



## Investigators- School-Aged Program

--Information Guide--

--2018/2019--

Congratulations on your choice to enhance your child's education with Nature School and Education Centre, Investigators Program. We are looking forward to working with you and your child - and excited for you to witness the benefits of this amazing child-directed, inquiry and project-based outdoor educational experience!

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## **Mission/Program Philosophy**

Nature School and Education Centre incorporates many teaching and educational models, making our approach dynamic, innovative, and intuitive. We believe that the child's nature (well-being) will benefit from the outdoor setting as well as our approach to learning. As educators we work as facilitators, and due to our low-ratios, we are able to provide one-on-one support as students develop meaningful questions and familiarize themselves with all the tools available to them. We meet students at their level to work with them to plan and execute projects designed to answer questions, or address a problem.

By not subscribing to one specific learning model, we are able to combine great ideas to create an amazing school environment. We are continuously developing a 'classroom' environment that best supports learning and well-being for students and staff. Research supports the idea that early learning in the woods/outdoors has numerous benefits - we plan to contribute to the growing studies and research around the benefits for elementary and junior education - academically, mentally, and socially with this program.

While there are aspects of our program that may change, there is a foundation to our philosophy. We will always follow these core three principles.

**Immersed in nature** – research supports our own observation that time in the woods is good for a child's physical, mental, and emotional health. Resilience is built when children trek into the woods in all kinds of weather, negotiating trails, working as a team, and assessing and taking risks in the physical environment. One of the many special features of Nature School is that sessions are held in the same area of woodland over a period of time, allowing participants to become very comfortable in and knowledgeable about the area. Indeed, we believe that it is only through a deep connection to place that children grow up to be stewards of the land.

**Child centred** – trained teachers work individually with your child to develop their educational plan. Our model allows for regular individual consultations and lessons, as well as providing resources for individual practice of academic skills.

**Inquiry based** – "I notice, I wonder, it reminds me'. Children will be encouraged to ask their own questions, and practice mindfulness and observation skills. As children spend more time in the woods, their sense of wonder is heightened; questions become more complex and connections are made.

With varying levels of independence, children will complete projects of their choice throughout the semester. A project on bees, for example, may look like a labelled drawing of a bee, a song or book on pollinators, or it may be a well-researched video presentation on the importance of bees. Project

based learning also develops skills needed to be a successful learner, such as: research, independent learning, seeking understanding, etc.

**We are current** - We have amazing, involved, reflective and innovative educators - Nature School is dedicated to keeping them that way! We keep staff up-to-date by providing opportunities to participate in professional development workshops, a space for sharing ideas and collaboration, and access to resources and current research around well-being and education.

Teachers are members of the Ontario College of Teachers and qualified Early Childhood Educators who are dedicated to delivering a high quality, child centred, inquiry and project based Forest School Program.

Introduction of key concepts and research tools are introduced individually or in small groups, depending on readiness, rather than grade. Teachers are guided by the student first, by the natural phenomenon (i.e. changes in forest through the season) and real-life events (i.e. decline in bee population). The Ontario Curriculum is also considered in planning, setting goals and progression of skills, and some expectations may be recorded by the teachers after they occur.

Our goal is to foster the natural curiosity and sense of wonder about the world around them, leading them to be independent individuals who think critically, take assessed risks, ask questions, seek answers, and appreciate Nature.

### **Administration and Staffing**

*Staff Hiring, Teacher-Student Ratios, Brock University Researchers, Volunteers and Interns*

#### **Staff Hiring**

All of our lead educators are professional members of the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT) or are Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECEs) or equivalent. Staff are trained in First Aid, CPR, and have passed their vulnerable sector check. Opportunities for professional development are offered regularly, encouraging our teachers to practice reflective teaching.

#### **Teacher-Student Ratios**

Our teacher to student ratio is 1:8. Due to the nature of our program, we require a minimum of two staff with the students when exploring off-site wooded areas, even when the number of students is less than 8.

## **Brock University Researchers, Volunteer, Guest Speakers and Interns**

We will have volunteers and other visitors with us during the school year. We are working towards partnership with Brock University, parent involvement is voluntary - more information available if/when funding for the project is approved.

**Guest Speakers** - Students will be accompanied to participate in any guest speaker activities.

**Volunteers/observers** - We welcome any volunteers or donations; we built our shed and garden on such beautiful notions! Our program is interesting to many educators in the area, and we offer observations and tours to those who are interested. Parents will be notified of any observation sessions.

## **Logistical Information**

*Hours of Operation, Tuition, Payment Schedule for Tuition, Late Pick Up Fees, Additional Expenses, School Closures, Calendar, Withdrawal Policy*

### **Hours of Operation**

Regular day 9:00 AM - 3:30 PM

### **Extended Care**

Before care is available starting at **8:00am** and our aftercare is available until **5:00pm**. Contact us for information regarding registration and pricing for these services.

### **Late Pick Up Fees**

If you pick up your child after 3:30, you are required to pay aftercare fees. You may pay upon pickup, else you will be billed for aftercare in subsequent months invoices.

