



# Parent Handbook

## 2023-2024

### PROGRAM HOURS

#### Early Arrival:

Monday through Friday. **Doors open at 8:00 am on the B-side.**

#### Bear Cub Half-Day (Two-year olds):

Monday through Friday, 8:30 am to 12:30 pm. **Doors open at 8:30 am.**

Pick-up is **12:30 pm on the A-side.**

#### Bear Cub Traditional Day (Two-year olds)/St. Columba School Day:

Monday through Friday, 8:30 am to 2:30 pm. **Doors open at 8:30 am.**

Pick-up is **2:30 pm on the B-side.**

#### 3:30 Club:

Pick-up at **3:30 pm on the B-Side.**

#### Stay & Play:

Pick-up anytime between **2:30 and 5:30 pm.**

### COMMUNICATION

**Phones, Messaging, and Email:** The School Office number is (202) 742-1980. In addition to the Office phone, your child's classroom teachers have a school-based email address that has been shared with you and the "Brightwheel" app, which allows for quick messaging to teachers similar to a text message. Teachers are expected to check these regularly, but may be engaged with children and not respond immediately. Please do not text message teachers' personal phone numbers. Please use Brightwheel for messaging. **Please do not send any messages using Brightwheel that require immediate attention.** For these messages, please call or email the Office at [school@columba.org](mailto:school@columba.org).

**Attendance:** If your child will be absent from school for illness or for any other reason, please call the School Office, email ([school@columba.org](mailto:school@columba.org)), or send a message to the teachers through Brightwheel to let us know. If we do not hear from you, we may contact you to ask if all is well.

Please keep us informed of any major changes in your child's life – parents traveling, grandparents' visits, serious illness or death in the family, a missing pet, a new baby, etc., as life events and experiences often impact children in a variety of ways.

**Newsletters, Email and Brightwheel:** The Head of School sends weekly emails ("Monday Memos") and the Engagement Director sends monthly newsletters with information about the program, upcoming events, and community news.

The School's all-school parent email list will only be used for school-issued communications, including emergency notifications. The Directory is provided for the use and convenience of the Nursery School staff and families for school-related communication. The names, addresses, and contact information should not be shared outside the Nursery School community, nor should they be used for commercial or political purposes, or for charitable solicitations.

We use "Brightwheel" for teacher to parent communication. Teachers send photos, videos, updates, and information about your child and their classroom via the app. You can also send messages to the teachers through the app, as well. If you need to contact an administrator, it is recommended that you reach out via email or the office phone, as Brightwheel is primarily used for teacher communication.

**Parent-to-Parent Communication:** You will receive a copy of our Directory with the names, addresses, phone numbers and email addresses for the current year's St. Columba Nursery School families. This information is made available so that you may contact other families. Each class also has a room parent who will set up class "GroupMe" groups to communicate about class-specific topics.

**Friday Bags:** Each child will receive his or her own *Friday Bag* that will go home at the end of the week filled with their artwork, treasures, informational flyers, and any School notices. Please take the time to look over the week's work with your child. Sharing the contents of these bags with a parent helps build a child's language skills and develop a sense of time and sequence as he/she recounts the events of the week. Please bring your *Friday Bag* back to school every Monday (or the next day you return to school).

**Parent-Teacher Conferences:** Two formal, scheduled conference opportunities are planned for Fall and Spring. At these conferences, teachers will provide you with verbal and written information regarding your child's experiences at school, as well as his/her learning and development. Of course, teachers, the Head of School, or the Inclusion Specialist will make themselves available for a conference if you feel one is needed outside of these scheduled dates. Similarly, the School may request a conference/meeting outside of the scheduled conference dates to discuss your child's development.

**Confidentiality:** The school takes the confidentiality of student information very seriously. We follow FERPA (Family Education Rights and Privacy Act) guidelines regarding the dissemination of children's school records. Any record bearing identifying information for a child is maintained in locked rooms or

cabinets, accessible only to necessary nursery school staff and licensing personnel. Should information about your child need to be shared with outside agencies or practitioners, the school has a permission letter that, when completed, allows outside agencies and the School to share information.

