

Aldo Leopold Nature Preschool

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Welcome to our preschool! We are looking forward to sharing your child's journey through these amazing early learning years with you. We appreciate the time you will spend becoming familiar with the many details described in this Parent Handbook and encourage you to ask any of us at any time for additional information about our programs and policies.

- Aldo Leopold Nature Preschool Educators & Staff

ALNC Mission Statement

To engage and educate current and future generations, empowering them to respect, protect and enjoy the natural world.

ALNC Beliefs/Value Statements

We believe...

- When we are thoughtful about being inclusive in how we engage and educate, we help students to know that nature is for everyone and is a safe place to learn and explore.
- When we engage students in positive, hands-on experiences in nature, their curiosity is sparked and a lifelong connection to nature is made.
- When we educate students, nurturing a better understanding of the world around them, we foster an environmentally literate generation empowered to take positive ecological, social and fiscal actions.
- When we – as Aldo Leopold wrote – “teach the student to see the land, to understand what he sees, and enjoy what he understands,” empowered students take individual actions and create meaningful change – change that is critical to the sustainability and health of the natural world.
- When we strategically and thoughtfully work with community partners, we help them fulfill their goals while increasing our capacity to engage and educate students, creating healthy and sustainable communities everywhere.
- When we care for the land and are mindful of Aldo Leopold's land ethic, we are equipped to engage and educate students about the world around them – empowering them to preserve the land, providing a sanctuary for human, plant and animal communities.

Aldo Leopold Nature Preschool (ALNP) Statement of Purpose

To provide high-quality, developmentally-appropriate early childhood experiences that foster a love of nature and a lifelong, meaningful relationship with the natural world.

Aldo Leopold Nature Preschool (ALNP) Program Philosophy

At Aldo Leopold Nature Preschool we believe that children are imaginative, capable, and wonder-full individuals. Children are ready and eager to learn about the world, the environment, and each other.

The teaching staff promotes the process of learning by:

- Providing both indoor and outdoor environments rich in hands-on materials, literature, and open-ended play time which encourages wonder, discovery, experimentation, invention, creation, and the opportunity to see the results of one's actions.
- Developing whole-child centered (physical, social, emotional and intellectual) activities that encourage growth based on children's abilities and interests.
- Encouraging problem-solving and reflection by asking open-ended questions and providing resources in response to children's ideas, insights, inventions, creations, and concerns.
- Assisting children in their interactions with each other and offering opportunities for conflict resolution and cooperative learning while nurturing a caring and courteous community.
- Appreciating the individuality of children and families and celebrating diversity.
- Engaging each child's whole community, honoring the wisdom of their first teachers—the families and communities to which they belong.
 - As Aldo Leopold once said, "When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect." ALNC's Nature Preschool aims to foster love and respect for the diverse natural and human communities to which we all belong.

To be considered a nature-based preschool, nature must be at the heart of the program. While nature preschools have the same child development goals as any other high quality preschool, the curriculum and educators achieve these developmental goals through nature-based experiences. At our nature-based preschool this means that children are spending a majority of their time (at least 50-75%) outside every day, experiencing and connecting with the natural world around them, learning through hands-on experiences and activities that provide daily opportunities for personal growth and achievement.

Everyone is connected to the land and to each other and everyone/everything is treated with love and respect at ALNP. This includes the process of learning at the preschool and the value we place in your children. The spheres children find themselves in grow like concentric circles outward with love and respect building the connections.

But Why Is Nature so Important?

Nature is an essential part of life, providing us with food, water and other necessary resources; we are dependent on the sustaining properties that the natural world provides. Beyond this basis for life, if we allow ourselves to feel the connection to nature that we are all born with, we feel better. It is satisfying to be in touch with the world around us. Furthermore, we actually reap benefits that far exceed simple necessities, such as overall well-being, improved mental and physical health and an inner sense of peace and fulfillment. Specifically, studies have shown that spending time outside can increase concentration, observation, problem solving and social skills, and instill a sense of peace. Time outdoors can result in healthy, happy, creative members of society. In other words, nature is good for the soul, mind and body.

Young children especially need quality time in nature to support whole child development and to nurture their inborn sense of wonder. In nature you can find many different kinds of structures, a wide range of textures and smells, many animals, critters and plants, numerous opportunities for risk-taking and new

levels of amazement. Nature is a very interesting and engaging place that can maximize learning as children face and conquer challenges that give them strength and confidence. Nature provides a perfect context for learning about life while living a happy and healthy childhood.

This relationship with nature becomes stronger and more complete when we are able to nurture and sustain it early in life. If a child is able to experience a meaningful, nature-rich childhood he/she will likely grow into an adult who has a desire to care for the natural world.

Early childhood is where the seed to everything precious is planted. ~Helle Heckmann

Early childhood education (birth through age 8) focuses on developmentally appropriate practices that cover social, emotional, cognitive and physical domains. One premise is that young children learn best through play, which is vital to the optimal growth and development of a child through all of these domains. At ALNP, we want children to become lifelong learners and we believe that a love of learning can be nurtured at a very young age through play and discovery.

Connecting to nature promotes growth in all of these areas as well. Nature and play are a synergistic union; they are even better together. ALNP provides meaningful opportunities for your child to experience learning through play (inside and, most importantly, outside) and to develop problem solving, social and language skills. The learning activities, based on child interest and expanded upon through educator facilitation, provide opportunities for growth and development along our program goals/objectives.

When you visit ALNP, you will see children engaged in many different kinds of nature play:

- A child making cakes in the mud kitchen is utilizing imaginative play skills and scientific tools.
- A child climbing logs is building large and fine motor skills as well as analyzing risk.
- A group of children building a fort or a dam are experimenting with materials, gravity, balance, communication and collaboration.

Much learning is happening while children appear to be “just playing.”

Curriculum

Aldo Leopold said, “Teach the student to see the land, understand what he sees and enjoy what he understands.”

At ALNP, play-based and nature-based learning intertwine to create our rich, seasonally-based curriculum that incorporates aspects of a few different approaches to education including Montessori, Waldorf and Reggio Emilia.

Developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood environmental education means making program choices that emphasize and support both the individual and collective abilities of children. Academics at the preschool age are about building understanding of how the world works by being active participants in the world, i.e. children learn through play. For example, mathematical concepts like numbers and counting are experienced through activities like sorting and graphing sticks or pine cones on the ground. ALNP uses a combination of activity choices, discovery explorations and specific activities that reflect what is currently happening seasonally in nature; these frame our core curriculum areas of science, art, music, math, language and literacy. ALNP’s thoughtfully balanced curriculum, and significant time outside, is designed to address each child’s developmental needs (emotional, cognitive, physical and social) while encouraging curiosity, fostering love of the natural world, and developing the whole child. Educators serve as facilitators utilizing an emergent or child-centered approach (i.e., educators follow the child’s lead) while maintaining teaching objectives that are process-oriented with both content and developmental goals included. Educators also value spontaneity in activity and take advantage of the

“teachable moment.” We also understand that many people, especially young children, first experiencing regular activity away from home, benefit from knowing what will happen next. We maintain a flexible but structured schedule, with predictable events throughout the day (such as snack and group experiences).

For example, when studying insects, children may act out the life cycle of a dragonfly and “fly” through the forest for creative movement. Investigative, quantitative and analytical skills are developed as we compare, count and study terrestrial and aquatic insects. Teachers model careful treatment of nature and the creatures we examine are released back into their natural habitat. When out of the woods/prairie and back in the indoor or outdoor classroom spaces, we extend our learning and creativity in various ways, such as painting an insect at the art station or creating an insect story as a language arts activity.

Our curriculum aligns with Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards (WMELS) Performance Standards in all areas and also incorporates elements of *A Mindfulness-based Kindness Curriculum for Preschoolers* (developed by Center for Healthy Minds, UW Madison, and Healthy Minds Innovations, Inc). The Kindness Curriculum uses Attention, Breath and Caring as foundations for improving social and emotional skills and attitudes as well as resilience and general well-being. It dovetails well with our nature-based curriculum. Additionally, curriculum overall is a living, evolving tool; our staff is encouraged to explore new ideas manifested from their continuing studies, parent or child input, and other sources.

Preschool Program Objectives/Intentions

The goal of the curriculum and ALNP’s overall program is to help children’s growth and development in all domains. We want all the children who attend ALNP to reach their maximum potential, and we believe that is possible through nature play and being very intentional with the activities and choices we provide. Our thoughtful design keeps the following **Intentions** at the heart of what happens every day:

- Environmental Awareness
 - Show appreciation of the beauty and mystery of the natural world
 - Show respect for nature
 - Eagerly interact with nature
 - Show empathy for the natural environment
 - Begin to develop a special connection with the world around them

- Mindfulness/Spiritual Development
 - Practice acting in a kind and caring manner with compassion (KC)
 - Engage in opportunities for quiet and reflection
 - Express wonder and awe of the natural world
 - Exhibit a peaceful attitude toward life (we all want peace) (KC)
 - Demonstrate a sense of being part of something bigger than themselves
 - Begin to develop mindfulness practices (KC)
 - Demonstrate gratitude for self, others and the world (KC)

- Health and Physical Development
 - Develop large motor skills
 - Use large motor manipulations to do meaningful “work”
 - Develop fine motor skills

- Develop an understanding of healthy living and practice what that means
- Social and Emotional Development
 - Follow rules
 - Interact with others (learn to resolve conflict, join in play, demonstrate cooperation skills, forms relationships with adults) (KC)
 - Develop understanding of others (KC)
 - Develop social problem-solving skills
 - Develop an appreciation of differences and diversity
 - Develop a sense of self (confidence, pride, appropriate risk/challenges)
 - Learn to understand and handle emotions (KC)
 - Grow in independence
- Language Development/Communication
 - Demonstrate an ability to speak clearly and communicate
 - Develop an understanding and appreciation for print
 - Increase awareness of picture and print symbols, including letters and numerals (Develops pre-literacy skills)
 - Develop writing skills
- Approaches to Learning
 - Use a variety of senses to explore
 - Demonstrate creativity and imagination
 - Demonstrate curiosity and engagement
 - Show flexibility and persistence
 - Use scientific thinking and problem-solving
- Cognitive Development
 - Science
 - Demonstrate an understanding of living things, physical properties, seasonal changes and geography
 - Demonstrate an understanding of physical properties
 - Demonstrate an understanding of seasonal changes
 - Demonstrate an understanding of geography
 - Use scientific tools
 - Mathematical
 - Demonstrate counting skills and beginning number concepts
 - Develop an understanding of spatial relationships
 - Understand patterns and classifications
- Aesthetic Development
 - Explore visual arts and enthusiastically participates in art activities
 - Explore musical concepts and activities including singing and dancing
 - Express themselves and their experiences in nature through visual and movement arts
 - Express creativity through the arts
 - Recognize the beauty in nature

*Adapted and used with permission from Schlitz Audubon Nature Center 2019.
(KC) refers to specific Kindness Curriculum components.*

Staff

ALNP staff guide children along their individual learning paths and document child development and growth along the way. Each classroom will have 2 educators per class of a maximum of 16 children each, as well as staff who help cover lunches and breaks. Staff are trained in First Aid, CPR, bloodborne pathogens, Shaken Baby Syndrome and health and safety procedures. Children are under the direct supervision of a staff person at all times, whether in the indoor or outdoor classroom or on an excursion. A background check is required of all staff members. ALNP employees are mandated by law to report to children’s protective services any suspected child abuse or neglect.

Sample Schedules

Part Day (½ day) Sample Schedule

The following is an example of a possible classroom schedule for a part-day program that includes a mix of plenty of play, independent and group activities, spontaneity and structure. (Order of activities varies depending on the educator and classroom.)

Arrival

Class begins outside in the play area. The adult dropping off the child will make sure the child has used the restroom and put away his/her backpack or other belongings. The adult signs the child in for the day, then takes their child to the outdoor play area (dressed for the weather) to join the educators.

