



**Audubon Nature Preschool Acorns Program
2021-2022**



Philosophy of the class and school

- ❖ We are a nature-based, play-based school that honors and appreciates our students in all of their unique and amazing qualities.
- ❖ Parent-child classes are an opportunity for parents/caregivers and children to enjoy a morning of bonding time each week to spend quality time with one another and the natural world.
- ❖ Connect with your child in nature and take time to observe the natural world and discover what appeals to your child at this moment in time (Is it running through the meadow? Quietly observing a bird in the trees? Collecting acorns or pinecones?)
- ❖ We are a sacred space for young children to observe, engage, learn, and grow together within a warm and nurturing community alongside loving adults.
- ❖ Your children will be gently encouraged and celebrated – everyone needs different things at different times. Try not to be concerned if your child is not interested in joining the group at certain points of the class – follow their lead and read their cues. In time, the rhythm of the class will become more comfortable and easier for your child to follow. If your child is disruptive, try to engage them but don't feel badly leaving the group if needed. Your child is communicating their needs and we try to respect that.
- ❖ Every interaction we have with our students is deliberately geared towards building their confidence and comfort in the natural world. We will be awed and amazed by everything we find. We look forward to working with you in this goal.

- ❖ Our parent-child classes can be a wonderful stepping stone to the preschool program in which children become comfortable within the Nature Preschool setting with a parent present before joining drop-off classes on their own.
- ❖ Each week, students will be provided a take home, process-based activity to support further learning at home. At the beginning of the year, each student will receive their very own, “Acorns Box” with a small set of art materials, that we will ask families to bring to engage in projects throughout the year. Activities will range from playdough to water beads, encouraging exploration, fine motor development, and creativity.
- ❖ Weather Policy: Weather plays an important role – we spend our entire time together outside; thus, severe weather may dictate us cancelling class for that week. We will change our lesson plans based on the weather and often spend more time in the meadows and clearings during and after storms to avoid any damaged trees in the woods. Use your best judgment for your family’s comfort level with exploring in less than desirable weather. Most kids have no problem when dressed appropriately but some can be quite sensitive – you know your child best!
- ❖ Cancellation policy: During extreme weather, class may be cancelled. We follow MCPS for weather-related closings. When MCPS is closed or delayed, we cancel class. The long driveway and walkways at Woodend are privately plowed and do not get much winter sunlight and remain icy and dangerous. It’s possible the Nature Preschool might be canceled even if MCPS is in session. This would happen under the case of extremely high winds, active thunder storms, or cold rain, under 45 degrees. If class is canceled more than three times due to severe weather, we will extend our school year by one day.
- ❖ Covid Policy: If ANS must close the preschool for more than 14 days due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we will refund the corresponding portion of tuition for each student. During any school closures of less than 14 days, virtual story times will be provided by our teachers. Should a student need to miss school due to a potential COVID-19 exposure in their household, no refund will be provided.
- ❖ Withdrawal policy: If you need to withdraw from the class, please be in touch ASAP. You are responsible for tuition until your child’s spot is filled. If/when we are able to fill your family’s spot, you will not be required to pay the full year’s tuition.



Covid-19 Response

- ❖ Health screenings before class begins (Online questionnaires, temperature checks, etc.)
- ❖ Full 75 minutes outdoors, classes may be cancelled or shortened in inclement weather
- ❖ Teachers and Students over 2 years of age masked, and distanced as much as possible
- ❖ Regular cleaning of classroom materials, and materials individualized for projects
- ❖ Pause on our open door policy for families, will reassess our drop-in policy for other family members as the year progresses
- ❖ Pause on snacking during the program to ensure safe mask wearing practices



Items to bring to school each week

- ❖ A backpack or a bag comfortable to wear while hiking
- ❖ A blanket for sitting on
- ❖ A change of clothing including socks and undies for your child
- ❖ Weather-appropriate gear (rain boots, rain jacket, etc) for both of you including sunblock and/or bug spray as needed
- ❖ Shoes suitable for climbing, running, and mucking around
- ❖ A filled water bottle
- ❖ Teachers will carry a backpack with first aid and other program supplies
- ❖ Back up masks and hand sanitizer
- ❖ Your art kit for group projects

