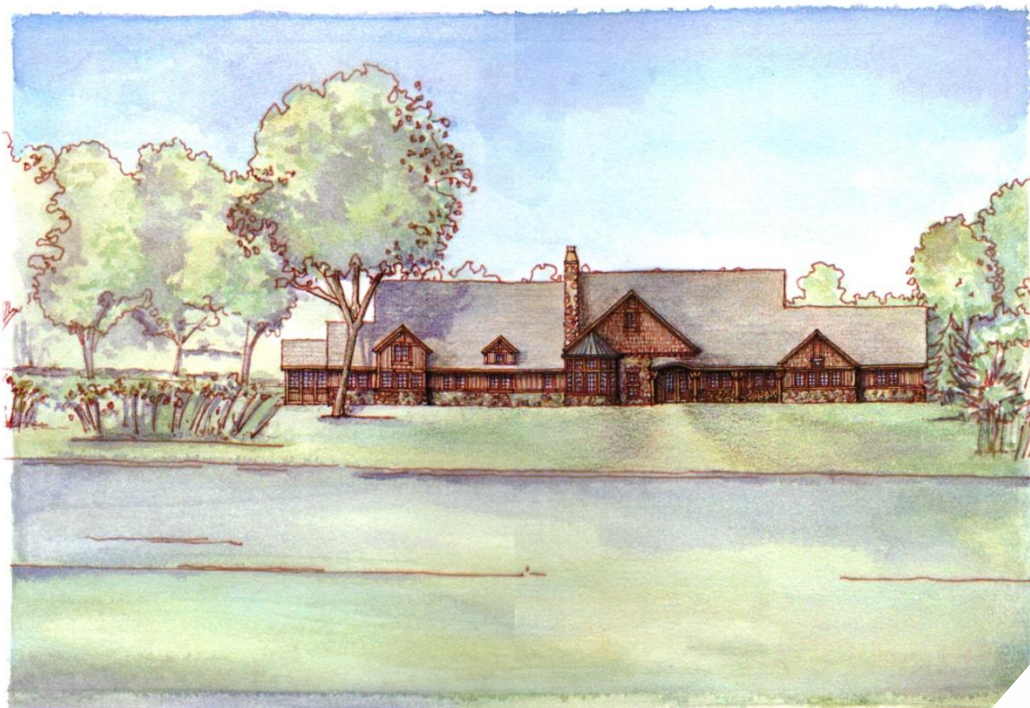




Dodge Nature Preschool Family Handbook



Welcome to Dodge Nature Preschool...

Together we will create a community of learning for the children, families, and staff of the preschool. Building a strong community depends on the partnerships we develop, especially between parents and teachers. As a school, we strive to include, validate, and celebrate each child's family relationship. We welcome you all and look forward to developing a rich and supportive connection with you and your child and to learning from each other in the months to come.

We hope this handbook will answer questions throughout the year regarding our policies and plans. Please read it thoroughly, and contact us with any questions.

*With warm regards,
Dodge Nature Preschool Staff*

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Preschool Mission / Vision Statement

The mission of Dodge Nature Preschool is to provide a premier quality early childhood environment which meets children’s developmental needs, while initiating them into a lifelong, meaningful relationship with the natural world.

Statement of Educational Philosophy

At Dodge Nature Preschool, we believe that children are intrinsically motivated to learn. The teaching staff promotes learning by:

- Providing an environment which encourages discovery, experimentation, and the opportunity to see the results of one’s actions;
- Developing activities to encourage growth based on children’s abilities and interests;
- Encouraging problem-solving and reflection by asking open-ended questions and providing information in response to children’s ideas, insights, and concerns;
- Assisting children in their interactions with each other and offering opportunities for cooperative learning;
- Partnering with families to understand children through the wisdom of their first teachers-their parents;
- Providing mixed-age classes to give children the opportunity to learn from and teach each other, much as it would occur naturally in multiple child families;
- Appreciating the individuality of children and families with an anti-bias approach.

Diversity Statement

Dodge Nature Center and Preschool is for everyone. As stewards of the land, we create and foster a safe, inclusive, and welcoming environment where all can nourish their need for nature. We listen to, honor, and learn from lived experiences and feedback to create a space where everyone feels welcome.

Providing access to environmental education and experiences in nature is essential to Dodge Nature Center and Preschool’s mission, vision, and values. As educators, we are committed to staying curious, challenging our status quo, and changing in ways that facilitate greater diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Statement of Services

Dodge Nature Preschool is accredited by the **National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)** and has received a 4-Star Parent Aware Rating from the Minnesota Department of Children, Youth and Families. We are licensed to serve 60 children (at one time) ages three through five. Class size is up to 20 children. The usual teacher to child ratio is 1:6.

School year options:

MORNING CLASS 8:45-11:30am	AFTERNOON CLASS 12:45-3:30pm
2-Day: Tuesday, Thursday 3-Day: Monday, Wednesday, Friday 5-Day: Monday through Friday	2-Day: Tuesday, Thursday 3-Day: Monday, Wednesday, Friday 5-Day: Monday through Friday

Extended care options (School Year Only):

MORNING BUNCH 8:00-8:45am	LUNCH BUNCH 11:30am-12:45pm	AFTERNOON EXTENDED CARE 11:30am-3:30pm	AFTER BUNCH 3:30-4:00 pm
Tuesday, Thursday Monday, Wednesday, Friday Monday through Friday	Tuesday, Thursday Monday, Wednesday, Friday Monday through Friday	Tuesday, Thursday Monday, Wednesday, Friday Monday through Friday	Tuesday, Thursday Monday, Wednesday, Friday Monday through Friday

What Does It Mean To Be a Nature-Based Preschool?

