

Fledglings

Nature-Based Preschool

at *Prescott Farm*

2025-2026

PARENT HANDBOOK

Prescott Farm

Environmental Education Center

928 White Oaks Road, Laconia, NH 03246 • (603) 366-5695 • Fax: (603) 366-5720

smarden@prescottfarm.org www.prescottfarm.org

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Introduction

Vision Statement

At Fledglings, we embrace the natural curiosity of each child and offer meaningful child-led educational experiences that strengthen skill development and nurture a lasting connection with the natural world while fostering a love of learning.

Educational Philosophy

Young children become better problem solvers, engineers, artists, and future inventors when given the opportunity to use the outdoors for their explorations. Our developmentally appropriate nature-based curriculum, allows children to make meaningful connections to the world around them while supporting their natural sense of curiosity.

Children learn best through play and learn more when interested in the topic. Everything is interesting when it's connected to places they have walked, sights they have seen and things they have smelled! Interacting with the natural environment stimulates the imagination and fosters a sense of belonging.

Learning how to respect nature helps to create caring, creative, empathetic, respectful, and responsible human beings.

Introduction, *continued*

What is a Nature-Based Preschool?

In a Nature-Based Preschool, children use outdoor experiences for:

- Exploring
- Counting
- Sorting
- Examining
- Problem solving
- Discovering

Outside exploration allows children to:

- Experience the four seasons and how they impact daily activities
- Cooperate with others
- Sequence events they witness in nature
- Create and re-tell stories about their experiences in a variety of natural habitats
- Enjoy dramatic play that focuses on the day's experience with topics like weather, hibernation, composting, and life cycles

The Importance of a Nature-Based Curriculum

Exposure and access to nature has a wide range of social and health benefits. The more senses involved in a child's experience, the deeper the learning process. Overcoming natural obstacles and observing forest life teaches children to trust their abilities.

Research shows that being in nature creates opportunities for children to:

- Improve focus
- Invent games
- Play and learn in a cooperative manner
- Experience higher academic achievements and test scores
- Develop solutions to problems that build strength in problem-solving
- Develop trust, independence and respect for the world around them

Fledglings Preschool offers a curriculum that encourages healthy minds and bodies and the necessary academic skills children need as they prepare for kindergarten.



Introduction, *continued*

Our Licensed and Approved Preschool Curriculum was influenced by:

- *NH Early Childhood Education Frameworks*
- *NH Early Learning Standards*
- *NH Child Development Bureau*
- *A Forest Days Handbook*
- *Nature-Based Preschool Professional Practice Guidebook*
- *Eastern Regional Association of Forest and Nature Schools*



Curriculum & Activities

Our curriculum encompasses the Seven Learning Domains by providing developmentally appropriate activities through both instruction and exposure.

Language

Reading, writing, singing, reciting, rhyming, letter recognition, letter sound activities, word and symbol recognition, sequencing of events, offering a print-rich classroom environment and using positional word use during exploration.

Pre-Writing/Pre-Reading Skills

Finger painting, sand drawings, letter formation, easel painting, drawing, and journaling about experiences in the natural world. Left to right tracking, sequencing of events, rhyming games, sight word exposure and experimenting with sounds.

Problem Solving

Sorting, graphing, nature exploration and discussion, cooperative play and teamwork, games, number recognition, one to one correspondence, measuring, estimating, balancing, block building, dramatic play and science experiments.



Curriculum & Activities, *continued*



Science

Observation and prediction, evaporation, floating, sinking, shadows, bubbles, air, weather, plants, animals, water, seasons, life cycles, nature, and patterns.

Dramatic Play

Animal and nature imitation, character-role playing, storytelling, voice control and communication promote comprehension skills.

Visual Arts

Painting, gluing, folding, cutting, color identification, shapes, patterns, light, clay, gardening, symmetry and creative construction inside and outside.

Sensory & Motor Skills

Building, climbing, balancing, creating with clay & sticks, movement, games, music, dramatic play, five senses activities, pre-writing skills, running, skipping, hopping, and having fun!



Facilities

Prescott Farm Environmental Education Center is situated on 160 bucolic acres and much of our learning occurs in the fields, forests, and gardens we call our outdoor classroom.