If you plan to apply to an independent school after St. Columba's, communication between schools regarding applicants is to be expected and does not require special permission.

## **ARRIVAL AND DISMISSAL**

**Arrival/Morning Drop-Off:** For families who are new to our carpool routine, we use a "kiss-and-ride" system as we find it makes the transition into school easier for the children and allows us the opportunity to encourage independence in managing their belongings and learning our daily routines. Families who drive will pull up to their designated carpool lane with their child's sign (class animal and child's name) in their car windshield. The signs will be provided to you the day before school begins at the Popsicle Playdate. To expedite this process, please place this on the side where your child's car seat is located in your car. Classroom teachers or administrators will get your child from their carseat and escort them into the building. For families who walk to school, please walk them to the relevant entrance/playground gate and teachers will escort them inside.

The parking lot is reserved for church and school staff only. **There are no visitors' parking places available during school hours even for a short while (the only exception is for Early Arrival - families may briefly park in the B-Side parking lot to drop off between 8:00 and 8:15 am if parking is available).** If you wish to walk your child up to the main entrance, please park on the street. Bike racks and stroller parking are available for families commuting on two or three wheels.

**Punctuality:** It is very important that your child arrives at school and gets picked up on time. The morning routines are among the most important of the day. Entering the classroom late can be hard for many children and pulls teachers away from their focus on the classroom. *Late arrivals and late pickups prevent teachers and staff from attending to their other responsibilities.*

**Late Fees:** If children are picked up late (after 12:45pm for Half-Day Bear Cubs, after 2:45pm for Traditional Day programming, after 3:30pm for 3:30 Club, and after 5:30pm for Stay & Play programming), late fees will be assessed. An initial fee of \$10 will be assessed for any late pick-ups. For each minute late thereafter, a \$1 fee will be assessed. If a family is regularly late (on three or more occasions), the Head of School will schedule a meeting with the family to identify a solution and determine next steps. We will reach out to a child's Emergency Contacts if they are not picked up on time.

**Early Arrival:** If you are using Early Arrival, you may park in the B-Side parking lot or briefly in the carpool lane in order to walk your child to the main entrance.

**AT 8:45 AM CARPOOL ENDS AND TEACHERS RETURN TO THE CLASSROOMS. IF YOU ARRIVE AFTER 8:45 AM, PLEASE DROP YOUR CHILD OFF AT THE MAIN OFFICE ON BUTTERWORTH PLACE.**

**Dismissal:** The school is required by DC licensing regulations to have a list of names of the people, other than parents, who are authorized to pick-up your child kept on file – for example, babysitters, friends in an emergency, or visiting grandparents. If there are changes during the year, please email the Office and teachers with the update.

Please have your carpool sign (the classroom animal icon and your child's name) visible in the window of your car. Teachers will identify your car, bring your child to this, and buckle them in.

**3:30 Club:** Pick-up is at 3:30 pm. You may park in the neighborhood and walk up or pull into the B-side lot. Your child will be brought out to your car as described in the “Dismissal” instructions for each class.

**Stay & Play:** Pick-up is anytime between 2:30 and 5:30 pm. If you arrive after 4 pm, you may park briefly in the carpool lane or B-Side parking lot and walk up to the outside gate or call the office. All children are signed out via Brightwheel.

**Carpool Changes:** **The School must be informed of any change in carpool pick-up plans in writing** (email is acceptable, but please ensure the email is sent to [school@columba.org](mailto:school@columba.org) well before the assigned carpool time). No child will be allowed to leave with anyone other than an authorized person without a written note, message, or email. **Please do not leave voicemail messages about carpool changes without also sending a confirmation email.** If the school is ever unsure about the dismissal arrangements, we will keep your child at school until we can reach an authorized contact.

