



Early Learning Center Parent Handbook

2023 - 2024

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School Board

Avery Sides, M.D. (2024)
Barbara Benson (2024)
Andrew Kathman (2025)
Marilyn Kaiser-Alter (2025)
Jack Lane (2026)
Kortney Hall (2026)

EARLY LEARNING CENTER OVERVIEW

ELC Definition

The Early Learning Center at Bethesda Lutheran Church and School consists of:

- 1) a preschool for children ages 3-5 on school day mornings,
- 2) early drop-off childcare service for children enrolled in the preschool or primary school,
- 3) afternoon childcare and enrichment,
- 4) Friday childcare and enrichment,
- 5) Summer Care and Enrichment from June through part of August for children in preschool through grade 3.

Mission Statement

The Mission of Bethesda Lutheran School and Early Learning Center is:

Partnering with families to:

- **Share the Gospel and love of Jesus Christ.**
- **Provide an excellent Christ-centered education.**

Philosophy

Bethesda Lutheran Preschool (ELC) exists as a part of the total ministry of Bethesda Lutheran Church, which is helping children know Christ (Jn. 17:3) and to make Christ known (Mt. 28:19-20) through prayer, worship, Bible studies (2 Tim. 2:15) and service ministries (Ja. 1:27).

Therefore, Bethesda Lutheran Preschool (ELC) will:

- *Provide the best developmentally appropriate Christian education,
 - *Be available to all children, regardless of race, creed, or national origin,
 - *Provide quality, creative learning through play, social interactions, and hands-on experiences, and
 - *Provide these in a loving, safe Christian atmosphere.

History

Our school shared in the greater history of Lutheran schools in the United States that goes back more than 150 years. Bethesda Lutheran School opened its doors in 1980 with an enrollment of eight students in kindergarten through 3rd grade. Each year a grade was added so that eventually the school reached a sufficient size to require three teachers. Our facility for the first eleven years was in the education building of Bethesda Lutheran Church. Due to the school's growth, in 1981, a classroom was added to the basic building. In 1992 a completely new educational structure was built as an addition to the existing church structure and serves as the school today.

In 2010 the preschool was added, and in 2018 the South Dakota Department of Social Services approved a licensed Child Care program. The Bethesda Lutheran School mascot is the Bald Eagle, which comes to us from our school Bible verse, which is Isaiah 40:31. The school colors are maroon and grey. We are committed to small class sizes and increased student/teacher contact time.

GOVERNANCE/ADMINISTRATION

The governance of Bethesda Lutheran Early Learning Center rests primarily with the Voter's Assembly of the congregation. This body executes its will through an elected School Board composed of six persons, with the pastor and principal serving as ex-officio members. The principal is responsible for seeing that the policies and directives of the School Board are carried out on a daily basis. Immediate administration and supervision of the student body rests with each individual teacher.

Parents having a question or concern should first of all speak with the individual about whom the question or concern is brought. Should that individual not be able to provide a satisfactory answer, the concern should be discussed with the principal. Should it be prudent to bring the matter to the School Board, the principal will contact the School Board President and request that the matter be added to their agenda.

Non-Discrimination

Bethesda Lutheran School admits students of any race, color, national and ethnic origin to all rights, privileges, programs, and activities generally accorded or made available to students at the school. It does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national and ethnic origin in the administration of its educational policies, admissions, and other school-administered programs.

Accreditation and Licensing

Bethesda Lutheran School and Early Learning Center is accredited by the State of South Dakota and by the National Lutheran School Accreditation (NLSA) and has been since 1993. NLSA is a national agency that assists and recognizes schools that provide quality Christian education. NLSA-recognized schools meet rigorous standards and commit to ongoing school improvement. Bethesda Lutheran Early Learning Center's before and after school care service is approved and licensed through the Department of Social Services of the State of South Dakota.

Admission Eligibility and Requirements

Children must be 3 years old BEFORE September 1st of the year entering preschool and 3 years old before attending preschool or child care. Your child must also be completely toilet trained. All new applicant families will participate in an interview with a school staff member prior to registration to jointly evaluate the child's school placement.

Bethesda Lutheran School does not have the facilities and staff to serve all children. Those with special developmental or physical needs will be referred to appropriate community or other educational agencies. All new students are on a trial period for their first thirty days.

Enrollment Requirements

The following are requirements for enrollment in Bethesda Lutheran Early Learning Center:

- * A copy of the child's birth certificate
 - * A copy of current immunization record as required by the State of South Dakota before attending
 - * A completed and signed enrollment packet
 - * A non-refundable registration fee at the time of enrollment, based on the child's placement.

