

Mother Nature Academy LLC

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Educators:

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If you wish to talk to one of our educators, please call, email or text a msg. **after hours** and we will set up a time to speak in person. Please do not call our educators during school hours except in the event of some emergency. If there is a simple message to relate, feel free to text us.

Our Vision:

Our vision and mission is to inspire children, ignite their imagination, promote a life-long love of learning, and foster scientific exploration and environmental awareness by providing to children the opportunity to learn outdoors.

Goals

Our goals for your children fall into five domains: Physical, Cognitive, Social/Emotional, Language, and Ethical.

Physical: Because our students will be outdoors, they will more quickly develop large motor skills because of the almost limitless opportunities for development. Running, jumping, skipping, and hopping will be encouraged every day. Building fine motor skills are important for learning to write and accomplish everyday tasks. We will offer many opportunities to work with beads, scissors, tweezers, crayons, markers, play dough and other media.

Cognitive: We have two extensive libraries, one of which is accessed directly from our outdoor learning environment. Our hope is that children will see something in nature that they are interested in and want to know more about, and then use our library as yet another source of information along with the hands-on opportunities that are plentiful in an outdoor setting. This will promote literacy, and hone reasoning and thinking skills. Along with the natural environment, our outdoor classroom is also set up to spur math and science questions and answers. We also hope to ignite our little artists' imaginations by encouraging the arts, visual and performing, with our music area, dancing and art center.

Social/Emotional: Being outdoors naturally encourages children to be more cooperative. As an example, we have intentionally set up our outdoor environment with such things that will require cooperative effort to build something. In an outdoor environment, there is generally less aggressive behavior and arguments because children will have the space and opportunity to walk away from confrontation if they choose to. Our goal is to teach children to help each other and teach them strategies to cope when there is a disagreement.

Language: Young children learn vocal language skills by scripting. They will imitate adults by creating a common scenario like cooking a meal, going to the doctor, feeding a baby, etc. Our dramatic play area encourages scripting with a wide variety of props for many possible scenarios. The writing center will entice a child to begin developing their writing skills with markers, pencils, chalk, and other interesting media while also introducing them to the alphabet and phonics.

Ethics: This domain is not often addressed in many preschools, but it is our goal that our students will move on to kindergarten and beyond embracing kindness and empathy for other people. We hope to partner with parents in instilling a standard of ethical judgment in our students that is much higher than that which has been traditionally required in public schools. Our goal is to leave children with an environmental awareness that will foster a sense of environmental duty in adulthood. Learning in an outdoor facility will cultivate a love of nature and all forms of life that translates into environmental stewardship and respect for all life in adulthood.

Enrollment:

Mother Nature Academy accepts children 2-1/2 to 5 years old. Children must be at least 2-1/2 years old by 9/1. If they turn 5 before 9/1, they are not eligible for Fall enrollment. Maximum enrollment is 15 students per day. We have at least 3 educators every day.

Hours and Tuition

Hours: School hours are Monday through Friday 9:00 am – 12:00 pm.

If you wish to talk to one of our educators, please call, email or text a message **after hours** and we will set up a time to speak in person. Please do not call our educators during school hours except in the event of some emergency. If there is a simple message to relate, feel free to text us.

Following Maria Montessori's common sense philosophy, we have chosen not to break our classes down by age. Montessori espoused the idea that teaching children in age "ranges" was more beneficial to her students.