**Carpool Safety:** At drop-off and pick-up, a staff member will open the car door and assist children getting into and out of your vehicle. They will also fasten the buckles of children's safety seats before you depart. By law, all children must use an **approved child safety seat** and **may not be seated in the front seat** of any vehicle. **It is helpful if your child's seat can be on the rear, passenger side of the vehicle** so that carpool staff doesn't have to go out into the street or parking lot to help your child into and out of the car. We will ask the driver to confirm that we have safely buckled the child into their seat before you depart.

**Approaching the School by Car:** Please remember, that all cars arriving for drop-off and pick-up must join the carpool line by approaching from 42<sup>nd</sup> Street (heading DOWN the hill). This applies to both the A-side and B-side. B-Side families will turn LEFT into the parking lot. A single carpool line allows for safer entrance into the parking lot, prevents blocked street traffic, and is mandated by local zoning officials. It also keeps our neighbors happy.

On the B-side, please remember to be courteous and leave a space for vehicles to enter and exit the driveway of our neighbors at Friendship Terrace while you are waiting to enter the School parking lot. If picking up on the A side, you find that cars in the Albemarle line are backed up to the corner, please drive around the block and rejoin the carpool line after some of the cars have departed. Blocking that intersection is a serious safety risk and might get you a ticket!

Whichever carpool line you are in, please pull as far forward into the parking lot or up along the curb so that we can fit as many cars as possible into the loading zone.

No matter which side you do carpool on, please don't park your car to help your child out of their car seat or park and walk your child up to the teachers. This stops the entire flow of traffic, angers other families, and happens more than you might expect. Lastly, if you are not the person picking up or dropping off your child, please share this important information with all caregivers.

## SCHOOL ROUTINE

**Dressing for School:** Please dress your child in comfortable clothing suitable for an active program that includes lots of daily and often messy outdoor time. At St. Columba's, we do a lot of running and climbing, so we encourage children to wear sneakers to school each day for safety and comfort. Sandals, open-toed shoes, clogs, jellies, flip-flops, party flats, or shoes that may slip off, fill with sand or mulch, or provide less-than-optimal climbing and running stability are discouraged. Children are encouraged, however, to keep a pair of water-shoes (Keens, Crocs, Texas, rain boots, etc.) in their school cubby so we can play with hoses, puddles, and other wet fun whenever we can.

Clothing is something many children form opinions about at an early age and often argue with parents over. Our philosophy is always, "Choose your battles, life is short." So, never feel you must wrestle your child into "proper clothing" for our sake. We will happily assist them to make different clothing choices later in the morning if you will just bring what you think they need.

Also, our busy girls and boys do get dirty! We suggest they wear clothes that you don't mind getting muddy or stained. Check for fasteners that are easy for children to manipulate and boots that are large enough to pull on and off easily.

Most kids like to have a change of their own clothing at school, as clothes sometimes get wet or if an accident happens. We encourage you to send in two extra sets of clothing in a zip-lock bag labeled with your child's name. Our school also keeps a supply of clean clothes that children can change into if they are wet and dirty. Please launder borrowed clothes and return them to the school at your earliest convenience. We do appreciate contributions to the supply, particularly of mittens, sweatpants, shorts, underwear, and socks.

Before getting your child dressed in the morning, please check the forecast and choose clothes with the following fact in mind: **our playgrounds are shady and usually several degrees colder than the reported temperature early in the day.** If you can, dress your child in layers that can be added to or removed as the weather changes. Please be certain that outerwear is easy for your child to get on and off or easily manageable for the teachers to assist. Buttons, multiple zippers, extra jacket liners, pullover jackets and complicated fasteners make it difficult for children to manage by themselves. It is our goal to teach every child to get into and out of their outerwear independently, and ultimately, to zip up jackets and put on hats and mittens without assistance! We know they can do it.

