



Schlitz Audubon Nature Center

Nature School

Family Handbook 2026/2027





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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 through play and inquiry.

Statement of Educational Philosophy:

At Schlitz Audubon Nature School we:

- Create learning communities in which children feel safe, known, and valued.
- Develop social-emotional literacy by helping children to recognize and name their emotions, practice conflict resolution with their peers, and act with empathy.
- Appreciate each child's individuality and uniqueness.
- Understand that children learn best through play.
- Foster self-efficacy and independence through choice making, taking risks, and trying new things.
- Provide an environment that encourages children to wonder, inquire, discover, experiment, learn cooperatively, and understand the results of their actions.
- Shape curriculum in response to seasonal phenology and direct observation of the natural world.
- Develop an emergent curriculum that supports children to the next level of understanding according to their abilities and interests.
- Inspire children's curiosity, divergent thinking, and inquiry by listening deeply, asking open-ended questions, and encouraging them to generate questions of their own.
- Provide needed information and resources so children can explore their questions, ideas, insights, and concerns.
- Form meaningful relationships with the natural world through reciprocity and kinship.



01

Admission

Licensing code 251.04(2)(h)4





Licensing Terms

The Schlitz Audubon Nature School will operate at the following location:

1111 East Brown Deer Road

Milwaukee, WI 53217

The Nature School programs are licensed under the Department of Children and Families (DCF) of the State of Wisconsin.

We are licensed to care for children ages 3 - 5. Children must be age 3 by September 1st of the year of attendance as well as bathroom proficient and independent. Children must not be older than 5 on September 1st but may turn 6 during the school year.

Hours of Operation

The Nature School 2026/2027 school year begins Tuesday, September 1, 2026 and runs until Friday, May 28, 2027.

The Nature School does not offer regular classes June - August. Instead, a variety of summer camps for children ages 3 - 6 are available.

Our hours of operation are Monday through Thursday 8:30 am to 4:00 pm and Friday 8:30 am - 12:00 pm.

The Nature School has a session capacity of 63 students.

Posted Program Information

The Nature School policies and the Wisconsin licensing rules are available for your perusal. These are posted across from the Nature School Reception Desk.

The Nature School Family Handbook listing current policies and procedures, school year Family Calendar, and Outdoor Gear List are all posted on the Schlitz Audubon website under the Nature School tab and Current Families drop down or linked here:

[Information for Nature School Current Families](#)
[2026/2027 Nature School Family Calendar](#)

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.



Inclement Weather/School Closings

We embrace all weather at Nature School, but we also prioritize safety. If temperatures are predicted to be physically dangerous or travel conditions are predicted to be treacherous, we will often decide it is in the best interest of safety to cancel classes for that day as many of our families and staff travel a distance to attend our program.

- 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.
- We will make the decision for cancellation as soon as we can, but will try to make the decision before 6:00 am the morning of the cancellation in most cases.
- We may choose to cancel afternoon classes only if weather is predicted to get severe as the day progresses.
- When the Nature School closes due to inclement weather, an announcement will be made on local television news stations and websites and a text will be sent through the REMIND app to all families who would be attending that day.
- Anyone that regularly does drop-off and pick-up should be signed-up to receive REMIND notifications.
- Closures for inclement weather are not refundable.

Confidentiality Statement

At Schlitz Audubon Nature School it is our intention to respect the privacy of children and their families while ensuring that we can provide them with a high-quality program and exceptional care. Access to personal and developmental records are restricted to administrative staff and the individual child's teaching team.

Administrative staff does not share information including addresses, phone numbers, birth dates, emails, or other personal information with parties other than the child's teachers as required for communication and care of the child.

This also applies to any health or developmental issues past or present. We keep enrollment information secure in both paper and digital files and are accessible to our licensor at times of inspection.

The information stored in these files include enrollment forms, health records, immunization records, emergency contact information, contact information for those authorized to pick up the child, and nutritional restrictions. Teachers maintain progress reports, child observation logs, parent conference logs, and anecdotal records.

We do not share records with other schools or organizations without the written permission of the child's parent/guardian.



Reporting an Absence

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.

Student absences should NOT be reported by email or texted to teachers' personal phones.

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. We will contact you via phone call if we do not hear from you within the first 30 minutes of scheduled class time.

Signing In/Signing Out:

- Upon arrival at your child's outdoor classroom, please wait for the teaching staff to welcome you in.
- Due to our licensing, we cannot accommodate early drop off.
- Teachers are responsible for signing your child in on their daily sign-in sheet.
- 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.
- The sign-in sheets allow teachers and staff to know the names of children and the number of children present.



Mandated Reporting

The health and safety of the children in our care is our priority. Nature School staff has been trained to recognize abuse and neglect and is obligated as mandated reporters to report any incident in which a child appears to be abused or neglected (other than by accidental means) to Child Protective Services and/or the Bayside Police Department.

CPS Visits

The Nature School recognizes the right of the state licensing agency, as well as Child Protective Services, Social Services or Students and Family Services to perform their duties as follows:

- Privately interview students and/or staff without prior notice or parental consent.
- Inspect, audit, and copy student and staff records without prior notice or parental consent.
- Observe the physical condition of the student, including conditions that could indicate abuse, or neglect.
- If determined necessary, arrange protective custody and/or have a licensed medical professional physically examine the student.
- We do not inform families when CPS has made a visit unless instructed to do so by CPS.
- CPS case workers will reach out to families informing them of a visit and whether an interview was conducted.

Insurance

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



Staff

- The Nature School Director and Associate Director oversee the Nature School staff and daily operation.
- Our teachers have a range of experiences, including degrees and/or teaching backgrounds in early childhood education, environmental sciences, art education, biology, and child development.
- We maintain a ratio of 8:1 in our classrooms, with a class limit of 16 children and 2 Lead teachers.
- All staff counted in staff-to-child ratio shall be physically, mentally, and emotionally able to provide responsible care for all children.
- We have both full time and part time teaching staff.
- Each teacher is considered a Lead Teacher and works cooperatively and shares all class responsibilities.
- Each staff member including substitute teachers meet Department of Children and Families (DCF) licensing requirements for childcare teachers.
- 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.
- All Nature School staff members receive an additional 15 hours minimally per year of professional development, both independently and through center-sponsored workshops and events. They also regularly attend conferences about nature-based and early childhood education; participate in team-building activities; and attend naturalist training.
- Each staff member is required by state licensing to be listed in the Wisconsin Registry.
- We also maintain current Infant, Child, and Adult CPR/AED/First Aid certification, have undergone emergency armed intruder training, and situational awareness training.
- All staff members are mandated reporters and have training and certifications in Child Abuse and Neglect.



02

Enrollment





The 2026/2027 School Year

The Nature School offers part-day classes, morning, or afternoon, for children ages 3 to 5 by September 1st, 2026. Children must also be bathroom proficient and independent (potty trained).

Each class has a maximum child/adult ratio of 8:1 with two teachers per class. Nature Preschool mixed age classes are composed of mixed age groups of three to five-year-olds. Nature K4 classes are composed of four and five-year-olds.

Our school year begins Tuesday, September 1, 2026, and ends Friday, May 28, 2027. We require a commitment to the entire school year. The Nature School closes for major holidays, winter break, spring break, and staff development days.