"As she watched the children busily going about their work, Montessori realized that it was natural and very easy for the younger children to learn by watching and listening to the older children. In fact she saw that children learn best this way and that something wonderful happened when a community of children could actively support and help each other. Montessori schools therefore encourage children of all ages to work together as a social group and do not normally split children by sex or age."(<http://www.montessori.org.uk/>)

Younger children tend to imitate the activities of the older children and their learning is accelerated by using that resource. The older children like to "show what they know" and they essentially "teach" the younger children the skills that they have mastered. It is said that one hasn't truly mastered a skill until one can teach it to someone else. This is especially true in early childhood. Mother Nature Academy can provide these opportunities for our students simply by offering mixed-age classes. To that end, we offer three schedules from which you can choose to enroll your child, regardless of his or her age:

2023-2024 Tuition:

	School
	Monthly / Year
2 days per week (Tuesday and Thursday 9:00am – 12:00pm)	\$295 / \$2655
3 days per week (Monday, Wednesday & Friday 9:00am – 12:00pm)	\$350 / \$3150
5 days per week (Monday through Friday 9:00am -12:00pm)	\$475 / \$4275

There is an annual registration fee of \$100 (this is non-refundable).

The slots we have available for each schedule are limited and are first come, first served based on when we receive the registration form and \$100 non-refundable registration fee.

Safety

The safety of your child is our number one priority. We are well aware that an outdoor preschool presents a unique set of opportunities for injuries to children, and we have made every effort to eliminate hazards on our campus. Hazards are threats a child cannot possibly avoid. The child cannot see hazards or comprehend them as dangerous.

We also continually assess risk associated with daily activities. Risk is something that a child can see, self-assess and avoid if they choose. Children are very good at assessing their own risk levels. Some children are more risk averse than others. Our teachers will monitor all activities to be sure the children do not misjudge. The structured activities will be developmentally appropriate with an acceptable level of risk. For example, if the risk for a certain activity might be a scratch or a bump, we would consider it an acceptable risk. If the risk for another activity is a possible broken bone or worse, it is considered unacceptable for our purposes.

Children are commonly injured every day, indoors and outdoors. Many children get hurt outdoors because of their lack of exposure to uneven terrain and other factors inherent to the outdoors. However, children who are exposed to the outdoors early and often, learn skills to navigate these factors and become nimbler and more athletic as they grow.

Curriculum

Mother Nature Academy will be drawing from the early childhood education philosophies of Reggio Emilia, Jean Piaget and Maria Montessori to offer your child a very unique vehicle to propel and sustain them through future academic success. All of these philosophies agree that children learn through play and that play should be child-centered.

Jean Piaget also believed that children build intelligence in a series of stages. These stages are related to their age, but one must be built upon the other as one stage must be accomplished before another stage could be started. This is called scaffolding. We recognize that children need to be taught material at the stage at which they are ready to receive it.

Maria Montessori believed that if the environment was intentionally set up with the tools children needed to learn, they would use these tools and learn the lesson with

minimal adult direction. This is because children have different learning styles and sometimes when teachers try to teach to the child in a different style, the child misses the lesson. We aim to set up our environment with those elements that will foster learning through play.

Reggio Emilia is project-based learning approach built on the principle that when a child is interested in something, they can learn many other concepts through that interest. For example, if one day we found that our students were interested in the deer tracks we saw on our nature walk, we might count the tracks (math), compare them with other animal tracks (science), learn about the foods they eat and compare them with our own healthy diet (nutrition), study a map to see where deer are found (geography), read books about deer (literacy), make plaster animal tracks (art), and maybe have a deer expert come and talk to us about our deer (enrichment). This is called the Project Approach and we intend to incorporate the approach in our curriculum.

Research has made it very clear that children can and will learn more effectively when:

1. Their environment is conducive to learning.
2. The child is emotionally ready to learn (He/she is not upset, worried, frightened or sad.)
3. The material is presented in a developmentally appropriate way.
4. The child is interested in the material.
5. The teacher is instructing from a position of positive guidance.

Our students will be continually observed and assessed for progress in four developmental domains:

1. Physical development
2. Social/Emotional development
3. Cognitive development
4. Language development

To this end, our outdoor learning environment will offer children a variety of activity centers that will challenge and delight them. These activity centers include:

1. Dramatic play area
2. Mud Kitchen
3. Sand Pit for digging and engineering
4. Water play (in temperate weather)

5. Balance bikes
6. Music wall
7. Library
8. Large Blocks Box
9. Tunnel/Climbing Net/Slide/Rock Wall
10. Art and Writing Center
11. Math and manipulative center
12. Science and discovery center
13. Light Board

In addition to these activity centers, we will be working on specific themed units throughout the year that will be chosen based on our student's interests.

