



Family Handbook

Last updated January 2, 2024

Welcome to Wind Ridge Schoolhouse - a nature preschool in Duluth, MN!

Brave and kind, hardy and free.

My vision for Wind Ridge Schoolhouse is to establish a neighborhood nature preschool that connects children to nature and families to one another. I want to create an environment where children feel nurtured and loved so that they are free to revel in the glory of their childhoods as they play, explore, create, learn, and grow. As the pace of this modern age rushes forward, I want the children at Wind Ridge Schoolhouse to know what it feels like to be timeless, surrounded by friends they love, playing in the Great Northwoods.

I hope this Family Handbook provides you with the information you need to become familiar with Wind Ridge Schoolhouse. Please use this handbook as a reference for the preschool year ahead. I look forward to welcoming your family to the Schoolhouse community! Preschool is an important step in a child's educational journey, and I am honored to be joining you on the adventure. Please be in touch with any questions or concerns you may have as you prepare for your child to join us!

Happy Trails!

Laura Whittaker

Founder, Administrator, Teacher

Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that we gather on the traditional and contemporary lands of Ojibwe, Dakota, Northern Cheyenne, and other Indigenous people. We acknowledge that the reciprocal relationship we are aiming to inspire between children and nature is best modeled in the ancestral and current Native nations.

SECTION ONE: ADMINISTRATIVE DETAILS

Wind Ridge Schoolhouse LLC is licensed by The Minnesota Department of Human Services with a C3-Group Family Child Care License. All families will receive a Rule 2 Summary at the beginning of the school year via the blog. Wind Ridge Schoolhouse is a Cedarsong Way Accredited School.

Wind Ridge Schoolhouse LLC does not discriminate on the basis of gender, race, sex, color, creed, political persuasion, national origin, handicap, or sexual orientation. Wind Ridge Schoolhouse LLC can receive translation services from [Minnesota Translations](#) should a family need information in a language other than English. Services are also available through Think Small Multilingual Contact Information [Language Access Line](#).

Website

www.windridgeschoolhouse.com

Teaching Philosophy and Curriculum

As a Cedarsong Way Accredited School, we believe that children, especially those between the ages of 2 and 6, learn best through direct experience with the natural world. Our goal is to tap into their sense of wonder about nature while teaching environmental and natural science principles. We promote individual empowerment and group bonding. We teach respect for all living beings and how to minimize our impact on the earth. Our lesson plans flow organically from what nature presents us with each day. We use our own Schoolhouse emergent curriculum, which has evolved over the past years from our daily notes and seasonal experiences. We weave many ideas into our curriculum from other nature-based curriculums as well. We document our learning in a class book and daily almanac note.

Teaching Staff

The Schoolhouse teachers are dedicated to their practice and are honored to be your child's guides as they learn, play, and grow at nature preschool. Our teaching team includes Director and Teacher Laura Whittaker, Teacher Laura Judd, and Teacher Lexi Bruno. While school is in session, we can be reached on-site at 218-340-3084. Otherwise, please email us through the windridgeschoolhouse@gmail.com. Detailed information about our teachers' qualifications can be viewed on our website. All Schoolhouse teachers are current in their First Aid and CPR certification and have passed a criminal background check.

Enrollment

Wind Ridge Schoolhouse LLC (a.k.a. the Schoolhouse) enrolls preschool aged children who are 3 years old through the start of kindergarten.

All children are initially enrolled for a trial period of 30 days. The purpose of the trial period is to ensure that the Schoolhouse, the child, and the family are all a good match for one another.

During the trial period either the provider or the family may terminate care without advance notice. A child may be discharged from the Schoolhouse for reasons such as, but not limited to the following:

1. Failure to pay fees/teacher on time.
2. Inability of teacher to meet the needs of the child. I will consult the family concerning how any problems might be solved before ending the care arrangement. The family will be referred to other community resources.
3. Repeated failure to pick up the child before closing time (4:30 pm).

The Orientation Open House is an opportunity for families and teachers to meet to discuss the child's specific needs and to review the program policies prior to the child's first day at the Schoolhouse. In addition, the following items must be completed before the first day of attendance:

1. Admission Application
2. Family Day Care Admission and Arrangements Form
3. Signed Policy Handbook and Service Contract at the back of the Policy Handbook
4. Wind Ridge Schoolhouse LLC's Insurance Statement
5. Immunization Records
6. Photo/media Release
7. Permission to Administer Medications, OTC and Rx

Families are required to keep the Schoolhouse informed of any changes in address, telephone number, email address, or other pertinent information.

Once you have been notified that your child can enroll at the Schoolhouse, a nonrefundable deposit for half of your child's first month of tuition will secure their place in the program. Due dates for the deposit and enrollment forms will be included in your enrollment email. The remainder of your child's first month of tuition is due on the first of the month that your child begins at the Schoolhouse.

Enrollment Considerations

In situations where more than one family is interested in an available opening there are several guidelines for determining which child will be enrolled.

1. Sibling of a Former or Current Schoolhouse Student: Families interested enrolling a younger sibling of a former or current Schoolhouse student are considered first.
2. Neighborhood Building: The Schoolhouse is committed to community building in the nearby neighborhood. Children in families who live within one mile of the Schoolhouse or whose families work within one mile of the Schoolhouse have precedence in enrollment. I want the Schoolhouse to connect families so that they can benefit from the convenient community of one another in many ways throughout their children's growth. I envision neighborhood children building lifelong friendships playing in the nearby natural places. Of course, children from all parts of the city are welcome.

3. Full-time and Part-time Scheduling: Children who would attend full-time have priority in enrollment. Part-time schedules are accommodated as capacity allows on a 3 days/wk (M,W,F) or 2 days/wk (T, TH) schedule. Programming and curriculum at the Schoolhouse is designed for children who attend 5 days per week.

Hours and Days of Operation

The Schoolhouse is in session from September (Tuesday after Labor Day) through June 30. The Schoolhouse is closed for summer break during July and August. When in session, the Schoolhouse is open Monday - Friday from 7:30 am - 4:30 pm.