Method of Enrollment:

- Applications are submitted on-line and become available at the end of November for the next school year via the Schlitz Audubon Nature Center website.
- Applications submitted before the priority deadline in January are eligible for enrollment through a lottery system in the following groups: returning current students, alumni siblings, members, and then non-members.
- After the Priority Application Deadline, applications will be accepted on a first-come, first-served basis.
- There is a \$65 application fee that is non-refundable and must accompany the child's completed application. This fee will be required each year when registering for preschool.
- Families will be notified of class placement by the end of February. If a place has not been secured, the child will be placed on a waitlist.
- Applications are accepted throughout the school year. Once classes are full, all new applicants are put on a waitlist in the order they were received.
- Parents/guardians will be notified via email when an opening is available for their child.
- If a family chooses to decline an opening when it becomes available, they will then be placed at the end of the waiting list for consideration at a future date.
- Applications are accepted regardless of race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, disability, political persuasion, national origin, or ancestry.
- Every attempt is made to place children in their preferred class; however, we reserve the right to create optimal learning communities by balancing classes according to gender and age.
- 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.



Class Offerings

The Nature School offers half-day classes with both mixed age preschool and K4 offerings.

The mixed age **Nature Preschool** classes are for children 3-5 years old and operate several different class sessions:

Cardinal Class: Monday/Wednesday/Friday mornings	8:45 am - 11:30 am
Chickadee Class: Monday/Wednesday/Friday mornings	9:00 am - 11:45 am
Goldfinch Class: Tuesday/Wednesday/Thursday mornings	8:45 am - 11:30 am
Cardinal Class: Tuesday/Thursday mornings	8:45 am - 11:30 am
Chickadee Class: Tuesday/Thursday mornings	9:00 am - 11:45 am
Cardinal Class: Monday and Wednesday afternoons	12:30 pm - 3:15 pm
Cardinal Class: Tuesday/Thursday afternoons	12:30 pm - 3:15 pm
Goldfinch Class: Tuesday/Wednesday/Thursday afternoons	12:45 pm - 3:30 pm

The **Nature K4** offers four half-day class options for children ages 4-5 years old with morning or afternoon sessions:

Nuthatch K4: Monday - Thursday mornings	9:00 am - 11:45 am
Chickadee K4: Monday through Thursday afternoons	12:45 pm - 3:30 pm
Nuthatch K4: Monday through Thursday afternoons	12:45 pm - 3:30 pm

Extended care option

The afternoon classes offer an extended care program from 3:15 pm to 4:00 pm at an additional cost of \$95.00 per month.

Required Enrollment Paperwork

We meet and maintain standards of excellence set by the State of Wisconsin licensing. Failure to complete and return the required paperwork will delay or deny your child's entry into the Nature School's programming.

Refunds are not given for days lost because of unsubmitted paperwork.

The following information must be supplied by the parent(s), legal guardian(s), or custodian(s) of the child and returned to the Nature School Director before July 15, 2026.

- Nature School Enrollment Information Form
- Tuition Payment Plan Selection
- Nature School Child and Family Information Form 2026/2027
- Nature School Health History and Emergency Care Plan 2026/2027 Form
- Nature School Enrollment Agreement Form 2026/2027
- Child's Health Report (must be completed by physician)
- Immunization Record (must be the State of Wisconsin form)

The records of children enrolled in the Nature School are kept confidential and are only available to the child's parent/legal guardian upon request.



Immunization History

Parents are responsible for providing the Nature School with an up-to-date copy of their child's immunization record. Immunization records can be obtained from your medical provider.

Waivers are available for those children who are not medically able to be vaccinated or who's families have chosen to opt out or delay immunizations.

Each child must have an immunization history that states that the child has been immunized against diphtheria, pertussis, tetanus, poliomyelitis, measles and rubella, chicken pox, and hepatitis B. The history must include the month and year that each dose was given.

Or one of the following compliance alternatives must be met:

- a. A signed permission of the parent to have the child immunized in a prompt and timely manner by either a physician specified by the parent or the local health agency;
- b. Upon written and dated statement from a physician that a particular immunization required is or may be detrimental to the health of a child, the requirement for that particular immunization shall be waived; or
- c. Upon written, signed and dated statement from the parent that a particular child is an adherent of a religious belief, which precludes immunizations.

Failure to meet Wisconsin's immunization requirements is against the law. If you fail to comply with the law, you may be fined up to \$25 per day by the State of Wisconsin, and your child will be excluded from participation in the Nature School without refund.

If an outbreak occurs of a vaccine preventable disease and your child is not immunized or is missing doses, they will be excluded from attending the Nature School until the outbreak subsides. The Nature School will work with the North Shore Health Department and follow their guidance on when students should be excluded or allowed to attend. No refunds in tuition are provided in these cases.

Note: The required immunization schedule is based on the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices of the U.S. Public Health Service and described in the compliance form issued by the Department of Health and Social Services.



Items Parents Provide and those Provided by the Center

The Nature School will provide all learning materials including toys, tools, art supplies, scientific equipment and loose parts.

Parents will be required to provide appropriate outdoor gear, a complete change of clothes, a gear bag and filled water bottle. Detailed information is available under the Dressing for Nature School section of this Handbook.

There are also times when the Nature School may ask for donations from our Teacher Wish list. This may include saving recycled containers or boxes or asking for purchased items.

Family Involvement

We value strong connections between home and school, and we welcome family participation in meaningful ways throughout the year. Opportunities might include celebrating your child's birthday, sharing a special skill or story, joining us for seasonal celebrations, or helping with special projects. These visits help strengthen our community while maintaining a consistent and secure environment for the children.

You may schedule these visits directly with your child's teachers.

Room Parents

Description:

Seeking one to two parents/caregivers to help organize and communicate classroom activities, needs, and fostering a sense of community.

Duties:

- Organizing classroom gifts (Holiday & Teacher Appreciation)
- Designated lead for classroom spring auction item
- Communicate volunteer opportunities out to classroom

Medical Logs

Injuries are recorded in each classroom's medical log and parents/guardians are informed of the injury. This log serves as the recording log for any minor injury a child may receive while attending the Nature School.

Child Records

The records of children enrolled in the School are kept confidential and are only available to the child's parents/guardians upon request.



Non-discrimination Statement

Schlitz Audubon Nature School complies with applicable Federal civil rights laws and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and gender.

Expectations for Adults

(including parents, caregivers, volunteers, teachers, and staff):

Our goal at Schlitz Audubon Nature School 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 and respect.
- Set good examples for children in terms of speech and behavior.
- Understand that Nature School staff will not share or discuss information about other children, their families, or their individualized learning plan. We can only discuss your child with you.
- Go through the proper channels of communication when problems arise (this includes talking first with teachers regarding any classroom concerns, then with the Nature School Director and/or the administrative staff, and finally, if need be, the Executive Director of the Nature Center).
- Maintain confidentiality.
- Arrive and pick-up children on time.
- Parents and caregivers are expected to supervise their children in the building, parking lot, and while on school grounds both before drop-off and after pick-up. This means that children must remain in sight and sound of their supervising adult.
- Teachers are expected to use developmentally appropriate practice in their teaching and maintain their level of expertise through continuing education experiences.
- Nature School staff are not responsible for student behavior outside of class time such as during play dates or birthday parties. If issues or conflict arise from outside interactions, those discussions must be handled between families without staff involvement.



