



Schlitz Audubon
Nature Center

Schlitz Audubon Nature Preschool and K4 Parent Handbook 2023-2024



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SCHLITZ AUDUBON NATURE PRESCHOOL and K4 PARENT HANDBOOK 2023-2024

Nature School Statement of Purpose:

To provide a high-quality early childhood environment that will meet young children's developmental needs while initiating them into a life-long, meaningful relationship with the natural world.

Statement of Educational Philosophy:

We believe that children are intrinsically motivated to learn. We can help promote learning by:

- Providing an environment that encourages discovery, experimentation, and the opportunity to see the results of one's actions
- Developing activities to take children to the next level of understanding based on the children's abilities and interests
- Encouraging divergent thinking and reflection by asking open-ended questions and providing information in response to children's ideas, insights, and concerns
- Assisting children in their interactions with each other and offering opportunities for cooperative learning
- Teaming with families to understand children through the wisdom of their first teachers—their parents
- Appreciating the individuality of children and celebrating their uniqueness

What is a Nature-Based School?

To be considered a Nature-Based School, nature must be at the heart of the program. While Nature schools have the same child development goals as any other high-quality early childhood program, the curriculum and teachers achieve these developmental goals through nature-based experiences.

A nature-based school provides children with special opportunities to learn about the natural world, while also providing daily opportunities for personal growth and achievement. By connecting young children with the natural world, we hope to inspire a love of nature, foster an environmental ethic, and encourage a caring attitude that will follow each child throughout their life.

We strive to meet best practices in all areas of early childhood learning and development. Children have opportunities to:

- Make discoveries and learn through play
- Make choices and follow their own interests and agenda
- Use their senses, as well as large and small muscles
- Express themselves creatively and use language in its many forms
- Make friends and learn about the social world
- Problem-solve and find solutions

Schlitz Audubon Nature Preschool and K4 provide many of these experiences through direct interactions with nature. Our program is designed to help children develop physically, cognitively, socially, emotionally, and spiritually in a dynamic and stimulating natural environment.

We also strive to meet best practices in environmental education. In our preschool and K4 programs, nature-based activities happen outdoors and indoors; in whole groups, small groups, and individually; as planned teacher-facilitated activities, child-initiated interests, and spontaneous pursuits; in the outdoor classrooms, and throughout the Schlitz Audubon Nature Center grounds. Children can look at their experiences through the lens of a naturalist as they are given encouragement to:

- Make observations and discoveries
- Satisfy their natural curiosity
- Hike on trails and climb on logs
- Appreciate the beauty of nature
- Build an understanding of themselves, as they relate to others and to the natural world
- Experiment
- Communicate about nature

Expectations and Agreements for Adults

Parents at Nature Preschool & K4 Must Understand and Agree that:

- We go outside rain or shine, and in temperatures as low as negative one degree Fahrenheit.
- Children will get wet and muddy, often requiring changes of clothing.
- While we always do our best to return your child in perfect condition, your child may occasionally experience small scrapes, scratches, bumps, and bruises.
- Perpetual lateness disrupts your child's learning experience, impacts the entire class, and may interfere with the teacher's ability to plan and prepare for the next class.
- Young children who are new to social situations may experience conflict. This can be stressful, but it is also an important part of learning how to interact with others.

Expectations for Adults (including parents, caregivers, volunteers, teachers, and staff):

Our goal at Schlitz Audubon Nature Preschool and K4 is to create an environment in which everyone can achieve their best in an atmosphere of kindness, understanding and respect. The following is an outline of expectations for the adults in our school who work together in support of the children.

We expect everyone to:

- Treat one another with courtesy
- Set good examples for children in terms of speech and behavior
- Go through the proper channels of communication when problems arise (this includes talking first with teachers regarding any classroom concerns, then with the Nature Preschool Director and/or the administrative staff, and finally, if need be, the Executive Director of the Center)
- Maintain confidentiality
- Follow school rules, deadlines, and calendars
- Report all student absences by calling or texting our **Attendance Line at 414-309-7500**. (This is a mandated state licensing requirement). Emails may not be seen for several hours or may be sent to people who are not at school, in both cases prompting calls to parents
- Read all school communications, including emails, calendars, and handbooks
- Arrive and pick-up children on time / start and end class on time
- Parents and caregivers are expected to supervise their children in the building and while on school grounds both before drop-off and after pick-up
- Teachers are expected to use developmentally appropriate practice in their teaching and maintain their level of expertise through continuing education experiences
- Parents, teachers, and caregivers will work together to ensure that children have the proper clothing for outdoor exploration

Social Media Policy

Please remember that online posts and social media conversations are not private. Even with the strictest privacy settings, you should consider any post you make to be a part of the public domain.

We expect our entire preschool community to abide by the following rules regarding social media:

- Do not share confidential information, internal school discussions, or personal and specific information about students, parents, teachers, or staff on social media sites.
- Do not post photos that identify any of our school children by name, or that show individual child faces, without prior permission from that child's parents or guardians.

- Please strive to keep any criticisms you may have of the school or its members respectful. Comments should be constructive rather than hurtful.
- We recognize that some of our teachers and parents are very comfortable maintaining friendships on social media, while others may choose to decline friendship requests on sites such as Facebook while your child is enrolled in the school. This is a professional choice and should not be taken personally.

Our Nature Preschool & K4 Programs

Staffing

We maintain a ratio of 8:1 in our classrooms, with a class limit of 16 children and 2 teachers. Our teachers have a range of experiences, including degrees and/or teaching backgrounds in early childhood education, environmental sciences, emerging literacy, biology, and child brain development. Teachers receive an additional 15 hours per year of professional development, both independently and through center-sponsored workshops and events.