Reporting Changes of Circumstances or Information

Your enrollment forms contain valuable information the center uses to provide a secure environment for your child. If there are any changes of the circumstances or information on that form, please report the new information immediately to the director. Of greatest importance is who may or may not pick up your child and important family contact information.

The center, likewise, is responsible for reporting to the Department of Social Services any circumstances that have changed that affect your child at the center, including staff updates and changes, classroom changes, and the like.

Withdrawal from the Program

Students may be withdrawn from the program for a variety of circumstances. Either the parents or the school may initiate withdrawal procedures. In the case of the school, withdrawal may be initiated upon failure to pay the tuition and fees in a timely manner or for any violation of the school's established principles of acceptable conduct. If your child appears to be having difficulties behaviorally in adapting to our school environment, the teacher will request a meeting with you to develop a behavioral intervention plan. This plan will be implemented over a two-week period to attempt improvement of the identified problem. Thereafter, lack of progress may result in the need to dismiss a child from the program. Please understand that both the Director and the Principal will make every possible effort to work with you before this type of action becomes necessary.

We recognize that difficulties may arise with a family's financial situation during the year that may make payment difficult. However, it is the family's responsibility to contact the School Board through the director when these difficulties arise. Please understand our situation in that we want to pay our staff and our bills regularly.

Please notify the director or the ELC office in writing two weeks in advance of voluntary withdrawal from the program. All fees and remaining tuition due must be paid in full upon withdrawal. Contracts remain in effect until written notice is received by the ELC office. Families who withdraw from an ELC program are responsible for the tuition through the last day of school attended. No school records are released until the tuition balance is paid in full. The final tuition balance shall be calculated on a per diem basis when two weeks written notice of withdrawal is received by the ELC office.

FEES AND TUITION

2023 - 2024 School Year

Registration and Materials Fees

Preschool and Pre-K—\$75

Child Care Only if not already enrolled (Before and After School and/or Friday)--\$45

Tuition

Preschool (3- and 4-year-old students)--8:00 am—12:00 Monday – Thursday--**\$255** per month.

Pre-Kindergarten (4- and 5-year-old students)—8:00 am—12:00 Monday – Thursday--**\$255** per month.

Please note that Preschool and Pre-K students may be combined in one class.

We offer several monthly Childcare programs for different situations, as well as a Drop-In program:

1) Childcare which includes care from 7:15 – 7:45 am before school and after preschool-- 12:00 – 5:30 pm--**\$335** per month (we call this Preschool Plus childcare). There is no additional registration fee for the childcare portion of Preschool Plus. Total fee for Preschool Plus Childcare for the month will be **\$590 (\$255 + \$335)**.

2) School time childcare for primary students through 4th grade (includes before school 7:15 – 7:45 am and after school 3:45 pm – 5:30 pm)--**\$130** per month. A one-time registration fee is also required.

3) Friday childcare for 3- 8-year-olds (7:15 am – 5:30 pm)--**\$130**per month. A registration fee is also required.

4) Drop-in childcare for 3 – 8-year-olds (12:00 – 5:30 pm Monday – Thursday and 7:15 – 5:30 on Fridays)--**\$4.00** per hour (must be scheduled ahead and paid in advance). A registration fee is also required if not already enrolled.

If a child is picked up after 5:30 pm, a fee of \$5.00 per every 15 minutes late will be charged and must be paid to the dismissing teacher at the time of pick-up.

A completed Registration Form and advance payment of the registration fees will insure your child a place in the program. If classes are full, your child may be added to a waiting list. Families enrolling after the start of the program year are required to pay the full registration fee and will also be required to make a full billing cycle's tuition payment at the time the billing contract is signed. Billing contracts remain in effect until a two-week written notice of withdrawal is received by the ELC office.

***Summer Care and Enrichment traditionally begins approximately 1 – 2 weeks after school is over and extends until approximately 1 – 2 weeks before school begins in the fall. Programs and activities may vary from year to year, but times historically have been 7:15 am to 5:30 pm, 5 days per week. Summer rates are different from school year rates and may be re-evaluated each year. Summer Care is billed biweekly in advance. A registration/materials fee is also required.

Discounts/Credits/Refunds

Registration before April 15 for Preschool and Childcare receives a \$25 discount.

A 2% discount will be given if monthly tuition is paid in full at the beginning of the school year.

A discounted monthly rate for Preschool and Primary School is offered for active members of Bethesda Lutheran Church. For 2023 - 2024, the discounted tuition for preschool is **\$195. No discounts are offered for childcare.**

Because students who are children of Bethesda Lutheran Church members attend Bethesda Lutheran Preschool and School at a reduced tuition rate, it has become important to define the term "member". A "member" with regard to reduced tuition status for a child attending Bethesda Lutheran School and Preschool shall be parents or legal guardians who are communicant members according to Article 4 of the Articles of Incorporation of Bethesda Lutheran Church.