Outdoor Play and Group Exploration

Children will play for at least 60 minutes in the outdoor play area, then take a hike on ALNC grounds. Play area activities include, but are not limited to, climbing, water play, sand play, snow play, fort building, digging, gardening, and dramatic play. Activities on the Nature Center grounds include hiking to and playing in the forest, prairie/fields, trails around the pond, the Sugar Bush and the Children’s Shack.

Group Meeting

Children take part in conversation, greet one another, engage in music and movement activities, practice mindfulness, and participate in other whole-group activities.

Snack Time

Snack is served family-style, either inside or outside depending on the weather. Educators and children eat together, converse, share and listen to each other’s stories. Children assist in clean-up and transition to choice time.

Choice Time

Children have time to choose an activity among the different interest areas of the indoor or outdoor classroom. This allows children time to develop and grow in developmental areas through focus and gained competency with an activity. Children may choose activities that include:

Blocks and building, e.g., the use of unit blocks or hollow blocks

Art activities, e.g., painting or collage

Sensory activities, e.g., water play or clay

Science activities, e.g., observing an animal or experimenting with color panels

Writing activities, e.g., creating a book or drawing a picture
Reading activities, e.g., listening to a story or playing with puppets
Dramatic play activities, e.g., playing house or pretending to be a veterinarian
Math and manipulative activities, e.g., completing a puzzle or playing a matching game
Music and movement activities, e.g., playing instruments or dancing to recorded music

Small Group

Adult-directed activities occur in small groups and allow educators to focus on a particular skill set. These activities allow children to ask more questions and allow the educators to evaluate each child's needs and progress (according to the program objectives). This is an opportunity for more concentrated learning. Small group experiences may include activities such as cooking, planting seeds, science experiments or woodworking. Woodworking with preschoolers starts by using simple tools such as hand drills, potato peelers, hammers and nails. Children are supervised closely and trained in the correct and safe ways in which to use the tools. Children will be required to wear safety goggles and to use gloves as appropriate. The use of tools helps children to develop hand-eye coordination, large and small motor skills, attention and concentration as well as body control. It is also fun to be creative in a new manner. (These may occur according to a predetermined schedule set by the educators in each classroom.)

Ending Group Meeting

This always begins with clean-up. It is important for children to feel invested in their classrooms by caring for the indoor and outdoor spaces. Children put away materials they have used and prepare for our end of-class routine.

Inside: we gather on the rug to say good-bye before families/caregivers pick up the children, signing them out in the lobby.

Outside: We assemble in the gathering space close to the building, sing a song, say goodbye and await families/caregivers to pick up and sign-out the children.

Full Day Sample Schedule

The following is an example of a typical full day classroom schedule (only the aspects that differ from the half day are elaborated upon):

Arrival

Outdoor Play and Group Exploration

Group Meeting

Snack Time

Choice Time

Small Group

Ending Group Meeting

Lunch (11:30-12:30)

Children eat lunches brought from home in a family-style manner. As students finish their lunches, they clean up their spaces and then choose activities for the remainder of the lunch period.

Rest*

Following the lunch period, children transition to rest time. Children visit the restroom, find their rest bin, choose a book and stay flat on their back. Children who do not fall asleep within 30 minutes will be able to choose a quiet activity. As children awake, they will visit the restroom and choose quiet activities until the entire group is awake. On nice days, rest time may occur outside.

Rest time at ALNP is important for those children staying for a full day. Cots or mats and sleeping bags will be provided along with a bin to place personal items. Sleeping bags are washed as needed and at the end of every week; cots or mats are wiped down after every use. Children may choose one small soft “comfort” toy to bring from home to keep in their rest bin at school. This item will only be available during rest time. Sleep habits are important to honor, staff will refrain from waking a child unless the family has requested this to be done or in the event that the child needs to get ready to leave school.

Afternoon choice

Once all children have woken from rest, snack will be served. Then, for the remaining class time, children can choose an activity among the different areas of the indoor or outdoor classroom. Children may also be invited to participate in small group activities. Before pick-up, children will put away materials they have used and prepare for our end-of-class routine. They will sing a song, say goodbye and prepare for pick-up. Children attending after care will be helped through this transition by staff.

Clothing - Dressing for Success!

Discovery-based learning can be messy. For this reason, it’s important that children come dressed for messy play and in clothing that does not hamper their free activity. Outdoor exploration requires freedom from restrictive clothing. This includes tight clothing, fancy dresses and costumes that get in the way during active play.

Layers of clothing for changing weather and moving from outdoors to indoors are needed for children to enjoy the variety of activities offered throughout the day.

Expect your child to spend a majority of their time outside every day. We believe that one of the best ways to prevent outbreaks of flu and colds in the classroom is by getting fresh air and exercise outdoors. We will not go outside if there is severe weather (the wind chill is -10° Fahrenheit or colder or heat index of 95° Fahrenheit or above), but we may go outside if the temperature is 0° Fahrenheit (although not for a long time). Children should be appropriately dressed for outdoor play for all seasons of the year!

Clothing needs for each season include:

Fall/Spring: Rain/Rubber Boots with sturdy socks (not ankle socks)
 Sturdy shoes and/or Sandals with closed toes and heel straps
 Indoor shoes (not slippers) that your child can put on independently
 Jacket/Sweatshirt
 Mittens (to fit under ALNP provided waterproof over-mittens)
 Sun hat
 We do not carry umbrellas at ALNP

Winter: Scarf/Neck Cover
 Hat
 Mittens (to fit under ALNP provided waterproof mittens)
 Insulated/waterproof Boots
 Indoor shoes (not slippers) that your child can put on independently
 Wool/Fleece Socks
 Long Underwear
 Snow Pants and Winter Coat (or one-piece suit)

Provided by Nature Preschool

The Nature Preschool will provide Oaki one-piece rainsuits, shared between classes/groups and kept at school. We have them in the following sizes and colors: 3T (green), 4T (blue), 5T (red). These are designed to be worn over children's outerwear, to keep them dry and warm. We will also provide waterproof outer mittens (to be shared) that will fit over snug, warm mittens.