Classroom Pets and Animal Interactions

Our indoor classrooms have a selection of classroom pets. These include a variety of reptiles and invertebrates.

Currently the Nature School has a Russian Tortoise (Tatiana), two Three-toed Box Turtles (Boxy and Freddie), pink-footed millipedes, Indonesian Blue-tongued Skink (Nigel), Regal Jumping Spider (Magnolia), and a Painted Turtle (Squirt).

Families/guardians will be notified via email if any animals are added during the school year.

- 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 do not have access to these animals without adult supervision.
- Children are required to wash their hands after touching any of our pets.
- All of our animals go through yearly wellness checks by a veterinarian.
- The Nature Center also has a group of Animal Ambassadors that may also visit the classes periodically. These include reptiles and amphibians such as snakes, lizards, and turtles.

Raptor Programs

- Schlitz Audubon's Raptor Department educates the public about raptor ecology, conservation, and these birds' important roles in the ecosystem. Our premier collection emphasizes raptors: hawks, owls, eagles, and falcons, but also includes a Turkey Vulture and an American Crow. Each of our resident birds is not releasable to the wild and is in our permanent care. These feathered ambassadors are dedicated to providing information about their wild relatives, habitat concerns, and issues facing raptors today is not releasable to the wild and is in our permanent care.
- The Nature School schedules occasional visits from the birds in our Raptor Program including owls, hawks, eagles, and falcons.
- Children do not interact with the raptors but view them at a distance.



Photography

Teachers regularly use photography to document student activities, document learning, 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. We have also used photos of our students in member newsletters and for presentations to our Board, families, national conferences, and presentations to fellow educators.

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.

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.

Parents/guardians 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.

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



03

TUITION AND FEE PAYMENT

Licensing Code 251.04(2)(h)1





Tuition and Fees:

- The enrollment deposit of \$275.00 is due within two weeks of acceptance to secure our child's place in a class. This deposit is applied towards the first tuition payment.
- We do not offer scholarships or a sliding tuition scale.
- All classroom materials are included in tuition excluding student outdoor clothing and gear.
- Tuition is non-refundable.
- Tuition is due in one annual payment or monthly with nine payments that are billed on the first of every month starting August 1, 2026.

Tuition Rates

Monthly:

Monthly Tuition Rates for the 2026/2027 Nature School Year:

- Two days per week programs: \$3,605
 - Monthly Option: \$275.00 deposit plus 9 monthly payments of \$370.00
- Three days per week programs: \$4,982
 - \$275.00 deposit plus 9 monthly payments of \$523.00
- K4 programs: \$5,828
 - \$275.00 deposit plus 9 monthly payments of \$617.00

Annual:

The option to pay tuition in a one-time annual payment is given at a slight discount.

Annual Tuition Rates for the 2026/2027 Nature School year:

- Two days per week programs: Deposit of \$275 plus \$3,209
 - Three days per week programs: Deposit of \$275 plus \$4,534
 - K4 programs: Deposit of \$275 plus \$5,249
-
- The afternoon Extended Care program fees are an additional cost of \$95.00 per month.
 - Initial tuition payments due August 1, 2026.



The family/guardians are responsible for payment of all scheduled days, whether the days are used.

We do not issue refunds, tuition payment pauses, or credits for the following circumstances:

- Toileting/Potty training issues or delays
- Vacations
- Travel to winter residences
- Outbreaks of contagious diseases
- Religious Holidays
- Inclement Weather Closings
- Missed days due to a child's illness or injury
- Failure to submit required paperwork on time

Late Fees and Unpaid Tuition:

- Tuition is due before "close of business" on the first of the month.
- A late fee of \$25.00 per week will be charged for payments received after the due date.
- Late fees will be applied to your next billing cycle.
- In addition to transaction fees, we also charge for ACH returns (\$10), ACH chargebacks (\$25), and Credit Card chargebacks (\$25).

Non-payment of Tuition and Termination of Enrollment

In the event of missed tuition payments, Schlitz Audubon Nature School reserves the right to suspend or terminate your child's enrollment.

Privacy and Security

All payment information provided will be treated with the utmost confidentiality and in compliance with data protection laws.

Tuition and Fee Communication

For payment-related inquiries or concerns, please contact Patti Darby at 414-352-2880 extension 153 or pdarby@schlitzaudubon.org



Membership

Each family enrolled in the Nature School will receive an annual family membership to Schlitz Audubon Nature Center at a value of \$85.00 per year.

Membership will be added when you make your first tuition payment in early August. (You will either receive new membership or if you are already a member, a year will be added to your renewal.)

Fundraising

Fundraising activities help support our program beyond the scope of our basic budget. These efforts typically fund items from our teachers' wish lists - special tools that enrich the children's experience and enhance our curriculum.

As a non-profit, 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 occasionally need families willing to help plan, organize, or facilitate these events. Nature School staff will communicate with your classroom room parents with any needs.

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



04 Behavior Guidance

Licensing Code

251.04(2)(h)3

Licensing Code

251.04(2)(h)8





Transitions and Positive Guidance

We support children through transitions and daily routines using positive guidance strategies that are developmentally appropriate and relationship-based.

Our approach includes:

- Stating the behavior we want to see, rather than focusing on what not to do.
- Redirecting to a more appropriate activity or behavior.
- Modeling positive social interactions.
- Staying nearby to offer support and maintain connection.
- Noticing and naming appropriate behavior.
- Offering alternatives to challenging behaviors.
- Using visual and auditory cues to signal upcoming transitions.
- Giving gentle prompts or reminders before a transition occurs.
- Breaking into smaller groups for smoother transitions or parts of the day.
- Providing one-on-one attention when needed.
- Teaching and practicing social-emotional skills during calm moments.
- Flexibly adjusting the daily schedule to meet the group's needs.

Child Guidance

The Schlitz Audubon Nature School focuses on the development of self-regulation and self-efficacy skills in the students. These skills are necessary to be able to participate with others safely and successfully in a group setting. We use positive guidance, redirection, and teaching respect for self and others.

Teachers set clear guidelines and agreements for class behavior from the very first day of class and use them as a framework to guide connections and interaction for children with each other and with adults. The strong relationships built between teachers and children make the connection needed to form a sense of self and community and allows children to take risks and succeed.

The length of time it takes for your child to feel comfortable in the outdoor classroom and with the children and teachers in that room depends on your child's personality, and past experiences. Crying and sad feelings in new situations is common and expected. The Nature School teachers will draw on their experience as professional early childhood educators to work with your child to make the adjustments and transitions go smoothly. Rest assured that your child will be attended to and not left to cry unnoticed.



We believe that the best way to deal with inappropriate behavior at Nature School is to prevent it. Children are helped to understand the reasons for our rules. The staff attempt to prevent misbehavior by keeping children engaged in meaningful activities and by establishing clear and consistent guidelines regarding behavior. Children may experience varying difficulties at different stages of their development. While this is quite typical, it is also important that problematic behaviors not be shrugged off as being ‘just a stage.’ We look at all behavior as communication; when a child is struggling, their behavior is sending signals that they have an unmet need to address or an unlearned skill to master. Teachers and families work together to identify the child’s needs and teach skills to support a child as they work through a developmental/behavioral issue.