*We really do go outside to play in every kind of weather including rain and snow, so rainboots, raincoats and/or heavy winter jackets, snow pants and warm snow boots are a must for cold and/or wet days!*

**ALL CLOTHING SHOULD BE CLEARLY MARKED WITH YOUR CHILD'S NAME!**

**Inclement Weather Policy:** An exception to our “outside-every-day” policy may be made for dangerous weather conditions (e.g., heat, thunderstorms, wind, or ice). The Office staff monitors weather conditions including the heat index, air quality, and wind-chill factors daily to determine if, and for how long, children may safely be outdoors.

**Weather-Related Closures and Delayed Openings:** In the case of closing due to inclement weather, SCNS will contact you as soon as possible via "Brightwheel" and email, but no later than 6:30 am. We typically follow DCPS for all weather-related closures, but will use our own discretion if there are potentially hazardous conditions for staff who may be traveling from areas outside of DC.

**On days when a delayed opening is necessary,** we will open our doors at 10:00 am. There is no Early Arrival when we open late.

If conditions in your neighborhood are unsafe but we are open, please stay at home until the roadways improve. Your child’s safety is much more important to us than his/her presence at school when travel is dangerous.

**Closures for Weather or Other Emergencies:** Once school has opened for the day, we will strive to stay open. However, should weather conditions or some other emergency (such as loss of heat, power, or water) warrant closure, we will contact families via Brightwheel and email immediately to pick-up children as soon as possible. In such situations, we ask that you or someone designated by you come as quickly as possible to pick-up your child.

Should conditions in the building become unsafe and require evacuation beyond our playgrounds, (e.g., a fire emergency in bad weather), we have arrangements with neighboring Janney Elementary on Albemarle Street for off-site shelter until children can be picked by parents or other caregivers. Please make sure that we always have your most current contact information on file in the Office at all times.

**Snacks:** We serve a simple, healthy mid-morning snack and an afternoon snack during the 3:30 Club and Stay & Play. Our snacks may include crackers, fruits, vegetables, cheese, hummus, yogurt, or other foods children enjoy. Talk with your child’s teacher if you would like to send in something for a special occasion (such as a child’s birthday), but bear in mind that your choices should be nut-free and may be restricted by allergies within the class or other prohibitions (see the Birthday Section below for more details).

**Lunch:** Children should bring their lunches with them to school in the morning. We are unable to refrigerate or reheat lunches. Please pack your child’s lunch in temperature-maintaining containers or in an insulated lunch box, and don’t forget to pack utensils if they will be needed. Please send a reusable water bottle. We discourage juice boxes, as children often drink them first and don’t have enough room in their tummies for their “**growing** food.” We recommend packing 2-4 food options as more can be overwhelming. Further, please pack your child’s lunch in containers they may open by themselves or learn to open.

## HEALTH AND SAFETY

**Life-Threatening Allergies:** The Inclusion Specialist and School Office will assist in the management of any child's life-threatening allergy/ies while he/she is at school by providing teachers and staff written emergency-response procedures containing your child's picture and information about the allergy, its presenting symptoms, treatment actions recommended from your healthcare provider, and emergency contact information. If your child's allergy warrants it, please plan to provide the School with medicines required for emergency treatment, (e.g., an EpiPen, Benadryl, etc.) in a ziplock bag labeled with your child's name. We will also provide you with a Medication Authorization form to be filled out by your doctor. We rely on you to work with us to keep your child safe at school by keeping us informed and supplied with what your child may need to be cared for in a medical emergency.

We maintain a **nut- and peanut-free environment** in classrooms at St. Columba's. We will also limit exposure to **gluten, casein, or other allergens** that can trigger certain children when we are aware of such sensitivities.

In the case of **food allergies or food sensitivities**, we will be happy to provide you with a list of the snack foods usually served at school including their ingredient labels for your approval. Anticipating that special snacks and birthday treats will frequently arrive in your child's classroom, **we ask that parents of children with allergies provide a container of non-perishable special treats or ones that can be frozen to replace goodies whose ingredients are not known.** Teachers will not serve unapproved snacks to children with allergies, nor will they send them home with the child for later consumption. These procedures follow the recommendations provided by the Food Allergy and Anaphylaxis Network.