The Schoolhouse is also closed on:

- MEA Break
- Thanksgiving and the Friday after Thanksgiving
- Winter Break
- MLK
- Midwinter Break
- Spring Break
- Memorial Day
- Juneteenth

Please refer to the yearly calendar on the website for more specifics.

Tuition and Payment

Days of the Week	Monthly Tuition
5 days (Monday - Friday)	\$940
3 days (Monday, Wednesday, Friday)	\$564
2 days (Tuesday and Thursday)	\$376

Payments are due in advance via check, money order, or through our online management system (CORE). Payments must be made by the first of the following month.

Parent Aware Four-Star Rating

Wind Ridge Schoolhouse earned a four-star rating from [Parent Aware](#), the highest possible rating. Parent Aware Ratings are based on demonstrated use of practices that best prepare children for kindergarten. The Minnesota Early Learning Standards reflect the full range of child development and include six domains:

- Social and Emotional Development
- Approaches to Learning
- Language, Literacy and Communications

- Creativity and the Arts
- Cognitive Development: Mathematics, Science and Social Systems
- Physical and Movement Development

The philosophy and curriculum at Wind Ridge Schoolhouse engages all of these domains in a whole-child approach. With the Northwoods as a classroom and nature as one of the teachers, children play, learn, develop, and grow. They are ready not only for kindergarten, but also for a childhood rooted in connection with the earth and an understanding of themselves and their place in things.

As a four-star rated program, Wind Ridge Schoolhouse:

- Is committed to school readiness by using best practices in child assessment, and always working toward making instruction more individualized, stimulating and language-rich in order to promote critical thinking.
- Has education credentials, is committed to ongoing professional development and has volunteered for training in the following: key areas of children's development; cultural and socio-economic differences between families; practices that support inclusion; offering healthy meals; and engaging children in physical activity and active play.
- Develops strong relationships with families by doing the following: sharing assessment results, helping them access family support services, and providing information in families' primary languages.

A primary motivator for the Schoolhouse to volunteer for the Parent Aware Rating was the Early Learning Scholarships. The Early Learning Scholarships give families financial support to help pay for high-quality early care and education to prepare their young children for school. The scholarship amount is up to \$7,500 for a 12 month period. The Early Learning Scholarship must be used at a Minnesota child care or early learning program that is a 3 or 4 star-rated Parent Aware program. Learn more or apply at <https://northlandfdn.org/special-initiatives/>.

Cedarsong Way Accredited School

Wind Ridge Schoolhouse is a Cedarsong Way Accredited School. The Cedarsong Way® Nature Pedagogy, developed by Erin Kenny and Robin Rogers over the past decade, is distinguished by a commitment to place-based nature immersion, authentic play, child-driven flow learning, child-inspired emergent curriculum, compassion scaffolding, inquiry-based teaching style and documentation of the learning. The Cedarsong Way is an award-winning leader in the U.S. Forest Kindergarten and Nature Preschool movement and has received international accolades for its groundbreaking work.

The Cedarsong Way accreditation is your assurance of the best quality outdoor education program. Learn more about [The Cedarsong Way](#) and our philosophies.

Cedarsong Way On-site Teacher Trainings

The Schoolhouse hosts and facilitates [Cedarsong Way On-site Teacher Trainings](#). Teacher Trainings occur simultaneously with regular programming at the Schoolhouse. 6 - 8 visiting teachers will be on-site to learn, observe, and practice in our nature immersion setting. The Schoolhouse teachers will rotate teaching time with the visiting teachers and Schoolhouse children. Cedarsong Way On-site Teacher Training weeks are energizing, full weeks of learning and play! Schoolhouse grown-ups are encouraged to connect with the visiting teachers and have the opportunity to participate in a family panel to interact with the visiting teachers.

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy

Culturally sustaining pedagogy is education that sustains the lifeways of communities that have been and continue to be negatively impacted by schooling. It frames the outcome of learning as enriching strengths rather than replacing deficits. It seeks equity, access, opportunity, social transformation, and revitalization. We strive to acknowledge, value, and elevate the wealth of knowledge found in communities that have been marginalized. We welcome each child's family and culture to enhance, enrich, diversify, and deepen the web of experiences we create together each year.

Planning for Children with Special Needs

We work with the school district in serving children with special needs. The district special education teacher, speech therapists and physical and occupational therapists along with the Schoolhouse teachers and the child's families work cooperatively to meet the needs of the child. Information about how the child is progressing is shared through emails, phone calls, IEP meetings and visits to the classroom. We discuss strategies by working together to help the child meet the goals we have cooperatively set as a team.

Late Pickup Fee

The Schoolhouse day ends at 4:30 pm. Beginning after 4:35 pm, families are charged \$1 for every one minute they are late to pick up their child. You will receive a late pickup charge request via email. This late pickup charge needs to be paid within 24 hrs of receiving the email.