We have a bright and open classroom in the Samuel P. Pardoe Education Center featuring passive solar and geothermal heat, as well as natural materials that lend comfort, light and warmth to the space.

We recognize the importance of child-led unstructured play. Our outdoor Natural Play-scape is a certified Nature Explore classroom offering imaginative play for Fledglings in a safe and contained setting.

Facilities, *continued*

Our program accommodates a maximum of 18 students per day, taught by our team of state qualified and licensed teachers. We maintain teacher to student ratios of at least 1:9 at all times as required by State of New Hampshire licensing, often exceeding the minimum with ratios of 1: 6.

Our Nature-Based Preschool educators bring the following skills and experience to our program:

- Passion for and experience teaching children in the natural world
- Knowledge of and respect for nature
- An understanding of the developmental needs of young children
- Completion of necessary Early Childhood Education course requirements set by the NH State Licensing Board for Early Childhood Education/Childcare



Preschool Staff

Preschool Programs Director:

Shannon Marden has been teaching and directing in the Lakes Region for 23 years. She is also the Arts and Crafts Director at a seasonal campground. Her education is from the Lakes Region Community College, combined with some business education, CDA credential and a Nature Based Teacher Certification. Shannon loves children's music and puppets. Racci Raccoon (puppet) is well known amongst the children in the area. When Shannon is outside she enjoys camping, kayaking, swimming and walking nature trails.



Preschool Staff, continued



Fledglings Teachers:

Renee West was born and raised in South Africa and has been living in the U.S. since 1998. She studied Dance and Exercise Science at Palm Beach Atlantic University, and went on to get her masters in Leadership Studies. She is certified by the State of NH as an Associate Teacher and is a certified nature-based teacher. Renee has worked with children as a gym teacher, camp counselor, My Gym Children's Fitness



Instructor, Music Together teacher, and an elementary school teacher in Florida. Renee loves dance, music, nature and is passionate about child development and working with children.

Nicole Sturgeon has been working in early childhood for over 20 years. Nikki worked for Belmont Parks and Rec and at a large childcare center in Tilton. She has always loved being outside and exploring nature with her own children. Since high school she wanted to be a preschool teacher, and she enjoys crafting, yoga, and spending time with her family at the beach. Nicole is certified by the State of NH as a Lead Teacher and is a certified nature-based teacher.



Substitutes: Substitute teachers are certified early childhood professionals. Substitutes are fingerprinted and have the required criminal background checks on file at Prescott Farm.

Schedule

Arrival: Doors open promptly at 8 am! Parents/guardians are required to sign-in their child.

Departure: Departure is at 11:30 am or 3 pm. **Parents/guardians are required to sign their child out.** If your child is leaving with someone not on your dismissal list, please fill out a Pick-Up/Departure Form. To confirm

identity and for your child's safety, we may ask for the individual's driver's license for verification. ***Children must be picked up within 15 minutes of class ending. \$1/minute will be charged for families arriving more than fifteen minutes late with a minimum charge of \$15.***

After Care: After care is available for an additional fee, until 4 pm. Please sign up with the Program Director.

Schedule, continued

We offer several schedule options: 2-day Tuesday/Thursday, 3-day Monday/Wednesday/Friday or a Full Week schedule. Our days have flexibility and the schedule is determined by weather, interest, and time needed to complete meaningful tasks. The sample schedule below is a guideline.

Daily Schedule

8-9 am	Arrival/Self-directed free play/ Provocations	11:30 am	Morning departure
		12-12:30 pm	Lunch
9-9:30 am	Morning Meeting	12:30-1:30 pm	Rest Time
9:30-10 am	Snack	1:30-3 pm	Outdoor Learning
10-11:30 am	Outdoor Learning & projects	3 pm	Afternoon Departure
		3-4 pm	After Care M,W,F