**Sun and Insects:** If your child is sensitive to sun exposure or insect bites, please consider sending him or her in a hat and long sleeves during the early fall and late spring when these issues most often arise. **We ask that you apply sunscreen and insect repellent products at home before school begins.** When applying both sunscreen and insect repellent, the sunscreen should be applied first. We can reapply these products at school when they are supplied by parents with written instructions in the Medication Authorization document.

### **Excluding and Readmitting Ill Children**

In accordance with our DC Licensing Regulations a child exhibiting one or more of the following symptoms will be sent home and **must be kept home for a full 24-hours *after* the symptoms subside (and without the use of any medication):**

- Fever (temperature 100.4 or higher),
- Diarrhea,
- Vomiting,
- Body rash with fever,
- Sore throat with fever or swollen glands,
- Thick, persistent cough,
- Eye drainage with thick mucus or pus draining from the eye;
- Pink eye, i.e., colored drainage, eye pain and/or redness of the eye;

- Fever accompanied by rash, vomiting, diarrhea, earache, irritability or confusion;
- Abnormal discoloration of skin;
- Continuous irritable crying that requires more attention than the School can provide without compromising the health and safety of other children; or
- Any other symptom indicative of a communicable disease.

If a child is behaving in an unusual manner or seems ill, we will check his/her body temperature. Fevers over 100.4° require exclusion from school. If a child has a temperature below the 100.4° threshold but above 99.0° we usually alert parents so that, should the child's temperature continue to rise, they will have time to prepare for an early pick up. If a child exhibits mild symptoms of illness or discomfort other than a fever, the School, in consultation with the child's parents, shall decide whether the child should be immediately sent home or discharged at the end of the day. Should a child require exclusion from the classroom due to illness, he/she will be taken to the Office to rest. Parents will be contacted to pick up the child.

**Medicines:** Ideally children taking medications should receive them at home before or after the school day. If your child has a condition (e.g., asthma, seizures, ADHD, etc.) that requires medication be administered during the school day, please contact the School's Inclusion Specialist to ensure that all paperwork required by DC has been completed and that the appropriate staff has been given instructions on proper dosing and administration of medications. The Head of School and Inclusion Specialist will ensure that medications are stored and administered properly.

**Accidents and Emergencies:** Small accidents during the school day are treated with simple first aid such as washing with soap and water, applying band-aids, and using ice packs. When possible, teachers will send you a message via Brightwheel alerting you of small injuries. In the case of a serious injury or illness that requires immediate medical attention, 911 will be called immediately and the parent notified.

Should a significant but non-emergency injury occur, parents will be called immediately and an Unusual Incident Report form will be completed, submitted to the DC Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE), and maintained in the main office with the child's permanent record. The staff at St. Columba's is not permitted to transport any child for medical care. Please be sure that your emergency contact information on file in the Office is current and up-to-date at all times as well as contact information for others whom we might call if you cannot be reached. **Emergency contacts must be local.** OSSE will not accept forms which have emergency contacts who are not readily available in an emergency.

**Diapering & Potty-Training Policies:** The school follows the guidelines set forth by National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and DC licensing guidelines set forth by the DC Department of Health and Human Services on diapering and potty training.

- Staff should check children for signs that diapers or pull-ups are wet/dirty at least every two hours.
- Diapers are changed immediately when discovered to be soiled or wet.
- Diapers/soiled clothing are only changed in designated areas.
- When placing a child on an elevated surface one hand is ALWAYS kept on the child.