At Dodge Nature Preschool, children will have special opportunities to learn about themselves, the world and life.

We offer the experiences typically found in child centered early childhood education programs.

Children will have opportunities to:

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

A unique quality about Dodge Nature Preschool is that many of these experiences can happen through interaction with nature.

Nature permeates the children's experiences at Dodge Nature Preschool.

Nature-based activities happen indoors and outdoors; in whole group activities, small group activities, and individual activities; at the preschool site and on Dodge Nature Center grounds; and as planned, teacher-led activities, child-initiated activities, and spontaneous activities.

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

- Make observations;
- Satisfy their natural curiosity;
- Make discoveries;
- Appreciate the beauty of nature;
- Experiment;
- Build understanding of themselves as they relate to others and to the natural world;
- Communicate about nature through art & writing activities, as well as verbally

We offer experiences which may be different from other child-centered preschool programs.

- *Children will have frequent experiences with animals.*
These can take the form of enjoying a classroom pet, visiting animals at the Model Farm, visiting reptiles and amphibians in the Nature Center's Reptile and Amphibian Laboratory, learning about bees at the Apiary, saying hello to the birds at the Raptor Mews, or observing animals in their natural habitat: the woods, prairies and trails of Dodge Nature Center.
- *Children will have frequent experiences with plant life.*
We will grow plants in classrooms and in gardens on our playground. There will be opportunities to visit Dodge Nature Center's gardens and orchard. And there will, of course, also be exploration and play in the woods, prairies and wetlands of Dodge Nature Center.
- *Children will enjoy the expertise of naturalists and teachers who are experienced in introducing children to the natural world.*
With the preschool staff and through visits with Dodge Nature Center's naturalists, children will be introduced to nature by people trained in nature education who are experienced in sharing with children their enthusiasm and joy of the natural world.

Enrolling Your Child

School-Year Lottery Process

School-year children must be three years old by September 1st of the year they begin at Dodge Nature Preschool. Children are expected to be toilet trained. To enroll, fill out an application and submit it. Priority will be given to children who are ineligible to enter Kindergarten.

School year applications become available in January of every year. Placements will be made beginning early February. Please check our website for the enrollment calendar. All applications will be randomly numbered and placed in a lottery to provide a fair process. Currently-enrolled and returning families will be given priority placement. After these placements are made, new families are placed. Applicants who are not placed during the lottery process will be put on a waiting list. Any application received after the lottery process ends will be placed in the order it was received. (Exceptions may be made for creating balanced classrooms).

Once a child has been placed, parents will receive a confirmation letter from Dodge Nature Preschool. At that time, a registration fee and May tuition will be due to hold this placement.

In late August, teachers will contact each child's parent/guardian to arrange an initial conference. This conference allows each child to experience their classroom with the comfort of the parent's presence and allows parents and teacher to become better acquainted. This information helps the teacher and families assist children in making a smooth transition into preschool.

Summer Enrollment Process

Children enrolled for summer preschool must be three years old by June 15th of the year they begin at Dodge Nature Preschool. Children who have attended Kindergarten are not eligible for preschool summer camp. Children are expected to be toilet trained.

To enroll in summer preschool, fill out an application on our website. All applications will be randomly numbered and placed in a lottery to provide a fair process. Applicants who are not placed during the lottery process will be put on a waiting list. Any application received after the lottery process ends will be placed in the order it was received. (Exceptions may be made for creating balanced classrooms).

Once a child has been placed, parents will receive confirmation by email from Dodge Nature Preschool. Payment is due with summer enrollment confirmation. If we are unable to place your child in one of the sections you indicated, we will place their name on a waiting list.

There is an Open House for summer families. Families are encouraged to attend to familiarize their child with the school and meet their teachers.

Documents required by the state of Minnesota before each child's first day of attendance:

- Proof of immunization;
- Health Care Summary to be completed by the child's health care provider;
- Completed Admission Information Forms;
- Information Release Form;
- Emergency Contact Information.

We must have two people **other than** the child's guardians to contact in case of an emergency. Full names, addresses and phone numbers of at least two alternate people authorized to pick up your child are required.

- Records relating to medical conditions (allergies, asthma, etc.) or developmental needs (IEP, IFSP, therapy reports, etc.)

Special Accommodations

Dodge Nature Preschool will make every effort to meet the needs of all children enrolled in our programs. Information regarding your child's needs, interests, and abilities will be gathered at the initial conference before your child begins school. If you believe your child may have needs which will require additional planning or preparation on the part of the school, please let us know.

Tuition Rates & Policies

<u>2025-26 Half-Day Tuition Rates:</u> 2-day: \$3,339/year or \$371/month 3-day: \$4,365/year or \$485/month 5-day: \$7,704/year or \$856/month	<u>2025-26 Extended Care Tuition Rates:</u> Hours: 11:30am-3:30pm 2-day: \$3,258/year or \$362/month 3-day: \$4,941/year or \$549/month 5-day: \$8,199/year or \$911/month
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<u>Morning Bunch</u> Hours: 8-8:45am Rates: \$33 per month per day T/TH - \$594 yr/ or \$66 month MWF - \$891 yr/ or \$99 month M-F - \$1,485 yr/ or \$165 month	<u>Lunch Bunch</u> Hours: 11:30am-12:45pm Rates: \$53 per month per day T/TH - \$954 yr/ or \$106 month MWF - \$1,431 yr/ or \$159 month M-F - \$2,385 yr/ or \$265 month	<u>After Bunch</u> Hours: 3:30-4:00pm Rates: \$21 per month per day T/TH - \$378 yr/ or \$42 month MWF - \$567 yr/ or \$63 month M-F - \$945 yr/ or \$105 month
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<u>2025 Summer Tuition Rates</u> <i>Summer Tuition covers entire 6-week camp</i> 2-Day: \$610 - Tuesday, Thursday AM/PM & Monday, Wednesday PM) 3-Day: \$850 - Monday, Wednesday, & Friday AM 4-Day: \$1,120 - Monday through Thursday PM 5-Day: \$1,460 - Monday through Friday AM