### **Tuition and Payment Schedule**

<b>Part Time (1 or 2 days a week)</b>	<b>One day</b>	<b>Two days</b>	<b>Payment Due</b>
<i>Summer - Fall</i> September 5 - November 7	\$550	\$1100	September 4, 2018
<i>Fall - Winter</i> November 14 - January 30	\$550	\$1100	November 14, 2018
<i>Winter - Spring</i> February 6 - April 17	\$550	\$1100	February 6, 2019
<i>Spring - Summer</i> April 24 - June 26	\$550	\$1100	April 24, 2019

<b>Full Time (3-5 days a week)</b>	<b>Three days</b>	<b>Four days</b>	<b>Five days</b>	<b>Payment Due</b>
	\$660	\$880	\$1100	1st day of each month

Monthly plan- Payment for the upcoming month is due on the 1<sup>st</sup> of each month. Your monthly statement will be calculated based on the average number of days attended per month - this means your monthly statement will be the same every month.

Yearly plan (5% discount) - Payment for the entire upcoming school year is due on September 4<sup>th</sup>, 2018. Please contact us if you would like to take advantage of this option and we will send you an individual cost breakdown.

### **Additional Expenses**

We include all aspects of our program expenses into our tuition fees. Any other purchases, above and beyond, are based on our fundraising efforts. You are under no obligation to participate or purchase any aspect of our fundraising initiatives, nor will you be required to pay any additional fees.

### **Calendar**

*We will be closed on the following days - Holidays: October 9<sup>th</sup>(Thanksgiving), Dec 24-Jan 4<sup>th</sup> Winter Break, Feb 19<sup>th</sup>(family day), March 11<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> (March break), March 29<sup>th</sup>(Good Friday), April 2(Easter Monday), May 21<sup>st</sup>(Victoria Day).*

Please see the calendar on our website for more information on holidays, special events, workshops, events, meetings etc. at the following link:

<http://www.natureschoolniagara.com/calendar/>

### **Professional Development Days**

Nature School provides teachers with opportunities to participate in workshops, seminars and a variety of other activities that help them to develop themselves as facilitators at Nature School. Nature School will remain open on P.D. Days, where we welcome guest teachers to spend the day with the students. These will be outlined on our calendar.

### **Enrollment and Admission**

Children must be ages 3.8 - 12 to attend our Investigator program. A non refundable deposit of \$200 is required pre registration.

Forms to be signed & handed in:

- Child Information Form
- Permission Form

### **Scholarships**

At Nature School, we do not want finances to be a barrier to our program. Fundraising efforts throughout the year help to provide financial support to families in need. Our Scholarship program is applicable only to students over the age of 6, and who will attend full-time. It is our goal to make our programs accessible to anyone who wants to attend - Scholarships will be granted to a limited number of students based on available funds, benefits to the student and financial need.

Please fill in the following form to begin the application process:

[Nature School Scholarship Program Application](#)

### **What to bring: Preparing for Forest School**

#### **Supply List:**

Depending on the season, participants, including students, teachers, and accompanying volunteers, will need rain-suits, boots, extra warm clothing, waterproof/warm snowsuits, extra hats and mitts, hiking shoes, sneakers, wool socks, thermal underwear, etc.

For cold weather please consider the following factors when dressing for Forest School:

- 1) Insulation: Natural fabrics such as wool or silk work well as an inner layer, as does fleece. Polyester pyjamas are another good option. The key for this layer is to wick moisture away from the skin and insulate it with a breathable layer.
- 2) Middle Layer: This is another insulation layer that creates 'dead-air space' between skin and the elements. This airspace helps in keeping warm. Wool sweaters (Merino wool is exceptionally warm and soft on sensitive skin) and fleece tend to work well.
- 3) Outer Shell: This layer should be waterproof and windproof, as well as breathable.

### **Winter:**

- Two winter hats [must cover ears and stay on the head]
- Balaclava or neck warmer [no scarves please due to risk of strangulation]
- Two pairs of warm, waterproof mitts
- One warm, waterproof snowsuit
- One set of warm, waterproof boots
- Wool socks
- Three base layers: thermal shirt and pants, middle layer, wool/fleece sweater [cotton is not recommended for cold weather conditions]

### **Spring:**

- Rain gear [waterproof boots, pants, jacket], with extra insulation on colder days
- Wool socks on colder days [they insulate even when wet]
- Sneakers for running shoes [please no open toe shoes even in summer]
- Sun Hat [for warmer months]
- Warmer sweater or jacket for colder days
- Bug Jacket (optional) Summer:
- Rain gear [waterproof boots, pants, jacket]
- Sneakers for running [please no open toe shoes even in summer]
- Sun Hat
- Lightweight clothing [silk/cotton ideal, synthetic fibres do not breathe well]
- Bug Jacket (optional) Fall:
- Rain gear [waterproof boots, pants, jacket]
- Sneakers for running [please no open toe shoes even in summer]
- Sun Hat [for warmer months]
- Warm Jacket [fleece or other breathable fabric ideal]
- Bug Jacket (optional)

### **All Seasons:**



- Small backpack
- Lunch and snacks
- Water bottle
- Two extra changes of clothes [including underwear and socks]

**A note to parents/caregivers:**

It's not necessary to invest in expensive brand names to keep your child warm. Thrift stores are great places to look for children's wool clothing at cheaper prices. If you are looking for a regular store to purchase outdoor clothing, Mountain Equipment Coop (MEC) has excellent children's outdoor wear for all seasons.