Items to NOT bring to school each week

- ❖ Cell phones – it's a gift to be able to fully engage with your child in nature during class. Of course we understand emergencies arise – please keep cell phones on vibrate and excuse yourself from the group to answer any phone calls.
- ❖ Due to Covid-19, we are asking that all snacking be done outside of our class time together
- ❖ Toys/costumes from home
- ❖ Clothing with media images – many of our families are media-free so on school days, we ask you to please choose clothing without characters (ex: Batman, Superman, Disney princesses)
- ❖ Shoes unsuitable for hiking
- ❖ Umbrellas

Acorns Arrival

- ❖ Acorns meet near the Mansion at 9:00 and 10:45am and set up blankets in the circle. Due to the need for temperature checks, we ask families to arrive on-time for programs.
- ❖ Have masks on and a pump of hand sanitizer (provided) before joining the group.
- ❖ Before arriving to school, please encourage your child to use the bathroom. A bathroom is available off the portico mansion during the program.
- ❖ Follow your child's lead when it comes to joining the group. Giving our children the time they need to feel comfortable to enter a space is important. Feel free to join the group yourself and your child will join when ready.
- ❖ Allow your child to join the group without insisting on a greeting. If greeting others is important to you, your child will pick up on it from the modeling you provide. Teachers will greet students gently within a few minutes of your family's arrival.



Meeting Time

- ❖ Follows the same rhythm each week
- ❖ Repetitive songs so children can become familiar with them
- ❖ Builds sense of community
- ❖ Helps children feel welcomed
- ❖ Social skills modeled and practiced
- ❖ Greeting song
- ❖ Songs, fingerplays, questions and answers, meaningful conversations, introduction of seasons and what we're seeing in nature

Outdoor Exploration

- ❖ Nature Hikes – the highlight!
- ❖ Repetition helps children know what to expect and helps them feel safe in their surroundings. Following the same path each week also fosters a deep knowledge of the trail and helps it become each child’s “special place” in nature.
- ❖ Helps foster a love of nature
- ❖ Builds gross motor skills
- ❖ Importance of fresh air (growing minds)
- ❖ Different habitats: meadow, pond, forest, field
- ❖ Group games/activities: Please invite your children to join if/when they are ready. There is no pressure for anyone to actively participate. Young children often prefer and even need to watch first and then possibly participate. Many children will simply observe the game and then later recall how much fun they had “playing that game”! However your child enjoys the activity is just right for him/her and there are no expectations or pressures. If your child prefers to observe and you are comfortable joining into the game, please do! Often your child will get a great kick out of seeing a parent playing in a game and it might be the incentive they need to join into the game themselves.



Closing Gathering

- ❖ Review our day together – recap activities, stories, songs, experiences
- ❖ Sing “Good-bye”
- ❖ Pick up activity for the week
- ❖ Picnic area near mansion, children’s garden and pond trail head for lunches and explorations – chance for relationship building and extending the community connections

Important Notes

- ❖ Importance of being healthy, arriving on time, and getting enough sleep
- ❖ Importance of routine and rhythm
- ❖ Dress child appropriately for outdoor play every day – ticks, mosquitoes, poison ivy, weather
- ❖ Teachers will share relevant news articles and child development information via email throughout the school year
- ❖ ANS will stay up to date with COVID-19 best practices and continue to shift programming, if necessary, as the year progresses

Closing Notes

- ❖ View the parent-teacher relationship as teamwork
- ❖ Email is best way to communicate with teachers
- ❖ If need to contact via phone, please call 301-652-9188 x32
- ❖ Please let us know if your child won't be at school
- ❖ Sharing information about child's day is done out of earshot of child – phone calls or emails.
- ❖ Amazing to witness the world through the eyes of children.
- ❖ Each day will be different, unique, and special. Each day will bring brand new experiences to your child and it's our privilege to witness the growth and learning taking place. We'll celebrate each child's journey together and work to create an open, welcoming, non-judgmental space where we can all be present in the moment and relish in this special time that moves so quickly.



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