Tuition Payment

Full tuition is due regardless of the child’s attendance. There will be no reduction in tuition for days missed or on days school is closed. A non-refundable payment equal to the monthly tuition is due prior to the child’s first day of school and will be applied toward May tuition only. Summer tuition payment is due at the time of placement.

A late fee of \$25.00 per occurrence will be charged for payments received after the 10th day of the month in which they are due. If payments become 20 days in arrears the Preschool Director has authority to drop your child from our program.

We accept checks, automatic payments and credit cards (Visa and Master Card). We can accept cash, but we do not always keep change on-hand. Families can choose to register for our monthly Tuition Express payments which are paid directly from a checking account. Tuition Express is our preferred payment method. Payments made with credit cards will be charged a 2% fee with each payment to help cover the fee charges.

Scholarship

We understand that some families will need assistance with tuition. This may be ongoing support or temporary help due to a change in circumstances for your family. Families interested in applying for scholarship can fill out the scholarship application form on our website when they apply or request the application at preschool@dodgenaturecenter.org .

Dodge Nature Preschool is a 4-Star Parent Aware Rated Program. Funds may be available from the Minnesota Department of Education State Early Learning Scholarship Program. For more information about these funds, visit <https://earlylearningscholarshipshub.mn.gov/>. Funds may also be available through the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP). For more information about these funds, visit <https://dcyf.mn.gov/individuals-and-families/family-services/child-care-and-early-learning>.

Snacks

We provide a snack for the children each day, emphasizing foods that are nutrient-dense and low in salt, sugar, fat, and processing. We will offer a variety of fruits, vegetables, breads, and dairy products. Children are encouraged to try foods but never forced to eat anything. Children will often help to prepare the day's snack. Snacks will occasionally include foods grown on DNC grounds or that relate to our nature studies.

Servings will be kept small to be non-threatening to timid eaters. Second helpings will be offered. Notify us of any food allergies. We are a Peanut-Free School. Peanuts or peanut products are not served or permitted.

We do not allow items prepared in the home to be shared with the class. **Food brought into the preschool must be commercially prepared.**

USDA Requirements for snack for Children 3-5 yrs
Two of the following will be provided each day during snack: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Milk• Fruit• Vegetable• Whole-grain bread, grain, pasta, cereal, etc.• Cheese, egg, beans, nut or soy butter (not peanut), nuts (not peanuts), seeds, or yogurt
Food Guidelines developed by the MN Department of Children, Families, and Learning. Contact Food and Nutrition Services: 1-800-366-8922

Some families choose to send their children to school with a water bottle. Per Minnesota Child Care Licensing rules, water bottles must be labeled with a child's first and last name. Families will clean and sanitize water bottles after class each day and return them with fresh water in them. Water bottles may contain only water and will be stored in a manner that reduces the risk of a child using the wrong one.

Lunch Requirements

Children attending Lunch Bunch bring their own lunches. Milk will be provided. We ask that Lunch Bunch students bring a healthy, well-balanced lunch. Label the lunch with the child's first and last name. We suggest that families send a variety of small portions rather than large sandwiches. Minnesota Licensing requires that all lunches served at Dodge Nature Preschool adhere to the meal pattern outlined by the USDA.

USDA Requirements for Lunch for Children 3-5 yrs Please provide the following in your child's lunch each day:
6 fl. oz. of milk (provided by the school at Lunch Bunch)
1 ½ ounces of: meat, cheese, egg, beans, nut or soy butter (not peanut), nuts (not peanuts), seeds, or yogurt (or equivalent combination of meat/meat alternatives)
¼ cup of fruit and ¼ cup of vegetables
½ ounce or equivalent of grains

Lunches will not be refrigerated so please avoid sending food that will spoil. For food that tastes better if it is cool/cold, you may want to add a cold pack to the lunch. Children are often more interested in the social experience of Lunch Bunch than actually eating, so some of the food you send may return untouched. We will encourage children to leave uneaten food in their lunch boxes so families will know what they consumed. Please be aware that due to severe allergies, **WE ARE A PEANUT-FREE SCHOOL.** Peanuts or peanut products are not served or permitted.

To encourage good nutrition, we ask that you refrain from sending sugary sweets or sodas in lunches. We also ask that you send food in reusable containers and try to reduce packaging when possible.

Classroom Environment

The Dodge Nature Preschool building is designed to provide the best possible preschool environment for young children. The welcoming entrance encourages family involvement and smooth transitions from home to school. Spacious classrooms allow for active play of preschool children, with special attention to open-ended equipment and supplies that encourage creative and cooperative play. Each outdoor classroom space includes access to sandbox, mud kitchens, loose parts, and more. Our indoor building includes three classrooms and a multipurpose room that are used to enhance children's inquiry and learning as well as provide access to bathrooms.