A \$50 credit will be given to parents who refer Bethesda ELC or school to another family who subsequently enroll. Only one credit may be given to each referring family per school year.

When a child is withdrawn from the program, pre-paid tuition will be refunded on a per-diem basis.

Payment Options and Billing

Bethesda Lutheran School directly bills each family each month and accepts physical payments--personal checks and cash.

Unless other arrangements have been made with the director, each month's preschool and childcare tuition must be paid on or before the **fifteenth** day of each month (August – April). Any variation from this payment schedule must have School Board approval. It shall be the parents' responsibility to contact the school representative prior to the due date to request an extension. Extensions will be granted only in extreme conditions. If the tuition is not paid by the first Monday following the fifteenth, a payment reminder will be sent in the Monday

envelope. If payment has not been received by the 20th, the school administrator will contact the parent/guardian to create a payment schedule so that the tuition costs are met. If there is no payment before the 15th of the following month and an extension has not been granted, Bethesda Lutheran School reserves the right to terminate admittance to the school.

Scholarships are not available for the Early Learning Center, but families who qualify for State assistance may have a portion of their Preschool tuition and Child Care and Enrichment subsidized. Please ask for details of State Assistance in the Church/School office.

Child Care and Enrichment charges must be paid by the 15th of each month in advance. **Summer Care and Enrichment is a completely different program and may have a different payment schedule. Parents will be notified ahead of time.**

Drop In Child Care

Drop-in Child Care is a service offered for currently enrolled students at Bethesda, on a space-available basis only. Drop-in care must be arranged 24 hours in advance. Parents must provide snacks and/or lunch on that day. The drop-in rate is \$4.00 per hour or portion of an hour, due at the time of arrival. Frequent users of drop-in care should pay in advance the amount estimated for **Drop-in Care** for the month. The weekly amount owed will be deducted from that amount. The parent will be billed for any additional balance due.

GENERAL ELC POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Calendar

Bethesda Lutheran ELC will follow the same calendar as Bethesda Lutheran School, which closely coincides with the local public-school calendar. We will operate our preschool on a four-day school week with the same holidays, teacher in-service days and breaks as the public school schedule. However, the before and after school services provided for childcare will operate on a slightly different schedule and will have its own calendar. Childcare and summer care calendars will be published and given to parents. For parental convenience, the academic calendar for Bethesda School and ELC is published ahead of time each year. Please see the calendar on the following page.

Bethesda Lutheran School and ELC Academic Calendar

2023-2024 School Year

Staff Meetings - Preparation	August 7-11
Parent Night 6:00 – 7:00	August 15
1st Quarter-34 Days	
First Day of School/Preschool/Child Care	August 21
Labor Day No School/Child Care	September 4
Professional Development-Teachers Only	September 22
No School/Child Care-Great Plains Lutheran Conference-Seward, NE	October 16
End of first quarter – Early Dismissal 1:30	October 19
Parent Teacher Conferences	October 19 2:00-7:00
Parent Teacher Conferences	October 20 7:30-12:00
Professional Development-Teachers Only	October 27
Reformation Day Celebration	October 26
Kids Sing in Church-Reformation Day	October 29
2nd Quarter-34 Days	
Thanksgiving Break No Child Care	November 22-23 November 22-24
Christmas Concert	TBA
End of first Semester – Dismiss 1:30	December 21
Christmas Vacation - No Child Care	Dec. 22-Jan. 5
3rd Quarter-35 Days	
Classes and Child Care Resume	January 8
Professional Development-Teachers Only	January 19
National Lutheran Schools Week	January 21-27
Professional Development-Teachers Only	February 9
President’s Day – No School	February 19
Kids sing during Lent	March 6
End of third quarter – Early Dismissal	March 7
Parent Teacher Conferences	March 7 2:00-7:00
Parent Teacher Conferences	March 8 7:30-12:00
4th Quarter-40 days	
Easter Break - No School & Child Care	March 28-April 1
Easter	March 31
Spring Concert	TBA
End of fourth quarter – Dismiss 1:30	May 21
No Child Care Cleaning/Training	May 27-31
Summer Child Care Begins	May 30

Attendance

Regular attendance is essential to the satisfactory progress of children. Parents' attitudes toward attending school encourage children's interest. We expect every Preschool child to be in regular attendance for the full four-day week, Monday through Thursday, unless school is not being held due to weather, holidays, unexpected closures, etc. Illness, family emergencies, or other urgent reasons may prevent a child from attending school. In those cases, parents are asked please notify the school office to inform the teacher of the reason for the child's absence.