Snacks

Nutritious snacks will be accessible to our students during the entire morning. The children will be encouraged to serve themselves a snack – that will include a vegetable or fruit, and a grain or a protein – any time they feel hungry. It is common knowledge that children are not emotionally ready to receive instruction if they are distressed and hunger can cause distress. With this in mind, a snack table will be set up in a screened area with nutritious snacks, in individual trays. The children will be taught how and encouraged to wash their hands before choosing a snack. Allowing the children to serve themselves empowers them when they are hungry and helps to develop independence. Cards are provided with the quantity (depicted by word, numeral and picture) of each food they are permitted to take, so they will be learning an important math skill while they are serving themselves. Students are then asked to place their dirty trays in a tub. (These dishes will be rewashed and sanitized in a dishwasher at the end of the day.)

Parents are not responsible for bringing in snacks, they will be provided by Mother Nature Academy. Some of them may even be grown on our campus. We will be sure to address any food allergies children may have before we decide on the snack to be served each day. It is the responsibility of the parents to inform us of **any** allergies your child has.

Potty Guidelines

If your child is not potty-trained, you are required to bring them in a pull-up. We will, of course, change a dirty diaper, or assist a newly trained child with clothing, flushing, etc. However, we will not be potty-training during the 3 hours your child will be here.

Appropriate Clothing

Please bring your little one dressed in clothing and outerwear that is appropriate for the day's weather. Also, be sure the clothing and outwear are washable as the children **will be** getting messy, dirty and possibly wet.

Sunny days: If your child needs sunscreen or insect repellent, it must be applied before you arrive at school. By law, teachers are not permitted to apply sunscreen, insect repellent or any other chemical treatments or preventatives.

Because the children will be playing in sand, dirt, and mulch, we ask that if your child wants to wear a dress or skirt, please have them wear a pair of shorts or leggings underneath. This will help prevent urinary tract infections and other discomfort.

Wet Days: Children must wear a rain jacket with a hood on rainy days. This jacket should be made of plastic, not polyester, to be sure it repels rain. **Look for "rainproof" not "rain resistant."** Unless the weather turns extreme, we will be outdoors when it is raining. **In the event of snow, thunder/lightning, threat of tornado or hail, or rain with temperatures in the 30's, school will be closed.**

Cold Days: **On days where the temperature will be below 32 for the entire morning, we will be closed.** On cold days, be sure your child arrives with warm clothes, a warm jacket, winter hat and mittens. Because it usually warms up during the morning, it is best to dress them in easily removable layers. Children may not wear shorts or skirts on cold days unless they are worn in conjunction with warm, long pants. Warm boots are also advisable on cold days. If your child cannot put gloves on by themselves, please send them with mittens, not gloves.

Mother Nature Academy will be closed when Moore County Schools are closed or delayed for weather-related events. There are no makeup days. Tuition is not prorated for these unforeseeable events.

If you or your child are adverse to them being outside when it is hot, rainy or cold, please keep your child at home on those days. It is not possible to teach children when they are distressed.

Required to bring at the start of the school year and leave on campus:

1. A pair of rubber boots and a raincoat, both labeled with the child's name.
2. Two changes of clothing (1 for warm weather and 1 for cold weather, including socks and underwear)
3. A box of tissues

Please do not bring toys from home. We cannot be responsible for lost personal possessions. Also, toys from home tend to cause conflict in the classroom. A comfort toy may be brought and placed in your child's cubby to be taken out when needed.