Spanking or any form of physical or psychological punishment is strictly prohibited, even at parent request.

Timeouts are not used. The Nature School uses time away from the group on a very limited basis when needed to ensure safety for the child, other students, or staff. [Licensing Code 251.07(2)(c)] Physical restraint is used only when necessary to prevent a child from physically harming themselves or others.

Teachers and families work together to identify the child’s needs and teach skills to support a child as they work through developmental/behavioral issues. With positive child guidance strategies which include stating the behavior we want to see, redirection, modeling positive social interactions, keeping staff in close proximity, noticing appropriate behavior, planned to ignore of unacceptable behavior, substituting an acceptable behavior, using auditory and/or visual cues, prompting a child ahead of a transition, and practicing skills when a child is calm and ready to learn.



Bathroom Independence

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

This means:

- The child is not in diapers or pull-ups.
- The child can recognize when they need to relieve themselves and are able to communicate that to a teacher.
- The child can pull down and back up their clothing independently.
- The child can wipe themselves.
- The child can wash their own hands.
- 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 School due to the following:

- We are not licensed or equipped to have children enrolled in our program in diapers or pull ups.
- Independence in toileting is a developmental milestone that is a strong indicator of readiness for school. Inconsistency in toilet training may indicate that the child is not yet ready for more structured group routines.
- To protect a child's personal dignity, we try to keep accidents as unnoticeable as possible, but sometimes they do get noticed and the child is likely to feel embarrassed, especially if we need to return from a hiking adventure early due to an accident.
- 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 cannot be 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.

What if my child is not toilet independent and is having accidents throughout the day?

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 School.

If an enrolled child is having regular toileting 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.



Child Biting Policy and Procedures

Although not a typical occurrence, biting does occur occasionally with young children. If a biting incident happens, the incident is written in the classroom medical log by the observing teacher(s). First aid is administered as needed. The teachers will inform both families (the child who did the biting and the child who was bitten) about the incident either after class time in person or by a phone call. An email may be sent if the parent/guardian cannot be reached. It is our policy to keep the name of the biter confidential.

If biting becomes a frequent behavior of a particular child, the teachers will record observations and keep anecdotal notes. We will keep the child's family informed of any further incidents as they happen. We use these notes to look for patterns that may assist us in finding the causes of the biting and to look for ideas that may assist us in helping the biter find alternative, more appropriate behavior. If the behavior begins to impact the learning and safety of others, alternatives to enrollment will be discussed.

Elopement

Elopement refers to a child leaving a specified safe area without adult permission. Some children may wander or elope in response to fear, confusion, or because they're trying to reunite with a parent. Some children may wander or elope out of impulsivity, stress, or overstimulation.

Due to the nature of our outdoor program, elopement is a serious concern. Children who wander or elope from the group are significantly more likely to enter a pond, a ravine, or a busy parking lot. It is essential that while they are in our care, children remain with their teachers at Nature School.

- We regularly count the children and remind them that the woods, the prairie, and other open spaces are not places where they can run ahead of the teachers or play hiding games.
- We also conduct monthly safety checks where the children come over to the teachers and announce, "I'm here!" as a way of reinforcing group safety.
- Parents and guardians can support our school safety rules by making sure they never send children in or out of the building (or elsewhere in the building) without an adult accompanying them; that only adults open doors and gates; and that children are taught to never approach the ponds or cross the parking lot without an adult present.
- For most children, these reminders are enough to keep them alert, close, and safe when we head out beyond our fenced-in classrooms.
- However, for the child who is struggling with elopement due to neurological or psychological reasons, parents may need to consider whether an outdoor program, with more than six miles of trails and 185 acres of land, is truly the safest environment for them.



ADA policy

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires that childcare providers not discriminate against persons with disabilities based on disability. The Nature School does our best to provide children and parents with disabilities with an equal opportunity to participate in our programs. We cannot however accommodate children when inclusion would require a fundamental alteration of our program.

To make this determination, the administrative staff will ask for an individualized assessment about whether we can meet the needs of the child without fundamentally altering our program. During this assessment, we will talk to the parents/guardians and any other professionals (such as special educators or health care professionals) who work with the child in other contexts.

Family Communication Regarding Development and Behavior

To provide the best possible care and educational experience for every child, families are expected to share any information about their child's developmental, behavioral, emotional, medical, or social needs that may affect their participation, learning, or interactions in the classroom.

This includes, but is not limited to:

- Developmental delays or disabilities
- Speech or communication challenges
- Behavioral concerns or patterns
- Elopement or inability to stay with the group
- Sensory needs
- Aggressive, impulsive, or self-injurious behaviors
- Any supports, therapies, or intervention services the child currently receives

Providing this information before enrollment and updating the school as changes occur allows our staff to:

- Plan appropriate support strategies for your child.
- Promote a safe environment for all children and staff.
- Determine whether our program can appropriately meet your child's needs with the resources available.

Families are expected to provide complete and accurate information during the enrollment process and throughout their child's attendance. Failure to disclose information that significantly affects a child's safety, the safety of others, or their ability to participate successfully in the program may result in a meeting with the family to develop a support plan. If the program determines that it cannot safely or appropriately meet a child's needs, or if significant information was intentionally withheld during enrollment, the school reserves the right to deny enrollment or discontinue care in accordance with its enrollment and termination policies.



We are committed to working collaboratively with families and do not discriminate based on disability or developmental differences. Disclosure of a diagnosis or concern does not automatically affect enrollment. Rather, it helps us partner with families to determine how we can best support each child's success while maintaining a safe and positive learning environment for everyone.

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.
- We ask that parents be transparent of their child's
- 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. The Nature School cannot provide additional staff for individual children needing additional support or one-on-one assistance.
- Specialists serving the child are welcome and encouraged to serve the child in our setting and all of the information concerning the child's IFSP/IEP will be maintained and kept in a confidential manner.
- If your child has an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), we ask that you provide us with a copy of the plan to ensure we are offering complementing activities and support, within reason, at Nature School with the child's specialty teams.
- 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 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 of Enrolled Children 251.04(2)(h)3.

Behavior Guidance

- The policy of the Nature School is to view self-discipline/self-regulation as a developmental goal for children. The objective of the Center is to work with children to develop the child's self-regulation skills to be able to participate with others safely and successfully in a group setting.
- In guiding children, we use positive guidance, redirection, substitution, and teaching respect for self and others. Children are helped to understand the reasons for our rules. We believe that the best way to deal with inappropriate behavior at the Nature School is to prevent it. The staff try to prevent misbehavior by keeping the children involved in activities and by establishing clear and consistent guidelines regarding behavior.
- Teachers' check-in with families before and after class to communicate about a child's experiences in the class. When children's behaviors are of concern and negatively affecting others, it is the Nature School's and the child's family responsibility to work together.