- Gloves are worn whenever dealing with bodily excretions, but gloves are not a substitute for good hand washing following the process.
- Soiled clothing is placed in a plastic bag (without rinsing or prolonged handling) and out of the reach of children to be sent home that day for laundering.
- Soiled diapers are disposed of immediately in a hands-free can with a lid.
- The changing table (and any soiled surface) is cleaned and sanitized immediately after use.
- When a child has been changed or is finished with toileting, wash hands using procedures outlined in the St. Columba's hand-washing policy.
- Staff members whose primary function is preparing food should not be involved in diapering until their food prep duties have been completed for the day.
- Diapers/diapering supplies are provided by the family and labeled accordingly with the child's name.

We do not require that children be potty trained to attend school. We recognize that many children develop at different rates and we support them from their current level of development. **If a child who is not yet potty trained is showing signs of readiness, we will work with the family to support the child with this process. Signs of readiness include: telling an adult when they are wet or soiled, seeking a "special place" or "hiding" when having a bowel movement, regularly waking up dry from nap, pulling at a wet or soiled diaper, and/or asking or showing an interest in using the potty.** If you are noticing the above signs at home, it is recommended to begin potty training during a time when we are not at school, such as during a school break, so your child has ample time to practice in a space that is comfortable and familiar. We visit the bathroom at regular, predictable intervals and ask all of the children to try, which also helps set the stage for training.

**School Access:** The School space is securely separated from the Church by a keypad activated elevator panel and magnetic door locks. The street-side exterior entrance doors to each wing of the first floor have timed magnetic door locks to keep them secure during non-carpool hours. All Nursery School doors will be kept locked throughout the day to protect children. Staff members have key fobs for easy access.

**Background Checks:** All teachers and staff at the Nursery School are required to submit to background checks including FBI fingerprinting, a DCPD criminal records search, and the DC Child Protective Services Child Abuse registry search. These checks are repeated on a regular schedule established by the DC Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE), our licensing body.

**Fire Drills:** Fire Drills take place once a month. In the event of a fire alarm or drill, teachers line up their class and complete a headcount prior to exiting the building. Upon exiting the building, teachers take their classroom first aid backpack containing copies of each child's emergency contact information and medications with them, as necessary. Teachers and children exit the building from the designated or nearest building exit. All personnel and children travel to the bottom of the playground on the side of campus nearest to their exit point. In the event of a real fire (not a drill), we will evacuate the premises by crossing the nearest exit street (Albemarle and Butterworth). Those exiting the property closest to Butterworth Place will meet at the outdoor area seating across the street at Friendship Terrace. Those exiting closest to Albemarle will walk down the hill on Albemarle to the corner.

If there is no apparent smoke/fire, the Head (or other designated main office staff) will complete a building sweep on the Butterworth side of the building, closing doors as they check rooms. The Inclusion Specialist will conduct the same sweep on the Albemarle side of the building. After the sweeps are complete, school administration will meet the teachers and children at the designated evacuation locations to provide further instruction.

**Smoke-Free Facility Policy:** St. Columba's Church and Nursery School are smoke-free facilities. In the interest of public health and the health and safety of our nursery school children, St. Columba's playgrounds are also smoke-free at all times children are present.

**Pet Policy:** We love our classroom animals and believe that helping to care for animals is invaluable in teaching children empathy and caring for our world and all the creatures in it. With this in mind, many of our classrooms have pets. While we want to make the school inviting and welcoming to varied pets, the health and safety of our students is our first priority. We adhere to the following guidelines regarding pets: classroom pets or visiting animals should appear to be in good health; and pets or visiting animals will have documentation from a vet or shelter verifying they are fully immunized (if required for that type of animal) and that they are suitable for contact with children. Teaching staff will always supervise interactions with animals and instruct children on safe behavior when in close proximity to animals and, if a student has an allergy to an animal, contact with that animal will be avoided. Children will wash their hands immediately after handling animals.

*Additional Health & Safety policies for the school (such as supervision requirements, water play, etc.) exist. If at any time you would like to know more about these policies please feel free to contact the School's Office.*

## OTHER INFORMATION

**Daily Programs:** *Early Arrival, 3:30 Club, and Stay & Play* are add-on programs that provide parents the option to have their child spend additional time at school – either before or after regular program hours.