We regularly attend conferences about nature-based early childhood education; participate in team-building activities; and attend naturalist training. We are required by state licensing to be listed in the Wisconsin Registry, and to take Child Abuse and Neglect and Abusive Head Trauma training. We also maintain Infant, Child, and Adult CPR/AED/First Aid certification and have undergone emergency armed intruder training and situational awareness training.

Only those teachers, volunteers, student teachers, and subs who have undergone a thorough background check through the State of Wisconsin, including fingerprinting, as well as additional center and state-mandated training, are allowed to be alone with the children at any time.

The Nature Preschool and K4 does not endorse or recommend staff to parents (or parents to staff) for child care outside of school hours (babysitting) and is not liable for the conduct of the parent or the staff who enter a private care arrangement.

Physical Spaces

Outdoor Classrooms

We have four outdoor classrooms and four designated indoor early childhood classrooms in addition to our school hallway and family lounge. Families are asked to keep our public areas safe by *not bringing any foods containing nuts to any of our classrooms or hallways and by keeping bug repellents, essential oils, and sunscreens out of student's bags/backpacks. We ask that users tidy up the parent lounge after enjoying it, so that it is ready and welcoming to others.*

Our outdoor classrooms are the Gardens, Log Cabin, Woods and the Secret Forest. Students in all classes will rotate clockwise between our outdoor classrooms on a weekly basis. Indoor classroom use does not rotate.

Our outdoor spaces feature flower gardens, mud puddles, climbing structures, sand exploration, a seating area, and many loose parts. They may also contain rain barrels, buckets, shovels, and wheelbarrows. Because our outdoor spaces are nature-based, they undergo changes year-to-year and season-to-season. We regularly address, plan, and change the features in our outdoor spaces to make them fun, accessible, and welcoming to the children. They are not, however, without risk. Younger children require close supervision in these spaces, and older children may be too tall or too heavy for some of the equipment.

Outdoor Classroom Safety Guidelines:

Our outdoor classrooms are natural areas designed for children ages 3-6. These areas are more challenging than typical playgrounds.

Please respect the following guidelines:

- Please do not use the outdoor classrooms before, between classes, or when a class is in session there
- Please do not eat in our outdoor classrooms. The food crumbs attract rodents and many of our children have very serious contact allergies with certain foods
- Children must have an adult close by if they are climbing trees
- Trees must be strong enough to support a child's weight. (Some of our smaller trees cannot.)
- Children cannot be left unattended in these spaces. Always supervise your children (especially younger siblings) in these areas.

An Important note about Risk:

What is the difference between a risk and a hazard?

A risk is a situation that provides a challenge, in which the child has some control.
A hazard is a situation in which there is no control.

Hazards Include:

Dangerous Weather

Unstable Ice

A sharp branch at eye-level

Risks Include:

Climbing a log

Handling sticks

Rolling down a grassy hill

At Nature Preschool and K4, our goal is to eliminate hazards as much as we can. However, we do believe in the value of age-appropriate risk. Learning to take appropriate risks can help children develop confidence and improve executive function as they learn to consider and assess challenging situations.

Although we strive to keep our outdoor spaces safe, we do intentionally provide age-appropriate risks, such as sledding down hills, playing in and around deep puddles, balancing on logs, climbing small trees, and even taking social risks, such as asking other people to play. We feel that learning to address these sorts of risks is a valuable skill that will serve children well, years after they leave our program.

Indoor Spaces

Our three indoor classrooms are the Cardinal Room, the Chickadee Room, and the Goldfinch Room. Each classroom features a child-sized bathroom and sink, as well as a building area, dress-up area, sensory area, art area, reading area, and manipulative area.

We also have a fourth multi-use classroom, the Nuthatch Room, which we utilize for Audubon Babies programming and share with other programs in the center. This room is used by the Nuthatch classes when they come indoors.

Indoor Safety Guidelines

- For their safety, children should not be left to wander unsupervised into other areas of the center as this is a public building. When indoors, please keep children off the tops of cubbies and shelving units, as the glass panes behind these areas are very thin.
- Due to sensitivities that some children and adults have to strong scents, please apply essential oils outdoors, along with sunscreen and insect repellants.
- Children and guests are asked to wash hands upon entering our classrooms, to keep allergies and illnesses at bay.
- For safety and security reasons, indoor classroom doors will be kept locked and closed. For this reason, we do not allow parents and younger siblings to play in the indoor classrooms while the group is outside.

Emergencies

Our Nature Preschool and K4 teams, in addition to the Nature Center staff, have undergone emergency training with the Village of Bayside police department to address a range of possible scenarios involving dangerous intruders and emergency situations.

Although we do not provide the details of our emergency response plan to others, in any emergency our priority is the safety and well-being of the children. There are security cameras placed on the grounds and throughout the building, and we practice fire and tornado with our classes. We ask parents and caregivers to stop at the Welcome Booth when they arrive so that we know who is entering the property and strive to recognize each person who enters our school areas.

In case of an emergency, a text will be sent through the ProCare app to all Nature Preschool and K4 families with as much information as possible, including instructions on how to reunite with your child.