<https://oaki.com/collections/toddler-rain-one-piece-suits>

https://www.polarnopyretusa.com/index/page/product/product_id/19973/category_id/487/product_name/WATERPROOF+RAIN+MITTEN+%282-6YRS%29

There are often discounts on outdoor clothing from various companies for nature preschools. Aldo Leopold Nature Preschool staff will send information on this via email prior to school. Families can also consider re-selling or passing on used items to other families as your children "graduate" from the program or outgrow their clothes. ALNP staff can assist with making connections between families. Please let us know if clothing is a barrier and we will work with your family on finding a solution.

What to do with dirty, messy clothing

We recommend bringing a reusable, washable bag to school, for carrying home wet and/or muddy clothes.

We sanitize and disinfect our classroom materials on a regular basis. We do not wash borrowed mittens, rain suits, or snow pants after each wearing, as too many washings can make them less waterproof. Please remember to bring your own outdoor gear to school every day!

Snacks

A healthy daily snack will be provided once per day for half-day classes and twice per day for full-day classes. Snacks may include water, vegetables or fruit, milk, and cheese, with an emphasis on whole foods. Snacks may also be special as the desires of the children develop to include cooking skills.

- All snacks provided by the Nature Preschool will meet or exceed the nutritional requirements set forth by the *Department of CF Day Care Licensing Regulations*. Snacks will include items from at least two food groups.
- Menus will be posted outside of each classroom for parents to view.
- Children may help in the preparation of foods for snack.
- Educators eat with the children to promote community, sharing and safety.
- If your child has food allergies or needs a special diet, please make the educator(s) aware and we will work with you to make arrangements for your child to receive an appropriate substitute.
- Any food allergies will be made known confidentially to enrolled families (children names will not be shared) so that families and staff can maintain safe environments for all.

Holidays and Birthdays

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

However, we acknowledge that many holidays and cultural events are of significance to our families. Families 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 staff in advance.

Birthdays are very important for most preschoolers and will be celebrated during class with family approval. Families are welcome to join us, and are invited to bring in pictures of your child for each year of their life, along with your child's favorite book from home, to be read to the rest of the group.

It is fun to share a special treats from home. However, for the ease of accommodating allergies and to be able to make the focus about the child and family, we ask that birthday treats be kept at home. At preschool, if families would like to share something special with the class, we encourage them to give a book that will be enjoyed for years to come. We have stickers to put inside to commemorate the occasion with a handwritten name and date.

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

School Year and Session Offerings

Eligibility for ALNP is determined by the child's age by September 1 in the year of enrollment. Children must be three years old by September 1, no older than 5 and must be fully toilet trained (exceptions for children with special needs should refer to page 8 and contact staff to discuss inclusive accommodations). Children cannot attend both the morning and afternoon sessions. The 2019-2020 school year will run from early September through early June. We will follow our own calendar, but will make an effort to align extended breaks with local school schedules. ALNP is a 9-month program and requires a commitment for the entire year. ALNP is closed for major holidays, winter break, spring break, fall and early spring conferences, and several professional development days for educators per year. A school year calendar will be posted online and shared as soon as it is finalized.

Classes are composed of mixed age groups of three to five year olds. We believe that multi-age and diverse classrooms allow for more growth through peer-interactions while promoting empathy and cooperation as part of an overall theme of kindness. Children learn by watching other children and older children naturally develop leadership skills and serve as role models for younger children.

Days of the Week	Times
Monday/Wednesday/Friday- morning	8:30 - 11:30 am
Tues/Thurs- morning	8:30 - 11:30 am
Tuesday-Friday afternoon	12:30-3:30 pm
Tuesday-Friday Lunch Hour*	11:30 am- 12:30 pm
Monday- Friday (full day)	8 am - 4 pm
Before Care	Begins at 7:30 am

After Care	Begins at 4 pm for full-day classes
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**Available only for T-F afternoon participants; exact times subject to change*

Before/After Care

Before/After Care offerings help meet the needs of families with busy schedules. Before and after preschool program hours, children can participate in supervised inside or outside activities, play or relax before or after an active day at preschool. This portion of the day is not part of the Aldo Leopold Nature Preschool programming.

Children may attend Before/After Care by the day or by the week. Children may attend all of part of the Before or After Care sessions; families pay the full fee regardless of the amount of time spent in care. Payment is due at the beginning of the week or at the time of service. For families paying for every week per month, the amount can be added to the monthly tuition bill.

Space is limited so families must contact the Preschool Director, Tara Von Dollen, at 608-216-9376 or preschool@aldoleopoldnaturecenter.org ahead of time to make arrangements.

Before Care runs from 7:30 am until the start of class. For children enrolled in the full-day program, they will be escorted to their classroom at 8 am. Children enrolled in the part day program will be escorted to their class (or joined by the educator) at 8:30 am. Families wishing to drop their children off prior to the start of class (8 am for full-day or 8:30 am for half-day) will need to sign up for Before Care and are required to pay the associated fee.

After Care begins at 4 pm for the full day class. After Care runs until 5:30 pm. Families wishing to pick up their children past 4:05 pm (this allows a 5-minute grace period) will need to sign up for After Care and are required to pay the associated fee.

Inclusion & Access Statement

Cultural

Aldo Leopold Nature Preschool will create a climate where dignity and respect are encouraged and modeled so that everyone enjoys equitable opportunities.. Our staff embraces the many cultures and families in our community and is caring and respectful to all of our families’ cultural and diverse needs. We understand that culture influences every aspect of a child’s development. In our program, staff will refrain from making assumptions and are trained in opportunities to further their knowledge of enhancing their daily communications and curriculum planning. Classes interact with books, music, dramatic play area, puzzles and people which depict non-stereotypical roles and include family cultures and the community around us. We will continue to help our students foster self-esteem and self-awareness. We take pride in having a welcoming, nurturing and caring environment. Language, foods and other cultural input is encouraged in the classroom. We will continue to provide sustained professional development on diversity-related topics that support the mission. Please refer to [ALNC’s Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access Statement](#).