In terms of boots, we recommend purchasing boots that are one size larger than your child's foot. Again, this creates dead-air space to assist in insulation. Socks help to wick moisture away from the skin, (please note: cotton tends to sweat and doesn't do a great job at wicking moisture). The best foot insulator would be two pairs of wool socks with waterproof boots that have wiggle room.

For warmer weather we ask that your child has a light cotton/silk/hemp long sleeve shirt on for the day. Children are encouraged to wear a hat at all times. Children will be encouraged to stay hydrated for both cold and warm weather as this will assist in regulating body temperatures.

Please see us for further recommendations on staying comfortable throughout all weather conditions. ***\*some items may be stored indoors to lighten child's' backpack; children are responsible for carrying own backpack/water bottle.***

**Labeling** - Please label all your child's clothing and accessories. We will not be responsible for lost or stolen items.

**Parent Participation**

We always welcome discussion and ideas about our program. Please email us at [natureschoolniagara@gmail.com](mailto:natureschoolniagara@gmail.com) or speak directly with one of our lead teachers.

We encourage parent participation and involvement throughout the school year. If you are interested in becoming a volunteer, or have an interest, career, or a hobby that you would like to share with our students, please email us at [volunteer@natureschoolniagara.com](mailto:volunteer@natureschoolniagara.com).

**Communication**

Parents will regularly receive photos and documentation of their child's time at nature school, this may be in the form of a shared Google Album, individual email or through a virtual classroom. Details

regarding the virtual classroom and registration instructions will be emailed to families early September.

Parents will be invited throughout the year to join us as we celebrate our learning, where we showcase what we've been working on.

Meetings between parents and facilitators shall occur throughout the school year at request of educator, parent or child.

### **Investigators Program Contacts:**

**Tiffany- 289-968-7147**

**Jen- 289-990-2939**

### **One day a week program**

We are happy to work with your child's teacher to ensure the best educational experience for them. Feel free to share our email and contact information, if your child's teacher requests it. Here's an outline of the suggested steps to take:

1. Speak to your child's teacher - We have had a great response from the teachers of our students, they have been very supportive of the idea, and accommodating. Ideally, this is your first contact.
2. Let principal know - this can be in the form of an email or meeting. Having your child's teachers support goes a long way to making this meeting a success.
3. **If you plan on having your child attend weekly sessions, you must notify your child's school board** by sending a letter of intent (we will provide you with a sample upon request). Attendance to school is important, and governed by law, you may avoid any potential future conflicts by providing an accepted reason for the absence.

We are with you every step of the way! You have the full support of all our experienced staff.

### **Sample Day Schedule**

*Teachers take time during investigation time to meet and discuss projects, inquiry questions and progress one-on-one with students. At this time, new concepts may be introduced and practiced. Teachers also take this time to observe and record students work.*

9:00-9:15 drop off, free explore

9:15-9:30 morning meeting; goals and plans for the day (group introduction of concept, if applicable)

9:30-12:30 exploration time/investigation time (individual meetings)

12:30-1:00 lunch time

1:00-2:00 exploration time/investigation (teacher observation)

2:00-3:30 - home base - Guest Speaker/Seminars and/or work on research, projects, closing meeting etc.

3:30-pick up for home time

### **Celebrations and Birthdays**

Here at Nature School and Education Centre, excitement and adventure abound. Our proximity to a broad swath of plant and animal life cycles means that we will have the opportunity to celebrate and appreciate the changes in seasons, the cycle of life, as well as to explore many holiday traditions from cultures around the world.

You are also welcome to bring a special snack or small toy, but please do not under any circumstances feel obliged! We like to emphasize that your child's life is the most important treat of the day. Please check with your teacher beforehand to make sure there are no dietary restrictions that need to be met and avoid excessive sweets. Muffins, fruit, frozen yogurt, bubbles or stickers are great! If you choose to bring a treat please provide enough for all children (and staff).

If you are planning a birthday party for your child outside of school, please don't have invitations passed out at school unless all students are invited. For students with 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 teacher know how you would like them to handle this for your child.

### **Allergies**

Please make sure to alert staff of any allergies. Staff will make every effort to ensure that your child will not be exposed to any allergens. On occasion, snacks may be offered to all students, we will be sensitive to any special diet your child may be one. Please do not send nuts, or food that contains nuts.

### **Resources and suggested videos**

**Self-directed learning-**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YoE480mzrk0&list=PLu37fipD92Gi4RNXwFqA6TihvnBjdkCvT&t=0s&index=2>

**Forest School Canada Guide-** <http://childnature.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/FSC-Guide-1.pdf>

**Project Based Learning-**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LMCZvGesRz8&list=PLu37fipD92Gi4RNXwFqA6TihvnBjdkCvT&index=2>

**~Please see Nature School Policy Manual for additional Policies and Procedures~**