Calendar

2025-2026 School Year

September 1	LABOR DAY—NO SCHOOL
September 2	1st Day of Preschool! (Tues/Thurs & Full Week)
September 3	1st Day of Preschool (Mon/Wed /Fri)
October 10	Professional Development Day—NO SCHOOL
October 13	Columbus Day—NO SCHOOL
November 11	Veteran’s Day Observed —NO SCHOOL
November 26-28	Thanksgiving Break— NO SCHOOL
December 24-1/2	Winter Break-NO SCHOOL
January 1	New Years Day-NO SCHOOL
January 2	Professional Development Day—NO SCHOOL
January 5	School Resumes
January 19	Civil Rights Day—NO SCHOOL
February 16	Presidents’ Day—NO SCHOOL
February 23-27	Winter Break-NO SCHOOL
March 20	Professional Development Day – NO SCHOOL
April 27– 5/1	Spring Break-NO SCHOOL
May 4	School Resumes
May 8	Professional Development Day—NO SCHOOL
May 21& 22	Parent-Teacher Conferences
May 25	Memorial Day—NO SCHOOL
June 12	Last Days — Family Celebration of Learning!
June 22	Summer Session Begins
July 3	Independence Day— NO SCHOOL
Aug. 21	Last Day Summer Session

Professional Development Days: Preschool Staff Workshop/In-Service Day

There are many events and programs at Prescott Farm for the general public and families – such as our Harvest Festival, Tadpoles, Polliwogs Programs and camps. These are advertised and you will be notified in our Fledglings Facebook and Remind App.

A Note About Holidays

Fledglings focuses on the natural world. During holidays involving candy, gifts or specific decorations and song, we focus on daily activities and maintaining routines. Some projects may touch upon the holiday that is circled on the calendar, but will be oriented toward the natural side of the excitement.

Family Involvement

Family involvement is extremely important to the development of young children and an integral part of the preschool experience.

Below is a list of a few suggested ways parents/guardians/family members can support their child's educational experience here at Prescott Farm:

- Attend parent/family/school functions and parent/teacher conferences
- Provide an appropriate healthy snack and lunch
- Follow our private Fledglings Facebook Group
- Maintain open communication with your child's teachers
- Assist with family programs being offered
- Share your own interests/talents with your child's class: playing an instrument, teaching a dance, reading a favorite story, yoga, or a favorite craft or project....
- Volunteer in the classroom!
- Volunteer at Prescott Farm—ask us for a list of the many opportunities to get involved
- Bring your child to other Prescott Farm programs and events

Attendance Policy

Please contact us using Remind app or by phone at (603) 366-5695 no later than 9 am when your child will not be at school on any given day. *Refunds will NOT be made in the event of illness or other absences.*

Parent-Teacher Communication

Our posts in the private Facebook page and the Remind app will let you know what's happening at Prescott Farm. While we distribute progress reports and hold Parent-Teacher Conferences in May, they can be requested at any time. Our staff is always happy to talk with you outside of the classroom, on the phone or with an email. We always welcome parents to reach out!

Discipline

Fledglings students learn rules, boundaries, and expectations during the first weeks of school. With on-going support and positive feedback from preschool staff, your child should be able to function responsibly and respectfully as they become increasingly comfortable with routines and expectations.

The preschool experience should be positive for everyone. We have open communication with parents/guardians of any child experiencing difficulty following school rules. In extreme situations where behavior is detrimental to the learning atmosphere on a continual basis, a child may be asked to stay home while teachers work with parents to develop a plan to help the child function more appropriately. If the problem persists and attempts to change the negative behavior are unsuccessful, the child may be permanently dismissed from the preschool program. No refunds will be given in the case of dismissals due to misconduct.

Snacks & Lunch

Snack and lunch items are not provided by Prescott Farm. We encourage a healthy snack and a drink in a non-breakable container. *Please do not send food that needs to be heated— this is not a service we can offer.*

As we are instilling a respect for the environment and its value to us, please use minimal packaging and bring food in re-usable containers. We observe a “Carry-in/Carry-out” policy. Trash that can’t be composted will go home in your child’s lunch box/bag each day.

If your child has any dietary restrictions or allergies, we need to be notified and have it documented on the initial health form at registration.



Clothing

Dressing for Success

We spend much of our day outside and students need to be prepared for all weather. Clothing must be **labeled** with your child’s name and should allow freedom of movement, warmth, and be easy to put on and take off. We assist children who need help dressing. Please make sure your child has appropriate, safe, outside footwear; we do not allow open-toe footwear. Sneakers, hiking boots, and insulated snow boots are suggested.

