

Prescott Farm

Environmental Education Center

928 White Oaks Road, Laconia, NH

Phone: (603) 366-5695 Fax: (603) 366-5720

www.prescottfarm.org

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For Immediate Release

At Fledglings Preschool, nature-based learning is more than just playing outside!

Laconia, NH: Prescott Farm is expanding this fall with the opening of Fledglings, a nature-based preschool. This exciting program will begin on Monday, September 14, 2015!

Some may wonder what a nature-based preschool is and/or how it is different from other traditional preschools. The answer to that is twofold: like any effective, traditional preschool, a nature-based program offers a developmentally appropriate, child centered curriculum that will prepare children for school and the social interactions beyond. What is different for the students in a nature-based program is their learning takes place predominantly outside.



For the students enrolled at Fledglings, playing in nature means their learning will take place on the beautiful Prescott Farm property and their educational tools will be what nature has to offer. According to research (Fjortoft 2004; Burdette and Whitaker 2005), children who regularly play in nature are growing up healthy, smart, and happy.

LEARNING

Children learn best through play and learn more when that play centers around a topic that interests them. Everything is interesting when it's connected to places you have walked, sights you have seen and things you have smelled! Fledglings Preschool program will focus on the five senses throughout the seasons and offer many sensory learning experiences such as recognizing birds by their call, learning that water droplets magnify the veins on a leaf, feeling the different textures of tree bark and creating artistic rubbings from them; and

noticing the changing patterns in nature through each season.

Nature-based learning also prepares children for school. In a nature-based preschool, children use outdoor experiences for exploring, counting, sorting, examining and problem solving. They are given the opportunity to experience the four seasons first hand and how they impact daily activities. They cooperate with others when building mud pies, snow forts, and stick houses for the woodland fairies they have read about. They sequence events they witness in nature and create stories and re-tell stories about their woodland experiences. Their dramatic play is guided by their day's experience with topics like weather, hibernation, composting, and life cycles.

THE IMPORTANCE OF A NATURE-BASED CURRICULUM

Exposure and access to “green spaces” have a wide range of social and health benefits. In 2009, Andrea Mills’ article *Early-Childhood Education Takes to the Outdoors*, explored some of those benefits, citing research that indicates children who learned in a nature based setting exhibit greater strengths in problem solving skills and are able to offer more solutions to problems. Studies indicate more senses involved in a child’s experience, the deeper the learning process. Also, overcoming natural obstacles and observing forest life teaches children to trust their abilities so students develop trust, independence and respect. A nature-based program allows more physical movement on a regular basis: *something very natural for children*. Children invent their own games in a natural environment and play in a more cooperative manner. Research on learning through nature has proven higher test scores/academic achievements are attained.

Exploration and small group instruction at Fledglings will be preparing children for future school success by strengthening skills in Language, Pre-Writing, Pre-Reading, Problem Solving, Science, Dramatic Play, Visual Arts, Sensory, and Motor Skills. Nature offers a stimulation of all senses and interacting with the natural environment stimulates the imagination and fosters a sense of belonging. Learning how to respect nature and all that it has to offer helps to create caring, creative, empathetic, respectful, and responsible human beings.

The mission of Fledglings Nature-Based Preschool is to embrace the natural curiosity of each child and offer meaningful child-based learning experiences that will strengthen their skill development and help to nurture a lasting connection with the natural world.

Prescott Farm is a non-profit organization that offers environmental education for all ages throughout the year including WildQuest camps, public programs, field trips, long-term partnerships with local elementary schools and NOW Fledglings Nature-Based Preschool. The 160 acre historic family farm features woodland and field trails, a “green” building with geothermal and solar energy systems, historic barns, an old-fashioned maple sugaring operation (during the month of March), heritage gardens, and forested pond. Prescott Farm is open year round, seven days a week from 9:00 – 4:00PM. It is free to come and go for a hike or explore the “green” building!

For more information on Fledglings Preschool please contact Cathy Duffy, Director/Lead Teacher at cduffy@prescottfarm.org/ 366-5695. Also, more information about this program can be found on our website, www.prescottfarm.org. We look forward to providing this exciting new program to the community!

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