For Safety:

- In case of dangerous storms or tornado warnings, we will retreat to the lower level of the building
- First aid equipment will be always on hand
- Teachers have walkie talkies to communicate emergencies to indoor staff
- School issued classroom cell phones are always carried by teachers and staff
- Staff members are certified in First Aid and CPR

Inclement Weather/School Closings

We follow the lead of the Fox Point/Bayside school district when making the decision to close due to inclement weather conditions. *We also reserve the right to make our own determinations, as needed.*

When the Nature Preschool or K4 close due to inclement weather, an announcement will be made on local television news stations and websites and a text will be sent through the ProCare app to all families who would be attending that day. Closures for inclement weather are not refundable.

Program Planning and Scheduling

Our curriculum is based on an emergent, child-centered approach, which means that we value spontaneity in activity and take advantage of the “Teachable Moment.” We also know that many people, especially young children first experiencing regular activity away from home, benefit from knowing what will happen next. We maintain a loose but structured schedule, with predictable events throughout the day.

The following is an example of a typical classroom schedule. (Type of activities varies depending on the teachers, children, and specific classroom).

Arrival

We begin outdoors every day, rain or shine, unless the weather is truly prohibitive. Parents/caregivers bring the child to the appropriate outdoor classroom, dressed for the weather, after also making sure the child has used the toilet and washed hands prior to school beginning. *Parents and caregivers may not leave the child unattended, and should never depart without making verbal or visual contact with the teacher, who will greet each child and sign them in.*

An important note about toileting: Please do not skip taking your child to the toilet to meet the group outside sooner. Remember that if a child has a toileting accident outdoors, especially when dressed in rain pants or snow pants, not only is the child’s personal dignity compromised, but they also experience considerable discomfort.

Over the years, we have learned that children who skip their visit to the bathroom at the start of the school day are more likely to have accidents than those who do not.

Outdoor Free Choice Time

At the beginning of their school day in the outdoor classrooms, the children will engage in free choice activities and play. Children are given time to choose an activity and spend as much time during free choice on that activity that they wish within the outdoor classroom. This allows children to lengthen attention spans, and to develop competency with an activity.

Examples of activities for children to choose from during free choice time may include:

- Climbing and balancing
- Water, mud, sand, and snow play
- Digging and gardening
- Building with natural materials
- Art and music activities
- Fine motor and dexterity practice
- Science activities
- Emergent literacy activities
- Dramatic play activities
- Math and manipulative activities

Clean-up

Children put away materials they have used and prepare for our group time routine.

Group Time

During our group “Circle Time” we gather at the log circles in each of the outdoor classrooms to sing our Hello Song, to recognize our special helpers, and to connect as a class. One important aspect of group time is coming together to form a class community. To do this we take part in conversations to discuss similarities and differences, take turns listening and speaking as a group, listen to stories, sing songs, and go over class agreements.

Hike

Our exploration activities include hiking to and playing in the forest, prairies, boardwalks, around ponds, the beach, and the tower trail.

Ending time

We will always gather for a short end-of-the-day group time to recap the day, give context for upcoming activities, and to say good-bye before children are picked up.

Pick Up

Parents and caregivers are asked to wait until class comes to an end, and for the teachers to formally dismiss the children, before leaving. Teachers will do their best to provide a brief verbal summary of the school day to the adults in attendance at pick-up time, but they do not use this time to have lengthy conferences with individual families, unless an issue arises during class time that requires immediate communication. Always check in with teachers as you leave with your child to make sure your child was signed out.

Indoor Time

On days when we go inside, the children may just be in a short time for a warm up break or they may spend an extended time indoors. Classes may make use of many areas of the Nature Center in addition to the indoor classrooms.

Transportation and Drop-Off

It is extremely important that all drivers entering the property pauses at the Welcome Booth until the attending staff member waves you on. Welcome Booth staff will alert our facilities team if anyone drives past the booth without stopping to be identified.

We provide a limited number of entrance stickers for your cars, which makes it possible for the booth staff to identify you as a Nature Preschool family before waving you through. Anyone that will regularly pick up or drop off should receive a sticker to display on their vehicle. Please place the sticker in the bottom left corner of your windshield.

Please also maintain a slow speed of **15 mph** and take the curve into the parking lot slowly. Children and their families will be walking through the parking lot to the tower parking lot on their way to the Secret Forest classroom in this area. The Preschool parking lot will also have lots of activity and young children may not be aware of cars and dart out. As a driver it is difficult to see young children. Take your time! We would rather you arrive safe and late than someone getting hurt.

We stagger our class start and end times to cut down on congestion in the parking lot as much as possible. There may still be times when the center is full, and parking is difficult to find. We understand that it can take some time to find a place to park, and we will wait with your child in these instances until you are able to park safely.

The Nature Preschool and K4's responsibility for each child begins when the child is signed in by the teacher. Therefore, the parent must make sure that the teacher signs their child in upon arrival and out at departure on the daily attendance forms. Dropping children off outdoor classrooms is not permitted without a teacher present to sign the child in. *Due to State of Wisconsin licensing we cannot accommodate early drop offs.*

We ask families to consider that before school, teachers are busy preparing for their child's school experiences. Between the morning and afternoon sessions, the teachers are cleaning up and taking notes regarding the morning session, preparing for the afternoon session, and having a quick lunch. Please respect the teachers' time in preparing to make your child's school day experience the best that it can be and allow them the necessary prep time.

You may wish to carpool for your convenience. Anyone who picks up your child must be on your pickup authorization form, which we keep in our school files. If your child is going to be picked up by someone *not* listed on your authorization form, you must send a note authorizing us to release the child into that person's care. If an emergency arises which prevents you or another authorized person from picking up your child, you must call the school to notify us of this situation. For obvious safety reasons, unrecognized adults may need to show identification before the child will be released into their care.