Severe, Unsafe Behavior

- If deemed necessary, regular written anecdotal records are kept on the child's interaction and behaviors. When a child exhibits behavior that is a danger to themselves or to others or disrupts the learning environment to such a degree that most/all the children in the classroom are affected, the parent/s, Nature School Director will be notified. If warranted due to ongoing safety concerns, a child may be sent home from class.
- A meeting between the family, the child's teachers, and the Nature School Director will be scheduled to discuss what needs to happen for the child to remain enrolled in the Nature School.
- A decision will be made by the Director in consultation with the Executive Director and the child's teachers about the interventions needed to ensure the safety of teachers and other children in the program.
- If unsafe behaviors (hitting, kicking, biting, not responding to their name, running away, spitting, yelling obscenities/ inappropriate words, throwing objects, destroying property, etc.) continue despite accommodations and positive behavior interventions, the child's enrollment will be terminated.
- Children may experience varying difficulties at different stages of their development. While this is quite typical, it is also important that problematic behaviors not be shrugged off as being 'just a stage,' as this approach prolongs and reinforces behaviors that, if left unchecked, can create major difficulties for the child, the child's parents, and for others.



Discharge Policy

Licensing Code 215.04(2h)3

The Nature School reserves 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/guardian/caregiver.
- Failure of the parent/guardian/caregiver to observe the rules and policies of the Nature School.
- The parent/guardian fails to follow correct admission procedures, especially as they relate to submission of required forms.
- Non-payment of tuition or fees.
- Retention of the child would be detrimental to the health and safety of the other children in the Nature School, the Nature School staff, or the child due to the exceptional needs for special treatment.

Upon the discretion of the Nature School Director, 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.



05

CHILD EDUCATION

Licensing Code 251.04(2)(h)6





Cultural Diversity

Children live in a diverse and complex world, interacting daily with people different from themselves. A culturally diverse community promotes inclusiveness which reduces prejudice.

The Nature School celebrates and respects the diversity of our school community and for that reason we do not include religious instruction or practices in our daily activities, and we do not offer a religious education programs or curriculum.

We do want to recognize the variety of cultural traditions among our Nature School families, so we do welcome families to join their child's class to share any cultural traditions or arts. In the past, we have had families share about Dia De Los Muertos, Holi, Diwali, and Eid al-Fitr. 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 teachers in advance.

An important aspect of our culturally diverse curriculum is helping children to recognize biases and stereotypes when they encounter them in themselves and others.

Special Occasions

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

Program Planning, Scheduling, and Curriculum

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.

Our curriculum draws on the phenology of what is happening in nature at the moment but also builds upon our years of experience teaching with nature as our teaching partner. We may reference previous years lesson plans but focus on creating something new and fresh each year.

Nature School staff have Friday afternoons set aside for lesson planning and class preparation. Teachers plan for the week of lessons but also factor in flexibility for weather changes, phenological events and occurrences, and students interests and needs.



Physical Spaces

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 food to any of our classrooms or hallways.

Outdoor Classrooms

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 bi-weekly basis. (Indoor classroom use does not rotate.)

We regularly address, plan, and change the features in our outdoor classroom 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 reserved for use for our programming only.

These natural areas are 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 the start of class, between classes, when a class is in session, or weekends.
- Please do not eat in our outdoor classroom spaces. The food crumbs attract rodents and many of our children have very serious contact allergies with certain foods.
- Children cannot be left unattended in these spaces. Always supervise your children (especially younger siblings) in these areas.



Indoor Spaces

We have four indoor classrooms to use when we experience severe weather, when we need warm up breaks, or when the teachers have special projects they wish the children to experience.

Children are assigned to the same indoor classroom all school year based on their class bird. We do not rotate indoor spaces like we do outdoor spaces.

Our three main 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, dramatic play area, sensory area, art area, reading area, and manipulative area.

Nuthatch Room

The Nuthatch Room is slightly different as it is a smaller room and shares space with our Audubon Babies classes. This classroom does not have its own bathroom, or a loft area. Public bathrooms are available close by. The Nuthatch classes also make use of many of the public spaces in the Nature Center building such as the covered Veranda, Auditorium, and Great Hall.

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.
- Due to sensitivities that some children and adults have to strong scents, please apply sunscreen and insect repellents outdoors.
- Children and guests are required per our licensing 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 classes are outside.



Nature-based Curriculum

Nature schools have the same child development goals as any other high-quality early childhood program, the difference is the teachers use nature-based experiences to achieve these developmental goals. Nature is our teaching partner. We learn in nature, with nature, from nature, and about nature.

Schlitz Audubon Nature School provides 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.

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.

Teachers follow an emergent curriculum when lesson planning to support children in investigating subjects/topics they find interesting. We base this emergent curriculum on the seasonal phenology calendar and adjust our lesson plans accordingly. Lesson plans are posted in individual classrooms weekly.

At Nature School, 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.

Nature permeates our entire curriculum. Nature-based activities happen outdoors 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 inquiry as they are given encouragement to:

- Make observations and discoveries.
- Satisfy their natural curiosity.
- Communicate about nature.
- Build understanding of themselves, as they relate to others, and to the natural world.



The following is an example of a typical classroom schedule.

Type of activities and timing varies depending on the teachers, children, and specific classroom.

Daily Schedule

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. 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
- Building with loose parts and natural materials
- Process art and material exploration
- Fine motor and dexterity practice
- Science activities
- Emergent literacy activities
- Math and manipulative activities



Reset/Clean-up

Children work as a whole class to reset the classroom for the next class and prepare for our group time routine. The expectation is that all children actively assist in resetting these shared spaces.

Gathering Time

During our group “Circle Time” we gather at the log circles in each of the outdoor classrooms to sing songs, read books, 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, and go over class agreements.

Hike

The hike is an exciting part of Nature School Day. The students set out as a group to explore, play, and learn along the many trails of the Nature Center.

For safety, classes hike in a “sandwich formation” with a teacher at the front and a teacher at the back with the children in the middle. Safety guidelines and expectations are explained prior to hiking to ponds and Lake Michigan beach.

At the beginning of the school year, teachers introduce hiking and trail exploration gradually as children learn group routines, safety expectations, and trail etiquette.

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.



Dismissal

Families are asked to wait until class comes to an end before entering the outdoor classroom, 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.

Please be on time when picking up your child: If pick up time is a problem, please consider carpooling with another family or asking another parent if they would be willing to wait with your child until you arrive.

If parents/guardians/caregivers 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.

Indoor Time

On days when we go inside, the children may just be in a short time for a warmup break or they may spend an extended time indoors. Classes also make use of many areas of the Nature Center in addition to the indoor classrooms such as the auditorium, elementary classroom, or Great Hall.

Transportation and Drop-Off

It is extremely important that all drivers entering the property pause at the Welcome Booth until the attending staff member waves you on.

Welcome Booth staff will alert our security team if anyone drives past the booth without stopping to be identified.

Please follow the 15mph speed limit on all property roads and 5 mph in the parking lots.

Entrance Decals

We provide a limited number of entrance decals for your cars, which makes it possible for the booth staff to identify you as a Nature School family before waving you through. Anyone that will regularly pick up or drop off should receive a decal to display on their vehicle.

Please place the decal in the bottom left corner of your windshield.



Road and Parking Lot Safety

Please maintain a slow speed of 15 mph on Schlitz Audubon roads and 5 mph in the parking lots.

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 Nature School 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 School's responsibility for each child begins when the child is signed in by the teacher. Therefore, the parent/guardian must make sure that the teacher signs their child in upon arrival and out at departure on the daily attendance forms. Dropping children off in the 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.