Cost of Living Increase

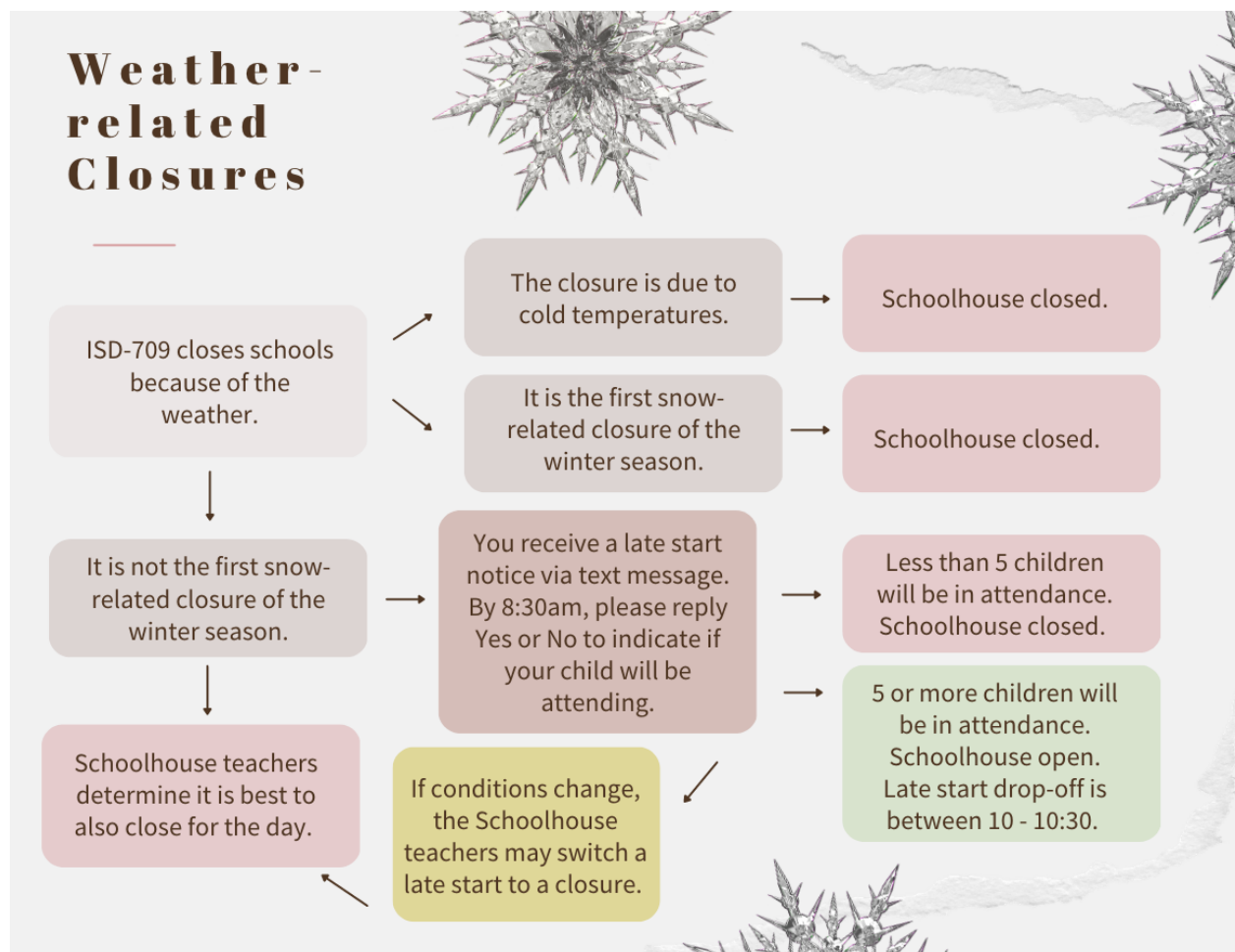
Due to cost of living increases, please expect a slight tuition increase at the start of each new year. While the Schoolhouse will attempt to keep consistent, small tuition increases from year to year, there may be times when the Schoolhouse needs to raise the tuition in larger portions to account for inflation and rising costs.

Teachers' Sick Days

Though we teacher's work together to cover times when one of us is ill, there may be circumstances where the Schoolhouse needs to close. Each calendar year the Schoolhouse has the option of being closed for 5 teacher's sick days. These days may or may not be consecutive. Families are given as much advance notice as possible when the Schoolhouse will be closed.

Weather-related Closures

Please use the flowchart below to learn about weather-related closures at the Schoolhouse.



Signing In and Out

Families must remember to sign their child in and out each day. As a part of enrollment, you will receive an invite to sign-up for our online management system (CORE). You will sign your child in and out each day on the CORE app.

Families are welcome and encouraged to visit the Schoolhouse at any time during the hours of operation. Children will only be released to persons listed on the enrollment form. If anyone other than the child's family or someone who is listed on the enrollment form plans to pick up a child, advanced notice is required. I.D. will be checked to confirm the identity of the person other than a family coming to pick up a child.

Transportation

The Schoolhouse does not provide transportation for children at any time. Wherever we go, we walk.

Child Care Emergency Plan

State law requires providers to create an emergency preparedness plan and share the plan with families/guardians. Families/guardians receive the emergency plan at orientation night, and it is posted on the blog in the first days of the school year.

Drug and Alcohol Policy

There is no use of non-prescribed mood altering medications, illegal drugs, or alcohol during the hours of operation by staff, volunteers, or visitors. There is no tobacco use at any time in the Schoolhouse.

Withdrawing from the Schoolhouse

A 30-day written notice is required to withdraw your child from the Schoolhouse. If less than 30-days notice is given, payment in full for 30-days is still mandatory.

In the event that I should find it necessary to end the contract agreement, the family will be given a two week written notice and payment is due for only those two weeks. Any payment already received that is for beyond two weeks will be reimbursed. Reasons include but are not limited to the child exhibiting dangerous behaviors, habitual tardiness for pick up, lateness of payment or nonpayment, lack of cooperation, or failure to maintain required supplies for children (e.g. adequate outdoor gear).

Notification of the Start of Kindergarten

In order to prepare for the new school year, I send out a form in December requesting information about your plans for the next school year. Please complete it by January 15. This way, I can plan for next year's enrollment and advertise potential openings while families are looking for preschools in January and February.

Schoolhouse Summer Camp

Much like our school year programming, the focus of Schoolhouse Summer Camp is nature play, slowness, and connection. Summer weather allows us to immerse in nature, spending nearly all of our time together outside. During Summer Camp, we offer weekly thematic explorations for the children to engage with should they choose. Summer in Duluth is so precious! We soak up the gifts it has to offer and learn from the season unfolding around us. We hope that the children deepen their relationships with the land, each other, and the camp staff during our time together.

Schoolhouse Summer Camp programming is Monday - Thursday (8am - 3:30pm) for 6 weeks. Participants must sign-up for the entire 6-week session. Our Summer Camp Crew will include 12 - 14 participants.

To participate in Summer Camp children must have completed one year or more of regular programming at the Schoolhouse. To support consistency of care, we will offer enrollment to

current families and their siblings first beginning in January. Should there still be openings, we will email past Schoolhouse families starting with the group that most recently moved on to Kindergarten.