Please be on time when picking up your child: If pick up time is a problem, please consider carpooling with another family in your child's class or asking another parent if they would be willing to wait with your child until you arrive. If parents are habitually late, a \$2.00 per minute late pick up charge is assessed for each minute that a child stays past the end of class time.

Please do not leave young siblings alone in the car. If you do feel it is necessary to leave your child/children in the car for whatever reason, please ask another parent to watch them while you are away from the car or call the Preschool reception desk (414-352-2880 x154) to ask if a staff person can assist you.

Special Occasions

Holidays tend to be exciting and, at times, over-stimulating for young children. We downplay the commercial aspects of holidays and do not serve candy or other outside treats. We do, however, try to acknowledge many holidays and cultural celebrations that are of significance to our families through simple experiences such as songs, stories, and cooking experiences. Parents are always welcome to share their own cultural celebrations with the class in a way that is age-appropriate and has been discussed with the teacher in advance.

At Nature Preschool and K4, seasonal experiences, such as gathering pumpkins and celebrating the harvest, winter solstice and groundhog's day, receive greater programmatic emphasis than religious holidays.

Birthdays are very important for most young children. We as a school also want to share in the birthday child's special day. Each class will come together for a Birthday celebration, sitting around a felted sun. The birthday child will walk around the sun while the children sing. Families are invited to join the class and bring in pictures of your child for each year of their life, along with your child's favorite book from home, to be read to the rest of the group.

We recognize that we also have several summer birthdays. We can either celebrate these at the end of the year or we can celebrate half-birthdays. When the time comes, just let your child's teachers know how you would like them to handle this for your child.

Because we have students with severe food allergies, please do not bring treats from home.

Classroom Pets and Animal Interactions

Each of our indoor classrooms have a selection of classroom pets. These include a variety of reptiles, amphibians, and invertebrates. These animals may be brought out to the outdoor classrooms for supervised interaction with the children weather permitting. During indoor programming, children may assist with feeding of the animals in addition to regular interactions. Children are required to wash their hands after touching any of our pets.

The Nature Center also has a group of Animal Ambassadors that may also visit the classes periodically. These include reptiles and amphibians as well as birds from our Raptor Program. Children do not interact with the raptors, but view them at a distance.

All of our animals go through yearly wellness checks by a veterinarian.

Parent Engagement

Classroom visits

We value parent volunteers in the classroom and are happy when you can put aside time to spend a day with us. Over the years, parents have taught yoga, brought instruments, led art

projects, showed off their fossil collections, or simply sat and read stories out loud. We are happy to invite you into our program.

There may, however, be times when we need to limit the number of parents who visit our class in one day. We may also suggest that a parent limit the number of days they volunteer if we feel it is preventing the child from fully engaging with their classmates. Please remember if you are volunteering that we cannot accommodate additional siblings, nor can anyone under the age of 18 volunteer in our preschool without a completed set of health and emergency contact forms, which we will provide in advance.

Room Parents

You may wish to be a Room Parent in your child's classroom. Room parents aid the classroom teachers for special events and/or activities. Room parents may also be asked to call other parents in the class to volunteer when needed, or help teachers distribute artwork. More information will be available at the Orientation at the beginning of the school year or let your child's teachers know if this is of interest to you.

Parents Night Out

We offer seasonal evening events just for our Nature Preschool and K4 parents. These nights hosted by the teachers highlight the shared connections among the entire school community. These events include appetizers, beverages, and a night hike led by a Schlitz Audubon Naturalist educator. Watch your email for the dates of these events.

Fundraising

We cannot stress enough just how valuable parent engagement is to the success of our program. We typically host one small fall fundraising event and a larger spring fundraising event. We always need families willing to help plan, organize, and facilitate these events. Opportunities to sign up will be available at Orientation at the beginning of the school year.

Any parent is invited to assist with school fundraisers or to help plan and organize special events on behalf of the Nature Preschool and K4 (with Nature Center approval). If you have an idea, or would like to be more involved, simply let us know!

Communication

Communication is extremely important to us. Regular communication between school and home can improve your child's school experience. We ask parents and caregivers to keep staff notified of significant events and changes in their children's lives (such as moving to a new house, the loss of a pet, or a serious family illness) as this will also impact on your child at

school. This could be a quick word before or after class, a text message sent via our communication app, or an email.

ProCare

This school year we are requiring families to download the ProCare app and to create an account. Almost all of our communication with families will be run through this app including newsletter emails, text messaging about classroom rotations, photos of class activities, information about upcoming events, and weather closing alerts.

Text messaging

We use text messaging to quickly get timely information out to families. This school year we will be using a new messaging system through the ProCare app. Any time sensitive announcements by teachers for specific classes or all school alerts will be sent via this app's messaging system. This is usually done about one or twice a week.

Email

Another important way to stay informed about what is happening here at Nature Preschool and K4 is to check your email. Our emails will contain useful information about school activities and calendar reminders. You can expect to receive an email from your child's teachers a couple of times a month.

You will also receive regular emails from Nature Preschool administration, which will contain information relevant to the entire school. If you choose not to read these emails, you may miss important announcements.

Photos

Teachers will share photographs with you, highlighting your child's activities, as well as the activities of the entire class. We keep most of our photographs in the Cloud. Throughout the year, you will be sent links to our online photo platform, allowing you to view photos documenting your child's adventures at preschool. Teachers will give short verbal reports about each day's activities at pick-up time.