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 Nature School Attendance Line 414-309-7500 to ask if a staff person can assist you.

Carpooling

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.



Late Pick Up

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.

Early Drop Off

We cannot accommodate early student 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.

Birthday Celebrations

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/guardians/caregivers are invited to join the class and bring in pictures of the birthday child for each year of their life, along with their 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 in the winter months. When the time comes, just let your child's teachers know how you would like them to manage this for the birthday child.

Communication

Communication is extremely important to us. Regular communication between school and a child's caregivers can improve your child's school experience.

We ask parents/guardians and caregivers to keep staff notified of significant events and changes in their children's lives (such as moving to a new house, new nanny, divorce or separation, the loss of a pet, or a serious family illness) as this will also have an impact on your child at school. This could be a quick word before or after class, a scheduled meeting, or an email.



After Class Teacher Talk

Teachers will give short verbal reports about each day's activities at the end of class to all families/caregivers at pick up time. This recap of the day is an important connection time for teachers and families. If you are running late, we ask that you do not expect teachers to give a full recap as they are transitioning the students to their families/caregivers and need to check everyone out of their care.

Text Messaging/REMIND System

We use text messaging through the REMIND app to quickly get timely information out to families. Any time-sensitive announcements by teachers for specific classes or All School Alerts will be sent via this app's messaging system. This is most often a quick reminder about the outdoor classroom assignment, a change in pick up or drop off locations, or a reminder to bring warm gear. We occasionally send updates of programs or events at the Nature Center.

Email

Another important way to stay informed about what is happening here at Nature School 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 at least twice a month.

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

Social Media

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 Nature School 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/videos 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.



Conferences

We frequently check in personally with families about your child's growth and development during the school year and through emails about the class. In addition, we offer one Fall phone conference opportunity and an *optional* Spring phone conference.

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.

Water Safety

Water play is a regular part of our programming. Many of the outdoor classrooms have water features or standing puddles of water year-round including our Mud Kitchen area.

A favorite hiking destination in all seasons is to one of our many ponds. Exploring ponds is not only fascinating and fun, but it's also educational. There's so much to see, feel, observe and learn about around a pond. Two teachers are always present when the students are crossing boardwalks over ponds or ponding with nets. Specific safety agreements are always laid out to classes before teachers will take them to a pond.

Classes also regularly hike to Lake Michigan. Safety agreements are also discussed before teachers take the class to the shore of Lake Michigan. No swimming is allowed, and children stay at the shore and beach.

Ice Safety

In winter, exploration on frozen ponds is a favorite activity for classes. Before venturing out on the ice, classes learn the precautions needed to ensure their play is safe.

Teachers check if the ice is strong enough each time before stepping onto ice. The ice conditions can change quickly from morning to afternoon. It is difficult to judge the thickness of any ice by sight. Teachers have simple testing tools to gauge the thickness of the ice. One example is a nail marked out by inches that is tapped into the ice to test depth. The ice must be five inches in thickness or more to allow students out on the ice.



Supervision of Children

Nature School staff will always know how many children are in their care. It will be the teacher's responsibility to check children in and out and keep a regular count of children's whereabouts.

A head count will be done prior to, during, and upon return when hiking on the Nature Center grounds. Each count will be compared with the check-in sheet to make sure all children are accounted for.

Teachers will record child arrival and departure times on their daily attendance sheet.

Supervision in Outdoor Classrooms:

- Teachers check the outdoor classroom before class for any hazards/damage including making sure the back gate is secured and latched.
- One teacher signs each child in at the gate as the other teacher supervises the children in the outdoor classroom. The sign-in teacher keeps their co-teacher updated about the number of children in care.
- The teacher not signing children in will be available to all students and moving around.
- Areas requiring close adult supervision (tree climbing, tree house, slackline, mud kitchen) are closed until both teachers are available.
- One teacher must be in the mud kitchen at all times if children are present there.
- Children are in sight and/or sound of a teacher at all times.
- Children are counted multiple times in the outdoor classroom, at transitions, hiking, and indoors.
- The class bird call is used anytime teachers need to get the children's attention. Upon hearing the call children are asked to freeze their bodies and look at a teacher for directions.

Leaving the Outdoor Classroom:

- When heading out of the outdoor classroom, teachers do line children up to discuss hiking guidelines and reminders, but the children do not need to stay in a line while hiking.
- If at any time the children are not attentive to directions, the class does not leave the classroom until everyone is able to give the teacher their attention.
- Teachers count the students at every transition point such as passing through doorways, crossing trails, curves in the trail, hallways, indoor spaces, at the veranda, and entering classrooms.



Supervision While Hiking:

- Student attendance check-in documentation is always carried with teachers on the hike.
- While hiking, children must be between the teachers. No child should be in front of the teacher at the front of the hike and no child should be behind the teacher at the back of the hike. We call this hiking in “sandwich formation”.
- Children are not allowed to run ahead of the teachers or stray behind.
- Teachers count the students every time they pass another group hiking.
- Each teacher should be in sight of their co-teacher when hiking.
- If the front teacher cannot see the back teacher, they stop the hike.
- If the back teacher cannot see the front teacher, they radio for them to stop the hike.
- When crossing ponds, children should be in a deer family line in the middle of the boardwalk.
- Students must walk on boardwalks.
- Children must be on their stomachs to look in the pond or seated away from the edge.
- At Lake Michigan, children must be between the backpacks on the beach. One teacher monitors the water's edge at all times.
- Teachers communicate constantly with each other on how many children they are supervising and who is supervising the water's edge.

Supervision at Dismissal:

- One teacher stays with the students in the gathering circle. All children remain seated at the logs until their adult comes in and collects them. Children should not run off and play unless they are with their adult caregiver.
- The other teacher (usually the one that gives the end of day talk) stays at the gate and checks out each child as they pass through the gate. Many teachers have the child give them a high-five/ hug/wave as they exit the gate.
- Per licensing regulations, no one under 18 years of age may pick up a child.



06

EMERGENCY PLANS

Licensing Codes 251.04(2)(h)9 and 251.06(3)





Severe Weather

The Nature School administration keeps a careful watch on the weather forecast during the school day and if severe weather is possible, we make appropriate modifications to our schedule and location.

Staff is in communication through walkie-talkie radios with the teachers outdoors keeping them updated about the weather in case they would need to come indoors.

- If thunder is heard or lightning seen, teachers move classes to the building for shelter immediately.
- In the case of a tornado warning, classes will relocate to the basement and follow tornado safety protocols.
- In high wind situations, the location of the classroom and surrounding areas will be assessed. In the event of no severe weather but there is a risk from high winds, classes will come indoors.
- In extreme heat or dangerous air quality warnings, outdoor activities are restricted, and children will be kept indoors in air-conditioned rooms.
- In extreme cold, classes may be canceled, and families will be notified through the REMIND app.

For Safety

- First aid equipment is always kept readily available indoors and in each teacher's backpack outdoors.
- Teachers have walkie talkies to communicate emergencies to other staff.
- School issued classroom cell phones are always carried by teachers and staff. These have all family contact information loaded into them for emergency use.
- Teachers always keep written records in their backpacks with daily attendance, family contact information, child health requirements, and emergency contact information.
- Staff members are current with their certification in First Aid and CPR.



