

Bluestem Hall Nature School

Parent Handbook 2026 | 2027



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Mission statement

Bluestem hall nature school fosters rich learning, place-based literacy, and a deep and lifelong sense of belonging to the natural world through slowness and freedom. In modeling healthy relationships that establish trust of self, trust of others, kindness, empowerment, and body autonomy, our students will have the support to be their authentic selves.

What is a nature-based education?

Simply put, it is using the natural environment as our greatest teacher. While nature-based programs have the same goals for child development as any other high-quality program, the curriculum and teachers achieve these goals through our state protected prairie restoration, the Barnhart Prairie Preserve.

Nature schools are also known for their progressive, inclusive, and play-based philosophy for learning.

Inquiry- based teaching: using the child's individual curiosities as a steppingstone for their development. In employing a play-based approach children become pioneers of their own interests and develop a natural hunger for their own education.

Emotional intelligence: empathy for creatures great and small so that each child can develop a sense of connectedness and oneness with their environment, their classmates, and their community.

Child-led pace: empowering the students to set their own pace (physically and intellectually), set daily and weekly goals (as simple as identifying a special flower to engineer a hut), and begin the lifelong skill of self-reflection and assessment.

Non-adult expectations: it is not uncommon for children even as young as 3 and 4 to be burdened with the rigor, organization, and expectations of an adult world. If given the slowness, the time, and the freedom, children will naturally develop their own goals, systems, and expectations and those will be coming from a place of instinct, curiosity, and innocence.

Recognizing the benefit of appropriate risk taking: understanding that healthy risk (climbing for example) establishes a sense of body-autonomy, self-confidence, wisdom, good judgement, courage, persistence, and resiliency.

Community focused: treating school as a true community as we establish trust and build kinship as a whole



Educational Goals

We strive to meet guidelines for excellence in all areas of child development and learning. We hope to provide a place for rich cognitive learning, opportunities for growth physically, socially, emotionally, and spiritually in a dynamic and stimulating natural environment.

We believe in honoring the season each child is in. The widely accepted notion that each grade is a preparatory space for the next year is not something to which we subscribe. It's a radical notion to let children emerge with skills on their own age-appropriate schedule (please don't forget what a big window of time each skill comes with) and "readiness" is not a term we use in our school. An emphasis on readiness will simply strip the child of the chance for authentic interest. We trust that with the developmental tools and cognitive support we provide, that children will flourish in their own time schedules (similarly to when they exclusively decided it was time to walk or talk). There is no reason your child should not thrive in our program, but we encourage you to check in with your expectations of how that should look.

What success can look like with our students:

- Asking and answering their own questions
- Making choices and following one's own curiosities and agenda
- Navigating a new social dynamic
- Self-expression through language, dance, movement, written, and creative forms
- Creative problem solving
- Making discoveries about themselves and the world around them
- Working as a team with other students
- Showing kindness to oneself
- Showing kindness to others: classmate, friend, plant, or animal
- Identifying the emotions of oneself and the emotions of others and the importance of this in community

Adult Expectations (directors, teachers, staff, parents, and caregivers)

Our adults are keenly observant, trained, and ready to lead classrooms where every student feels safe, secure, and able to thrive. These are the guidelines that we ask all adults at our school to ensure our students are in an environment and community that treats their wellness as critical.

Systematic empowering: the idea that the voice of authority is always right and that children cannot refuse or say "no" is a reckless and negligent lesson. If a system of trust is in place that supports the concept that children do have the capacity for self-reflection and to know what they need, then children can be empowered to trust their inner guidance above all.

The value of body autonomy: children in a school setting are often taught they are not allowed to listen to the needs of their own bodies. This can be seen regularly as the refusal for bathroom breaks or the ability to drink water at will. Each child should have the freedom to be completely in charge of their bodies. Even the most basic needs like stretching, standing, and moving is of value and should be honored.

Innovation over memorization: when the muscle to memorize is so highly valued, it sends the message that absorbing information is the only goal. The ability to arrive at a solution creatively (instead of following memorized steps) should be of equal importance and is often where the seedlings of innovation and magic can happen!

Authentic over agreeable: the message that being quiet, complicit, and always likable is what's best for the "whole" is antiquated. It is teaching the next generation that society functions better when we match the needs of others, not the needs of our unique selves.

Community over competition: the idea that you should do better than your neighbor at any cost because there is only room for the success of one, is a mindset that often fails in adulthood and takes a lifetime to reprogram.

Learning how to work as a community and to balance the uniqueness and vibrancy of the group is invaluable on a scale both big and small.

Stillness is not required for learning: asking children as young as preschool and kindergarten to stop moving and sit still (under fluorescent lights more often than not) because that's how we learn is an injustice to the capacity and cognitive needs of the human brain. Teaching children to sit still in desks is a logistical goal for convenience and has no place in nature-based education.