Inclusion

We commit to inclusion in our classrooms. Students requiring classroom accommodations or modifications because of a documented disability should discuss this need with the Nature Preschool

Director before classes start; this includes toilet training related circumstances. We respect the confidentiality of your child and family. If special needs cannot be met in the classroom, then outside help may be warranted.

Students in early childhood settings in Wisconsin are served by their resident districts. If a student who resides in Monona or Cottage Grove has a need for special education services, Nature Preschool will partner with the special education team in the Monona Grove school district for evaluations, observations, and support for educators and families. Students identified as requiring special education services MGSD offers a range of options for preschool-age students that may include sometimes providing support within the preschool program.

Throughout this process Nature Preschool staff will make efforts to continue to provide high quality care and education for each individual child. Parents will be notified before these services are requested. We value working with all parents, as they are an important part of their child's educational team; communication and collaboration with families is ongoing to meet the individual needs of the 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.

Family Involvement

In choosing our program, you have already affirmed your support for the ALNP philosophy. By actively showing your child that you care about the school, a stronger sense of community and trust is developed. Talk regularly about your student's new experiences. Recognizing the important connection of home and school we ask that your involvement include:

- Attending Parent Orientation, held in August without preschoolers, where you will have a chance to meet staff and learn what to expect for the coming year.
- Volunteering in the classroom. Consider sharing a special interest, talent or family custom or food. Talk to ALNP staff for details.
- Attending parent and family activities.
- Being available for a home visit and 2 conferences. The home visit will be arranged at Parent Orientation and will occur in late August/early September. This gives the new student a chance to meet his/her educator before school begins and for you to ask any questions and take care of any last paperwork. A second home visit may occur at the end of the school year. Conferences occur in late fall and early spring.
- Reading newsletters and flyers sent home with your child or via email.
- Communicating regularly with your child's educators and other ALNP staff.
- Signing the Adult Agreement (included with enrollment information).

We welcome all family members including parents, grandparents, aunts/uncles, nannies or other caregivers as visitors at ALNP during your child's preschool class. Please make sure to notify staff before visiting and then check-in with the Preschool Director upon arrival. There may be times when we need to limit the number of visitors who visit our class in one day. We also may suggest that parents/guardians limit the number of days they visit if we feel it is preventing the child from fully engaging with his or her classmates. Visitors may not be allowed during the first few weeks of school to allow for students to acclimate.

We ask that visiting family members allow staff members to manage student behavior according to our policies. Visitors are always under the supervision of ALNP staff and are not counted in staff:child ratios.

No child is ever left alone with a non-staff adult, unless that adult is their parent/guardian.

Families can also choose to be involved by contributing to the classroom needs, play space maintenance or fundraising events.

Parent/Guardians of ALNP children must understand and agree that:

- We go outside rain or shine, and in temperatures as low as negative 10 degrees Fahrenheit (with the wind chill), though maybe not for long.
- Children will get wet and muddy, often requiring changes of clothing.
- While we always do our best to return your child in perfect condition, your child may occasionally experience small scrapes, scratches, bumps or bruises or bug bites.
- Arriving on time for drop-off and pick-up is important for the continuity of programming and for the well-being of the children. ALNP reserves the right to charge a late pick-up fee.
- Young children who are new to social situations may experience conflict. This can be stressful, but it is also an important opportunity to learn how to interact with others/develop social skills/empathy.
- Children need to be supervised by parents/guardians inside and outside when children are not in class.
- Student absences must be reported by calling 608-216-9376 (or 608-221-0404 x0)
- School communications including emails, calendars and handbooks will be read.
- Children will be sent to ALNP in clothes that can be washed.

Adult Agreement (Expectations for all adults- staff, parents, caregivers, visitors, volunteers, and educators)

“When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect.”

Our goal at ALNP is to create an environment of kindness and respect in which everyone is able to achieve their best. The following is an outline of expectations for the adults in our school who all work together in support of the children.

Adults at ALNP...

- Believe we are all invested in the success of every child and our community.
- Agree that nature, play and kindness (through mindfulness) are priorities.
- Understand that kids will get dirty and that’s okay. Agree to support this and encourage it.
- Keep an open mind and ask for help when needed. Ask questions and learn with the children and with each other.
- Converse and act with grace and courtesy in all interactions as role models for others.
- Maintain confidentiality. This includes the use of social media.
- Follow school rules, deadlines and calendars.
- Arrive and pick-up/drop-off children on time and start/end class on time.
- Go through the proper channels of communication when problems arise (this includes talking first with educators regarding any classroom concerns, then with the Preschool Director, and finally, if need be, the Center Director).
- Ensure children have the proper clothing for both indoor and outdoor exploration.

Communication

Communication is extremely important to us, and regular communication between school and home can only improve your child’s preschool experience. We strive to meet the needs of every family to the best of our ability; please let us know what method of communication works best for your family. During program hours, staff are unavailable, except for messages of great urgency, to take phone calls or conduct personal conferences. Throughout the year, educators will keep in touch via phone calls, emails or brief in-person chats at pick-up to share child achievement or concerns.

We ask parents/caregivers to keep staff notified of significant events and changes in their children's lives (such as moving to a new house, the loss of a pet, or a serious family illness) as this has a significant impact on your child both at home and at school. Send a message or verbally communicate changes or special notes to staff.

The best way to stay informed about what is happening here at ALNP is to check your email. Our emails contain useful information about preschool activities and calendar reminders. You can expect to receive an email once or twice a month (more if there are any last minute notifications). Several times a year these emails will also contain an ALNP Newsletter that has information relevant to the entire school. If you choose not to read the newsletter, you may miss important announcements. Newsletters will also be available in the lobby.

Before the start of school, educators will set-up home visits with the families during Parent Orientation. This is a personal time for the family and child(ren) to meet the educator(s) and to ask questions. At these visits parents/guardians can share what their goals are for their children as well as any other information that will help educators to be able to set up the classroom spaces and curriculum to best meet the needs of all of the children. Home visits serve as the start of a strong home-school connection. Although we do feel that home visits are a valuable component of a successful preschool experience, families can choose to opt out and a phone conversation or meeting at another location may be scheduled instead.