In An Emergency

The safety of the children and staff is of utmost importance. If an emergency situation were to arise during the course of the day our staff are trained to handle it calmly and quickly.

- If the situation warrants, we bring the children indoors.
- If it is essential to evacuate the building, all children and staff would treat it as a fire drill, gathering outside to do name checks/roll call, and if necessary, proceed to the pavilion area or other safe zone.
- If it is safer away from the building, teachers stay in communication with the Nature School administration and evacuate to one of our pre-planned safe spaces.
- If it becomes necessary to evacuate the building or outdoor classrooms, all staff and children would evacuate by foot.
- The Nature School will make accommodations known to the staff/family for the children who need a special evacuation consideration.

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

Emergency Training

Nature School staff participates in annual training about situational awareness and emergency response training. We also work 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 safety drills with our classes.

We ask parents and caregivers to please stop at the Welcome Booth when they arrive so that we know who is entering the property and we strive to recognize each person who enters our school areas. We ask that the public stay outside our learning spaces and Nature School hallway when classes are in session.



Fire Drills Procedures

Fire drills are practiced at least 9 times during the school year. All children and staff practice safe exit from the outdoor classrooms and building to designated areas on Nature Center grounds.

Tornado Drill Procedures

Tornado drills are practiced monthly from April through October. During a tornado drill, the teachers lead the children indoors to the designated hallway in the basement of the Nature Center building.

Building Services

In the case of a loss of building services such as heat, air conditioning, water, electricity, plumbing, or telephone, and the problem cannot be corrected within a reasonable amount of time or if the safety of the children is impacted, the Nature School will close. Families will be notified and asked to pick up their children immediately and/or informed that the school is closed and not to attend.

Missing Child

If we receive word from a family or staff member that a child has gone missing from the Nature School or Nature Center grounds, the School Director or other administrative staff will immediately be notified to put in place our Lost Child Protocols.

Nature Center personnel will search the grounds and 911 will be called for additional assistance.

If there is any reason to suspect a child has been abducted, 911 will be called immediately.

Staff to Contact in an Emergency

In an emergency, please contact via phone or radio the Nature School administration in the following order:

- Nature School Director at ext. 153
- Associate Director at ext. 154
- Nature Center's Manager of Operations at ext. 200.



Food Allergies

Although we do not serve daily snacks, each child with a food allergy has a written care plan on the Health History and Emergency Care Plan form that includes:

- Instructions regarding the food(s) to which the child is allergic and steps to be taken to avoid that food.
- A detailed treatment plan to be implemented in the event of an allergic reaction, including the names, doses, and methods of prompt administration of any medications.
- The plan should include specific symptoms that would indicate the need to administer one or more medications.

Based on the child's care plan and prior to caring for the child, caregivers/teachers should receive training for, demonstrate competence in, and implement measures for:

- Preventing exposure to the specific food(s) to which the child is allergic including items that could be found on the Nature Center trails and outdoor classrooms.
- Recognizing the symptoms of an allergic reaction.
- Treating allergic reactions.

The written childcare plan, a mobile phone, and the proper medications for appropriate treatment if the child develops an acute allergic reaction should be routinely carried in the teachers backpack throughout class including on hikes.

The Nature School will notify the parents/guardians immediately of any suspected allergic reactions, as well as the ingestion of or contact with the problem food even if a reaction did not occur.

The Nature School will contact the emergency medical services system immediately whenever epinephrine has been administered.

Each child's food allergies and method of care are included on the child's Health History and Emergency Care sheet kept with the class sign-in papers carried with the teacher.



Injury Procedure

Any staff member who feels a child requires emergency medical care may call 911 themselves or contact another staff member to do so.

- Any emergency response call should be reported to the Nature School Director and the Executive Director immediately.
- The child's parents will be notified immediately by a direct phone call.
- A responsible staff member will accompany the child to the hospital and take the child's file along.

Procedure for Making Required Reports

The Nature School Director is required to report any severe injury, serious incident or accident, licensing violation, outbreaks of contagious diseases, and injuries caused by an animal in writing to our WI Southern Regional Licensing Office within 24 hours.

Posted Emergency Numbers

Emergency numbers are loaded into each classroom cell phone and are posted in each indoor classroom and Nature School offices and include non-emergency police, fire department, poison control, child protective services, and the nearest hospital.

Emergency Supplies

Emergency supplies such as emergency blankets, first aid kits, and radios are carried in staff backpacks and extra are kept in Nature School offices.

Authorized Pick-Up Persons

Parents/guardians must designate on the Enrollment Forms, who is allowed to pick up their child from Nature School. The teachers will not release a child to anyone without written notification and approval or to anyone they do not recognize.

- All individuals picking up must be over 18 years of age.
- If someone other than persons listed on your child's Authorized Pick-Up List needs to pick up your child, you must notify your child's teachers when you drop your child off or call the Nature School Attendance Line and leave a message or text. Provide the person's name, and relationship to the child.
- New pick-up persons must provide picture identification at time of pick up.



Action Taken When an Adult Seems Impaired/Unsafe

As childcare providers, it is our responsibility to protect the health and safety of the children in our program. Use of alcohol or drugs by adults while with the child or in transporting the child can create an unsafe situation. If, in our opinion, the child cannot be safely transported to or from the Nature School, we will call the emergency contact on the Child Enrollment form to pick up the child.

If the parent/guardian/caregiver refuses to agree to the alternative listed above and insists on transporting the child under unsafe conditions, we will immediately call the Bayside Police Department and report the unsafe driving situation.

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 School. 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 School unless they have made prior written arrangements with the custodial parent and the Nature School Director.

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



07

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, 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.

Communicable diseases such as strep throat, measles, chicken pox, and hand, foot, and mouth disease must be reported to Nature School 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 Nature School staff. The parent/guardian will be notified immediately to pick up the child. If we are unable to contact the parent/guardian, then the Emergency Contact will be notified.

Written permission from a parent/guardian 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 School. This permission shall be used only when the parent/guardian cannot be reached.

Medical Clearance to Return to School

When a student has a significant injury or had an extended period of illness, such as a broken bone, after a surgery, or a hospitalization; *a physician's note must be provided clearing the child to attend classes and listing any restrictions for attendance.*

If your child has a communicable disease (including but not limited to: German measles, infectious mononucleosis, infectious hepatitis, measles, mumps, tuberculosis, poliomyelitis, ringworm, scarlet fever, whooping cough, diphtheria, and meningitis), you are responsible for reporting it to the State Health Department. Your child will need a physician's note stating that the child is cleared to return to nature School classes before attendance will be allowed. Physician note must also list any restrictions for attendance.



