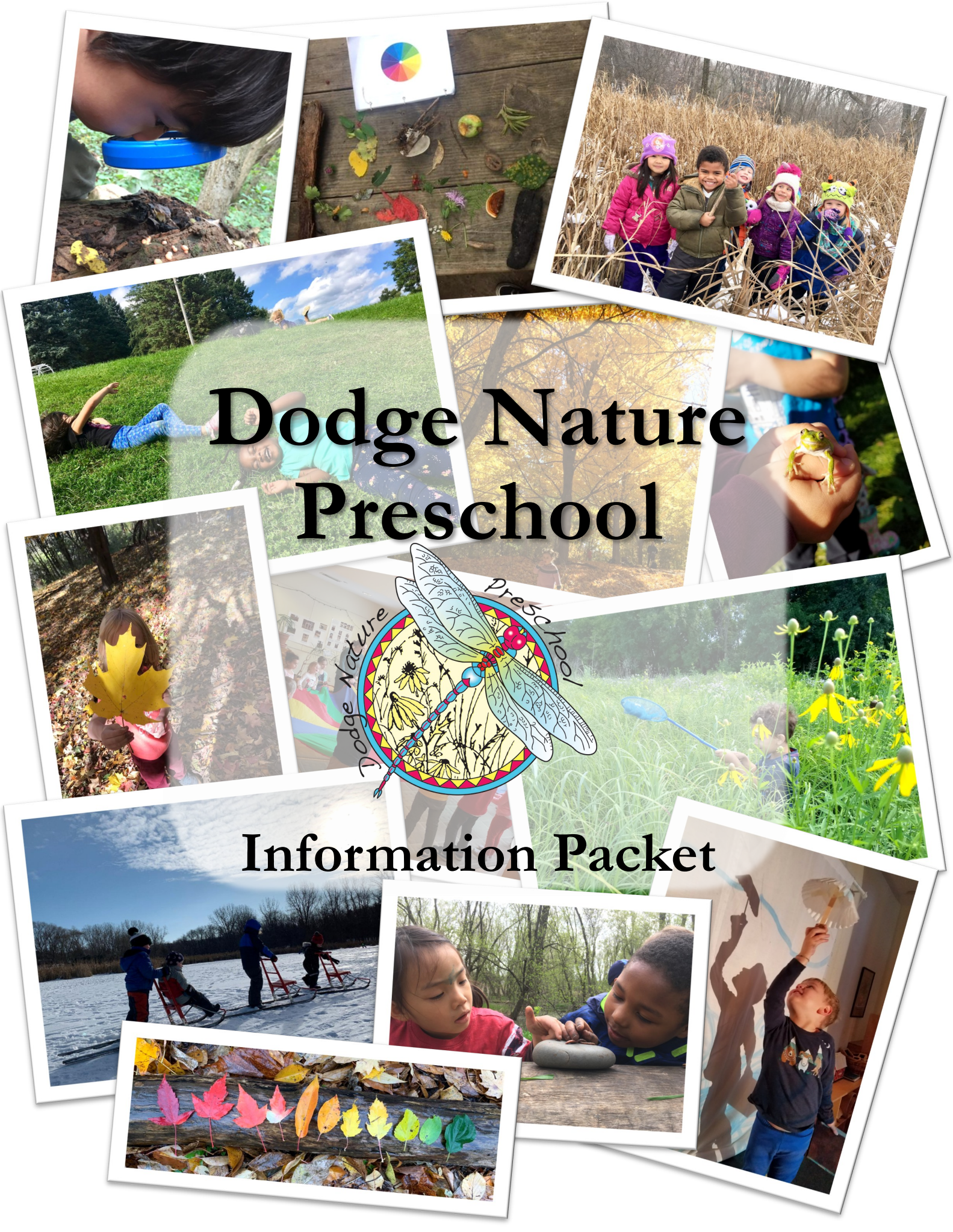


Dodge Nature Preschool

Information Packet

Dear Families,

Thank you for your interest in Dodge Nature Preschool. In this packet you will find the basic information about our school's philosophy, facilities, application process, daily schedule, and frequently asked questions. We would like to welcome you to an information session to learn more about our school, or you can contact us at preschool@dodgenaturecenter.org or 651-455-4555.

MISSION

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



ABOUT US

We believe young children thrive in child-centered environments that support play and inquiry. Our curriculum is driven by the interests of the children and framed by the natural cycle of the seasons. In our program, children build knowledge through first-hand experiences with nature, classroom materials, and—most importantly—their relationships with peers and caring adults.

EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY

Dodge Nature Preschool offers a nature-based, emergent curriculum that supports the development of the whole child. We ensure that children are active participants in their own learning. Children's learning is supported by:

- Individualizing instruction based on children's interests and abilities
- Providing opportunities for social interactions and for developing friendship skills
- Encouraging children's problem solving and reflection by asking open-ended questions and by valuing their ideas, insights, and concerns
- Creating an environment that encourages discovery, experimentation, and opportunities to see the results of one's actions
- Grouping in mixed-age classes to give children the opportunity to learn from and teach one another, much as it would occur naturally in multiple-child families

HIGHLY-QUALIFIED TEACHING STAFF

Positive teacher-child relationships promote children's learning, social competence, and emotional development. Dodge Nature Preschool values its team of skilled and professional educators. Teachers have training in education and hold degrees in various fields including early childhood education, psychology, environmental science, and art. They are certified in CPR and First Aid and participate annually in professional development to meet the standards of NAEYC accreditation and state licensing. Classrooms are staffed with two lead teachers and one assistant teacher. This high teacher-to-student ratio (3:18) allows for children's learning to take place in small groups.



DIVERSITY

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 the lived experiences and feedback of all 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.



PRESCHOOL FACILITY

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 classroom areas allow for the busy, active play of preschool children. Open-ended equipment and supplies encourage creative and cooperative learning. Outdoor classrooms feature climbing structures, swings, slides, a sandbox, a mud kitchen, vegetable and flower gardens, and a variety of loose parts. The large multipurpose room provides an indoor space for very active play.

DODGE NATURE CENTER

Dodge Nature Center's 110-acre environmental education preserve provides children opportunities to discover the wonder and beauty of prairies, ponds, and woodland trails. They regularly visit Dodge Nature Center's model farm where they interact with barnyard animals, plant vegetable gardens, and enjoy the harvest in the summer and fall. Naturalists from Dodge Nature Center engage children in beekeeping, honey making and maple sugaring. Picking raspberries and tasting apples picked right from the tree encourage children to explore the connections between their lives and the world of nature.

LICENSING

Dodge Nature Preschool is licensed by the Minnesota Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF), and has received a 4-Star Parent Aware Rating from the Minnesota Department of Education. We are also accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). We are a certified Nature Explore Classroom committed to providing nature-rich outdoor learning spaces.

SCHOLARSHIP

A scholarship fund is available to families who need assistance with tuition. This may be ongoing support or temporary help due to a change in circumstances for a family. Scholarship funds are made possible by parent fundraising, gifts from corporate donors, and earnings from the preschool endowment fund. Dodge Nature Preschool also accepts Pathway 1 Early Learning Scholarship and Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) which are granted by the state.

NEXT STEPS

We encourage you to attend an Information Session to learn more about our program, meet administrative staff, see our classrooms in action and ask questions. You can call or visit our website (dodgenaturecenter.org/preschool) for more information. You will find the application form on our website. To be considered in our priority enrollment lottery, your application must be submitted during our priority enrollment window each January. You can find more information about our enrollment process in our FAQ section.



We look forward to welcoming your family to our school community!

Sincerely,

Amy Warzybok

Amy Warzybok, Preschool Director

and the Dodge Nature Preschool Staff

A Day at Dodge Nature Preschool

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 maintain a flexible schedule, with predictable events throughout the day such as snack and group experiences, to give children the security of routine.

We have well-furnished outdoor and indoor classrooms. While we spend the majority of time in our outdoor classrooms, our schedule can be adapted for indoors or outdoors to best meet the needs of the children in each class.

Arrival

Children arrive at their classroom entrance fully dressed in outdoor gear appropriate for the season and are greeted by the teachers. Children enter their classroom through the door independently and say goodbye to their grownups before entering.

Hikes & Exploration

Children take hikes on the Dodge Nature Center grounds or play in their indoor or outdoor classroom.



Dodge Nature Center activities include:

- Visiting the Model Farm
- Playing in the woods
- Hiking the trails and boardwalk
- Harvesting or planting the gardens
- Looking for tadpoles in the ponds
- Kick sledding or boot skating on the Farm Pond
- Searching for butterflies in the prairies
- Learning about bees and honey at the apiary
- Handling and learning about reptiles and amphibians in the lab

Outdoor/Indoor Classroom Activities include:

- Swinging on the swings
- Water & sand play in the sandbox
- Journaling, writing & drawing
- Playing games of chase and hide & seek
- Planting & harvesting the preschool garden
- Playing house, superheroes, and other dramatic play
- Building a snow fort
- Relaxing & reading stories



Snack Time

Children prepare for snack by washing hands and helping set tables. Teachers and children usually eat "family style," serve food, converse, and enjoy each other's company.

"This is by far the best choice we've made for our child. She has excelled and grown so much this past year and her love for nature is so refreshing. She teaches us (about nature)!"