Conferences

We frequently check in with families about your child's growth and development during the school year, in addition to ongoing communication through emails about the class. In addition we offer one Fall phone conference opportunity and a Spring child-led event called a "Celebration of Learning" that showcases examples of student work and child-led hikes.

Between conference times, teachers are always willing to discuss any issues, questions, or concerns you may have regarding your child. Some things can be communicated through email, but if you need to speak over the phone or in person, please keep in mind that teachers and administration may not be available to meet immediately before or after class. We suggest scheduling a time to talk that works with everyone's schedule.

Posted information

Nature Preschool and K4 policies and the Wisconsin licensing rules are available for your perusal. These are posted across from the school reception desk.

Other pertinent information will be posted outside each outdoor classroom on the announcement boards. This may include class announcements, notes about any contagious illness in a class, or information about upcoming events.

Classroom Management

Optimal learning occurs when there is freedom for discovery, enough structure to allow everyone to learn, and physical and emotional safety. To maintain this atmosphere, we have designed our outdoor classrooms to provide children with ample room and equipment. Conflicts are generally avoided when there is enough to go around. In addition, the daily program will be structured to provide extended periods of outdoor play. This allows children to expend the wonderful energy of this age group in appropriate ways.

Adults will be available to help children solve social problems. For example, some children need encouragement to stand up for their rights with stronger children. Some children need to be taught the language and skills necessary for dealing with issues such as sharing. Adults will serve as models and facilitate the resolution of disputes.

Challenging behavior

When children are having a hard time controlling themselves, adults intervene in a manner that is educational, rather than punitive. We help children see the connection between their behavior and its consequences. Methods of discipline include clear rules, redirection, planning to prevent problems, encouragement, and the use of logical and natural consequences. We do

not use physical punishment, bribery, threats, and other methods that would hurt, frighten, or humiliate children.

It is expected that parents work with teachers in helping find solutions to persistent behavioral problems. In the rare event that a child's ongoing disruptive behavior does not improve despite the best efforts of the staff and this behavior has a continuing negative effect on the classroom climate, the Nature School Director may determine that our program cannot meet the child's needs and the child may be dis-enrolled from the program. We do not dis-enroll children due to normal developmental struggles such as pushing or name-calling, unless they are associated with other issues we feel require additional support and resources that we cannot provide.

Childcare employees are legally mandated to report known or suspected cases of child abuse or neglect.

Children that Require Additional Support

In cases of special educational, developmental, or behavioral needs; the health and safety of the individual child as well as the whole class will be assessed.

The Nature Preschool and K4 cannot provide additional staff for individual children needing additional support or one-on-one assistance. In some situations it may be deemed necessary for the child's safety and the safety of the other children in the class to have additional one-on-one support for the child. Families will be asked to provide the additional support person whether it be an adult family member, school district personnel, or hired individuals at the family's own cost.

In some situations, school staff may suggest a referral to a specialized health professional. By consulting with an outside professional, staff will make efforts to continue to provide high quality care and education for each individual child. It is expected that any referral costs are the responsibility of the parent and that the process involves a strong, interactive partnership between home and school.

We welcome support staff from other facilities and schools to support students with additional needs outside of the scope of care the Nature Preschool and K4 teachers can provide.

We want our program to be a positive and inclusive experience for all students, but we are also realistic about the unique risks and dangers our outdoor program has. If a child's support needs take away from the care, safety, and learning of others in the class, poses a health and safety risk to the individual even with support staff, or a support person is not able to be provided, we may decide that our program is not a good fit for your child and ask that they not continue with their enrollment.

Discharge Policy

The Nature Preschool and K4 reserve the right to cancel the enrollment of a child for any of the following reasons:

- Physical or verbal abuse of children or staff by a parent
- Failure of the parent to observe the rules and policies of the Nature Preschool
- Failure of the parent to complete and return all required forms
- Upon the discretion of the Nature Preschool Director and after reasonable efforts on the part of the staff and the child's parents to integrate the child into the Nature Preschool or Nature K4 programs, the child's participation may be terminated if there are behavioral, educational, or developmental concerns beyond the scope of what the program is able to manage.

Health

Illness

Children are to be kept home if they have symptoms of illness such as persistent runny nose (especially with green or yellow mucus) , a persistent or productive cough, sore throat, inflammation of the eyes, lice, rash, vomiting, diarrhea, or other illness, or if they are running a fever. Children must be symptom free for a full 24 hours before returning to school.

Contagious diseases such as strep throat, chicken pox, and hand, foot, and mouth disease must be reported to Nature Preschool administration in compliance with our State of Wisconsin licensing so that they can be posted. The child will remain anonymous and details of their illness will not be shared by teachers or administration.

Staff will be alert to symptoms of illness throughout the day. If a child's condition is suspected to be contagious or the child is not feeling well, the child is made comfortable in a location away from other children but where they can be supervised by a member of the preschool staff. The parent or legal guardian will be notified immediately to pick up the child. If we are unable to contact the parent, then an emergency contact will be notified.

Written permission from a parent to call the family physician or to refer the child for medical care in case of accident or emergency shall be on file at the Nature Preschool. This permission shall be used only when the parent or guardian cannot be reached.

Medication is dispensed at the Nature Preschool and K4 only if the following conditions are met:

- A State-provided [Authorization to Administer Medication Form](#) must be completed and signed by the parent for each medication. This form gives authorization and instructions for dispensing medication.

- All medications must be in their original containers and marked with an expiration date indicating that it is current. The parent will be notified 30 days before the expiration date is reached. When medications reach the expiration date, they need to be replaced.
- All medications must include a prescription label with the child's name.
- All medication must be given directly to a staff member so it may be stored in a safe place.