Highly-Qualified Staff

At Dodge Nature Preschool, early childhood development is at the core of our programs. Our staff has a strong background in education. They hold advanced degrees in various fields including early childhood education, psychology, environmental science and art. They are certified in CPR and First Aid and have also completed numerous hours of in-service training to meet the requirements of NAEYC accreditation and state licensing.

There are two teachers and one assistant teacher in each classroom. Our high teacher-to-student ratio of 3:20 allows for children's learning to take place in small, intimate groups both indoors and outdoors. We frequently partner with local colleges and universities to place student interns and teachers in our classrooms.

Animal Policy

Animals play a large part in our curriculum. We often have visiting animals, as well as permanent classroom pets. Please notify your child's teacher of any animal or other allergies your child may have or other concerns you may have regarding animals. Please note that dogs are not allowed at Dodge Nature Center and Preschool. This includes the preschool parking lot. Please do not bring dogs (or other pets) into the parking lot or pick-up line if they are with you at drop off/ pick up. Typical pets in our classrooms include chickens, box turtles, painted turtles and hermit crabs.

Sibling Policy

Our spaces are set up to best meet the needs of our preschoolers. Not all the materials are safe and appropriate for older or younger siblings. Our living room area is available to families and siblings during regular morning and afternoon class time.

If you bring siblings to school, we ask that you follow these guidelines:

- Siblings should never be left unattended by parents.
- Children should not be playing in the classrooms when teachers are not present, with or without parents.
- Do not bring sick siblings into school.
- If you need assistance bringing your preschooler into the building because of a sick or sleeping sibling, call the front desk at 651-455-4555. Staff are available to escort your preschooler into or out of the building. Staff are not able to wait by your car while you bring your child into the building.

Reviewing Program Plan

Parents interested in reviewing our Staff Handbook, which includes a program plan or curriculum guide, may request a copy from the office.

School Adjustment

Entering a preschool program is a big step for most children. We acknowledge each child's style in adjusting to school and provide the support needed for a happy adjustment. Parents have insight into children's reactions to separation and new situations. At the initial conference, families and teachers can communicate and make plans for school adjustment.

General strategies to support separation:

- Before school, role-play or discuss the routine with your child.
- At drop off, be confident and lovingly firm.
- Once you say good-bye, don't return for additional goodbyes. If you choose to wait, wait in a place where children in the classroom area cannot see you. Multiple goodbyes and lingering outside of the classroom create confusion and make it harder for a child to settle into a routine.
- Some children enjoy having a lovey or comfort object to help calm them.
- Arrive on-time for pick-up each day so they know that you will always come to get them at pick-up time.

Your child may still cry when you go, but the teachers will comfort them and help engage them in a preferred activity when they are ready. It can be hard, but by staying consistent, your child will get used to the transitions.

Arrival and Departure

A parking lot is located in front of our building. The preschool doors will remain locked other than as needed for drop off and pick up. All children are to be brought to their assigned entrance. Dropping off children in the parking lot or in the reception area is not permitted. Do not leave your vehicle idling while dropping off or picking up your child.

Please be prompt for arrival and departure. If you know your child will be late (dentist appointment, car trouble, etc.), please call the front desk to let teachers know. If your child arrives late and their class has already left for a hike around the nature center, you may be asked to wait to drop your child off until the group returns to the classroom. At the end of the class period, children want to see their grown-up(s) arrive, and often become anxious when waiting for a late parent or caregiver. Teachers also need this time for cleaning up and preparing for the next session of class. A "Late Fee" of \$1 per minute may be instituted after the first 5 minutes, payable at the time of pick up.

Anyone who picks up your child must be on your Emergency Contact Form. If your child is going to be picked up by someone not listed on your Emergency Contact Form, you must send a note authorizing us to release the child into that person's care. Please let this person know that they will be required to show picture identification to a staff member. If an emergency situation arises which prevents you or another authorized person from picking up your child, you will be required to phone the school to grant another person the authorization to pick up your child. We will call you back to check the validity of the arrangement.

Field Trips

The Preschool utilizes the Dodge Nature Center grounds for hikes, exploration, and projects. We will take spontaneous as well as scheduled trips to the Nature Center and will notify the front desk when we are gone, so parents can find their child's class. We will also take a cell phone or two-way radio with us on these excursions to allow contact with the office or emergency service providers.

Sample Schedules

At Dodge Nature Preschool, we value spontaneity in activity and take advantage of the “teachable moment.” We also know that many people, especially young children, first experiencing regular activity away from home, benefit from knowing what will happen next. We will maintain a flexible schedule with predictable events throughout the day, such as snack and group experiences, to give children the security of routine. Children are provided with blocks of uninterrupted time to choose an activity. This allows children to transition into their play, lengthen attention span, and develop competency with activities.

HALF-DAY CLASSES

Arrival

Families bring children to their entrance and are greeted by the teacher.

Dodge Nature Center Walking Field Trips (approx. 1 hour)

In both large and small groups, children explore the Nature Center grounds. Activities include visiting the model farm, gardens, ponds, prairie, apiary, boardwalk, greenhouse, and playing in the woods.

Snack Time (approx. 30 min.)

Children prepare for snack by washing hands. Children eat, converse, and enjoy each other’s company.

Exploration Time (approx. 1 hour)

Available materials create opportunities, such as:

- Blocks and building, e.g. the use of magna tiles and loose parts
- Art activities, e.g. painting, drawing or collage
- Sensory activities, e.g. water play or clay
- Science activities, e.g. observing an animal or experimenting with light and shadow
- Literacy activities, e.g. writing in story journals or listening to a story
- Large and Small Motor Activities, e.g. using tools or swinging
- Dramatic play activities, e.g. playing family or pretending to run a restaurant
- Math and manipulative activities, e.g. sorting sandbox treasures or charting birds
- Music and movement activities, e.g. playing instruments or dancing
- Adult-directed activities, e.g. building a fort or planting seeds

Group Time (approx. 15 min.)