Your child will need a pair of inside shoes while wet footwear dries. Please make sure your child has a spare set of clothing.

Gear List:

FALL/SPRING

Rubber boots (**rain boots**) or multi-season insulated boots

Hat

Rain Suit (**or rain pants and rain coat with hood**)

We recommend: Oakiwear, Tuffo Muddy Buddy, Ducksday, Reima, Polarn O Pyret

Extra socks

WINTER

(2 Sets Required Daily)

Winter Boots (We recommend ones that are a size larger than your child’s foot with socks on. This Creates a “dead-air” space to assist in insulating the foot. The best insulation are **wool socks** with **waterproof boots**.)

*We recommend: LONECONE, neoprene Boots, Baffin Boots, Kamik Warm socks **(wool!** We recommend Smart Wool)*

Snow jacket/poants or (one piece snowsuit)

*Waterproof mittens **(NO GLOVES-mittens are easier for your child to put on)***

Second layers (**sweatshirts**)

Balaclava (**in place of hats and scarves**)

SUMMER

Rubber boots (**rain boots**) or multi-season insulated boots

Jacket/ sweatshirt

Rain Suit (**or rain pants and rain coat with hood**)

Sun hat

Spare Clothing (**water activities**)

Extra socks

(No Opened toed or crocs style foot wear)

Clothing, continued



Staff uses discretion to limit outside time on extremely cold days.

All preschool staff members remain with the students outside for instruction, supervision, and to comply with licensing laws. We cannot sacrifice a staff member to stay inside with a student who has not come prepared. We thank you in advance for making sure your child is ready to go!

Bug Spray & Sunscreen

Please apply sunscreen/ bug repellent prior to arrival. We will reapply as needed using Fledgling

bug spray and sunscreen. **Please do not send sunscreen or bug spray in with your child.**

Health & Safety

Sick Days: There are times when your child should not attend school for health reasons.

Please refer to the list below and if your child has one or more of the following symptoms, do not send him/her to school:

- *A temperature of 100 degrees+*
- *A low grade fever and acting ill*
- *An infectious disease*
- *Vomiting or upset stomach*
- *Diarrhea*
- *Constant runny nose*
- *Coughing non-stop*
- *Pain*

COVID Protocol:

Do not send your child if they have COVID-19. The CDC now recommends that individuals aged two and up wear masks inside public spaces when the rate of COVID-19 community spread is “high”. Prescott Farm will track the CDC website with data on the spread of the disease in Belknap County and use rating to determine if mask use is required or optional. Please inform your child’s teacher if your child has been exposed to or contracts any communicable disease outside of the preschool environment so we can monitor others.

Ticks, Bees & Poison Ivy

We do “spot checks” for ticks and encourage you to do the same at home. If a student is stung, we monitor the child and notify parents. Prescott Farm staff identifies poison ivy and avoids any areas that have it.

Inclement Weather Policy

We follow weather cancellations of Laconia School District. In the event of a delay, Fledglings arrive at 10:00 am. We notify parents on the Fledglings Facebook group page and Remind app by 7 am if school is delayed or cancelled. If Laconia School District calls for an Early Release, Fledglings’ students need to be picked up by 1 pm. No After Care available in the case of an Early Release. **Cancelled school days due to weather will not be made up or refunded.**

Release of Children in Custody Situations

Children are released only to those authorized by the parent/guardian listed on registration forms. Under no circumstances will a child be released to anyone other than those adults listed unless prior approval from the child’s parent/guardian is received. A change in the “authorized person” requires the person picking up to show valid picture ID. If there is any question during departure, the parent/guardian will be contacted by phone.

In the event a non-custodial parent arrives to pick up a child, we follow all guidelines for child custody situations. We do NOT release children to the non-custodial parent. The custodial parent/guardian will be notified. We apologize in advance for any oversights, it is our legal responsibility to comply with court orders and make sure our students are in safe hands at all times.

Mandated Reporting

We are obligated by law to report any suspected cases of child abuse, neglect, or exploitation to Child Protective Services and/or to the local law enforcement agency.

Health & Safety, *continued*

In Case of an Accident

Although children are supervised at all times, accidents may occur. Parents are notified of any accidents and the circumstances under which it occurred. If the accident is minor, parents receive an accident report form at pick-up. Our first action is to obtain the needed help and the second will be to notify the parent/guardian in more serious situations.

