



Parent Handbook Pine Creek Nature School

2026-2027

The mission of Pine Creek Nature School is to hold space for children to explore, play, and grow in connection with the natural world.

We cultivate a deep sense of belonging by honoring each child's unique identity and voice, while nurturing a strong foundation for lifelong learning. Rooted in respect for self, others, and the environment, we support the development of the whole child. We investigate nature through play-based exploration and hands-on activities involving art, science, math, literacy, music and most importantly play.

Programs & Curriculum

- Our teachers are guided by the principles that children follow their interests and learn by doing; through play-based exploration and hands-on experiences. Teachers guide with questions instead of only giving answers, they offer support while meeting children where they currently are in their journey of creating a sense of self and learning about the world around them. It is a priority that all of our classes have a low child to teacher ratio. We aim to honor the magic of childhood through quality literature, music, math, art, science, and most importantly play.

The Chickadee Program is an exploratory and play-based class designed to nurture curiosity, confidence, and a deep connection to the natural world. It focuses on building social-emotional skills, strengthening fine and gross motor skills, noticing nature and its rhythms, and getting used to being outside in all weather! This class is aimed towards younger children first entering a preschool environment who are 3 years olds.

The Bluebird Program builds on the foundations described in the Chickadees class. It includes developing early skills in literacy, math, and science through hands-on activities and explorations. This class is designed for children who are 4 years old and have some previous preschool experience.

The Steller's Jay Program blends structured instruction with child-led exploration connecting outdoor experiences to academic concepts. We implement engaging, hands-on activities that integrate literacy, math, science, music and art. This more structured and academic class is geared towards 5 year olds.

- The curriculums we use are listed below. Lessons are chosen based on the time of year and season, and the ages and capabilities of the children.
 - *Project Learning Tree: Trees & Me* - Sustainable Forestry Initiative
 - *Growing Up Wild* - OSU Oregon Natural Resources Education Program
 - *Wild Learning: Wild Math & Wild Reading* - Rachel Tidd
 - *Blossom & Root: The Early Years*
 - *Nature School: Lessons and Activities to Inspire Children's Love for Everything Wild*- Giordano, Hathaway & Stroup

- Our Daily Rhythm

Chickadees

Tues-Wed-Thurs

8:30am - 11:30am

8:30	Drop-Off & Morning Invitation
8:50	Today's Inquiry (Lesson/Activity)
9:30	Music & Movement
9:45	Snack & Story
10:00	Nature Exploration/Free Play
11:30	Pick-Up

Bluebirds

Tues-Wed-Thurs

12:30pm - 3:30pm

12:30	Drop-Off & Afternoon Invitation
12:50	Today's Inquiry (Lesson/Activity)
1:30	Music & Movement
1:45	Snack & Story
2:00	Nature Exploration/Free Play
3:30	Pick-Up

Steller's Jays

Mon-Tues-Wed-Thurs

9:00am - 1:00pm

9:00	Drop-Off & Morning Invitation
9:20	Morning Inquiry (Literacy/Math Lessons)
10:00	Music & Movement
10:15	Snack & Story
10:30	Free Play
11:30	Guided Nature Exploration/Science Inquiry
12:00	Lunch & Story
1:00	Pick-Up

Tuition & Enrollment

- PCNS uses the communication and billing platform Brightwheel for enrollment. This can be downloaded as an app on your phone. All enrollment forms must be completed through Brightwheel.
- The completed registration forms and the \$100 non-refundable registration fee are required to hold your child's place at Pine Creek Nature School; this \$100 registration fee will then go towards your child's first month's tuition.
- Tuition Rates:

Chickadees: 3/4 year olds: \$375/month
Tuesday-Wednesday-Thursday 8:30am-11:30am

Bluebirds: 4/5 year olds: \$375/month
Tuesday-Wednesday-Thursday, 12:30pm-3:30pm

Steller's Jays: 5/6 year olds: \$520/month
Monday-Tues-Wed-Thursday, 9:00am-1:00pm

- Monthly invoices will be sent out via BrightWheel. Tuition is due on the 1st of the month; a \$25 late fee will be applied if tuition is not received by the 10th of the month. Payments can be made through Brightwheel or via check/cash. A 30 day withdrawal notice is required if you plan on discontinuing enrollment.
- There is a \$50 materials and site fee due on September 1st and January 1st.

- We will follow the Baker 5J School District calendar (Sept - May). Tuition will not be reduced if a child is unable to attend class for any reason. If PCNS needs to close on any scheduled school calendar days, you will be notified as soon as possible. Those days will then be added to the end of the school year as “make-up days”.
- All substitutes will have a background check and be registered with the Central Background Registry. We will do our best to notify parents of this in advance so your child can be aware of the change before drop-off.
- If you are going to have a late arrival or your child will not be joining us on any given day, please let us know so we can make the appropriate accommodations.