Should interest exceed available openings as we offer enrollment to the groups, we will randomly select participants through a lottery.

SECTION TWO: HEALTH AND WELLNESS

When to Keep Your Child Home

Due to the active nature of the program, children who are not feeling well have a difficult time keeping up and participating in daily activities and routines. At the Schoolhouse, we strive to maintain a healthful environment where children are feeling their best. A major part of this relies on families' cooperation to not bring their child to the Schoolhouse if he or she is feeling ill or exhibiting any symptoms listed below:

- An oral temperature over 99.5 degrees F or an axillary temperature over 100 degrees F
- Vomiting or diarrhea that has occurred more than once in the past 24 hours
- Trouble breathing, sore throat, swollen glands, continuous, persistent coughing
- A contagious condition such as chicken pox, strep throat, pink eye, scabies, infectious diarrhea, or lice

Children need to be fever free (without the aid of Tylenol, or any other fever reducing substance) for a minimum of 24 hours before returning to the Schoolhouse. Children may return when they are symptom free, have been appropriately treated with antibiotics for at least 24 hours, or have been given medical approval to return to child care.

If a child should become ill while at the Schoolhouse, families are contacted immediately and are required to pick their child up within one hour. If the family cannot be reached or have not arrived within an hour, the emergency contact person is called and is required to pick the child up. Sick children are isolated nearby (within sight or sound of the teacher), kept busy with books or toys, and made as comfortable as possible.

Should an ambulance be needed due to a medical emergency, families will be responsible for any cost. Families will be contacted as soon as possible after contacting 911.

Should my child attend nature preschool?

Please be mindful of the following health guidelines as you consider whether or not to have your child attend nature preschool:

1. In the last 24 hrs has your child had a fever, vomited, or had diarrhea? If yes, your child should stay home. Your child needs to be fever-free without the use of fever-reducing medication for 24 hrs before returning to nature preschool.

2. Is your child feeling generally well? If yes, your child can attend nature preschool. If your child is feeling unwell, it will be hard for them to have a positive experience at nature preschool. It would be best if they stayed home until they are feeling well.

We hope these health questions will help you to make decisions about when to send your child to school or not. Thank you for your cooperation in keeping our Schoolhouse community of children and teachers well!

Medications

If requested, we will administer medications. Prescriptions and non-prescriptive medication will only be given to children if families have requested it, and only in the amount indicated. We will not exceed the regulated dosage on the label of any medication without a written doctor's authorization. Should your child need to take medications at school, we will have you complete a form with information and a signature prior to administering medications.

Sunscreen and Insect Repellent

On days where children need sun and insect protection, please apply sunscreen and insect repellent on your child before sending them to the backyard playscape. We have a supply of both in the coat room for your use. Teachers reapply sunscreen and insect repellent as needed throughout the day. We have organic sunscreen and deet-free insect repellent available, but if you would prefer a certain sunscreen or insect repellent, please let us know and store it above your child's spot in the coat room.

Children also need hats that provide sun protection. We recommend dressing them in a lightweight long-sleeved shirt and pants until it gets too hot. This extra layer provides good protection from sun and mosquitoes.

Tick Checks

Teachers will notify you via email, blog, and coatroom notes when ticks are active. (Generally, August - freeze in Oct/Nov and thaw in April - June.) It is very important that you establish a nightly tick check routine with your child. After a cleansing bath or shower, check the entire surface of your child's body for ticks. [Familiarize yourself with the types and sizes of ticks in our area.](#) If you notice an unusual rash or irritation on your child's skin, contact your child's doctor immediately. We have found that the "tick tickle check" can be a sweet before bed routine for families: check for ticks first, tickle second.

Vaccinations

Vaccinations and signed physical forms are mandated for all children enrolled in state licensed child care facilities. The Schoolhouse is required to have records on file showing that each child has been immunized against or has a legal exemption from immunization for the following diseases: diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, polio, measles, mumps, rubella, Hib (Haemophilus influenzae type b), and pneumococcal. Vaccines for hepatitis B and chickenpox are recommended but not required by law.

Children whose families or legal guardians are conscientiously opposed to any or all immunizations must submit a signed, notarized statement to that effect.

Medical Log Notes

All medication administered, accidents or injuries occurring on-site, marked change in behavior or appearance, and any observation of injuries to the child's body received inside or outside of care are entered into the Schoolhouse medical notes and shared with the child's families. As a licensed child care provider, the Schoolhouse is required to report suspected child abuse or neglect to the local authorities.

Emergency Plans

Minor bumps and scratches are inevitable, but we make every effort to keep the children in my care safe through supervision, guidance, and childproofing. We are certified in CPR and First Aid. Minor injuries receive appropriate first aid, and if an emergency injury or illness occurs, families are contacted as soon as possible. For emergency purposes all families must keep contact phone numbers current. If necessary, your child will be taken to the nearest hospital where you will be asked to meet us. If you are not going to be at your usual place of employment or at home, please make sure we have a number where you can be reached. Families are responsible for all costs involved in emergency medical treatment, including emergency transportation, if required.

In the event of a fire, everyone will evacuate the house immediately and gather in front of the neighbor's house near the hydrant. If severe weather arises and a tornado warning is issued, we will proceed to the basement. Fire and severe weather drills are practiced each month so the children are familiar with the procedure. Evacuation and shelter plans are located in the coatroom and posted on the Schoolhouse Family Blog.

Illness Prevention at the Schoolhouse

The Schoolhouse is committed to keeping the classroom and spaces used by students as hygienic and clean as possible. Children learn good hand-washing skills and do so before eating, after handling animals, and after using the bathroom. When hands need to be washed on trail, children use instant hand-sanitizer or a sanitizing hand wipe until they can wash with soap and water. Additionally, they are taught to cover their coughs and sneezes in their elbow, and gain an understanding of how germs spread so they can try to protect themselves from illness. Eating surfaces are cleaned with an antimicrobial spray or single-use cloth after each use. Play surfaces and toys are cleaned frequently, especially during cold and flu season.