**Admission:** Sharing your positive experiences at St. Columba's with your neighbors and friends helps to keep us fully enrolled and we truly appreciate you spreading the word.

Need-based financial assistance is available to help qualifying families with tuition. Applicants must submit a Schools & Student Services (SSS) application and, once the information is processed, grants are determined by the Head of School and a member of the School's Board of Governors. All information is kept strictly confidential.

**Enrollment Deposits:** Once admitted to the Nursery School, parents submit an enrollment deposit to hold the child's place at school for the duration of the child's tenure (e.g., the child "graduates" or moves to another program). **Enrollment deposits will be refunded at the written request of the family to the Head of School or School Office Manager. Families will be reminded at re-enrollment time that, should they choose not to re-enroll, this request must be made. Refund checks are**

processed in June after the program year has finished and all outstanding fees and tuition, if any, have been collected. Any money owed to the school will be deducted from the enrollment deposit before refunding.

**Outplacement:** Families planning to apply their child to an independent school for either Pre-K or Kindergarten should begin scheduling visits to schools of interest. The Head of School is happy to meet with families who wish to discuss this process and the variety of school options for their child.

After you have applied to a school or schools, please let the Head of School know and send school recommendation forms to their email address. The Office tracks deadlines and ensures that your child's teachers complete and submits all recommendation forms based on each school's requirements.

**Most schools have an early January deadline for new applicants but many have much earlier application dates for siblings of current students.** Please help us be timely in submitting recommendations by letting us know as early in the process as possible about your plans.

**Families intending to send their child to public school Pre-K** following St. Columba's can help by letting the Office know your intentions.

**St. Columba's Nursery School Parent Engagement Team (PET):** Our very active Parent Engagement Team creates volunteer opportunities that assist the School and School staff in many ways. We encourage parents to consider volunteering to help our community flourish.

**Parent Education:** St. Columba's provides opportunities for parents to learn about child development and discipline issues that can affect family life. Newsletters, email messages, and fliers from the School will alert you to these important and helpful events.

**Birthdays:** Every child enjoys celebrating his or her birthday at school and we are happy to help you with your child's celebration. Please contact your child's teachers in advance to arrange for a date on which you will provide a **pre-packaged**, nut-free, special snack for the children.

**Child Progress Reports:** At St. Columba's, we seek to ensure that children are meeting age-appropriate milestones as they progress along the developmental continuum. Our goal is to help every child become as competent as possible across all areas of development. We track children's progress in several formal and informal ways throughout the year. The year starts with teachers reviewing family background questionnaires completed by each family. At school, the teachers observe children looking for evidence that each child has reached the developmental milestones our curriculum addresses in language, cognitive, fine- and gross-motor skills, social-emotional development, early literacy, and early math. Teachers track children's progress for their age group in accordance with [DC's Early Learning Standards](#) by collecting anecdotal evidence of their growth in each area. For each conference, teachers complete a Child Progress Report for each child that includes their observations of the child and his/her development across each domain. They provide written "End of the Year" summaries for each child at the end of the school year.

Regular and frequent communication between teachers, as well as between teachers and parents, is another important piece of our assessment practices. Staying informed about any challenges emerging at home and keeping the parents abreast of what we see at school helps teachers and parents better meet children's evolving needs.

**Inclusion of Children with Special Needs:** In keeping with our mission, the Nursery School seeks to admit a number of students with known special education needs each year. Our play-based curriculum focuses on knowing each child for his or her unique gifts and challenges. This makes an ideal setting for educating all children. We believe that all children benefit from learning to understand and having compassion for human differences. If you have any questions about our inclusion policy, please contact the School Office for more information.