Children take part in large group dialogue, listen to stories, sing, dramatize stories, and take part in movement experiences.

Departure

Families and children reunite at their entrance.

MORNING BUNCH

Choice Time (approx. 30 min.)

Children will engage in free play with materials such as blocks, art, books, or movement activities. Some children may eat breakfast that they bring from home.

Prepare/Dress for class time (approx. 15 min.)

Children clean up from playtime and dress for outdoor play as needed. Teachers bring them to their classroom for the start of class at 8:45 a.m.

Sample Schedules (cont.)

LUNCH BUNCH

Arrival and Lunch (approx. 30 min.)

Children wash hands and bring their lunches to the table. Teachers encourage conversation among children while they eat and may read stories aloud.

Choice Time (approx. 30 min.)

Children will engage in free play with materials such as blocks, art, books, or movement activities.

Prepare/Dress for class time (approx. 15 min.)

Children clean up from play. Children transitioning to afternoon class dress for outdoor play as needed. Teachers share songs and stories to end the day. Teachers bring children to afternoon classes and children from morning classes are dismissed for family pick up.

AFTER BUNCH

Choice Time (approx. 25 min.)

Children will engage in free play with materials such as blocks, art, books, or movement activities.

Departure (approx. 5 min.)

Children clean up from play and prepare to go home.

AFTERNOON EXTENDED CARE

Children enrolled in Extended Afternoon care eat lunch with children in the Lunch Bunch program (see above)

Rest Time

After lunch, children use the bathroom and prepare to rest on their cots. Teachers help children relax and rest with stories and soothing music. After 30 minutes (or upon awakening from sleep), children transition out of rest time.

The remainder of the afternoon extended care time is structured similar to the half-day classes.

Snack (Approx. 30 min.)

Exploration Time – Indoors and Out (approx. 1 hour)

Group Time (Approx. 15 min.)

Departure

Families and children reunite at their classroom entrance.

Rest/Nap Time Policy

Children enrolled in the Afternoon Extended Day program will have a rest time each day. All children are encouraged to rest; children are never required to close their eyes or fall asleep. We teach children that resting is an important self-care skill in the middle of a fun, busy day of play, learning, and exploration. If a child falls asleep their body needs to rest to get through the day. Our teachers will support that need.

Per licensing regulations, children will not be required to stay on their cot for longer than 30 minutes if they don't fall asleep. Generally, children who fall asleep will be able to sleep for the full nap time (approximately 1.5 hours). After nap they will join the rest of the class for snack and playtime.

A cot and a cot sheet will be provided for each child. Families should send a small blanket for their child to use during nap time. Children may also bring a security item (small stuffy or blankie) and/or a small pillow. Plastic bags are not allowed for nap item storage due to the risk of suffocation. The bedding will be sent home to be washed weekly and when soiled or wet.

Guidelines For Dressing For Outdoor Play

You should expect us to spend significant time outdoors every day, other than during severe weather. Your child will need appropriate clothing to be comfortable outdoors. This includes coats, snow pants, and waterproof boots in the winter. During muddy seasons, trips to the Model Farm and other parts of the Nature Center require appropriate shoes and other clothing. **YOUR CHILD'S NAME SHOULD BE LABELED CLEARLY** on all jackets, sweaters, boots, hats, mittens, etc. Many will look the same!

Please apply sunscreen and/or insect repellent (if wanted) outside of the building, away from others, before drop off.

Clothing

Discovery learning requires freedom from restrictive clothing. Tight clothing, fancy dresses, and costumes get in the way during active play. For independence in toileting, children need clothing that is easy to take on and off. Children need comfortable, protective shoes with gripping soles for running, jumping, and climbing. Sneakers or well-fitting hiking boots are best.

Clothing Needs: *Please Label All Items*

<u>Fall</u>	<u>Winter</u>	<u>Spring</u>	<u>Summer</u>
Rain boots Second layer Rain jacket Rain pants Light gloves	Snow pants Snow Boots Waterproof mittens Scarf/Neck warmer Hat/Ear covers Second layer Wool/ Fleece socks Snow jacket/ Coat	Rain boots Rain jacket Rain pants <i>*No umbrellas, please.</i>	T-shirt & shorts Rain jacket Rain pants <u>Closed-Toe Shoes</u> <i>*No flip-flops, please.</i>

We know our program requires a lot of gear that families may not have. If you have trouble acquiring gear or cleaning your child's gear for any reason (financial, sizing, no access to laundry), please contact us, and we can help make your child comfortable at school.

We get messy at Dodge Nature Preschool. Dress your child in clothing that can get dirty and allows for active exploration. Bring an extra labeled set of clothing to leave at school, including shirt, pants, underwear, and socks. Exchange this clothing as your child grows into new sizes and when the seasons change. We ask you not to send your child to school in sandals, flip-flops, "party" shoes, or cowboy boots.

Items from Home

Some children may need to bring a transitional object such as a "blankie" or stuffed animal. Security objects from home may be needed, but help your child understand the risks of loss and damage.

Holidays & Birthdays

We acknowledge that holidays are important to children, but refrain from celebrating holidays during school. Nature-based celebrations, such as pressing apple cider in October or creating ice "castles" in winter, receive greater emphasis. Families are invited to share cultural and traditional events with their class (i.e. baking krumkake or making ofrendas). If you are interested in sharing a family tradition with your child's class, make arrangements in advance with your child's teacher.