Children play together closely and no matter how careful we are, germs will be shared from time to time. The single most effective way to prevent illness amongst our class is for families to keep children that are ill home until they are feeling better. We are thankful for your cooperation with this!

Resting Time

Romping around in the forest and backyard playscape expends a lot of energy. So, each day children have the opportunity for quiet resting time. Rest takes place on mats in the classrooms on cooler days and in hammocks in the Wild Wood on warmer days. Even if children do not sleep, they need this quiet time to reflect and calm themselves during a busy day. Rest time is approximately 70 minutes, and children are awoken gently to join in the afternoon's activity.

To make sure your child is comfortable and cozy for resting time, we provide a blanket and pillow for your child. If your child sleeps best with a security stuffed animal or blanket, that item can come with in the morning and go home in the afternoon. Nap time blankets and pillows are washed at least once per month or right away if they are soiled.

Water Bottles

The Schoolhouse provides Hydro Flask insulated, metal water bottles for each child. They are washed and water is replaced daily. The children are encouraged to stop and get a drink whenever they are thirsty. Good hydration is important because of how active their play is.

Lunch and snacks

The Schoolhouse does not provide lunch and snacks for the students; families are required to pack hearty lunches and snacks (2) for their child each day they attend. The children carry their lunches and snacks in their trail bags, so they need to be packed in a container or bag that the children can manage independently yet stays closed while in the knapsack. We require families to purchase a Bentgo Kids Children's Lunch Box because they fit well in their trail knapsacks, promote independence, are durable, and are well-portioned for a preschool lunch. Please label your child's lunch with his or her name. Snack time at the Schoolhouse happens around 9:30am and 2:30pm, and lunch happens around 12pm.

[Choosemyplate.gov](https://www.choosemyplate.gov) recommends the following as a healthy lunch for an active preschooler: 1 ounce grains, ½ cup vegetables, ½ cup fruit, ½ cup dairy, and 1 ounce protein foods. Please try to pack a low or zero waste lunch to reinforce our commitment to protecting Earth's resources.

We ask that families prepare lunch and snacks from home for several reasons: 1.) Families know their child's taste preferences at the time best. We want children to be eating a hearty, sustaining meal each day so they are at their best, and lunches from home tend to be most successful in doing this, 2.) Teachers are on-trail with the children, and are therefore unable to make lunch and snack in the kitchen, and 3.) Lunch and snacks from home are a good midday connection between families and children. Children look forward to seeing what their family has prepared for them, and feel a family's nurturing amidst their day adventuring at the Schoolhouse.

Foraging, Tea, and Garden Snacks

As we explore in the forest and garden, the children will be invited to learn about and sample foraged and harvested foods like berries, greens, and garden veggies. We teach children to always have a positive ID on a foraged food before sampling and supervise them closely. On winter days, we offer the children a caffeine-free herbal tea during warm-ups. When available, we make forest tea foraged while we are on-trail.

Allergies and Food Restrictions

Children enrolled in the Schoolhouse who have known allergies need to have a completed Student Allergy Information Form on file. Additionally, prior to care, the families and teachers meet to discuss the child's allergy(ies) and needs so that a safe environment can be provided.

Some children have allergies that require a response from the whole Schoolhouse community (e.g. a peanut allergy). If a child with such an allergy is enrolled in the program, the other Schoolhouse families will be informed of the requirements for lunches and snacks packed from home. We appreciate your cooperation with this.

Outdoor Air Quality

As a nature immersion school, outdoor air quality impacts our programming. We use the [outdoor activity guidance for schools](#) to support the health of the children in our care. Please monitor the AQI if you are concerned about air quality levels and your child's health. On days when the AQI is in orange and red, we will encourage the children to take it easy and offer lower-key activity options while playing outside. On orange and red level days, we'll take a break from the outdoor air with an inside rest. You are welcome to keep your child home on orange and red level days if you prefer. On purple level days, the Schoolhouse will be closed. You can learn more about AQI and children at <https://www.airnow.gov/>.

Toilet-training

Children attending the Schoolhouse need to either be toilet-trained or showing signs of readiness to begin toilet-training.

Toilet-training can be a stress-producing time for families and children. All children toilet-train at their own pace, and it is important to approach the process in a way that is encouraging, engaging, and comfortable for the child. When a child who is not fully toilet-trained enrolls in the Schoolhouse, the child, families, and teachers work together toward the goals of first staying dry when the child is awake, and second, staying dry when sleeping.

Routine toilet breaks throughout the day provide opportunities for children to use the bathroom or learn to use the bathroom. Children at the Schoolhouse also need to be able to go to the bathroom on-trail, away from the toilet. Teachers are prepared with items to help a child go to the bathroom on-trail, to clean up an on-trail accident, and to ensure that the child is clean and comfortable as quickly as possible.

Accidents

When a child has an accident while at the Schoolhouse, they are cleaned up as quickly as possible and changed into their additional clothes. Families need to provide a complete change of clothes and make sure that used items are replaced for the next day of care. Soiled items are contained in a sealed plastic bag and stored on the child's coat room hook for laundering at home.

Children are never shamed or punished for having an accident. Instead, they are comforted, reassured, and encouraged to come up with a plan to avoid an accident next time.

SECTION THREE: COMMUNICATION, ROUTINES, AND NATURE PLAY

Family Communication

Communication between families and teachers is an important part of a student's success. There are several ways that we communicate with families whose children are enrolled at the Schoolhouse.