Lyme Disease and Deer Ticks

Ticks are a part of nature and until there is a hard frost, ticks are often found on our property. The most common tick is the Wood Tick, which is large enough to be easily spotted: it may resemble a small spider at first glance (although ticks have six legs, not eight).

Deer Ticks are more difficult to spot. When not engorged, they may be the size of a poppy seed. A certain percentage of Deer Ticks carry Lyme Disease.

Ticks tend to crawl up from the ground, especially in wooded, brushy areas, but they can also fall from overhead branches and grasses. To help prevent access to skin, shirts should be tucked into pants, and pants should be tucked into socks. Boots are always preferable to sandals. Hats are also a good idea. Have your preschooler take a bath after preschool and use this time to conduct a thorough tick check. Adults and older children may wish to take a shower as soon as possible after hiking, with the strongest jet of water your shower has, directing it to all skin areas, especially if there are areas you can't examine well.

Many ticks will not actually embed in the skin for 24 hours.

Our teaching naturalists often toss their clothing into the dryer after a day of teaching and turn it to the hottest cycle. Ticks thrive in damp, humid places and generally cannot withstand extremely dry conditions.

If you do find a tick:

- Remove the tick with tweezers or "tick keys" (often used for pets), as close to the skin as possible to avoid pushing fluids from the tick into the body. Pull the tick straight out, rather than wiggling it from side to side- wiggling it may cause the head to break off and remain in the skin. Be patient with your pulling; you want to "tent" the skin but not

break off mouthparts. It can easily take 5 minutes of constant pulling force to remove the tick, since the deer tick has longer mouthparts than most other ticks.

- Wash the area with soap and water.
- Do not flush the tick. The current recommendation is to place the tick in a sealed baggie to identify it and have it tested. Deer ticks are the only known vectors for Lyme disease, but other ticks may carry different diseases. We have several people on staff who can help you to identify what kind of tick it may be, or you can refer to one of the many new phone apps for tick identification.

Some people report the appearance of a bull's eye rash following a bite from a deer tick. This will look different on different skin tones and not everyone will get a rash. For that reason, it is important to see a doctor even when no rash appears. (This is another reason why tick checks are so important. Lyme is often hard to diagnose.)

Lyme disease is serious, and we do not take the risk lightly. But by being aware and by checking for ticks daily, it is possible to spend plenty of time outdoors, enjoying all the fun, warm-weather activities nature has to offer!

Food

As a half day program, we do not serve regular daily snacks. We recommend that families provide a nutritious meal before class to provide the energy needed for participation in our active program. Occasional snacks may be served when they correspond to our curriculum.

Food Restrictions and/or Allergies:

We are a NUT FREE & PEANUT FREE SCHOOL (no peanuts or nut products are served). Parents are required to notify the Nature Preschool and K4 in the enrollment paperwork of any food restrictions or food allergies.

Avoidance of exposure to allergens is the key to preventing a reaction. School can be a high-risk setting for accidental ingestion of a food allergen, due to such factors as the large number of students, increased exposure of the allergic student to food allergens, as well as cross-contamination of tables, desks, and other surfaces.

Therefore, we take the following measures in reducing the risk of life-threatening anaphylaxis and other effects of food-related allergies:

- Peanuts/nuts and their products will not knowingly be used in the classroom. All known peanuts/nuts and their products are eliminated from the classroom curriculum. Product labels are read, and consideration given to the possible presence of allergenic substances

that must be eliminated from teacher-directed classroom activities. Classroom teachers scrutinize art, science or other project ingredients that contain potential allergens and act according to classroom protocol.

- Please do not bring in treats or snacks for birthdays, cultural celebrations or holidays. (See the Special Occasion section for more information).

Dressing for Outdoor School

Outdoor Gear

Expect your child to be active in play and have the possibility of getting dirty every day in all seasons. Children should be appropriately dressed for outdoor play everyday in all seasons.

We have learned a few things over the last 20 years about dressing for outdoor play in Wisconsin. Children are involved in many types of activities while at Nature Preschool and K4, many of them involving mud and water, and they should be dressed accordingly.

Here are our tips:

- Outdoor exploration requires freedom from restrictive clothing including tight clothing, fancy dresses and costumes that get in the way during active play.
- Rain gear is not just for rain. Play is messy and rain gear helps keep the students dry and comfortable.
- For independence in toileting, children need clothing that is easy to remove and put on.
- Children need comfortable, protective shoes with gripping soles for running, jumping, and climbing. Waterproof outdoor boots are best. Sandals with closed toes and heel straps are acceptable for warm weather—flip flops though, are not safe on trails.

All clothing should be LABELED with the child's name

Everyday Items:

- Reusable water bottle
- Waterproof bag/backpack
- Appropriate seasonal change of clothes

Start the School Year with these items (you will switch back to these items in Spring too):

- Rain boots
- Longer socks (no footies)
- Rain pants/bib
- Rain/Shell Jacket with hood
- Hat with brim – for fall/spring

- Rain mittens (or shell mittens)
- Stretch mittens/gloves for under rain mittens

As weather cools add these items:

- Wool socks (multiple pairs)
- Warm mittens to wear under waterproof mittens (multiple pairs)
- Mid-layer fleece jacket - wear under rain jacket and tuck under bibs

Change to these in Cold Weather:

- Base layers – wool or high-tech poly or function fleece – *never cotton*
- Insulated waterproof snow jacket with hood or insulated waterproof snowsuit with a hood
- Insulated waterproof snow pant or insulated waterproof snowsuit
- Waterproof rain suit to fit over snow gear - our winters have been more wet than snowy. This worn over the snow gear helps keep your child dry and warm
- Insulated waterproof snow mittens or gloves
- Warm hat that covers ears
- Gator or neck wrap
- Insulated waterproof snow boots - buy a size larger to accommodate thick socks, foot warmers, and to allow for toes to move to stay warm. Tight boots equal cold toes!
- Foot warmers
- Hand warmers

All children must also have a labeled change of clothes for emergencies kept in their waterproof bag. This should include underwear, pants, shirt, and multiple sets of socks. This extra set of clothes should be changed for each season (replace shorts with long pants, etc. when the weather gets colder).

