

SECTION 1: BACKGROUND ON ST. MARK'S

Brief History of St. Mark's Methodist Church Early Childhood Educational Program

In 1989 Mrs. Jean Williams, a well-respected Petersburg native and a long-standing member of St. Mark's Methodist Church closed her half-day school and donated her school equipment, teaching supplies and personal references to St. Mark's for the formation of a new early childhood education program. Since 1989, St. Mark's has operated a half-day preschool located at 225 Claremont Street in the Walnut Hill neighborhood of Petersburg under a non-profit, religious-exempt status. The staff consists of three full-time teachers, one part-time teacher and a music teacher. The education program encourages and depends upon significant parental involvement, and volunteer support from parents, St. Mark's parishioners, and special visitors.

Programs and Services Currently Provided by St. Mark's

St. Mark's early childhood education program provides a unique educational experience for children and fulfills a definite need for many families in our community. Our philosophy is to provide children with a developmentally-appropriate learning environment: a healthy and safe place that provides satisfying activities. We also continually strive to improve the teaching quality in our early childhood education program.

We recognize that the learning needs of preschool are different from those of infants, older children and adults. Preschoolers learn by doing, touching, tasting, hearing, smelling and seeing things that interest them. St. Mark's provides many real experiences

for the children including art projects in a variety of media, music time, field trips, exploration of nature, food preparation and tasting.

A key component to preschool learning and growth is play. As children dress-up and play mommy or daddy or firefighter, build with blocks and tools, play in rice, sand or water, ride tricycles or talk with each other and teachers, they are re-enacting or anticipating real life. By playing out these experiences, they are beginning to organize and understand their world.

Geographical area served by St. Mark's

St. Mark's early childhood education program serves people from Prince George, Colonial Heights, Dinwiddie, Petersburg, Hopewell, and Fort Lee.

Constituency served by St. Mark's

Since 1989, St. Mark's early childhood program has served approximately 550 families from the tri-city region. The average annual enrollment is between 35 and 45 children. Our 2004-2005 enrollment includes 12 children from Prince George, 3 from Colonial Heights, 7 from Dinwiddie, 8 from Petersburg and 4 from Hopewell. This distribution is fairly consistent with other years.

Our constituents are middle class, working class, and one-income families. The majority of our constituents are stay-at-home moms and mothers who work only part-time. We also serve military families from Fort Lee.

SECTION 2: PROJECT INFORMATION

Description of St. Mark's Need to be Addressed

St. Mark's Pre-School requests a \$25,000 grant for the purchase and installation of a new playground. The new equipment will address two critical goals: to improve the quality of the educational program, and to address the declining condition of the current equipment which could be at risk of not meeting current public safety standards for playgrounds.

How Proposed Project Relates to Stated Needs

1. Improve quality of educational program.

Large muscle activities are a very important part of our curriculum. Running crawling, balancing, climbing, jumping, swinging and digging all help the child improve coordination, use their imagination, problem solve, and boost feelings of competence. Our children go outdoors almost every day for a large block of time. For some this is their very favorite activity at school, and it is very beneficial physically and mentally.

Recent research shows that physical health is a key factor to a child's successful transition to kindergarten and primary school. In an April 2003 press release, Child Trends (an independent non-profit research center) states, "*It is best for children to enter kindergarten healthy, with social and emotional skills and with cognitive skills. These children performed the best on math and reading assessments at the end of first grade and their teachers more often reported that they "usually or always" performed at their best ability.*"¹

2. Increased Safety

This equipment will meet all current safety and handicap-accessibility guidelines for two to five year-olds and will provide a safe and enjoyable play environment for the school children and community families at large.

Our present playground is mainly wooden and causes children to get splinters. We also have to re-hammer nails and watch that the arsenic in the wood doesn't harm the children. The proposed playground is made of galvanized steel, aluminum and durable plastic laminate with activity panels, slides, climbers and swings. These materials are designed to resist rust, mold and mildew and degradation from the sun.

The quality and safety of this proposed playground is highly rated. The equipment meets or exceeds current ASTM and CSA safety guidelines. It will well serve the community's and the preschool's future children for a minimum of fifteen to twenty years.

In addition to the regular school function, the playground is utilized year-round. Neighborhood children from the community often come to play, as our playground is clearly visible from Wilton Road, and there are no other play areas or play equipment for preschoolers in the area. Children enrolled in the school have birthday parties and play dates on the playground after school hours. It serves as a great meeting place for mothers and children to develop friendships and spend quality time together.

Geographical Area to be Served by the Project

St. Mark's early childhood education programs serves people from Prince George, Colonial Heights, Dinwiddie, Petersburg, Hopewell, and Fort Lee.

Staff or Consultants Required to Implement the Project and their Qualifications

We have contracted the Play N' Learn Ultimate Backyard Company. They visited our school and helped us design a playground appropriate for children from two to five years old. It will meet all of the standard Consumer Safety Specifications of playground equipment for public use, including handicap accessibility.

Mike Atcheson, a commercial sales consultant for Play N' Learn Ultimate Backyard and a trained certified safety inspector of playground equipment, helped us to design a safe and fun structure. We selected Play N' Learn Ultimate Backyard because they are the leading distributors for America's finest commercial playground equipment and accessories for schools and churches, and they have been in business since 1986. Mr. Atcheson is very knowledgeable and experienced, and we gained valuable safety information from him. Play N' Learn Ultimate Backyard company staff is fully knowledgeable in delivery and installation.

Project Timetable

When an order is placed, it will take four to seven weeks to ship and then approximately a week to ten days to install.

Long Term Positive Impact

The playground will have a minimum expected useful life of fifteen to twenty years, and will serve the goals of improved quality of education and increased safety for a very long time. The play area would be compliant with the 2000 American Disabilities Act (ADA) Play Areas Rule, allowing handicapped children to feel comfortable and included in the school setting regardless of their ability or mobility. The enrolled

preschool children and the Walnut Hill neighborhood children will have a safe and fun playground. This is an investment not only in the St. Mark's program but an investment in the community at large. Every child deserves the right to play!

Post Grant Approval Project Evaluation

St. Mark's fully expects both short and long term positive results from replacing the playground. Immediately, old, dilapidated and somewhat dangerous equipment will be replaced with a safer system, reducing injuries. For the long term, the playground will be a strong, positive and very visual representation to prospective families of St. Mark's commitment to provide the highest quality early childhood learning environment available in the area. The ultimate measure will be the continued drawing of new families to the church and school in Petersburg, and the continued successful transition of well-prepared children to kindergarten and beyond.

3. Provide the following financial information:

- Basic financial information showing revenues and expenses for the previous three fiscal years, together with information showing the sources of the revenues.
- A detailed budget for the proposed project. If the project is to last for more than one year, include a complete budget for each year and a total for all years. List all direct costs and indicate which of the costs would be paid from a grant from the Foundation.
- Other sources of financial support for the project and the amounts of such support.
- The plan for continued support at the conclusion of the project, if applicable.