Redefining discipline: an over emphasis on discipline is a harmful and dangerous contribution to the school to prison pipeline and a continuation of the destructive message of authority at schools. "when children attend schools that place greater value on discipline and security than on knowledge and intellectual development, they are attending prep schools for prison." - angela davis, "are prisons obsolete?" with systems of trust in place we hope to address behavioral issues devoid of fear tactics and disempowerment.

Final thoughts: children have their own sense of justice and fairness. While we will always protect each child's physical and emotional rights, we also respect the resolution and sense of community decisions made by our students. It can be hard as adults to restrain (and we will always step in when necessary), but the best way to model trust is to let some of the normal conflicts and bickering (bickering is such an important part of the school social dynamic) and ownership resolve according to the students. A basic rule of thumb for adult intervention to resolve conflict: harming self, harming others, harming the environment.



Outdoor Field Stations

Although we will have access to the entire Barnhart Prairie for various exploration, out of respect to our animal neighbors who are already displaced and survive undue stress, we will primarily study in designated prairie field stations. These field stations will have mowed and tallgrass elements with visible markers in place (when a fence is not already established) to highlight the boundary of where we are spending time.

South Sky Field Station: our main fenced in playscape area with fallen trees, logs, stumps, and built structures for climbing, scaling, balancing, burrowing, crawling, swinging, sliding, and adventuring.

Burrow Field Station: a nook nestled in between the groundhog berm and our family spruce trees (father tree, mother tree, and baby tree have so much to offer) designed for animal habitat study (hedgehogs, field mice, hawks, ground squirrels, and deer), water settling, and tree climbing.

Hedgerow Field Station: where the prairie meets our majestic Osage orange hedgerow, this is a wonderland of gnarly hardwood trees (that produce fun hedge apples), and our best tracking and viewing on the highest slope of our prairie for study of soil, stem, root, leaf, and sky.

Bluestem Hall Interior

We have the unique pleasure of exclusive use of the architecturally stunning Bluestem Hall. A wonder for children to explore, our building (outfitted in hand-burned wood made by owners Abbie and Tim), even adults who walk in feel the sense of magic and a sacred history.

Bluestem Hall is a restored 1963 machine shed that is ADA accessible and built with safety and innovative engineering in mind. School Founder, Abbie designed the major renovation, and it now sits happily accepting the shouts and skips of happy children. Our 5th generation family building has had many chapters including basketball practice for Uni High in the 70's, square dances in the 80's, a blacksmithing shop in the 90's and most recently functioning as a wedding venue until Fall 2021. A source of community gathering always, what once was a humble shed for antique tractors and trucks is now a site for our children.

We have worked closely with DCFS, Illinois State Board of Education, the Fire Marshall, and Public Health requirements for our school to be a safe conducive learning environment with a multitude of opportunities for social, emotional, cognitive, and physical interactions.

Plant and Animal Life on the Barnhart Prairie

Our unique location on the Barnhart Prairie Preserve (a state protected nature preserve) offers an incredible amount of diversity in plant, animal, and insect life. This will provide our students with rich opportunity for place-based literacy with their native midwestern environment. Our school will be in a symbiotic relationship with our location, meaning that we strive to have a mutually beneficial connection to our prairie. The more our students know, understand, and respect the prairie as environmentalists, the better for prairies all over our region. Of course, the prairie offers us her abundant magic as our classroom.

It will not be unusual for animal sightings to occur and will most notably be a source of excitement and amazement for the students. Our resident animals typically memorize our human quarters and avoid it at all costs during the day (children especially give away their location with shouts and laughter!) However, it's not inconceivable that we'll cross paths with animals along the way. Prairie ecosystem animals: deer, coyote, bobcats, foxes, raccoons, opossums, badgers, ground squirrels, pheasants, mice, snakes, frogs, hawks, falcons, vultures, sweat bees, honeybees, carpenter bees, butterflies (SO MANY butterflies...our prairie is on a monarch route in September!) Lightning bugs, dragonflies, and moths.

We will spend our student orientation educating everyone on these animals and how to safely avoid any surprise encounters. We are versed in the language of coyotes and have no intention of finding them or interacting with

them. They are even less interested in running into each other than we are. Your signature on this document means that you understand your child will be educated in and around a prairie nature preserve with wildlife, and you agree to release and hold Bluestem Hall Nature School harmless from all liability for any injury as a result of an encounter with any wildlife or any harmful plant.

We are adopting a leave no trace policy meaning that we will take as few items from the prairie as possible and only for educational purposes. There are some plant species that may be spiky, burn skin, or cause other irritation and part of our curriculum is to identify those species to inform our students. Plants of any kind should never be ingested, and we will never encourage the consumption of plants identifiable or not.



