



DIOCESE OF COLORADO SPRINGS

228 N. CASCADE AVE, COLORADO SPRINGS, CO 80903

TEL: 719.636.2345 • FAX: 719.636.1216

www.diocs.org

February 6, 2023

Dear Parents,

As many of you are aware, Governor Polis signed into law HB22-1295 which created a statewide universal preschool program for Colorado students. The Universal Pre-K (UPK) Program provides part-time preschool funding (15 hours per week) to all Colorado four-year-olds. Three-year-olds are also eligible for up to 10 hours per week if they meet certain "qualifying factors" determined by the newly created Colorado Department of Early Childhood.

The Preschool Directors at our schools attended many information sessions in the Fall. In these sessions, the directors learned how to register their program, how families would register, reimbursement rates, and other nuts-and-bolts for the program. We were very interested in participating in the program so that our families would have the benefit of these funds to assist with the cost of preschool.

On December 16, 2022, the CDEC released the Provider Agreement and Provider Agreement Terms and Conditions. Inside that agreement is language that conflicts with our religious beliefs. If we were to enter into that agreement, it would jeopardize our religious exemption for employment and admission practices. The Colorado Department of Early Childhood has discussed the possibility of exemptions from these requirements for religious providers but has not yet provided clear guidance or information on if, how, or under what circumstances such exemptions might be provided.

Brittany Vessely of the Colorado Catholic Conference has reached out to Governor Polis on behalf of the three dioceses and the Catholic schools in Colorado; we are still waiting for a response. As it stands, we will not sign an agreement that requires us to turn away from Church teachings.

Therefore, at this time, our Catholic preschools will not be an option for parents signing up for the UPK. We are committed to providing faithful Catholic education and this would allow an erosion of that mission. We will update you when we have a specific response for the governor's office. We pray that you value Catholic education enough to understand why we cannot start a slow slide towards accepting policies that conflict with our faith.

Yours in Christ,

Sheila Whalen, Superintendent of Catholic Schools