Twice per year, ALNP holds conferences with families and educators. Although conferences are for adults only, childcare will be provided. During conferences, child progress related to growth and development is shared. Parents/guardians are encouraged to bring questions, concerns or goals.

Between conference times, educators are more than happy to discuss with you any issues, questions, or concerns you may have regarding your child. Likewise, the Preschool Director is always available either in person, by phone, or through email. Please keep in mind that we may not be available to meet until after school hours.

Other pertinent information such as classroom messages, snack menus, etc. will be posted on the bulletin board in the lobby. A variety of other information interesting or necessary for parents (including ALNP policies and the DCF licensing rules) will also be posted in the lobby so check these spaces often.

Registration Requirement

- Registration Form (includes contact information and is available online)
- Registration Fee
- Child is or will be at least 3 years old and no older than 5 by September 1 of registration year.
- Toilet trained (see page 9 for our inclusion statement)

Enrollment Process

ALNP welcomes all children regardless of race, color, religion, national origin, gender or gender identity or familial status.

To have your child considered for admission to ALNP, you will need to complete a registration form and submit it with a \$75 non-refundable registration fee per child. You will receive a confirmation email that will include the next steps and placement process.

Registration payment includes a one-year membership to Aldo Leopold Nature Center. If you are already a family member of ALNC, your membership expiration date will be extended by one year.

Registrations received before May 12th will be reviewed the following week. On or before May 17, ALNP staff will contact you to confirm your child's enrollment. If more registrations are received than available spots, a lottery process will be used to determine enrollment. In the event that you are not admitted, ALNP will maintain a waiting list and contact you if a spot becomes available. Registrations received after May 12th will be processed on a rolling basis.

An effort will be made to grant each family's first choice for class days and times, however ALNP will attempt to balance classrooms with a mix of ages and other characteristics to create optimal learning environments.

At that time, a \$200 deposit will be due within 10 working days to hold your child's place. Those receiving a *partial scholarship* are still required to pay a deposit. However, a deposit is not required for *full scholarship* recipients. This is a non-refundable, non-transferable deposit that will be applied to the tuition account. The deposit will not be refunded if you withdraw your child from the program.

A complete list of needed paperwork and documentation will be sent to you over the summer to help us prepare for your child's preschool experience. Some of the documentation required before each child's first day of attendance includes:

- Health History and Emergency Care Information
- Child Health Report (must be completed by physician within 90 days after the start of preschool)
- Immunization Record* (must be completed by parent within 30 days after the start of preschool)
- Child Information Form
- First month tuition payment or full year payment
- Adult Agreement

We ask that you complete paperwork (online) as soon as possible and return it prior to Parent orientation in August.

*Please note that enrollment is open to those families with complete immunization records. ALNP aims to maintain herd immunity (a safe and healthy barrier to infectious diseases) for our families, staff and community and, therefore, at this time, ALNP only allows waivers for medical reasons (signed by a licensed physician).

Scholarships/Tuition Assistance

Funding may be available to those who qualify.

See Registration Packet for details.

Tuition Payment Schedule

Upon notification of placement in the program, \$200 is due within 10 working days. This is a non-refundable, non-transferable deposit that will be applied to the total tuition payment. Tuition is based on our 9 month school year; the June week is essentially taking the place of one of the holiday break

weeks. Each month's balance is considered a 1/9 portion/fraction of the total yearly tuition. Payments commence September 1, with subsequent payments due on the first of each month Sept-May. Tuition can either be paid monthly or in one lump sum (discounted).

Late Payment Policy

There is a 10-day grace period; this lasts from the first of the month until the 10th of each month. After the 10th of the month, a \$25 late fee will be added to the unpaid monthly tuition amount.

Discounts

The following discounts may be available to those families who qualify:

- Pay-in Full discount 3% (pay the full-year tuition amount in entirety before September 1 and receive 3% off the total)
- Sibling discount (10%)
- Staff discount (10%)
- Only 1 discount may be applied.

Refunds

Refunds will not be made for absences, vacations or illnesses.

Refunds will not be made for days the school is closed.

Refunds will not be made for notices of withdrawal without required 2-week notice.

Refunds will be given in the following circumstance only (after discussing with Preschool Director):

- An intent-to-withdrawal written notice was submitted 2 weeks prior to the last day of attendance by the family. In this instance the refund amount will be pro-rated for the remaining weeks/days of school for that month (if on a monthly tuition payment schedule) or for the year (if paid the yearly tuition in full at the beginning of the school year) less a 15% administration fee.

Withdrawal Policy

It is required that families fulfill the responsibilities outlined in the manual. As problems/issues arise, be sure to communicate with Nature Preschool staff. When staff members are informed of the situation, most problems can be overcome as staff and families work together. Families who withdraw must inform Nature Preschool in writing 2 weeks in advance of the last day of attendance and will not be refunded the \$200 deposit. See Refunds above for details.

Sign in/Sign Out

Children must be signed-in and out each day. Parking is available in designated spots and children must be accompanied to their classroom (indoor or outdoor) and signed in.

Under licensing rules, only adults listed on the authorized leave-of-care form can pick-up the child(ren). ALNP reserves the right to request ID for any adult not recognized as being on the approved list. If a child is going to be picked up by someone not listed on their authorization form, the parent/guardian must send a note authorizing ALNP to release the child into that person's care. If an emergency situation arises which prevents parent/guardian or another authorized person from picking up your child, please call to notify us of this situation.

If an unauthorized person arrives to pick up a child, staff will attempt to reach the parents/guardians. If they cannot be reached, the child will remain with staff until authorization is received. Once signed out, children are in the care of their parent/guardian and should be supervised by those adults.

Late Pick-up Policy

At ALNP, we understand that issues may arise that keep you from picking up your child on time. It can be alarming for children when their parent/guardian does not arrive on-time. If families are consistently late for pick-up, a fee may be issued.