1. Monthly emails: At the beginning of each month I send out an email with information about the month's learning theme and other announcements.
2. Website: The website is kept up to date with the current Wind Chime newsletter, calendar, forms, and handbook.
3. CORE alliance online management system: Most forms and some communication are accessed through CORE. You will receive information about downloading the app upon enrollment.
4. Schoolhouse blog: Families at the Schoolhouse are invited to participate in a private blog where we post pictures from the day and share other announcements as needed. families are welcome to converse and connect with each other there. The blog is updated in the early afternoon.
5. Drop-off and pick-up conversations: Though these conversations are quick, we try to connect with you everyday at drop-off and pick-up so we can chat about the day's happenings.
6. Phone: A call, voicemail, or text message is the best way to get a hold of us during the day. Otherwise, please email us through the windridgeschoolhouse@gmail.com.
Note: Because guiding young children requires mindfulness, vigilant supervision, and being present in the moment, teachers' phones are tucked away. We carry them with for emergencies and for photo documentation, but interactions with and watchfulness of the children is the first priority. This means that we may not be available to answer messages until the early afternoon. If you need to get in touch quickly, please call rather than sending a text message. Thank you for your understanding.
7. Conference: At least twice per year we schedule a conference. We use several assessment tools to monitor your child's growth and development: Redleaf Press Developmental Assessment, the Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA) Preschool 2nd Edition, and Get Set For School Kindergarten Readiness. These tools

will be a part of our conference together. If you would like more frequent conferences, please let me know.

8. Student Observation Forms: These forms give us an opportunity to touch base on a child's progress in between conferences.
9. Schoolhouse Family gatherings: We strive to create a community among the Schoolhouse families. There are three family gatherings for the children to share their Schoolhouse experiences with their families and for families to connect with each other and build relationships. The family gatherings are a September Apple Press, a December Winter Solstice Candlelight Snowshoe and Cocoa Party, and a June Graduation, Picnic, and Hike. I also provide a directory for families to connect with each other and nourish their children's friendships.

Grievance Procedure

If you have concerns about anything that occurs at the Schoolhouse, please let me know immediately and I will schedule a time when we can meet and discuss your concerns. I will consider your concerns, and let you know in writing how I will address them.

Student Communication and Discipline

As nature-based teachers we are committed to inspiring and teaching respect for the Earth and all its creatures. This includes modeling and fostering respect for self and for others at all times. We discourage competitiveness in favor of cooperative activities, guiding children into co-creative adventures.

Preschool aged children are focused on how to socialize with each other, so communication is an important part of our work together. Teachers model positive communication and guide children as they learn about communicating with each other. We aspire to help children learn to communicate their thoughts, needs, wants, and feelings so that they can engage fully with those around them.

As children learn about how they want to act in a group, they sometimes try on new behaviors that they have observed. Preschool aged children are also learning to manage their energy. They are in the early stages of learning about who they are, how they act, and the fabric of their character - those attributes about them that make them who they are. They actively reflect about what they have seen and how they have behaved. With all of these developmental activities interwoven in a child's outward behavior, we find that a punishment model is not an appropriate way to manage behavior.

Instead we use a positive reinforcement discipline model that includes modeling, communication, boundary setting, reflection, preparation, and practice. The ultimate goal of our discipline style is to help children develop self-regulation so that they are in control of how they would like to behave. We empower children in learning how to work with others while simultaneously enhancing their individuality. We speak respectfully to children and model appropriate responses to the range of their emotions.

Nurturing Touch

Physical touching is an important part of the care and nurturing of young children. Children feel loved, accepted, and supported through touch by nurturing adults and peers. Nurturing touch is necessary for every child's emotional growth. Affectionate nurturing includes: hugging, holding on lap, rocking, carrying, patting or rubbing backs, and hand holding. We are sensitive to children's requests for physical interaction and responses, and we model appropriate nurturing touches. Children are taught to respect adults' and other children's touch preferences.

Except for safety or cleansing, children always have the right to refuse touch. Safety and cleansing touch may include assisting with face and hand washing, nose wiping, assisting with toileting in the case of illness or accident, assisting with necessary clothing changes, and first aid treatment. Physical intervention occurs when necessary for the safety of children and the teacher, or to provide the least restrictive guidance necessary in a given situation. Children are taught through assisted interactions, modeling, and verbal guidance to use words and problem solving skills rather than physical reactions to settle their differences with others.

Nature Play Inside, Outside, and Beyond

Nature play is a critical part of human development. Playing in trees, forests, and with nature provides a safe space to assess physical risk, an environment to nurture good mental health, and promotes overall good physical health through activity. At the Schoolhouse, nature play is a primary focus.

Inside the classroom, children play with natural elements like rocks, sticks, baskets, blocks, and other loose parts. The manufactured toys and books in the classroom space are intentionally chosen to be open-ended, not associated with a brand, and linked to the same skill-development that happens during outdoor nature play. The art and craft projects, songs, movement, math, literacy, and other learning we do are connected to nature. Because young children learn through experience, the natural world provides a learning environment that creates an excellent foundation for further academics.

Outside in the backyard, the children play in a natural playscape that includes a gathering area, walkways through the garden, a barrel and pump, flower gardens, grassy open areas for large motor play, bird feeders, natural percussion area, sand pit, big climbing boulders, lookout over Lake Superior, veggie garden/compost, tree parts, forts, sliding hills, and most importantly, gates with quick access to the Superior Hiking Trail for adventures beyond.

Beyond on the trails, children hike or snowshoe on the Superior Hiking Trail, explore in the Little Creek, free play on the bedrock, and explore amongst the trees. It takes time to build a trust-level and teacher-student relationship for the children to feel safe and comfortable to play and explore in the beyond.

Safety On-trail

Children at the Schoolhouse spend part of most days on-trail hiking, exploring, learning, and playing in the neighboring forest. We are fortunate to have access to the diverse and beautiful parks and trails near Enger Tower including Enger Park, Twin Ponds, the Duluth Traverse, and the Superior Hiking Trail.

The parks and trails that we use are public. Therefore, we cross paths with others from time to time. The children at the Schoolhouse look forward to on-trail greetings, and learn to be courteous travelers.

While we are on-trail, teachers wear a backpack with a cell phone, a comprehensive first aid kit, medications children may need in case of emergency (e.g. EpiPen), a snack, on-trail bathroom supplies, hand sanitizer and/or wipes, and extra water. Because other people and animals use the trails and parks, we may come across animal droppings, dangerous litter (e.g. broken glass), or other unexpected encounters. We use the trails frequently and do our best to keep them free of hazards as well as teach the children about what to do should they come across something unfamiliar on-trail. Additionally, when we stop to free play on-trail, teachers check the area first before the children begin their play.