By law, we document, maintain, and update any health and accident reports along with any inspection or licensing reports made by the state. Those reports will be housed on site and made available upon request to any parents.

All Fledglings staff members are certified in CPR for Infants and Children with Obstructed Airway Education and First Aid Certified by law. Several Prescott Farm staff members are also certified in Wilderness First Aid/First Responder.

Emergency Response

As required by law, Fledglings maintains an emergency response plan, including response actions for natural, human-caused or technological incidents including but not limited to: evacuation, secure campus, drop and cover, lockdown, reverse evacuation and shelter-in-place. Fire drills are held monthly. We have an emergency management plan, detailing procedures should an emergency occur. Evacuation maps and emergency contact numbers are posted in every room.

A Final Note on Safety

Prescott Farm's Samuel P. Pardoe Building and grounds are open to the public. We take several measures to be sure that children are not in direct contact with members of the public. Children are never left unsupervised by the preschool staff, the door to the classroom is kept closed to separate the classroom from the lobby area, and exterior doors off the classroom are locked during the day to prevent anyone from entering the room.

While on the property you must be idle-free at all times. Idling is harmful to the environment and must be taken seriously. Children may not be unattended in vehicles. This is a public facility so please keep children with adults at all times.

Tuition & Registration

Time	Days	Tuition	Summer Tuition
8:00-3:00	Mon-Wed-Fri	\$5,839	\$1,294
8:00-3:00	Tues-Thurs	\$3,931	\$871
8:00-3:00	Full Week	\$9,635	\$2,115
NOTE: No HALF DAY Fledglings (refer to Tadpoles for Half Day program)			
3:00-4:00pm	MWF	\$990	\$260

Tuition is based on the number of school days in each session per school year. “No school days” (teacher professional development days and holidays) are accounted for in tuition. No refunds are given for inclement weather closings or missed days. There is no discount on preschool tuition for Prescott Farm Members.

Registration

Our enrollment timeline: Enrollment opens for existing students, siblings and alumni families on February 12th. Waitlist families will begin to be contacted in the beginning of March by the Preschool Director, in waitlist order, and offered an opening. Waitlisted families have 48 hours to accept the opening and remit the initial deposit. If openings remain, enrollment opens for general public by April 1st.

All Registrations are completed online. Current Fledglings and families on our wait list will be contacted with the registration link.

There is a \$100 non-refundable Registration Fee (\$25 for scholarship applicants) which must accompany each child’s registration application. This fee holds your child’s place until the first month’s tuition is due on July 1st 2025. If the first tuition payment is not received by the deadline, your child’s space may be lost.

Please Note: Once your registration has been confirmed, you must then complete the “Participant Profile” section of the registration by August 18th.

Children must be 2 years and 9 months when entering the program in the Fall (3 years by December 31). NO EXCEPTIONS. Children must be toilet trained and wearing underpants (not pull-ups) to attend. If on August 28, 2023, your child is not toilet trained, you may either: a) pay the tuition and hold the space until your child is ready to start school, b) put your child on the

Tuition & Registration, *continued*

wait until he/she is toilet trained OR c) wait until the next school year. In all cases, the registration fee will be held until ready to enroll. We understand that accidents happen, but we are not set up to change diapers.

If your child is registered, but does not appear for classes without notice or other arrangements, by September 29, 2025, you are obligated to continue with future tuition payments until we are notified. If arrangements have not been made by September 29, 2025, the deposit and payments made will be forfeited and your child's spot will be made available. If you have prepaid for the entire 2025-2026 school year, as soon as your child's spot has been filled, you will be reimbursed for the remaining months of that prepaid amount.

Payment Plans

Tuition can be paid in full or monthly. The first month's (September's) tuition is due by July 1st, 2025.

Full Payment: Full payment is due by May 1st, 2026 and will receive a 2% discount. ????