Arrival Time/Dismissal

Drop off time for preschool is no earlier than 7:45 a.m. Children arriving before then will be considered in childcare and will be charged accordingly. Please be sure your child arrives on time, having had a good breakfast and an unrushed start to the preschool session. The instructional period begins at 8:00 a.m. and runs until 11:45, at which time those who are leaving for the day will get ready to be dismissed to their parents. Please plan to arrive for your child at 12:00 p.m. Please keep in mind that it is important for your child to be picked up on time. If you anticipate being detained, please notify the school immediately so we can reassure your child.

Those families choosing the Preschool Plus option may bring their children at 7:15 a.m. and may pick them up as late as 5:30 p.m.

All children **MUST** be signed in and out by a parent or guardian or a person designated by the parent/guardian. Any person unknown to the school will be asked for identification. If an unauthorized person attempts to pick up your child, your child will not be released, and you will be notified. Please let the teacher know in advance of alternative drop-off or pick-up arrangements. A list of individuals who are permitted to pick up your child will be on your child's enrollment form, which should be modified as necessary throughout the school year to keep it current.

Arrangements for children's after-school visits to classmates' homes should be made **before school dismissal**. A parental note of permission or verbal permission must be given for any child to leave the school with any person other than a known parent.

Staff members are not allowed to drive children to or from school, except for scheduled field trips or emergency situations. The preschool assumes responsibility for your child after s/he has been signed in by a parent, guardian, or your designated representative. The preschool shall retain responsibility until your child is signed out by a parent, guardian, or designated representative.

If your child is going to be absent for the day due to illness, please call the school/church office or let the teacher know as early as possible in the school day.

Daily Preschool Activities

The class session will begin with about 30 minutes of choice time. This allows your child to make the transition from home to school and have a successful separation from mom and dad. We will then begin with circle time and the most important part of our day, Jesus Time. Your child will be given opportunities to work in learning centers, with opportunities for group or individual play. Art, computer, and one-on-one work will also be offered during this time. Work, story, and music times will round out our preschool session. Library, music, choir, and chapel are also offered at various times during the week.

Snack and recess are a daily part of our routine. We do go outside every day if the weather is suitable. Please make sure that your child is appropriately dressed for various types of weather.

Children enrolled in the Child Care and Enrichment program will be in enrichment on the days and times that they are not in their preschool session. Morning Child Care and Enrichment is from 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. Preschool Aftercare is from 12:00-5:30 p.m. and consists of lunch, a quiet time, snack, work time and indoor/outdoor play until pick-up.

Lunch is served from 12:00 – 12:30 p.m. The children are then allowed play time before lying down for a nap or having an afternoon enrichment time.

Children enrolled in the Child Care and Enrichment program who nap are welcome to bring a small blanket or “lovey”. These should be taken home at the end of the week for washing. We will provide an individual nap mat for your child.

Holidays and Days Off

The entire center is closed for the following holidays: New Year’s Eve, New Year’s Day, Independence Day, Memorial Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day, the Friday after Thanksgiving, Christmas Eve, and Christmas Day. On other days when there is no school the director will survey families enrolled in Childcare. If three or more children need childcare on a specific day, childcare may be considered. Holidays are celebrated in the ELC. We do not celebrate the secular meaning of special holidays such as Santa, the Easter Bunny, and Halloween. Rather, we will celebrate them emphasizing the Christian meaning of these special occasions. However, we will not discourage the secular line of thinking, knowing that this is a common experience and source of linkage for your children.

The center may not be open on all dates set forth on the ELC calendar for varying reasons, some of which may be related to weather and/or the inability to use the facilities.

There will be no reduction in tuition for Snow Days, Spring Break, conferences, training, holidays, vacations, illnesses, or other absences.

Communication and Conferences

Parent/teacher conferences will be held two times per year. Parents may request additional meetings with the teachers throughout the year. Information about pupil progress will be given only to parents/guardians.

Your suggestions and ideas are always welcome, and we want to be as open and receptive as possible. However, for various reasons we may not be as accommodating as you would otherwise prefer, but we will do our best to strike a balance that meets a positive outcome for everyone. Each week your child will have a Monday folder in their mailbox slots at the sign in desk that will become an important source of helpful school information and special notes from your child's teacher. Please help us keep those lines of communication open by using the enclosed envelope and returning it promptly the following school day, including any questions or comments that you would like to share with the teacher.

Observation Policy

We have an open door policy for our classrooms in which parents may observe their child at any time. As a courtesy, please notify the child's teacher in advance.

Discipline

Bethesda Lutheran ELC is committed to helping each child begin to realize his/her potential as a worthy person. Part of the teacher's responsibility is to guide students toward becoming a more mature, competent, self-directed person. While pursuing this, we must remember that we are dealing with developing personalities from which immature actions and reactions can be expected. The teacher will emphasize positive measures that encourage healthy learning and promote responsibility and self-discipline.