If your child wants to do something special to acknowledge their birthday at school, they can bring a favorite storybook from home to share with the class. Make arrangements in advance with your child's teacher. Birthday party invitations should not be passed out at preschool. You can find classmates' contact information in your Class Directory.

Illness

One of the consequences of entering preschool is the occasional exposure to illness. At Dodge Nature Preschool we will work to prevent the spread of illness by maintaining a clean environment, providing substitutes for staff in the contagious stage of an illness, and setting clear limits on the health of children in attendance. Minnesota law requires children enrolled in school to be immunized against certain diseases or to file a legal medical or conscientious objection. In the event of an occurrence of a vaccine-preventable disease in our program, we will consult the MN Department of Health for guidance on excluding any under-immunized children.

We also need your cooperation. Please keep your child home when any of the following circumstances are present:

- A fever of 100 degrees Fahrenheit or when your child has had a fever the night before (fevers tend to rise as the day progresses);
- Significant respiratory distress;
- Diarrhea, vomiting, or stomach complaints;
- Contagious conjunctivitis or pus draining from the eye;
- Symptoms of unknown origin such as a rash;
- An illness during its contagious stage;
- Your child requires more care than the program staff can provide without compromising the health and safety of other children at school.

This policy is for everyone's benefit. Recovering children are more likely to pick up a new illness. If children are exposed to a contagious illness such as chicken pox or strep, notices will be communicated within 24 hours of our being notified. If we inform other families about a contagious illness to which your child has exposed others, we will maintain confidentiality.

If your child will miss school, please communicate this information to us before the school day begins at 651-455-4555. Teachers need to know if children will be absent, so they do not delay walks to the Nature Center or other plans until the full class is present. This also gives the office time to post a notice to other families if their children have been exposed to a contagious disease. Keep in mind that we will spend time outdoors almost every day. If your child is not well enough to play outdoors, please keep them at home.

If your child becomes ill during the school day, they will be isolated in the Get-Well Room next to the reception desk. You will be contacted to pick them up. If we cannot reach you, we will contact the people listed on your emergency form. Sick children need to be picked up from school as soon as possible.

Dodge Nature Preschool staff will not administer medications without a signed permission form on file. All medications will be stored out of reach of children.

Emergency Care Procedures

Dodge Nature Preschool staff are trained in CPR and basic emergency first aid. In the event of an accident which creates a need for medical attention, we proceed as follows:

If, in the opinion of the Dodge Nature Preschool staff, circumstances require immediate professional care, we will call 911 and a staff member will accompany the child to the nearest emergency room. At the same time, parents are contacted by Dodge Nature Preschool staff.

Staff will respond as necessary until a rescue squad arrives.

Discipline

At Dodge Nature Preschool we will maintain a calm atmosphere with clear expectations for everyone. Optimal learning occurs when there is freedom for discovery learning, enough structure to allow everyone to learn, and physical and emotional safety.

To maintain this atmosphere, we intentionally design our environment to provide children with ample room and equipment. Conflicts are generally avoided when there is “enough to go around.” In addition, the daily program will be structured to provide enough time for children to feel satisfied in play.

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

When children are having a hard time controlling themselves, adults will intervene in a manner which is educational, rather than punitive. We will help children see the connection between their behavior and its consequences. Methods of discipline will include clear rules, redirection, planning ahead to prevent problems, encouragement, and the use of logical and natural consequences. Techniques which are not used include physical punishment, bribery, threats, “time-outs,” and other methods which would hurt, frighten, or humiliate children.

When a child’s behavior challenges are regularly disruptive to the class, teachers will reach out to partner with families, creating a plan for the child’s needs and connecting with outside support when necessary. In the rare event that a child’s ongoing disruptive behavior does not improve despite the best efforts and has a continuing negative effect on the classroom climate, the Preschool Director may determine that the program cannot meet the child’s needs and the child may be removed from the program.

Family Involvement

Our school thrives with family involvement. We encourage families to stay connected to school in whatever ways are comfortable and convenient, including one-time opportunities or year-long commitments. Grandparents and other caregivers are welcome to get involved, as well.

Parent Partners:

Parent Partners help foster a sense of community through monthly communication, school events, volunteer opportunities, and more. Parent Partners help with planning for fundraising events and education opportunities; lead a book study; or plan a family potluck or playdate. Parent Partners meet virtually once per month.

Ongoing Tasks:

There are some chores we ask for help with on a regular basis, such as washing snack dishes, categorizing books, leading tours for prospective families, or occasional technical, marketing, or “handyperson” expertise.

Special Events & Skills:

We also need help with events throughout the year, such as camping trips, plant sale fundraisers, and restoration work. You will see requests for these volunteer opportunities throughout the school year. We also invite families to share any special talents with us (i.e.: professional photography, wool spinning, children’s yoga, etc.).

Communication

Communication between parents and staff benefits the educational experience of children. Children's growth and discoveries, as well as changes or extremes in behavior, will be shared with parents. Due to limitations on conversation during arrival and departure times, phone calls, email, and conferences will be the primary means used to communicate with parents. Translating services are available to us, as needed.

We ask parents to keep staff notified of significant events and changes in their children's lives. Visitors, moving, new babies, illness, divorce, and deaths all affect children's lives at home and at school. If you are aware of an unexplained change in your child's behavior, please discuss it with the teacher. They may have insights to share with you.

During the school year, teachers send out frequent emails to the families including stories and highlights of the day. This communication is intended to provide a starting place for discussions between you and your child about school happenings. Photos and news about the classroom activities will also be displayed and shared via email. Weekly all school email newsletters are also provided.