A lost and found table is kept in the Nature Preschool hallway. There is also a lost and found area for items found out on the trails at the Nature Center front desk.

Sunscreen & Bug Spray

In accordance with our State of Wisconsin licensing restrictions, Nature Preschool staff does not provide sunscreen or insect repellent nor are we allowed to apply these products to the children.

In addition, *children cannot have access to sunscreens and insect repellents. Therefore, these items cannot be stored in a children's backpack/bag.* Parents or caregivers should apply these products prior to the start of class, either at home or outside the building.

Please be aware that the combination of several strong-smelling oils and repellants in the classroom and hallway can cause breathing difficulties and severe headaches for children and staff. Essential oils can also cause skin reactions if applied in heavy doses. Please use these products sparingly.

Administration

Absences

If a child will not be present at school, we ask families to notify us through our

Attendance Line at (414)-309-7500

You may text that your child will be absent or call and leave a message. The absence will be reported to your child's teachers and recorded.

Please provide the following information:

- Child's name
- Child's classroom
- Date(s) of the absence
- Reason for the absence

Please note: We do not return calls or texts to confirm your message. Please trust that your message was received. On occasion, we may call for more information or to clarify if we have a question about the nature of the absence.

The State of Wisconsin requires all Licensed Group Child Care centers and preschools to know the status of any children that do not show up as scheduled to their Center. We are required by our licensing to contact you in the event we do not hear from you.

Student Absences should not be reported by email. Email is not checked until after attendance is taken.

Bathroom Independence

Children must be bathroom proficient and independent to attend the Nature Preschool and Nature K4 programs.

This means:

- o The child is not in diapers or pull-ups
- o The child can recognize when they need to relieve themselves and are able to communicate that to a teacher
- o The child can pull down and back up their clothing independently
- o The child can wipe themselves
- o The child can wash their own hands
- o The child is able to briefly postpone going to the bathroom if they must wait for another child to finish or when we need to walk inside from the outdoor classrooms or trails

Why Is It Important That Your Child Is Toilet Independent Before Attending School?

We ask all families to have their children toilet independent before enrolling them in Nature Preschool due to the following:

- We are not equipped to have children enrolled in our program in diapers or pull ups as we do not have changing tables or cleaning supplies for diapering, which can be a health/sanitary issue. (Changing stations are a licensing requirement for programs that change diapers.)
- Children end up missing out on the fun and interesting things going on when they need to leave the group to go indoors to change themselves and clean up.
- It can become a safety issue when children have toileting incidents, as one adult is taken out of ratio. Other children may need to go indoors with your child and wait while they clean themselves up. This impacts the learning of others in the group.
- To protect a child's personal dignity, we try to keep accidents as unnoticeable as possible, but sometimes they do feel embarrassed when others do notice. Especially if we need to return from a hiking adventure early due to an accident.
- Independence in toileting is a developmental milestone that is a strong indicator of readiness for preschool. Inconsistency in toilet training may indicate that the child is not yet ready for more structured group routines.

What if my child isn't toilet independent and is having accidents throughout the day?

If a child is having regular bathrooming issues, families may be asked to keep their child home for a period to work on toileting. We will hold the child's spot in the enrolled class, but will not issue refunds for missed days. The child may return when they are more confident and independent in the process.

If your child is not demonstrating readiness for toilet training, or if training is feeling overwhelmingly stressful, consider taking a step back. Do not despair if they are not yet ready – they will be, according to their own inner clock. Follow the child’s lead. This is the approach we take in the classroom with all developmental growth.

If your child does not initiate going to the bathroom and is having accidents regularly, it is best to wait until they are ready before attending Nature Preschool.

Registration

- Applications are accepted regardless of race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, disability, political persuasion, national origin, or ancestry.
- No geographical boundaries are observed.
- Children must be three years old by the first day of school and no older than five years old when entering in September. Children may turn six during the school year.

The following information must be supplied by the parent(s), legal guardian(s), or custodian(s) of the child and returned to the Nature Preschool Director before the child's first day of attendance.

- [Enrollment Information Form](#)
- [Health History and Emergency Care Plan](#)
- [Enrollment Agreement](#)
- [Child and Family Information Form](#)
- [Child's Health Report](#) (must be completed by physician)
- [Immunization Record](#)

We meet and maintain standards of excellence set by our State of Wisconsin licensing. **Failure to complete and return the required paperwork will delay your child’s entry into the Nature Preschool’s programming. Refunds are not given for days lost to unreturned paperwork.**

The records of children enrolled in the Nature Preschool and K4 are kept confidential and are only available to the child's parents upon request.

Photographs

Please note that the Enrollment Agreement includes permission to photograph your child for educational and marketing purposes.

Teachers regularly use photography to document student activities, to document learning, to capture a poignant moment, as a tool to discover important information about class relationships, and to tell the story of the class day.