Our Staff practices positive reinforcement and intervention. We use redirection when possible. The Peace Table (a quiet relaxed break for the child to regain self-control) is used when a child is losing control and redirection is not helping.

At all times we encourage children to be responsible for themselves and begin to see how their actions affect others. We will strive to help children learn to work through their problems independently in an atmosphere of love, respect, support, kindness, and courtesy. On a case-by- case basis, we may request a parent consultative visit so we can become partners in helping your child become more successful in managing their behavior in a way that is friendly and respectful toward themselves and others.

Chapel

In addition to the regular religion class held in the classrooms, students will participate in a weekly chapel service every Wednesday from 8:00 – 8:45 a.m. These services are conducted by the pastor, faculty, various guests, and at times, the students themselves. Parents and friends are welcome to attend. A chapel offering is accepted from the children. Money from chapel offerings is donated to a variety of charitable causes, including missionaries, new churches, human needs, and the like. We encourage parents to have their children participate in chapel offerings as a way of teaching their children about tithing and sharing their blessings with the needs of others.

Church and Sunday School Attendance

In keeping with the program of Christian training in the school, Bethesda Lutheran School encourages students to attend worship services and Sunday school regularly. Parents should keep in mind that the example they set is very important; attitudes are better caught than taught. For this reason, we ask parents to attend church with their children.

Curriculum

Our educational program is Reggio Emilia Inspired as well as somewhat informal and flexible. We build some structure into the program by using Voyages Preschool Curriculum from Concordia Publishing House, which focuses on teaching simple prayers, songs, Bible stories, and art projects that familiarize children with basic Christian teachings. We also include Heggerty's phonics curriculum as well as Reading Enchantment. However, structure will not be the basis of the program. Play is at the heart of how children of this age learn, and we will help your child foster their natural creativity through various experiences throughout the day to include exposure to finger play, puppets, puzzles, music, books, manipulative toys, recognition of shapes, sizes, colors, numbers, letters, learning to manipulate buttons, and tie shoes. The students will be working with natural materials and things from the world around them to further their learning.

What Is Reggio Emilia?

The Reggio Emilia Approach is an approach to teaching, learning and advocacy for children. In its most basic form, it is a way of observing what children know, are curious about and what challenges them. Our program allows children to use words, movement, drawing, painting, building, sculpture, shadow play, collage, dramatic play, music, nature, literacy, science and social studies in "The Hundred Languages of Children," supporting children as competent, resourceful, curious, imaginative, inventive and possess a desire to interact and communicate with others. The vision of the child as a competent learner has produced a strong child-centered curriculum and features a "Hands on, Minds on" exploration of materials and media.

The Image of the child

We believe in children's strengths and capabilities. Our goal is to empower children to explore the world, create meaning and challenge their own thinking. Over time, children apply their knowledge confidently and successfully to new situations, which results in feelings of pride and self-worth.

The Role of the Teacher

Teachers are facilitators who guide children's thinking, document their ideas, and support them in their learning. They provoke skill development and positive social interaction.

The Role of the Parents

We recognize that each family brings a unique perspective to the classroom and welcome parents' active participation in our program.

The Role of the Environment

The classroom environment is known as the "Third Teacher" in the Reggio approach. The classroom reflects the values, beliefs, and cultures of those who share it. Each area of the room and the materials housed there has a specific purpose. Design, color, and natural light are backdrops to feature the children's work as the main attraction of the classroom setting.

Child-centered Curriculum

Children's interests and discoveries build our curriculum. Our goal is to challenge children to generate their own ideas and theories, posing thought-provoking, open-ended questions. In keeping with our teaching philosophy, teachers encourage in-depth learning experiences.

The Power of Documentation

Documentation provides a visual record of the dynamic learning encounters which take place in the classroom. With this, we can interpret children's interests, feelings, and ideas and give value to their work. Documentation is a form of assessment and advocacy for each individual child.

Authentic Art Materials and Visible Learning

Children are encouraged to participate in a variety of expressive activities such as sculpture, dramatic play, shadow play, puppetry, painting, dancing, music, ceramics, construction, and writing. A child can give an idea form by drawing, painting, sculpting, or building the idea. In doing so the child can clarify what they are thinking. Children in our program use authentic art materials to make learning visible.

Our classroom spaces are carefully considered by the teacher. Materials are thoughtfully displayed to allow the students to participate directly with their environment while fulfilling their need to learn. The Reggio Inspired environment incorporates natural elements to stimulate the senses. The trickle of water in a fountain, the beauty of a green plant, the taste of fresh vegetables and fruit, the scent of a flower and the texture of a shell are just a few of the elements we build into the child's day.