These are the diseases we MUST report to State of WI if there is a case in our school community:

- Mumps
- Gastroenteritis, Bacterial
 - Including:
 - Campylobacter
 - Salmonella
 - Shigella
 - E.coli
- Gastroenteritis, Parasitic
 - Including:
 - Cryptosporidium
 - Giardia
- Outbreaks, confirmed or suspected illness:
 - Foodborne
 - waterborne
- Hepatitis A
- Measles
- Rubella
- Pertussis (whooping cough, caused by any Bordetella infection)
- Varicella (Chickenpox)
- Bacterial Meningitis
- STDs

Additional Reporting:

- Botulism (Clostridium botulinum) (including foodborne, infant, wound, and other)
- Cholera (Vibrio cholera) Diphtheria (Corynebacterium diphtheria)
- Haemophilus influenzae invasive disease, (including epiglottitis)
- Hantavirus infection
- Meningococcal disease (Neisseria meningitidis)
- Middle Eastern Respiratory Syndrome-associated Coronavirus (MERS-CoV)
- Monkeypox
- Plague (Yersinia pestis)
- Poliovirus infection (paralytic or nonparalytic)
- Primary Amebic Meningoencephalitis (PAM) (Naegleria fowleri)
- Rabies (human, animal)
- Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome-associated Coronavirus (SARS-CoV)
- Smallpox
- Tuberculosis
- Yellow fever



Health

Health records are kept on all children enrolled in the program and are due before starting at the Nature School. These records must be renewed every two years for children over the age of three.

In the event of a medical emergency requiring immediate medical attention, we will call 911 to request police or ambulance service. We will then call the parent/guardian or the emergency contact person if the parent cannot be reached. The child will be transported to the health facility listed on their enrollment form or to the closest emergency treatment center. If a child is transported to a medical facility, a staff member will accompany them. Staff members maintain certification in infant/child CPR/AED and First Aid and use the procedures learned to care for medical emergencies and/or injuries not requiring immediate medical attention. Teachers always carry First Aid kits with them. First Aid supplies and an AED are available in the main Nature Center building.

Emergency Numbers

Phone numbers to contact police, fire, poison control, and child protective services are posted in each indoor classroom. 911 will be used for any emergency. Emergency contacts for each student are loaded into class cell phones and each teacher also has a written list.

Medical Logs

Injuries are recorded in each classroom's medical log and parents/guardians are informed of the injury. This log serves as the recording log for any minor injury a child may receive while attending the Nature School. The medical logs are reviewed and signed by the Nature School Director every 6 months.

Hand Washing Procedure

To help reduce the risk of transmission of infectious diseases, licensing standards require that all children wash their hands upon entering the classrooms. Staff members follow universal precautions when encountering bodily fluids and wash their hands before they begin work in a classroom. Families should see that their child washes their hands before they join the class outdoors.

All students are required to wash their hands after using the restroom or encountering bodily fluids.



First Aid

If a significant injury occurs when a child is in our care, the child is first assessed for the severity of injuries. If the injury is severe or life threatening, 911 will be called immediately and a staff member will always remain with the child. The parent/guardian will be called. If they cannot be reached, we will call the designated Emergency Contact.

Teachers record all injuries, minor or more severe, in the Accident/ Injury/ Incident Logbook which is kept in each classroom. The write-up includes date, time, place and cause of injury, situation causing injury, any medical treatment provided name(s) of staff present, who provided care and persons contacted.

Our Licenser will be notified of any serious injuries/incidents which require medical attention while the child is in the care of staff of the Nature School.

With minor injuries First Aid is administered immediately. Staff will determine, to the best of their ability, if the child is able to return to class. A staff member will check in with the parent/guardian at pick up or call the parent/guardian to make them aware of the injury. If it is determined best for the child to be returned to parental care, staff will contact the parent/guardian to pick the child up early.

Special Medical Procedure Care

To give your child the highest level of care, our teaching staff need to fully understand your child's medical condition(s) and be prepared for and competent in the care the child needs. If a child needs specific care for a medical condition, parents need to inform the Nature School prior to the first day of class. Nature School staff need to meet with the family and get written information from the child's doctor regarding specific care.



Universal Precautions

Nature School staff are trained in and abide by Universal Precautions whenever there is potential for exposure to blood or body fluids, and/or injury discharges. Single-use disposable gloves are carried in backpacks and are available in classrooms. These are worn by staff whenever there is potential contact with body fluids or discharges such as nose wiping assistance, toileting assistance, or injury. Gloves are safely disposed of after each use.

Each child must have a complete change of clothing (including socks) in their gear bag each day. These are used in the event of a toileting accident or if clothes become wet or soiled during play. All clothing should be clearly and permanently labeled with your child's name so that it can be easily identified. In compliance with state health codes for public buildings, we cannot rinse soiled clothing in the toilets or sinks. Wet or soiled clothing will be placed in a plastic bag and put in your child's gear bag. Please check gear bags daily. The Nature School does have some extra clothing that will be provided to your child if needed; if used for your child, please launder and return as soon as possible.

Classroom Cleanliness

The Nature School indoor classrooms and adjoining areas will be cleaned on a daily basis using disinfectant solutions. Nature School staff is responsible for cleaning countertops and tables and wiping them down prior to and after staff lunches and as needed after table activities. Staff also cleans learning materials and toys and sanitizes them regularly. The hired cleaning service provided by the Nature Center is responsible for the daily cleaning and disinfecting of classrooms including bathrooms, vacuuming of the rugs, mopping floors, and cleaning sinks.

Sunscreen & Bug Spray

In accordance with our State of Wisconsin licensing restrictions, Nature School 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.

Grown-up 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.



Tick Precautions

Ticks are a part of nature and until there is a hard frost, ticks are often found on our property.

Ticks have eight legs as adults and in their nymph stage of development, but only have six legs in their initial larval stage.

- 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.
- 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. We stay on trails to minimize this risk.
- 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.
- We highly suggest adults do a tick check on their child after each class. Ticks tend to crawl onto the lower half of the body first so start by checking there especially between the toes and behind the knees, also check warm areas such as your child's groin area, armpits, ears and check the nape of the neck, especially if they have longer hair.
- Have your child take a shower or bath after school and use this time to conduct a thorough tick check.
- 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.



Administration of Medications

Medication is dispensed at the Nature School 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.
- The medication is in the original container and labeled with the child's name, directions for dosage, date, and prescribing physician's name.
- All medication must be given directly to a staff member so it may be stored in a safe place indoors or the teacher's backpack. Medication is not allowed to be stored in the child's bag/backpack.
- Parents will be notified if medication has been administered.
- The child's medical information is kept confidential.
- If a family opts to not send a physician recommended medication, such as an EpiPen, parents will need to sign a waiver stating they are choosing to not bring the medication to school.

08

NUTRITION

Licensing Code 251.04(2)(h)7





Snacks

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 program. Occasional snacks may be served when they correspond to our curriculum.

Extended Care Snacks

The exception for snacks is given to children attending the Extended Care Program. Children enrolled in this program will be asked to bring a nutritious snack consisting of the following components: fruit or vegetable, grain, or protein for their child to eat. **We ask that all snacks be free from nuts and peanuts.** Water is offered at every snack and staff sit at the table with children during snack and time is allowed for socialization.

Food Restrictions and Allergies

We are a NUT FREE & PEANUT FREE SCHOOL (no peanuts or nut products are served).

Parents are required to notify the Nature School 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.
- Please do not bring in treats or snacks for birthdays, cultural celebrations, or holidays. (See the Special Occasion section for more information).

Snacks/Lunch Before or After School

We ask that snacks/lunch not be served in the Nature School areas including outdoor classrooms, hallways, and gathering lounge.

You are welcome to snack/lunch in the public areas of the Schlitz Audubon Nature Center in the Great Hall or on the Veranda.



Final Thoughts

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 young child will benefit from your support and understanding as they begin to grow outside the home.