Required documents:

These forms must be sent to us at least 1 week before your child begins school and must remain with us for the entirety of the school year:

1. Medical Release Form
2. Emergency Contact Information
3. List of people who have permission to pick up the child from school
4. Allergy Notification
5. Field Trip permission slip. (This slip is a blanket permission for allowing your child to go on teacher-supervised nature walks on our campus. The state of North Carolina only recognizes a designated, fenced area on campus as our "classroom." We need your permission to take the children out of that area.)

Health and Wellness Guidelines

Germs and viruses do not spread as quickly in an outdoor environment because there are fewer surface areas on which to collect and because germs tend to thrive at room temperature, but not in the varying temperatures of the outdoors.

Even so, there will be instances of illness at our preschool. If your little one is too sick to fully engage in our daily activities, please keep them at home until they recover. Our facility is not equipped to serve sick children, so if any of the following symptoms appear while your child is with us, we will ask you to come and pick them up:

- ✓ Temperature of 100° or higher
- ✓ Vomiting
- ✓ Stomach ache
- ✓ Headache

- ✓ Diarrhea
- ✓ Red or pink eyes
- ✓ Sore Throat
- ✓ Cough
- ✓ Earache
- ✓ Rash
- ✓ Lethargy

Please be sure your child has been fever-free for 24 hours before returning to preschool. If they have been prescribed an antibiotic for their illness, please be sure that the first dose is taken 24 hours before returning to preschool.

We require that parents notify us immediately in the event that your child was diagnosed with COVID-19, lice, strep throat, pink eye or pinworms. These are conditions that can easily spread between children and the earlier they are diagnosed, the faster we can control the contagion. Parents will be notified of any incidences of these conditions, so that they can watch for symptoms. Names of children that have been diagnosed will not be released in these notifications. This information will be kept in strict confidence.

Medications

Our educators are not responsible for administering medications. Please let us know if your child has allergies or other conditions that may require an emergency reaction plan.

If you cannot be reached during an emergency, we will seek emergency medical treatment as outlined in your Emergency Contact Form. Any expense incurred during such emergency treatment is solely the responsibility of the parent(s).

Drop-off and Pick-up

It is our goal to make drop off and pick up times as stress-free as possible for the children and their parents. Every child reacts to separation differently and every parent has a different way of responding to that reaction.

If your little one needs a little extra time with you before you leave, feel free to park your car by the goat pen and stay as long as you like. If it is easier for both of you if you leave as soon as possible, you may simply drop-off your child at the gate.

Please let us know if there is something that your child is upset about, so that we may be able to support them through a position of empathy and understanding.

Drop-off times are staggered (8:50, 9:00, & 9:10). Please know your assigned time and try to be prompt. After 8:50 the children, as they arrive, may assemble in the Pavilion where they will be encouraged to “sign-in” (practice writing their first name). When all the children have arrived, we will start our program. Any parents who are still here are welcome to stay or leave as they see fit. If, after the first two weeks of school, you plan to stay on a consistent basis (daily or weekly), we will ask permission to run a background check, as per state law.

Pick up time is staggered (11:50, 12:00, & 12:10). Parents, please respect our educators' time. We have appointments to keep and errands to run, just like you. Promptness is expected every day. If you consistently (more than 3x's per month) arrive to pick up your child more than 15 minutes after your assigned time, you will be charged an extra \$100 per month tuition.

Parent /Volunteer Involvement and Mentorships

Mother Nature Academy encourages parental involvement in your little one's education. We invite you to come and spend an entire morning with our class anytime you would like to come. We also ask that parents who have a skill or a field of occupation that would interest the children, to come and share that with our students. We are always looking for enrichment opportunities to supplement our curriculum. If you know of anyone who would be willing to share their skill or talent or talk about their occupation, please put them in touch with us and we'll make it happen.

We would also like to invite seniors or empty-nesters, who would like to spend time with young children, to volunteer time to read or tell a story to the children, or, again, share a talent or skill with them.