It is our goal to provide your child with opportunities that promote love for learning and work, success for developing self-esteem, development of motor and social skills, and a sense of themselves as God's children. All of these are important for success in kindergarten. One of the benefits of being in a school setting is that your child will have the opportunity for exposure to our older children's school activities that include school plays, chapel, and playground games. At Bethesda, we want our children to grow in Christian character in order that they may effectively serve Christ both in a church and in the world. We encourage our children to be helpful, caring, and considerate of each other, looking out for the welfare and safety of each other. You can expect that the same consideration will be given to your preschool child.

Student supply lists will be given at the beginning of each school year. Supplies will be pooled together to be used by everyone and kept by the teacher.

Field Trips and Transportation

The preschoolers have various field trips that are arranged each school year. We rely heavily on our parent volunteers to help drive and supervise. You will be notified beforehand of all trips by way of written and verbal communications and must sign a permission form for any field trip requiring transportation from the property. Please let the teacher know if you will be willing to chaperone. A signed release form must be returned to your child's teacher before you will be allowed to transport children for a field trip.

The use of seatbelts and car seats/boosters is a must for all preschoolers. Children requiring car seats will need their own car seats for the field trip. We follow the state law concerning car seats and boosters. Vehicles will carry no more passengers than there are legal seat restraints in the vehicle. Bethesda Lutheran ELC staff members are not allowed to transport children in private vehicles except in the case of a field trip or an emergency.

Snacks and Lunches

Snacks for the ELC classes will be brought by students on an assigned basis. We ask that these snacks be simple, healthy choices, such as crackers and cheese, veggies and dip, fruit, yogurt, etc. that would meet choices from the basic food guide pyramid. Juice or milk may be brought with snack; otherwise, we will supply water, milk, or juice as on hand. This should be a fun experience that the students look forward to anxiously. Students will only need to bring enough snacks for their own preschool class.

Bethesda Lutheran ELC does not offer a breakfast program, but your child will be allowed time before 8:00 am to eat breakfast brought from home, if your child is enrolled in the childcare program.

Children who participate in the afternoon Child Care and Enrichment program will bring their own lunch and afternoon snack. Lunch hour is 12:00 – 12:30, and the afternoon snack will be at 3:00 pm.

Parents of children who remain for Child Care and Enrichment will send a sack lunch and afternoon snack. Meals and snacks should reflect healthy, nutritious decisions on the part of the parents. Lunches needing refrigeration will be stored in the kitchen refrigerator. Otherwise, sack lunches and snacks will be kept in your child's cubby.

If your child has any special dietary needs or allergies, please let the teacher know, as we will be happy to help accommodate your child's nutritional requirements.

Birthdays

We celebrate birthdays during the preschool snack time. We welcome you to bring treats, and we ask that you discuss this with the teacher in advance so she can plan accordingly. We request that all treats be peanut and tree nut free, and we prefer that you send cookies,

cupcakes with minimal frosting, donut holes or other easily handled treats. PLEASE DO NOT HAVE YOUR CHILD PASS OUT BIRTHDAY INVITATIONS IN CLASS UNLESS YOU PLAN TO INVITE THE WHOLE CLASS. Feelings are easily hurt if someone is left out. If you are inviting only a few from the class, please give the invitations to the teacher and she will put them in the sign-in folders.

Nap Time

Children in attendance for more than four hours are required to have a rest period. If they do not fall asleep, they will be provided with quiet activities.

HEALTH POLICIES

PLEASE NOTE THAT BETHESDA LUTHERAN SCHOOL WILL OBSERVE ALL CDC-RECOMMENDED PRECAUTIONS FOR CHILD CARE CENTERS DURING ANY HEALTH EMERGENCY.

Upon enrollment at Bethesda Lutheran Early Learning Center, immunization records are required for your child. These records must be current and updated as immunizations are received.

Children who ache, have a fever (over 100 degrees), have diarrhea, are vomiting, or show any other signs of illness should remain at home. Children who have had a fever may return to school no earlier than 24 hours after the fever (without using fever-reducing medication) is gone. In the event that your child should become ill while at school, your child will be isolated, allowed to rest, under supervision, until pick-up is available. You will be notified immediately if your child becomes ill, or if you cannot be reached, the emergency contact for your child will be called.

Bethesda Lutheran School and ELC has first aid and CPR trained staff on campus at all times. The preschool and daycare staff will give appropriate first aid to a hurt child. A parent/guardian will be contacted if it is the judgment of the preschool or daycare staff that immediate medical attention is necessary. If it is the further judgment of the preschool or daycare staff that the injury is of an emergency nature, paramedics will be called to the preschool and a parent or guardian will be contacted.