Safety and Health

- The health and safety of your child/children is our number one priority at all times. All staff are First Aid, CPR & AED certified (adult and pediatric), are equipped with a first aid kit and will have cell phones with them at all times. We teach the children comprehensive safety rules to prevent accidents or injuries, and require children wear a reflective safety vest during their time with us (vest provided by PCNS). If there is an accident, caregivers will be notified at pick-up, or sooner if needed. We also do routine “check-ins” with the children to make sure they are aware of how their bodies are feeling and assist them with any needs they may have.
- In the event of a medical emergency Pine Creek Nature School will make every attempt to contact the child’s parent or guardian. If the parent or guardian cannot be reached, PCNS will contact the person(s) listed as the emergency contact. If the child requires transportation as a result of a medical emergency, we will utilize local emergency medical transport as directed by 911 operators. Parents are responsible for any and all medical treatment, costs and ambulance fees. Pine Creek Nature School will not be held liable for any cost incurred during a medical emergency.
- PCNS utilizes an Emergency Action Plan (EAP) specific to our learning environment. All staff are trained in the EAP protocol and procedures.
- Risky Play: PCNS fully embraces the benefits of “risky play” as an important part of a child’s development. This type of play builds resilience, self-confidence, executive functioning skills, risk-assessment skills, and physical competence, while reducing risk of injury by teaching children to recognize their own limits. Examples may include balancing on rocks or logs, supervised tool use, exploring trees, navigating uneven ground, etc.

- PCNS will often build outside fires during the colder months to cook, for warmth and educational purposes. For more information, see our “Outside Fire Policy” in BrightWheel.
- Regarding illness: As mandated by state law, please keep your child home if they have a runny/stuffy nose that is green or yellow, if they have vomited in the last 24 hours, if they have a rash, chest congestion/cough, watery or mucousy pink eyes, or diarrhea. Only send your child once they have been fever-free for at least 24 hours (without medication) and are no longer contagious. If we feel your child is too ill to be at nature school, we will call you to come pick them up.
- Potty Protocol: We have a vault toilet for use within the fenced in play area at PCNS. Children must be completely out of diapers and pull-ups, and need very little assistance while going to the bathroom.
- Pine Creek Nature School has the right to refuse enrollment or terminate enrollment of a child participating in the program due to safety concerns (i.e. on-going lack of proper clothing, inability to follow directions, safety of other children).
- Child Abuse Reporting: In accordance with Oregon Revised Statute 419B.005, PCNS is a mandatory reporter, and trained in Child Abuse and Maltreatment Identification and Prevention.
- In accordance with Oregon Law OAR 333-050-0020, Pine Creek Nature School requires a Certificate of Immunization Status (CIS) form for each child, showing either evidence of immunization, medical or nonmedical exemption, or documentation of immunity. PCNS is required to exclude children from attendance if they don't provide one of these before starting or while attending.
 - “This information is being collected on behalf of the Oregon Health Authority and may be released to the Authority or the local public health department by the school or children’s facility upon request of the Oregon Health Authority.”
- Weather Closures: PCNS will cancel school due to inclement weather. This includes; if the wind is above 35mph or the class is in danger of falling trees or branches, if the wind chill index is below 20 degrees Fahrenheit, if the heat index is 100 or greater, or if the air quality index is deemed unhealthy.

What to Bring:

- Clothing: Proper clothing for your child is extremely important for their safety and success at PCNS. It is always better to have too many layers than too few! We are outside every single day regardless of weather, so please make sure your child is dressed appropriately.

Recommendations on dressing during the colder months:

- Boots - **insulated AND waterproof** are a must in the fall, winter and spring (even if there is not any snow on the ground). Close-toed shoes are required throughout the year.
 - Wool/thermal socks
 - Base-Layer- Merino wool or polyester blends (avoid cotton).
 - Mid-Layer - Fleece lined pants, wool sweaters, puffy jacket, fleece hoodie
 - Outer Layer - This needs to be **completely waterproof**, especially if there is any snow on the ground.
 - Head & Hands - Ski hats that cover the child's ears, gator/face covering and **waterproof** mittens. Wide brimmed hats are recommended late spring and summer for sun protection.
- Please send a complete set of extra clothing in a ziplock bag with your child's name on it on the first day of nature school. We will keep this at PCNS in case of accidents/wet clothes.
 - Make sure your child has a full water bottle every day in addition to a filling and healthy snack (and lunch if applicable).
 - Please do not bring toys or other personal items from home.

Discipline

- The principles we use involve guiding children towards desired behaviors through positive reinforcement, clear communication, and natural consequences. We emphasize empathy and understanding, fostering a nurturing relationship between staff members and the children, and between the children themselves. If a child is unable to respond to these methods with recurring behavioral issues, a meeting may be scheduled with the parents for a behavioral plan. If patterns persist, especially if safety is an issue, PCNS has the right to terminate the child's enrollment.

Drop-Off & Pick-Up

- Parents are expected to assume full responsibility for their child during drop off, and once they enter the property for pick-up.
- Please help your child manage their belongings upon arrival, and double check that all of your child's belongings are accounted for before leaving PCNS during pick-up. PCNS is not responsible for lost or missing personal items.
- An additional fee of \$1 per minute will be charged if the child is picked up more than five minutes later than the scheduled time. In the event you are going to be late, please let us know. No late charges will take place if prior arrangements are made and agreed upon.

-
- Pine Creek Nature School, LLC is a Recorded Preschool Program with the Oregon Department of Early Learning and Care.
 - Statement of Non-Discrimination and Inclusion

PCNS operates in compliance with the requirements of the Oregon Early Learning Division and applicable state and federal civil rights laws.

We do not discriminate in enrollment, access to services, or employment on the basis of race, color, national origin, ancestry, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, marital status, familial status, age, disability, or any other protected class under Oregon law.

We are committed to creating a welcoming, inclusive community where every child and family feels a strong sense of belonging. We honor each child as a whole person and value the diversity of identities, experiences, and family backgrounds within our program.

As a nature-based preschool, we believe that time spent outdoors offers meaningful opportunities to build empathy, respect, and connection—to each other and to the natural world. However, a small drop-off nature school setting may not be a good fit for all children.

