews (Appendix P) show a typical school day where all developmental learning areas are addressed. Activities flow between teacher directed and child centered. There are opportunities for individual and small group experiences as well as recess.

h. At the beginning of the school year parents receive a school year calendar (Appendix Q) with all the long-term events clearly marked. At the beginning of each month, parents receive a monthly calendar/newsletter (Appendix R) from the teacher telling them about the topics to be covered as well as any other school events. In addition, parents receive a monthly newsletter from the Preschool Director (Appendix R) that includes school information and reminders of key dates. All information is posted to the website on a regular basis. Regarding field trips, parents are responsible for transporting their own children or they may arrange carpools amongst themselves. Parent permission for alternative drivers can found on each child's Enrollment Form (Appendix N).

i. The scope and sequence of the program is available to parents via the monthly teacher calendar (Appendix R). All staff review the themes covered throughout the year at the monthly staff meeting. All special events are clearly marked on the calendar provided to parents at the beginning of the school year.

j. Parents receive a Parent Handbook (Appendix B) at the beginning of the school year that addresses school policies and procedures. Individual progress assessments (Appendix S) are conducted in March and that information is shared with parents at a teacher/parent conference. Email is used by each teacher to keep in daily contact with parents as well as informal conferences with parents should the need arise.

k. Teachers recognize the rich variability of learning styles and maturity. They are continually adapting their planned curriculum to meet both individual and class needs. Best Beginnings has been recognized by FEAT (Families for Effective Autism Treatment) for its open door policy to children on the autism spectrum. Class adaptations are made for children on the spectrum, those with sensory or learning disorders, hearing loss or physical limitations.

l. Best Beginnings is exempt from day care licensing as the Preschool is engaged primarily in educational work with preschool children. No child is enrolled for more than four hours per day. Children do not nap and no food is prepared on site.

9. Assessment

9.1 The Preschool has a written assessment plan of the educational program, indicating how/when student growth is measured and communicated to parents.

a-e. Formative assessments are conducted throughout the school year and help to guide the implementation of the curriculum for each class. In March, a summative assessment is conducted for each child. Parent/teacher conferences are scheduled as a follow-up to this assessment. Conference details can be referenced in our Parent Handbook (Appendix B, p. 12). Assessments for our 3's, 4's & PreK classes can be found in Appendix S.

9.2 The Preschool conducts annual reviews of all persons and elements key to the operation of the school.

a. Teacher performance is reviewed annually at the end of the school year. This includes both a self-assessment and an assessment by the Preschool Director. The review forms can be referenced in Appendix H. Director Performance is conducted by the Rector on an annual basis and is referenced in the Bylaws (Appendix D).

b. All student and personnel records are kept in secure file cabinets in the staff offices.