We plan several scheduled conferences during each school year to aid in communication. An initial conference is planned for each child who enters the program to familiarize the child with the school and for parents to share background information with the teacher about the child. Fall and spring conferences will also be scheduled. The fall conference is planned for teachers to share information about the child's school adjustment and experiences during the first few months of school and for parents to share their experiences, questions, and suggestions for their child's school year. The spring conference is a time for teachers to share more specific information about the child's cognitive, physical, social, emotional, linguistic, and creative development. Other conferences will be scheduled as the need arises. Parents receive written end of the year reports.

Summer communication includes a weekly all-school email newsletter and a weekly classroom email. An Open House before Summer Camp offers families, teachers and classmates the chance to meet one another before camp begins.

Snow Days and Emergency Preparedness

School is canceled if weather conditions prevent safe transportation to school (including winter weather, extreme cold, and dangerous air quality >300). Dodge Nature Preschool follows ISD 197 decisions with regards to snow closures. (In the event that ISD 197 is not open for service, Dodge Nature Preschool will make snow day decisions.) In order to keep children, staff, and families safe, Dodge Nature Preschool will closely monitor when temperatures will be too cold to safely go outdoors.

Any unexpected closures will be emailed to families and updated on our phone message.

We will conduct regular fire and tornado drills to prepare children for actions taken during emergencies. Every effort will be made to keep these activities as matter of fact and non-frightening as possible. In case of a fire, we would vacate the children to the edge of the playground to give firefighters access to the school. In case of a tornado, we would take children to our storage room, which has been designed to be a tornado shelter. In addition, Dodge Nature Preschool has a written Emergency Preparedness Plan, which is reviewed annually and available for viewing in our common area.

Child Assessment

Assessment is a daily ongoing activity here at Dodge Nature Preschool. Child assessment informs teachers' planning, is a method for teachers to understand the growth and development of each child during their attendance at Dodge Nature Preschool, and it informs parents about the growth and development of their child across all domains.

We use a variety of opportunities to assess children and share that information with parents and guardians. Our assessment procedures align with our program curriculum and philosophy in that they are non-intrusive to children's play, they are done indoors and out, and they are used to help teachers follow children's interests in curriculum planning and setting the classroom environment. Assessment methods are one of the many topics covered during staff in-service training and professional development seminars.

Assessment methods at DNP include:

Anecdotal records- Teachers take notes during class to document children's interests, skills, or areas for growth.

Photographic Documentation- With certain materials, like unit blocks, this is often the best way to document a child's work. Photographs are catalogued on classroom computers and used in child assessment, for planning, and for reflection among teaching teams. Teachers also use photographs to show evidence of children's work to families and visitors to the school.

Work Sampling- Teachers use work sampling as needed in child assessment. Children's classroom journals also provide evidence of their work (writing and drawing) over the course of a school year.

Year-end Developmental Summary- This document is written for families and future teachers. Documentation sources described above, as well as family feedback from conferences, are used to create a year-end summary of a child's development. Teachers use Minnesota's *Early Childhood Indicators of Progress* as a developmental benchmark guide when creating developmental summaries.

Teachers use the information that they gather about children to plan curriculum. An interest in raptors in one child in a classroom led teachers to plan a visit to our natural history museum and a visit from a naturalist. Collectively, teachers share observations and insights from their assessments of students in their classes at lead teacher meetings and annual staff retreats. This information is used to guide program improvement. Hypothetically, if teachers assess that children throughout the school need more opportunities to develop fine motor skills, a programmatic decision can be made to purchase more stencils, letter tracing guides, pens, chalk, etc.

Teachers share assessment information with families during the school year at Fall and Spring Parent-Teacher Conferences. Conferences with families are also a time that teachers seek feedback and insight from children's caregivers to help interpret information that has been gathered.

Publicity and Research Projects

Interns and practicum students from local colleges will be trained in Dodge Nature Preschool classrooms. The training of interns and practicum students will reduce student/adult ratios in the participating classrooms while exposing and training a new generation of teachers in how to provide nature-based early childhood education.

Dodge Nature Preschool thus may be periodically asked to take part in educational research projects. Only non-intrusive research is allowed at Dodge Nature Preschool. This may include observation in classrooms, parent interviews, photographing, and videotaping. Children will not be included in research without written parental permission. Photographing and videotaping of children and adults at Dodge Nature Preschool for purposes of publicity will be taken on occasion. No child will be included without completion of a "Information/Publication Release" form signed by parents or guardians.

Data Privacy Statement

The only persons permitted to see children's records (enrollment forms, observation and assessment records, health information, emergency information, etc.) are parents and legal guardians, Dodge Nature Preschool staff who work directly with the child, legal representatives, the Minnesota Department of Children, Youth & Families, and the assessment staff from the National Association for the Education of Young Children. Information gathered in children's assessment is kept confidential. Conference reports and children's records are kept secure in the preschool office area.

Dodge Nature Preschool will not provide copies of children's written records without consent from the parent or legal guardian or in accordance with law. It is the policy of this program not to disclose the names of children who may have communicable illness or caused injuries to other children while at the program. This is a safeguard for the data privacy of each family. *We will not verify your child's enrollment to anyone without your consent.*

Grievance Procedure

If parents wish to file a complaint regarding action/s taken by a staff member, please first take the concern to the staff member. If you are not comfortable talking to the staff member or do not receive a satisfactory resolution, discuss the concern with the Preschool Director.