Medications—Storage and Administration

Staff are not permitted to give or administer any prescription or non-prescription medication to children without written parental consent and doctor permission. If it is necessary to take any type of prescription or non-prescription medication while at school, bring the medication in its original container and the medical permission form signed by the child's doctor. Staff will store the medication in a secure storage area in the office away from the children. Medication will be administered by the director, or another staff member instructed by the director. Cough drops are considered medication. If the prescription changes, a new signature is required.

Reporting Contagious Disease

Any outbreaks of communicable diseases should be reported to the teacher, who will contact the Department of Health (Phone: 605-394-2516). Communicable diseases include such diseases as pink eye, head lice, chicken pox, strep throat, and meningitis.

Dress Code—What to Wear at School

Think of your child's comfort and provide simple clothing that is free of complicated fastenings. Consider messy art and science materials and provide clothing that is washable and you can destroy...so no nice clothing!!!! We encourage messy play, and this allows the children to play without being worried about ruining their good clothes. Think of our playground and provide clothing that is sturdy.

Think of your daughter's comfort and provide her with long pants, as they are safer and more comfortable for active preschool play. Think of your child's safety and provide well-fitting, rubber-soled play shoes. Think of changeable South Dakota weather and dress your child appropriately. It is easier to remove an unneeded item than to put on something your child does not have. PLEASE put names on all backpacks and outer garments.

In cold weather, please make sure that your child has a warm coat, snow pants, mittens/gloves, hat, and boots. Please send an extra pair of shoes for indoor wear.

In the event of inclement weather, Bethesda follows the lead of Hot Springs Public Schools. Teachers, the principal, or office staff may send cancellation messages to parents via telephone or text messaging.

Personal Belongings

Upon arrival, children should hang their coats in their cubby and change from boots to shoes, if necessary. Each child is asked to bring a water bottle with fresh water and a backpack to school each day. ***The backpack should contain a complete change of clothes.*** The backpacks will be hung in the cubbies and will be taken home by the children each day. The preschool will make every effort to safeguard personal belongings brought by the children but cannot be responsible for lost or broken items. If your child has a comfort object that they need in the very early days of school to help ease the transition, we will welcome this while helping them come to feel more comfortable and secure working toward expanding your child's options for comfort.

Toys From Home

Except for comfort toys that are needed in the very opening days of school to help ease your child's transition, we ask that you leave your child's toys at home or in the car. If you have a book or song that may be of interest to all the children, the teacher will appreciate this being shared and ask that it may be left for several days.

No guns, war toys, or other toys of destruction are allowed in our school. If a child must have a means to express feelings of aggression, we use play dough to pound, finger paints and bubble water to sooth jangled feelings.

The teacher will have designated days for Show and Tell and these will be indicated on your monthly snack/show and tell calendar.

Allergy Policy

Bethesda Lutheran School and ELC Policy for Supporting Students with Life-Threatening Allergies

This policy will take effect when a child with life threatening allergies is enrolled in our school/center.

A goal of Bethesda Lutheran School and ELC is to provide a safe environment for all children. Students with life-threatening allergies may require certain safeguards in order to be safe in school. Our policy guidelines establish protocols to promote prevention and management of life-threatening allergies. It addresses the identification of individual needs, staff awareness, necessary curricular and procedural modifications, and emergency plans.

Protecting students with life-threatening allergies is the shared responsibility of families, schools, and the community. Parents will be required to notify the school of the child's condition on the registration form.

Bethesda Lutheran School and ELC cannot create or ensure an all-allergen-free environment. That said, our policy addresses the needs of students' life-threatening allergies and when implemented will reduce the risks associated with exposure.

Parents of children who are subject to an allergic reaction are required to inform the director and the classroom teacher of the steps necessary if the child should get an allergic reaction in school. It is the responsibility of the parent to train the teacher on the proper use of the epi-pen. Should further action be necessary, the school will call 911 and contact the parent immediately.

Food Allergy Guidelines

1. Bethesda Lutheran School and ELC cautions that it is necessary for everyone to understand that an ALLERGEN-FREE environment is impossible to achieve, and to expect it is to harbor a false sense of security.
2. Each student/family will work with staff to create an Emergency Care Plan and talk through accommodations.
3. Due to the student privacy policies, the School and ELC cannot divulge who has an allergy to the classroom without parent/guardian consent.
4. Bethesda Lutheran School and ELC will not serve any foods containing peanuts or tree nuts during school or the afterschool daycare program; however, we cannot guarantee that all the foods will be allergen-free. For this reason, all students with food allergies should bring their own lunch from home each day.