Monthly Payment Plan: After the first and second months' tuition payments are made, remaining tuition is divided into seven equal payments due on the first Monday of each month from Sept.-March. You must put a valid credit card on file with our office regardless of payment method. If payments are not made on time, they will be charged to your credit card. **If for whatever reason you choose to withdraw your child from the program before the end of the school year, the balance of payments due for the school year will be charged to your credit card unless we can fill your spot.**

Tuition Assistance

At Prescott Farm, we believe all children should have access to quality preschool education. Many generous community members and organizations donate funds to provide tuition assistance for families who would not otherwise be able to attend Fledglings. In order to be considered for the 2025-2026 school year, **all tuition assistance applications must be completed online no later than May 26, 2025.** Funds are very limited and are awarded first to children already enrolled at Fledglings. Any remaining funds will be made available for new students on a first come, first served basis. We do expect that families will contribute financially as much as possible to their child's preschool education.

Verification of income eligibility occurs through our partnership with the Family Resource Center

Tuition & Registration, *continued*

of Lakes Region Community Services (LRCS) or by evidence of enrollment in the children's Medicaid program. All tuition assistance applicants must complete the "Scholarship Application" which enables us to verify eligibility.

Families applying for tuition assistance are charged a reduced Registration Fee of \$25. This fee may be refunded if sufficient tuition assistance is not available. Notification of awards will be made via email by June 16, 2025. If you accept the tuition assistance offered, the remainder of the first month's tuition will be due by July 17, 2025 and the second payment will be due on August 25, 2025. The remaining tuition will be divided into seven equal payments to be made on the first Monday of each month from October-April.

Fledglings is now part of the State of NH Childcare Scholarship Program and accepts the State of NH Childcare Scholarship for eligible families!

Miscellaneous

Toys from Home: Sometimes children need a comfort item from home to help with new situations. We prefer special items stay home but understand they might be needed initially to ease your child into their new preschool environment. After the initial adjustment period, we encourage keeping special items from home in your child's bag or cubby and only using it in times of need.

Birthdays & Special Occasions: We are more than happy to celebrate your child's special day! As we are nature-based and educate children about the importance of nature in their lives, some of the celebration for your child's special day will be connecting them to what is happening in the environment at the time of year/season in which they were born. Your child will celebrate with their friends through song and cooperative activities. If you are planning a celebration outside of school and expect to invite all of their classmates, you may bring invitations to school. If you are not inviting every child in the class we request that you send invitations privately.

Photo Policy: Pictures are taken on a daily basis to record progress and document activities. Some pictures are posted on our closed Facebook page. We ask your permission to use photos with a release form signed electronically at the time of registration. Please request an invitation to our preschool Facebook group page, "Fledglings Families 2025-26". These photos are NOT available to the public for viewing.

Miscellaneous, continued

We ask parents who have taken photos of their child with other classmates during any activity to be respectful of other families and not post the child's name if sharing photographs online.

A Final Word...

Preschool is often the first time children leave family to be with others their own age. Children are usually excited to participate in this new experience, but hesitant to say "goodbye" to home. We understand this. Everyone adjusts to change at their own rate and we guide that adjustment period in a positive, nurturing way.

Be prepared for your Preschooler to have their ups and downs initially, as they navigate their new environment and find their own place away from home. You can help prepare your child for Preschool and talk about it from time to time the week before preschool begins. Answer your child's questions with honest answers.

Bring your preschooler to Prescott Farm to visit! They may enjoy participating in one of the Polli-wog classes we offer. This is a great way to introduce the learning environment at Prescott Farm. Anything that ties to Prescott Farm is an opportunity to better prepare your child for coming as a student in the fall.

...And last but not least, please communicate with your child's teacher(s) if your child exhibits anxiety or fear about coming so that an enjoyable, smooth transition from home to school can happen. We are all on the same team and we want this to be an wonderful experience for everyone!

Acknowledgement

The **Fledglings Preschool Parent Handbook** provides important information about Fledglings Nature-Based Preschool at Prescott Farm. I understand that I should consult the Preschool Programs Director or the Executive Director regarding questions not covered in the handbook. The information and policies described here are subject to change, and I acknowledge that revisions to the handbook may occur. While these changes may be communicated through official notices, I understand that revised information may supersede, modify or eliminate existing policies with or without prior notice. I understand that this handbook supersedes any prior handbook.

You will be required to acknowledge receiving and reading the 2025-2026 Parent Handbook with an electronic signature at the time of registration.