When we are headed to play at Twin Ponds or when water is high at the Little Creek, the children are not allowed to go in over their knees. If we are going paddling, the children wear Schoolhouse-provided life jackets.

Parking and Street Safety

Please do not use neighbors driveways to turn-around in. When the Whittaker's car is not in their parking spot by the white shed, you are welcome to park there for drop-off or use it to turn-around in. Note that alternate side parking is in effect on W. 5th St. However, because we are concerned about traffic speeds on W. 5th St., we don't mind when you park briefly on both sides of the road during drop-off and pick-up. We have noticed that passing cars are more cautious and drive slower when Schoolhouse grown-ups are parked on both sides of the road. Please keep close watch of your child near the street.

Drop-off and Morning Gear Set-up

We appreciate your cooperation in helping your child get off to a good start for their school day. In the coat room, please sign your child in and pack their lunch/snacks in their knapsack or place your child's lunch/snacks on the shelf above their cubby spot if it is not knapsack season.

We start our days outside. Assist your child to get appropriate gear on for an outside play session in the backyard playscape to start their day. The "what to wear wall" in the coatroom has photos of the required gear each child needs to wear each morning. This may include putting on their rain suits. Walk around the porch to the brick patio in the backyard where a teacher will meet you. Say goodbye to your child on the brick patio (fairy ring) and send them off to play.

Saying goodbye to a family in the morning can be difficult for children initially and at different developmental phases. We recommend that you and your child decide on a fun, loving, and brief goodbye routine ahead of time. We are happy to help with goodbye strategies, and we always have a snuggle and reassurance ready for children who are struggling to say goodbye in the morning. This is a part of learning independence that needs to be responded to with intention and gentleness.

Thank you so much for your help and cooperation with drop-off and morning gear setup!

Coatroom Cubby Spots

Children who attend the Schoolhouse full-time have their own coatroom hook and cubby. Children who attend the Schoolhouse part-time may share a hook and cubby with the child that attends on the alternate days. In this case, part-time students need to clear their cubby spaces and hooks each afternoon at pick-up so it is available for the other child the next day.

Pick-up Time

Preschool pick-up times tend to be very busy transitions. At the Schoolhouse pick-up time is from 4:00 - 4:30 pm. This staggered time allows for families to use the small coat room space to gather their child's things in smaller groups rather than all at once. When you arrive to pick-up your child, he or she will be engaged in free play in the playscape. Please wait on the brick patio (fairy ring) for a teacher to bring your child to you. By having families stay on the fairy ring, the play in progress is not interrupted. After your child has connected with you on the fairy ring, it is time for a snuggle on the snuggle step and a visit to the coatroom to gather items to bring home. Once you are on the snuggle step, supervision of your child is transferred back to you. This routine helps to make pickup time predictable, reconnecting, and swift. Please keep close watch of your child as you go to the coatroom and depart from the Schoolhouse, especially near the street.

Sample Daily Rhythm

7:30 am	Drop-off, morning provocation, free play in the backyard playscape, and getting trail ready
8:30 am	Depart to go on-trail On-trail time is responsive to the children's interests and rhythms and includes morning snack, tea time, authentic child-led free play in nature, documentation book activities, impromptu nature lessons, book reading, hiking, and lunch
12:30pm	Return to the Schoolhouse and set-up and settle-in for rest
1 pm	Rest
2 pm	Slow wake-up, bathroom, and afternoon snack
2:30 pm	Free play and activities in the backyard playscape or Wild Wood
4:00 - 4:30 pm	Pick-up from the backyard playscape or Wild Wood

Our days vary due to the seasons and the weather, so this sample daily schedule does change throughout the year.

Indoor Policy

At the Schoolhouse, we are outside as much as possible. Children will spend time outside everyday. Because our climate here in Northern MN can be very cold, as the weather cools our rhythms shift to accommodate more warm-ups inside. Snacks and lunches transition to being eaten outside to inside. We monitor wind chill to plan warm-up breaks during our outside play time where children stay in their gear but come in to warm-up. This keeps children safe and comfortable, but also gives them the opportunity to play and explore in all-weather.

Indoor activity options:

- Reading books
- Coloring and painting
- Blocks and natural loose part building
- Participating in weekly theme-based presentations and lessons
- Participating in daily provocation
- Practicing in handwriting book
- Participating in Floorbook activities

Outdoor All-weather Gear

The Scandinavian saying, “there’s no such thing as bad weather, only bad clothes” is true at Wind Ridge Schoolhouse. As a nature-based preschool, we spend much of our time outdoors in all seasons. Selecting quality outdoor gear is a critical part of your child’s success in this program. Be on the lookout for used or new high-performance gear that is child-friendly (since they will be learning to dress and undress for outdoor play). Also, your child will be bending, climbing, and stretching while they play, so make sure that gear is big enough to keep them covered when they are moving around.

Packing the right gear for the weather depending on the season can be complex. The What-to-Wear-Wall in the coatroom will list the gear your child needs each day to be ready to play. We recommend packing a backpack for the week with all the gear your child may need and hanging it at their spot in the coatroom. Also, include a complete change of clothes in the backpack. In some seasons, we recommend two extra changes of clothes. We play with water and mud a lot! Please replace used extra clothing by the start of the next day.

Below is a guide for the gear required for each season. You may wish to purchase duplicates of some gear (e.g. merino wool base layers, fleece pants and sweaters, wool socks, and insulated winter mittens) You will receive a more specific document about gear as a part of your child’s enrollment.

Fall	Winter	Winterspring	Spring
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bog Classic or Neo-Classic Boots - Sturdy sandals or shoes - Merino wool mitten - Fleece jacket - Stocking cap or beanie - Sturdy play pants - Wool socks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Merino wool base layer - Fleece pants and sweater - Neck warmer - Insulated hat - Insulated winter mittens - One-piece snowsuit - Down puffer jacket - Insulated winter boots - Wool socks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bog Classic or Neo-Classic - Merino wool mitten - Fleece jacket - Stocking cap or beanie - Neck warmer - Wool socks - Merino wool base layer - Fleece pant and sweater 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bog Classic or Neo-Classic Boots - Sturdy sandals or shoes - Fleece jacket - Sturdy play pants or shorts - Sunhat
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* Waterproof rain suits and mittens are provided by the Schoolhouse. The Schoolhouse also provides waterproof mittens for wet, cold weather.