If the Preschool Director does not give a satisfactory response, written complaints can be brought forward. The chain of command is as follows:

1. Executive Director of the Nature Center
2. President of the Board of Directors

For complaints regarding policies and procedures, speak directly to the Preschool Director or follow the chain of command. All complaints will be addressed and responded to in verbal and/or written form within a two-week period.

DCYF Licensing

Dodge Nature Preschool is licensed by the Minnesota Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) as a child care center facility. Any questions can be directed to the Preschool Director or DCYF Licensing at (651) 539-8300.

Maltreatment of Minors Mandated Reporting

What to Report

Maltreatment includes egregious harm, neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, substantial child endangerment, threatened injury, and mental injury. For definitions refer to Minnesota Statutes, section 260E.03. Maltreatment must be reported if you have witnessed or have reason to believe that a child is being or has been maltreated within the last three years.

Who Must Report

If you work in a licensed facility, you are a “mandated reporter” and are legally required (mandated) to report maltreatment. You cannot shift the responsibility of reporting to your supervisor or to anyone else at your licensed facility.

In addition, people who are not mandated reporters may voluntarily report maltreatment.

Where to Report

If you know or suspect that a child is in immediate danger, call 9-1-1.

Reports concerning suspected maltreatment of children, or other violations of Minnesota Statutes or Rules, in facilities licensed by the Minnesota Department of Children Youth and Families, should be made to the Licensing Division’s Central Intake line at (651) 539-8222.

Incidents of suspected maltreatment of children occurring within a family, in the community, at a family childcare program, or in a child foster care home, should be reported to the local county social services agency at 952-891-7459 or local law enforcement at 911. Calls during the evening, weekend, or otherwise outside county office hours to report suspected child abuse or neglect should be made to the Dakota County Crisis Response Unit at 952-891-7171.

Information to Report

A report to any of the above agencies should contain enough information to identify the child involved, any persons responsible for the maltreatment (if known), and the nature and extent of the maltreatment and/or possible licensing violations. For reports concerning suspected maltreatment occurring within a licensed facility, the report should include any actions taken by the facility in response to the incident.

Failure to Report

A mandated reporter who knows or has reason to believe a child is or has been maltreated and fails to report is guilty of a misdemeanor.

In addition, a mandated reporter who fails to report serious or recurring maltreatment may be disqualified from a position allowing direct contact with, or access to, persons receiving services from programs, organizations, and/or agencies that are required to have individuals complete a background study by the Department of Children, Youth, and Families as listed in Minnesota Statutes, section 245C.03.

Retaliation Prohibited

An employer of any mandated reporter is prohibited from retaliating against (getting back at):

- an employee for making a report in good faith; or
- a child who is the subject of the report.

If an employer retaliates against an employee, the employer may be liable for damages and/or penalties.

Staff Training

The license holder must train all mandated reporters in their reporting responsibilities, according to the training requirements in the statutes and rules governing the licensed program. The license holder must document the provision of this training in individual personnel records, monitor implementation by staff, and ensure that the policy is readily accessible to staff, as specified under Minnesota Statutes, section 142B.65, Subdivision 9.

Provide policy to parents

For licensed childcare centers, the mandated reporting policy must be provided to parents of all children at the time of enrollment and must be available upon request.

Internal review

When the facility has reason to know that an internal or external report of alleged or suspected maltreatment has been made, the facility must complete an internal review within 30 calendar days and take corrective action, if necessary, to protect the health and safety of children in care.

The internal review must include an evaluation of whether:

- related policies and procedures were followed;
- the policies and procedures were adequate;
- there is a need for additional staff training;
- the reported event is similar to past events with the children or the services involved; and
- there is a need for corrective action by the license holder to protect the health and safety of children in care.

Primary and secondary person or position to ensure reviews completed

The internal review will be completed by the preschool director. If this individual is involved in the alleged or suspected maltreatment, the assistant director will be responsible for completing the internal review.

Documentation of Internal Review

The facility must document completion of the internal review and make internal reviews accessible to the commissioner immediately upon the commissioner's request.

Corrective Action Plan

Based on the results of the internal review, the license holder must develop, document, and implement a corrective action plan to correct any current lapses and prevent future lapses in performance by individuals or the license holder.

Contact Information

Dodge Nature Preschool Office	Dodge Nature Center – Main Office
Preschool Director: Amy Warzybok Email: awarzybok@dodgenaturecenter.org	Interim Executive Director: Chad Dayton Email: cdayton@dodgenaturecenter.org
1715 Charlton St • West St. Paul, MN 55118 Phone: 651-455-4555 • Fax: 651-554-8444	365 Marie Ave W • West St. Paul, MN 55118 Phone: 651-455-4531 • Fax: 651-455-2575
Website: dodgenaturecenter.org/preschool	

Important Phone Numbers

Department of Children, Youth & Families (DCYF), Licensing: (651) 539-8300
DCYF, Licensing Division's Maltreatment Intake Line: (651) 539-8222

"I sincerely believe that for the child and for the parents seeking to guide him (or her), it is not so important to know as to feel. If facts are the seeds that produce wisdom, then the emotions and the impressions of the senses are the fertile soil in which the seeds must grow. The years of early childhood are the time to prepare the soil. Once the emotions have been aroused -- a sense of the beautiful, the excitement of the new and the unknown, a feeling of sympathy, pity, admiration or love -- then we wish for knowledge about the object of our emotional response. Once found, it has lasting meaning. It is more important to pave the way for the child to want to know than to put him (her) on a diet of facts he (she) is not ready to assimilate."

Rachel Carson, [The Sense of Wonder](#)