Snow Days and Other School Closings

Aldo Leopold Nature Preschool does not cancel programs based on weather (except when safety is a concern). Programs take place rain or shine, snow or cold. We do not follow MMSD or MGSD closures!

As a general rule, the Aldo Leopold Nature Center and Aldo Leopold Nature Preschool will be closed and programs canceled if the City of Madison public transit services are discontinued (full service cancellation). Metro runs during even the most extreme of circumstances. However, on occasion, service may be discontinued due to heavy snow and ice causing unsafe travel conditions. Visit Metro Transit or City of Madison websites (or check local radio or TV stations) for delay and other severe weather service information.

Safety is a top concern for families and staff and occasionally we will be closed for unexpected circumstances or safety concerns relating to dangerous weather. The offices/facility may be closed at the discretion of the director.

In case of the ALNP closing due to inclement weather or unexpected circumstances, families will be notified by 7 am via either text or email. Any cancellation will also be submitted to media, etc.

Please notify ALNP by phone if your child will not be at school for any reason by calling 608-216-9376 or 608-221-0404 x0.

Closures for inclement weather are not refundable. If you choose to keep your child home from school, the tuition is non-refundable.

Maintaining Confidentiality

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

Educators and staff will not discuss private and confidential information regarding the programs, fellow employees, families, or children with anyone outside of ALNP. Educators and staff will also not discuss your child's development or situation with any other parents in the program. The only exception to this is authorized personnel on a need to know basis, particularly as it related to mandated reporting laws.

Photographs

Please note that on the Enrollment Form, it states that, "we request permission to use your child's photo and/or video image for use in ALNC/ALNP and/or sponsor and partner publications and community promotional materials. Please check below to provide consent to include your child's image in the materials listed above."

When images are used with consent, we never identify the children by name or by class, and request that others do not either. If you have not given your consent for ALNC/ALNP to use your child's image, we will honor that request and ensure that others do too.

Social Media Policy

We may use social media as a way to communicate with families and share the joys of the ALNP experience through the eyes of their children. Families can opt-out at any time. We ask that all families

honor the rights of other families **and not post pics** of other students on any social media or public domains.

ALNP expects our entire preschool community to abide by the following rules regarding social media.

- Do not share confidential information, internal school discussions, or personal and specific information about students, parents, teacher or staff on social media sites.
- Do not post photos that identify any of our preschool 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 (or any school related dialog) you may have of the preschool or its members respectful. Comments should be constructive rather than hurtful.
- ALNP recognizes that some of our educators, staff and parents are very comfortable maintaining friendships on social media, while others may choose to decline friendship requests on sites such as Facebook while your child is enrolled in the school. This is a professional choice and should not be taken personally.

Child Guidance and Discipline Policy

Spending a majority of each day outside, allows children to expend the wonderful energy of this age group in appropriate ways. Our spaces (indoors and out) are designed to allow for ample space to move and are equipped with plenty of tools and materials, all of which tend to limit conflict. At ALNP and ALNC, adults follow the premises of positive guidance, redirection and limit setting.

Adults will be available to help children solve social problems by serving as role models and facilitating the resolution of disputes following the Conscious Discipline method. The Conscious Discipline approach is a self-regulatory program that integrates social-emotional learning and discipline. In a typical day, you will hear educators acknowledging a problem exists, labeling the feelings being experienced and guiding the children to find a solution. Conflicts are transformed into learning opportunities.

When children are having a hard time controlling themselves, adults intervene in a manner that is educational, rather than punitive. We help children see the connection between their behavior and its consequences while building self-awareness, self-esteem and empathy towards others. Methods of discipline include explaining consistent and clear rules, redirection, planning ahead to prevent problems, encouragement and positive reinforcement, modifying the environment to meet the needs of the child, maintaining realistic and developmentally appropriate expectations, and the use of logical and natural consequences. These techniques and methods will also be used in the event of behaviors such as biting or aggression.

Time-outs are used only as a way to help calm a child who requires space to do so safely. The child will be within sight and sound of the educator(s) but in a more safe space and the child will be asked to join the group when they feel calm and comfortable doing so. A child will not be placed in time-out as a form of punishment. Staying close to an adult can be a viable way to help curb unwanted behaviors and help the child to make better decisions/choices.

Adults are prohibited from using physical punishment, bribery (including the use of food), threats, and other methods that would hurt, frighten, or humiliate children.

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

Field Trips

The Aldo Leopold Nature Center and adjoining parks and are considered part of ALNP's extended campus. Students may take spontaneous and planned or scheduled trips, traveling by foot, through the ALNC grounds, Edna Taylor Conservation Park and Woodland Park for activities under the supervision of ALNP staff. Since these adjoining parks are considered field trips, parents must sign a permission slip at the beginning of the year to meet DCF field trip licensing requirements. ALNP staff will take a cell-phone or walkie-talkie with us on these excursions to allow contact with Preschool Director and/or nature center staff. Child Information Records will be kept in the educator bag and accompany the group.

On these trips staff shall carry emergency contact information and signed parental permission for the emergency medical care of all children on the field trip. The following guidelines will also be followed:

- The staff to child ratio shall be maintained, except that the number of adults accompanying children away from ALNC property shall be no fewer than 2.
- A planned source of emergency medical care in the area to be visited shall be known to staff. In the case of these two parks to be visited on foot, emergency medical care is still Monona EMS.
- A list of children participating in the field trip shall be maintained by the Preschool Director and staff accompanying the children.
- Parents shall be notified in advance of the times and location of each field trip through emailed or verbal communication. Also, a sign will be posted in the lobby or on the sign-in/out sheet.
- First Aid supplies shall be taken on all field trips.

Attendance and Health

Regular attendance is very important for your child to get the most from preschool. When there are frequent absences, a child may feel uncomfortable as he/she may not know the songs, activities, staff or the other children. Friendships are easier when children attend regularly. If regular absences begin to interfere with your child's preschool experience, we will discuss with you possible solutions to resolve whatever issue may be preventing regular attendance.

That being said, there are times when it is best for a child NOT to be at school.