We offer a limited number of spaces for mentorship opportunities as well. If you know a young adult, age 16 or older, who would like to learn from experienced early childhood educators in our unique outdoor nature preschool, please ask them to contact us by email with name, age, and available times. Mentees are asked to commit to one full morning each week. If over age 18, we will require a background check.

Guidance Policy

At Mother Nature Academy, we believe that most children are capable of learning to control their own emotions and being responsible for their own actions. Our goal is to maintain an atmosphere where children can learn self-discipline and respect for themselves and others as well as other important life skills. We believe that children will develop these skills much more efficiently and effectively when we use positive guidance rather than punitive, traditional, disciplinary methods.

Traditional Discipline methods generally include some kind of punishment for challenging behavior. This type of discipline only tells a child that they did something that is unacceptable. It does not teach them how to accomplish their goal in a more acceptable manner. Therefore, the child may continue to display the same unacceptable behavior because they have not been taught a different way.

However, Positive Guidance utilizes techniques to curb challenging behavior before it begins. It is praising good behavior. It is recognizing where conflicts might occur and finding a solution before conflict starts. It is allowing the child to “own” his mistake and guiding them toward an acceptable solution; teaching them how to correct their mistake.

In this way, we can build positive relationships with our students. When that is accomplished, the learning can begin.

Relationships are built on trust. A child must know that we are going to be there to help them navigate social situations; that we are not going to scold them for trying and failing. They must know they can get honesty from us. And they must know that none of these provisions are going to change from day to day. Our educators know that before we can teach a child, we must have a positive relationship with them. We create these relationships by:

- Praising good behavior
- Showing affection (hugs, high-fives, pats on the back, etc.)
- Welcoming every student by name each day
- Having positive one-on-one reciprocal conversations with children
- Offering positive choices
- Encouraging children’s efforts (praise process over product)
- Modeling self-regulation, respect and courtesy

Mother Nature educators encourage children to communicate with us and other students in an acceptable manner. Some methods our teachers employ to encourage communication are:

- Focusing on what a child is saying – LISTEN
- Using reciprocal language so a child knows you are listening and understanding
- Being aware of non-verbal communication (smiles, glares, shrugs, hand gestures, nervous habits, etc.)
- Use positive verbal and non-verbal communication to praise efforts (high-fives, smiles, hand clapping, etc.)

We also encourage communication between parents and teachers. You know your child better than anyone else and we believe that the primary responsibility for the growth and success of the child belongs to the parents. If you see unusual behavior at home or know of a situation that may cause your child distress, please confide in your child's teachers, so we can make the adjustments necessary to support your child.

Reciprocally, we will inform parents of any unusual behavior or situations at preschool.

Positive Guidance Techniques

Our educators are knowledgeable about techniques that provide positive guidance for your child. They:

- See challenging behavior as a teaching opportunity, not as an annoying disruption.
- Are consistent in the way they care for the children
- Have a consistent schedule each day
- Set reasonable expectations that are developmentally appropriate.
- Control their own emotions
- Respond appropriately and patiently to challenging behavior
- Help children see that they are in charge of their emotions and their bodies and that they are also in charge of finding acceptable solutions to their dilemmas and obstacles
- Build self-esteem by acknowledging and praising positive behavior
- Respect our students and each other

Discipline techniques that are PROHIBITED:

Educators, staff and volunteers are not permitted to:

- Bully, tease or degrade any child
- Use corporal punishment of any kind (including slapping or spanking)
- Humiliate or shame children
- Shake, pinch, squeeze or jerk children
- Use time-out
- Restrict food, water, or snacks as a punishment

Correction techniques

We have found that most confrontations between children can be corrected by redirecting the student(s). More serious aggressive behavior will involve natural, logical consequences. The child(ren) will also be asked how the consequences could have been avoided and given some ideas on more acceptable ways to handle the situation. If the problem is a classroom-wide discipline issue, we will ask the children to help us find a solution and involve them in making rules to prevent the issue.