5. Bethesda school staff will work with students in finding a safe seat in the lunch area.
6. Daily classroom snacks may be required to be peanut and tree nut free. Snacks that are made in a facility that also produces nut products, meaning they *may* contain nuts or traces of nuts, are not allowed. This also applies to our Before-school and After-school daycare program.
7. When special curriculum events involving food occur, notice will be sent home to parents to allow for an alternate food item to be provided.
8. Parents wishing to bring birthday treats for their student's class should notify the teacher at least two days in advance. These treats need to be Peanut and Tree Nut free. Parents of students with allergies need to provide alternative snacks for these days.
9. Epi-pens and other medication for students with life-threatening allergies will be stored in each student's home classroom, out of the reach of students, so it is readily available if needed, to be dispensed **ONLY** with prior, written parental consent.

SECURITY POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

The Bethesda ELC takes the safety of children very seriously. All entrances to the building are kept locked during the school day. There is an active doorbell at the east and west entrances. Parents and anyone authorized to drop off or pick up a child will sign the child in upon arrival and sign the child out, noting the time. Children are kept in the presence of an adult teacher at all times. If an individual comes to pick up a child and the staff does not recognize the individual, the staff person will ask for an appropriate ID and check it against the authorized list. If the name does not appear on the authorized list, a phone call will be made to the parent/guardian to verify identity and request a verbal authorization to release the child to the individual in question.

Children Subject to Court Order Custody

Staff and School Board of Bethesda Lutheran School want to provide the safest environment for Bethesda Lutheran School students. Therefore, the following will be required:

1. Parents of children who are subject to court ordered custody will provide a copy of that child's custody papers to the school. These must be signed by a judge and sealed with a court seal.
2. Parents of children who are subject to court ordered custody will provide the school with a list of people who are authorized to pick up the child from school.
3. Please note that if a Bethesda Lutheran School staff person is subpoenaed in a custody case, they will present facts only.

Fire, Disaster, and Lock Down Drills

While the chances of fire or natural disasters are minimal, Bethesda has regular required fire, disaster, and lockdown drills. A written disaster plan is followed by each teacher. Students will be moved to the safest possible location, depending on the type of impending disaster. Dismissal may be delayed if dangerous conditions are present. Routes for evacuation for fires and disaster drills, such as tornadoes, are posted in each classroom at Bethesda Lutheran School and ELC. During such emergencies, parents are requested not to call the school since the phone lines may be needed for emergency communication. The school will inform parents via email, phone calls, and/or texts. If the school needs to be evacuated, students will be taken to a safe location, and parents will be notified.

Child Abuse and Neglect

Bethesda makes every effort to provide a safe environment for children. We are required by law to contact the South Dakota Department of Social Services whenever there is a suspected case of child abuse or neglect. Failure to do so is punishable by the law. It is not our responsibility, however, to investigate or prove child abuse or neglect. As a parent of a child in licensed childcare, you may report any suspected abuse by contacting the South Dakota Department of Social Services.

If you wish to make a complaint or have a concern regarding your provider, you may call South Dakota Social Services at 605-773-3165.

Members of the staff of Bethesda Lutheran School and Early Learning Center are required to read and sign a statement which defines child abuse and neglect.

Student Records/Confidentiality

Bethesda Lutheran School and Early Learning Center designates all student educational records, except for directory information, as confidential. No student records will be released without the written consent of the parent or guardian of the student. Bethesda Lutheran School and Early Learning Center follows the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) enacted by the Congress of the United States on November 19, 1974) with regard to the privacy and release of records.

While the law requires that educational records may not be released without the written consent of the parents or guardian, FERPA allows schools to disclose those records without consent to the following parties or under the following conditions:

- School officials with legitimate educational interest; or
- Other schools to which a student is transferring; or
- Appropriate parties in connection with financial aid to a student; or
- Organizations conducting certain studies on behalf of the school; or
- Accrediting organizations; or
- To comply with a judicial order or lawfully issued subpoena; or
- Appropriate officials in cases of health and safety emergencies; and

State and local authorities within a juvenile justice system, pursuant to specific State law.

Both natural parents have access to the educational records unless legal documentation is filed with the school that prohibits parents from having access to the records.

Parents or eligible students have the right to access the student records. Such a request should be made in writing to the school official. Should a parent or eligible student wish to challenge the contents of the educational record, the school's policy manual contains the procedure established for such a challenge.

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Thank you for working with us to make your child's first school experience a success! May God bless you and your child!

Please sign the Acknowledgement Form on the last page
and return it to the ELC Office

Bethesda Lutheran Church, School, and
Early Learning Center

PARENT ACKNOWLEDGEMENT FORM

Please sign and return this page to the ELC Office

I have read and understand the policies and procedures outlined in this parent handbook published August 2023.

Date _____

Printed Child's Name _____

Printed Parent Name _____

Parent Signature: _____