- Dodge Nature Preschool Parent

Child-Directed Play

Children have a long block of uninterrupted time to choose an activity. This allows children to lengthen attention span and develop competency with activities. Activities for children to choose from include:



- Art activities - painting, drawing, or collage
- Science activities - observing animals or experimenting with color mixing
- Sensory activities - engaging in water play or sculpting with clay
- Writing activities - creating a book or writing in story journals
- Reading activities - listening to a story or playing with puppets
- Dramatic play activities - playing family or pretending to be a firefighter
- Large-motor activities - swinging, playing hide & seek or chase
- Math and manipulative activities - completing puzzles or sorting objects
- Blocks and building activities - creating with blocks, Legos or Magna-Tiles
- Music and movement activities - playing instruments or dancing to music
- Real work activities - watering plants, setting the table or sweeping the floor
- Life-skill activities - preparing food for snack or helping with pet care
- Adult-directed activities - cooking applesauce or planting seeds

Clean-up

Children learn to take responsibility for themselves and the classroom by putting away materials and helping prepare for group time. Children look through picture books before group time begins.

Group Time

Children take part in whole-group, community-building activities:

- Listening to stories
- Singing songs together
- Acting in each other's journal stories
- Celebrating special occasions with favorite books



Full-Day Program

(School Year Only)

Children enrolled in the full-day program wash hands and prepare for lunch. After lunch, children spend at least 30 minutes resting before they return to play activities. With the addition of Morning and After Bunch, children in the full-day program can receive care from 8am-4pm.

Pickup Time

Children reunite with their grown-ups at their classroom entrance, ready to say goodbye until next time.

"Getting outside is important for our son. I can't imagine him anywhere else. I'm so grateful he gets to learn through nature-based play by touching farm animals, getting muddy in creeks and observing the prairie."

-Dodge Nature Preschool Parent

Frequently Asked Questions
about the Dodge Nature Preschool *Program*



How do I apply?
Complete the application form on our website. Submit your application by January 31. All applications received during the priority period in January will be randomly numbered and placed in a lottery. Currently-enrolled and returning families are given priority in placement. After these placements are made, new families are placed. An effort will be made to grant each family's first choice for days and times. A *non-refundable* deposit and registration fee will be required to hold placement. This payment will be applied to the May tuition only. The deposit and registration fee are *non-refundable* regardless of child's attendance.

Applications received after the priority period will be considered in the order in which they are received.

What ages are the children at Dodge Nature Preschool?
Dodge Nature Preschool welcomes children ages three to five-years-old into our mixed-age classrooms . Children must be 3 years old by September 1. Children who turn 5 before June 1 are not eligible for placement.

Are children really outside every day?
Yes. We go outside every day that it is safe to be outside: sunny, rainy, cold, snowy, muddy, hot. Being in nature is our passion. As we say at Dodge, "There is no bad weather, only bad gear."

What do children wear to be outside every day?
Our parent handbook provides a full list of recommended gear for each season. Below is a short example of the gear list. We have gear for borrowing for families who forget gear on a given day. If purchasing gear is a hardship for your family, please talk to a teacher or staff member. We want to help.

Fall / Spring / Summer
Rain boots
Rain jacket, Rain pants
and/or Rain suit
Light gloves*
Second layer (fleece/vest)*
Closed-Toe Indoor Shoes

* When needed for colder weather

Winter
Snow pants
Boots
Waterproof mittens
Scarf/Neck warmer
Hat/Ear covers
Second layer (fleece/vest)
Wool/Fleece socks
Snow jacket/ Coat

What about potty training?
Children should be potty-trained before starting preschool at Dodge Nature Preschool. If your child isn't yet potty-trained, you are still encouraged to apply during the priority period. We understand that potty training takes time and children will have accidents, but they should be well on the road to fully potty-trained.

Frequently Asked Questions
about Dodge Nature Preschool *Philosophy*

How do we build early literacy and math skills, preparing children for kindergarten?



- We read to children.
- We speak to children in complex language and support conversation skills.
- We sing together learning the basics of rhyming and phonetics.
- We teach children how to handle books gently and provide time to look at books independently.
- We model writing for children—story dictation, the "List" of activities, etc.
- We offer opportunities to measure - filling containers of different sizes, building block towers as tall as children, finding the creek depth with a stick.
- We count together - the number of children in a hiking group, the quantity of food at snack, the number of butterflies in the prairie today, etc.
- We provide a wide array of manipulative toys that allow children to make patterns, sort, and classify items.
- We play games that build visual discrimination skills, like "Who's Missing?"
- We sing songs that include counting forwards and backwards, like "Five Green and Speckled Frogs," "One Little Bird," etc.



How do we teach life skills (empathy, sharing, patience, inclusion)?

- We offer unlimited opportunities to practice in a social setting.
- We work in mixed age groups with children teaching each other.
- We support and model problem solving.
- We allow time to work on projects and develop skills.
- We express our own feelings and admit our mistakes.
- We set high, but reasonable, expectations.
- We take advantage of teachable moments.
- We listen to children.



How do we handle discipline?

- We set clear and consistent expectations and limits.
- We accommodate personal needs.
- We see children as capable to learn new skills.
- We follow through and celebrate success.
- We allow children to experience natural, logical consequences when appropriate.
- We work to keep the difference clear between requests and directions. For instance, cleaning up after playing is not a choice.

Main Property
West St. Paul, MN

Nourish Your Need FOR NATURE



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