Monthly Google photo albums of the class will be shared via email through a link just to the families of students in that class. If you wish to opt out of having your child's photos shared among class families, please let your teachers know before the first day of school. Photos will still be used for assessment purposes, but not shared.

In addition, we occasionally share photographs of students in all school communications. Please also let your teachers know if you would like your child to be excluded from these types of school communications.

We have used photos of our students in the member newsletters as well as for presentations to our Board, parents, national conferences, and presentations to fellow educators. More recently, we have begun using video images of some of our activities on our Schlitz Audubon website and Vimeo channel, as well as on our Schlitz Audubon Instagram and Facebook pages. In such scenarios, we never identify the children by name or by class and require that others do not either.

You also have the option of declining the use of your child's image for education and marketing purposes or declining the use of your child's image on social media or both.

Tuition Information and Fee Policies

Tuition can be paid monthly, by trimester, or year.

The enrollment deposit of \$250.00 is applied towards the first tuition payment.

Selection of a payment plan must be done by **July 15, 2023** using this link [Tuition Payment Selection](#).

Initial tuition payments are due **August 1, 2023**. Recurring payments are due one month in advance of the start of the session.

Payment can be made through our online credit card tuition payment system. Online payments will receive an emailed invoice with detailed instructions and links for payment.

- A \$25.00 charge is assessed for each Non-Sufficient Funds (NSF) received

- A \$25.00 fee is assessed for anyone changing their tuition payment plan during the school year
- Tuition is non-refundable

The parent is responsible for payment of all scheduled days, whether the days are used.

- Vacations: Credits will not be issued for vacations
- Holidays: There will be no credit given for holiday closings
- Inclement Weather Closings: There will be no credit given for days when the Nature School is closed due to inclement weather

The cost of a Family Plus 2 Membership (\$80.00 value) has been added to your tuition payment. If you are members prior to the year your child is enrolled, your membership will be extended by one year.

Responsibilities/Expectations Regarding Custody

All people listed on the registration form under parent/guardian, emergency contact, and authorized pick-up will be allowed to pick up a child during or after class. If carpooling, please make sure each adult is listed on that document. Wisconsin State licensing requires that at least one other person besides parents be listed on this form.

In families where the parents are separated or divorced, the custodial parent must have a copy of the legal documents stipulating custody on file at the Nature Preschool. Only parents having legal custody are authorized to pick up the child. Any person not listed as authorized to pick up the child on the child's most recent application form may not visit the Nature Preschool/K4 unless they have made prior written arrangements with the custodial parent and the Nature Preschool Director.

A court order must be on file at the Nature Preschool office if the need arises to prohibit pick-up by a previously authorized parent or guardian. Nature Preschool staff members will not be involved in custody related litigation.

Insurance

Schlitz Audubon Nature Center and the Nature Preschool and K4 both carry Liability and Property Damage insurance and Non-Owned and Owned Vehicle insurance. We do not provide student medical or accident insurance.

Days of Operation

The **Nature Preschool** will operate several different class sessions:

Monday/Wednesday/Friday mornings	8:45am to 11:30 am
Monday/Wednesday/Friday mornings	9:00am to 11:45 am
Tuesday/Wednesday/Thursday mornings	8:45am to 11:30am
Tuesday/Thursday mornings	8:45am to 11:30am
Tuesday/Thursday mornings	9:00am to 11:45 am
Tuesday/Thursday afternoons	12:30pm to 3:15pm
Tuesday/Wednesday/Thursday	12:45pm to 3:30pm

The **Nature K4** will operate these class sessions:

Monday thru Thursday mornings	9:00am to 11:45am
Monday thru Thursday afternoons	12:45pm to 3:30pm

Extended care

The afternoon Goldfinch and Chickadee K4 classes offer an extended care program from 3:30 pm to 4:00 pm at an additional cost of \$275.00 per trimester.

A Note About our Curriculum

A nature-based early childhood program provides children with special opportunities to learn about themselves, others, and the world around them. By connecting young children with the natural world, we hope to inspire a love of nature, foster an environmental ethic, and encourage a caring attitude that we hope will follow them throughout their lives.

At Nature Preschool and K4, children have opportunities to:

- Make discoveries and learn through play
- Make choices and follow their own interests and agenda
- Use their senses, and large and small muscles
- Express themselves creatively and use language in its many forms
- Make friends and learn about the social world
- Problem-solve and find solutions to what puzzles them

Nature permeates our entire curriculum. Nature-based activities happen outdoors and indoors; in whole groups, small groups, and individually; as planned teacher-facilitated

activities, child-initiated interests, and spontaneous pursuits; in the preschool outdoor classrooms, and throughout the Schlitz Audubon Nature Center grounds.

Children can look at their experiences through the lens of a naturalist as they are given encouragement to:

- Make observations and discoveries.
- Satisfy their natural curiosity.
- Hike on trails and climb on logs.
- Appreciate the beauty of nature.
- Build understanding of themselves, as they relate to others, and to the natural world.
- Communicate about nature.

Final Words

Entering an early childhood program is a milestone for children. Our goal is to provide a safe and nurturing environment in which every child is valued and is considered an integral part of our community. We strive to provide experiences in which children can develop confidence, build their critical thinking and social skills, and develop a deeper connection to nature.

This is also a milestone for parents. You are as much a part of our program as your child is, and your preschooler will benefit from your support and understanding as she or he begins to grow outside the home.

Welcome to our Nature Preschool community. We are sure it is going to be a wonderful year.