Please connect with me if you need to borrow outdoor gear for your child. Over the years we have collected plenty of high-quality gear to make sure that all children can be warm and comfortable playing outside everyday.

Getting Wet and Dirty

Nature play lends itself to getting wet and dirty. We have a drying system at the Schoolhouse for drying the children's gear when it gets wet from playing in snow or rain. We dry clothing when we come in from outside so it is dry for when we put it on to go outside again. Be prepared that the clothing your child wears to the Schoolhouse will likely get dirty, so please dress them appropriately. Please keep an extra set of clothing in your child's backpack or cubby.

Stick Play

At the Schoolhouse children play primarily with natural toys and items found in nature. Sticks are a common toy used because they are a prop which can become anything the child desires. Sometimes a stick is an icecream cone, drill, or microphone. Teachers guide the children to choose play scenarios that create an environment where everyone feels safe and welcomed; weapons play is not allowed. Children are constructing their own understandings and play scenarios for how these tools are being used. Teachers coach students to use and control their sticks in a safe, respectful way.

Barefeet

Children receive important proprioceptive input from their feet that develops coordination and balance. Shoes and boots can encumber this input. In safe conditions, children are welcome to play in the backyard playscape barefoot. While on-trail, however, children always have their footwear on.

Big Body Play

At the Schoolhouse children engage in some big body play which we refer to as “puppy play.” We believe in the value of exuberant, boisterous play to a child’s overall development. This vigorous body play allows children opportunities to use language—both verbal and nonverbal—and learn how to negotiate, take turns, wait, compromise, sometimes dominate and sometimes hold back, and make and follow rules. They are learning about cause and effect and developing empathy. Big body play also supports optimum physical development because it is so vigorous and because children—since they enjoy it so much—tend to engage in it for an extended amount of time.

There are many ways that teachers support safety in big play including establishing known rules within the class so all children feel safe and constantly monitoring (and guiding, if needed) the big body play in progress.

Campfires

In colder seasons, we end our day around a contained campfire at the fairy ring (brick patio in backyard). The sun is setting and the fire’s warmth is a good incentive for the children to gear up for one last dose of fresh, cold air before pickup. Prior to lighting campfires, the children learn fire safety and the rules of the campfire. Campfires are closely managed by teachers to insure the safety and enjoyment of the children.

Limited Media Conversation

The American Academy for Pediatrics recommends no screen time for children under two and no more than 1 - 2 hrs per day of high-quality content for older children. Studies have shown that excessive media use can lead to attention problems, school difficulties, sleep and eating disorders, and obesity. Children are developing rapidly in their early years, and screen time and media input take them away from other activities that promote their natural development.

At the Schoolhouse, there is no screen time. We also limit the conversations children have about shows, movies, or other media. We have found that when children’s play scenarios are based on what they have watched, it often leads to contracted play and conflict. They are restrained from freely engaging their creativity by both the viewing experiences of their peers and the storyline of the media. Instead, teachers encourage them to engage in open-ended play scenarios that are welcoming and accessible to all children.

Birthday Celebration

Birthdays are very important for most preschoolers, and the Schoolhouse wants to recognize this special day* in a non-competitive, non-commercialized, and pressure-free manner. On a birthday, the class celebrates by gathering around the birthday child. The birthday child selects seasonal props while a poem about the seasons they have grown through in the past year is read. The children then sing “Happy Birthday.” The child also receives a keepsake birthday bandana imprinted with his or her feet and hands.

Please do not bring treats or goody bags for the children due to differences in family customs, concerns about allergies, and differences in economic status. If families are planning a birthday celebration for their child, we ask that you either include all the children in the class or not pass out birthday invitations at the Schoolhouse in order to prevent hurt feelings among children.

*The Schoolhouse respects the family's wishes in the event that customs or religious beliefs prohibit birthday celebrations.

Transition to Kindergarten Celebration

Families are invited and encouraged to join us for their child's transition to kindergarten celebration. The celebration happens during the June Family Picnic and Hike. It is a time of both looking forward and backward, and is often emotional for the child, his or her friends, and me. We grow into a tight-knit community, and there are many emotions to process as a child ends one chapter and begins another.

During the picnic there is a short ceremony in which the children graduating are presented with a pair of silk monarch wings symbolizing their metamorphosis into kindergarteners. All of the children receive a yearbook poster with their friend's photos.

Toys from Home

The Schoolhouse classroom is prepared with toys to meet the needs of the children and to complement the curriculum. Though we provide some extra play items when outdoors, generally the natural world doesn't need extra toys to make it engaging and educational for preschoolers. Thus, children are asked not to bring toys from home to the Schoolhouse. Toys brought from home present potential problems in that they are difficult to share and may get broken. There may occasionally be a Special Book Day, Toy Day, or Stuffed Animal Day, when children can bring a special toy or book from home to share with the other children. Please note that children who need a security item such as a blanket or stuffed toy during nap time are welcome to bring that item and use it during resting time or as needed.

Animals

The Schoolhouse has animals that live and visit here. These animals are an important part of the learning that happens.

Lark is our family dog. She is a Golden Retriever, and is an important part of our nature preschool program. She is up to date with all of her shots and vet requirements. Lark is in training to be a certified therapy dog.

The classroom has aquariums depending on the time of year. They contain various creatures throughout the year that the children are learning about. Examples of visiting creatures may include tadpoles, lizards, or caterpillars.

The Schoolhouse hens live in their coop in the backyard playscape. The children collect eggs, handle, and help care for the hens.

The children always wash or disinfect their hands after handling the animals.

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Attachments:

Reporting Policy for Child Abuse and Neglect

Rule Summary for Parents

Child Care Emergency Plan Summary