Children are to be kept home if they have one or more of the following symptoms:

- A temperature of 100 degrees F or more*
- A low-grade fever and acting ill*
- An infectious disease
- Vomiting or upset stomach
- Pain
- Inflammation of the eyes with drainage
- Diarrhea (more than 2 loose/watery stools)
- Constant runny nose
- Coughing non-stop
- Lice
- Rash

**Please make sure your child is fever-free & symptom free for at least 24 hours before returning to school.*

You will be notified if your child has been exposed to a contagious disease. It is requested that you inform preschool staff if your child has been exposed to or contracts any communicable disease. Please take into consideration the rest of the children and staff.

Please call the Nature Preschool at 608-216-9376 before 8 am when your child will not be at preschool.

Health Care Plan

Many communicable diseases can be prevented through appropriate hygiene and sanitation practices. Contamination of hands, toys and other equipment in the room has appeared to play a role in the transmission of disease in child care settings. Illnesses may be spread by way of human waste, such as urine, feces; body fluids, such as saliva, nasal discharge, eye discharge, open skin sores and blood; direct skin-to-skin contact; touching a contaminated object or the air, in droplets that result from sneezes and coughs.

Since many infected people carry communicable diseases without symptoms and many are contagious before they experience a symptom, caregivers need to protect themselves and the children they serve by carrying out, on a routine basis, universal precautions and sanitation procedures that approach every potential illness=spreading condition in the same way. With this in mind, the following policies shall be implemented at Nature Preschool.

Handwashing

We wash hands a lot! This not only helps control the spread of infectious diseases, but also helps to avoid reactions for any students with allergies.

Staff must wash their hands:

- When arriving at school
- Before preparing or serving any food or drink even if wearing gloves (and not touching anything before handling food/drink)
- Before and after giving first aid (when appropriate)
- After using the restroom
- After sneezing or blowing the nose
- Before administering medication
- After handling insects or animals
- After any contact with a child's bodily fluids- including blood, vomit, sputum and mucus (from wiping noses)
- When hands are dirty

Children must wash their hands:

- When arriving at school
- Before and after eating
- After toileting
- After sneezing or blowing the nose
- After handling insects or animals
- When hands appear to be dirty

Handling Bodily Fluids

Nature Preschool staff will use universal precautions when handling potential exposure to any bodily fluids including but not limited to vomit, blood, and urine. All staff is required to wear protective gloves and/or eye wear when appropriate. Any materials to be discarded containing these fluids are to be placed in a plastic, sealed biohazard bag and disposed of properly.

Controlling Infection

If a child becomes ill while at ALNP, the child's parent/guardian will be called immediately to pick that child up. The child will be moved away from the rest of the group and made comfortable until the parent/guardian arrives. If parent/guardian cannot be reached, ALNP staff will contact other adults authorized for pick-up. If the child handled materials or other items in the classroom the items will be sanitized to reduce the risk to other students. When performing tasks that involve bodily fluids, staff will adhere to Universal Health Precautions.

When it is determined that a person in contact with the children or a child enrolled in ALNP has a reportable communicable disease, staff will make appropriate efforts to notify the parents/guardians of exposed students. Anyone with such a disease will be allowed to return to ALNP if the person's physician provides a written statement that the condition is no longer contagious.

Sunscreen and Bug Spray

Parents/guardians or caregivers should apply these products prior to the start of class, either at home or outside the building. Please be aware that the combination of several strong smelling oils and repellants in the classroom and hallway can cause breathing difficulties and severe headaches for children and staff. Please use these products outside.

Educators will re-apply bug spray and sunscreen after nap to those children who are at ALNP for full-days if parents/guardians if authorized by parent/guardian and as needed based on conditions/season. If you would like us to use sunscreen or bug spray on your child, sign and date the appropriate section of the enrollment form.

Please bring bug spray and sunscreen to leave in your child's classroom for children that are attending full-days. Half-day participants may also leave bug spray and sunscreen in the classrooms. ALNC may have extra "loaner" supplies to use in the event that someone has forgotten or run out.

Medication and Health Services

No medication shall be given at ALNP except on written order by the child's parent/guardian. A signed, dated, written authorization form is to be completed by the child's parent/guardian that includes the child's name, birth date, name of medication, administration instructions, medication intervals, and the length of the authorization. This form should be updated as often as needed or annually for medication that is administered on an ongoing basis.

Any medication that is to be given during class time will be kept in the Nature Preschool Director's office. Epi-pens, inhalers, insulin, or other medication used in the event of a life threatening situation will be carried by the staff member in charge of the child at all times. Medications should be given only under the following conditions: the medication is in its original container and labeled with the medication name, strength and dosage, the child's name, the physician's name, and directions for administering.

The child will come to the Nature Preschool Director's office at the appropriate time to be medicated. Medication will only be distributed by authorized staff and according to the label and authorization instructions.

Incident Reports

All injuries or incidents will be documented per child care licensing procedures and an adult contacted either when the incident happens (if severe) or notified at pick-up.

Animals at Nature Preschool

ALNP does not currently have any pets in our school or classrooms. In the event that classrooms adopt pets, child allergies will be taken into consideration and families will be notified.

Pets are not allowed on ALNC or ALNP property; please do not bring pets at drop off or pick up time.

Grievance Policy

If you have any concerns that you don't feel are adequately addressed by the educators or relate to educator performance, please contact Tara Von Dollen, Nature Preschool Director, at 608-216-9376 or preschool@aldoleopoldnaturecenter.org.

Resources

Resources for learning more about the importance of nature or play can be found and borrowed in the Nature Preschool lobby. Or if you prefer to access information online, the following websites and articles are a good place to start.

<http://www.bbc.com/earth/story/20160420-how-nature-is-good-for-our-health-and-happiness>

<https://www.wwf.org.uk/what-we-do/area-of-work/valuing-nature>

<http://eeinwisconsin.org/net/org/info.aspx?s=86593.0.0.2209> No Child Left Inside

Children and Nature Network

<https://www.childrenandnature.org/learn/tools-resources/> Benefits of Nature posters

<https://www.childrenandnature.org/?search=main&s=importance+of+nature>