**Shadows and One-to-One Assistants:** From time to time, a child may present with a learning, communication, motor, health, or behavioral challenge that requires the assistance of a shadow or one-to-one assistant in the classroom. In these instances, the Inclusion Specialist and Head of School will meet with the parents to discuss why this accommodation may be appropriate and necessary.

**Therapists/Practitioners:** Some children at St. Columba's Nursery School receive therapeutic services on-site (Speech, Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, etc.). All therapists and specialists that work on site are vetted and/or have submitted background checks. Please contact the Inclusion Specialist if you have any questions or would like to learn more about on-site therapeutic services for your child.

**Discipline Policy:** St. Columba's Nursery School recognizes that as children learn to navigate the world around them, they may exhibit inappropriate and/or mistaken behaviors from time to time. Our philosophy and approach with regard to supporting children is to carefully introduce, model, and teach children our expectations, as well as how to conduct themselves with their peers, teachers, visitors, and our school pets. We strive to reinforce prosocial behaviors through a positive classroom climate where we consistently and explicitly describe and narrate the behaviors we want to see from children.

In many instances, mistaken behaviors are a product of not knowing how or having insufficient words or self-control to manage strong emotions. We work to actively coach children and help them build the necessary skills and language to manage their feelings independently.

We strive to anticipate mistaken behavior before it occurs using redirection, gentle reminders, by providing choices, and/or direct instruction. Occasionally, children may be asked to step out of an emotional situation to cool off in a quiet space and consider alternatives, always under the supervision of a teacher or administrator. When the child is ready, s/he will be asked to rejoin the group to try again. In cases when misbehavior continues, or when it presents a safety issue for that child or to someone else, a parent may be called by the Office to pick the child up from school to spend the rest of the day at home. The child will be welcome back at school the next day for a fresh start.

If at any point, a child's behavior warrants additional attention from the teachers, a dialogue will begin among the teachers, parents, Head of School and Inclusion Specialist so that appropriate strategies for that child can be established. We always strive to resolve behavior issues by putting positive behavior

supports in place. WE NEVER use physical punishments, psychological abuse, or coercion. WE DO NOT withhold or threaten to withhold food, outside time, or special events as a form of punishment.

**Policy on Parent/Teacher Relationships Outside of School:** As a rule, when the School is aware of a close relationship between a teacher and family outside of school, the School will place the family's child in a different class. Likewise, as children grow to love their classroom teachers, parents often ask them to babysit, participate in birthday parties, and other activities outside of the school day that may create close friendships. Teachers, of course, are usually pleased and flattered to be considered for these invitations and know they are a sign of both confidence and affection from the family. However, it is a School policy that teachers not babysit for families whose children are in their current classroom, or engage in social activities outside of school that may affect the professional nature of the relationship between teacher and parents.

**Resolution of Parent/School Conflicts:** If a parent has a concern, he or she should first bring their concern to the child's teachers. If the issue cannot be resolved at this level, a discussion with the Head of School shall take place in an effort to resolve the concern. These conversations may include the teachers or others the family may choose. Failing to reach a satisfactory resolution through these steps, the parent may then file a formal grievance with the School's Board of Governors.

**Policy Against Harassment:** It is our policy to maintain a professional working environment for our employees and a learning environment for our students that is free from harassment of any kind including sexual harassment. In the event that harassment, sexual or otherwise, is reported, the Head of School and the Board of Governors will conduct a thorough investigation, and will take appropriate corrective action, if warranted. Staff receive training in recognizing abuse and neglect and are mandated reporters. The School abides by all laws and regulations in the District of Columbia regarding reporting suspected cases of child abuse or sexual misconduct.

**Statement of Non-Discrimination:** St. Columba's Nursery School does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, creed, gender, sexual orientation, family status or composition, economic status, age, or physical disability in the administration of its admission policies, financial aid program, educational program, hiring and terms of employment of faculty and staff. As a part of St. Columba's parish, the School does give special consideration in the admission process to active and officially enrolled members of the parish, as well as to children with special needs.