Risk and safety

Let's talk about risk vs hazard. Risk is a situation that provides a challenge, in which the child has some control. Hazard is a situation in which the child has no control or a condition that poses a likelihood of injury.

Examples of risk:

Learning to roller skate

Balancing on a log

Handling a stick

Sledding down a hill

examples of hazard:

unstable ice

sharp tree branch at eye level

dangerous weather

drinking water from a puddle

At Bluestem Hall Nature School, we feel that the risks of nature play could just as easily be labeled as the lessons in safety. When we allow children the opportunity to experience the benefits of exploratory play, they also garner the skills and awareness of their own abilities to use their bodies in a variety of environments. While we will do our absolute best to eliminate hazards, we do believe in the value of age-appropriate risk.

Children need risk (which we're positive you've all seen at home too) "it is a powerful catalyst for growth that helps them develop good judgement, persistence, courage, resiliency, and self-confidence. Remove risk from children's lives and parts of their growth may stagnate." -Ken Finch, "The Risks and Benefits of Nature Play."

Daily Schedule Example

800 - 830	Arrival on the playground
8:30 - 900	Relationship Building
900 - 915	Community Meeting
900 - 10:30	Field Station Studies
10:30 - 10:45	Bathroom
10:45 - 11:15	Slowness + Rest time
11:15 - 11:45	Lunch
11:45 - 1200	Bathroom
1200 – 100	Focused Investigations
1 - 130	Teatime + Journaling
1:30 - 2	Prairie Farewell + Parent Pickup

Kindergarten + Afternoon Schedule

1200 – 130 Focused Investigations
130 – 200 Teatime + Journaling
200 – 230 Prairie Farewell + Parent Pickup

Grades 2+ will not have a formal “rest time” with the Prek-First Grade students. Many moments of rest and slowness will still be built in, honored, and celebrated!

Arrival: We offer a 30 minute window for arrival from 8 - 830. We will start each school day at 800 outside on the playground. When parents arrive you are asked to come through the building to check in your student on the Brightwheel app, drop off personal belongings into cubbies, take your child to the restroom and then to dress them for weather appropriate outdoor activities. Please do not skip taking your child to the restroom, it is extremely important that we start the day this way so each child is prepared to move away from the building and toilets for their field station studies. Bathroom requests are met without hesitation at any time from our students.

Discharge: For the preschool class, we offer a window for **pickup 130 – 150**, with class closing by 200.

For the age K+ classes, we offer a window for **pickup 200 – 220**, with class closing by 230.

Our teachers have a marathon of work to do after class is out. Please help support our staff and respect our teachers' time by arriving during the pickup window.

If you have students in both classes, your younger student can join their older sibling on the playground so that both students can be picked up together (being that 2 pm is the overlapped pickup time).

To secure our building and maintain a safe school environment, we will lock the doors at 830 every morning and 230 every afternoon.

*Our speed limit is 15 mph, please always drive slowly and enter the property watching for both children and animals. Parents will park in our main lot and take the very short walk up the lane for Arrival and Discharge. Please do not drive all the way up to the building for pick up or drop off unless instructed to do so (most likely for weather conditions). We do have 4 paved handicapped spots, please let us know if you need one and we'll make sure you have access to drive up to the paved spots next to the building.

K+ students are expected by the State Board of Education to attend daily.

Holiday Calendar 2026 – 2027

First Day of School: Tuesday 9/1/26

Closed for Labor Day: 9/7/26

Closed for Professional Development Day: 10/12/26

Thanksgiving Break: 11/25/26 – 11/27/26

Winter Break: 12/21/26 – 1/1/27

Closed for Professional Development Day: 1/18/27

Spring Break: 3/15/27 – 3/19/27

Closed for Professional Development Day: 4/16/27

Last Day of School: Friday 5/28/27

Late Pickup Policy

Our program ends daily by 2 pm for preschool students and 230 pm for K+ students with parents on site at least 10 minutes before closing. Promptly after your students' class has ended, we close to all families for staff cleaning, meetings, and administrative work (we have a LOT to do after class each day). Consistent tardiness during pick up time will result in an in-person assessment with the parent and staff.

10 minutes after closing, if there is no one present to pick up the child, attempts will be made to contact the parents / guardians. After unsuccessful attempts to make contact, we will contact those listed on the Emergency Contact List. After 30-40 minutes and unsuccessful attempts to contact someone on the Emergency Contact List, we will call the Champaign County Non-Emergency Police Line (217-333-8911) and follow instruction from authorities, which may include taking the child to the nearest police station.

Clothing + Gear

Please expect and prepare for your child to go outside every day, (not including extreme weather such as lightning and thunder, high winds, blizzard, ice storm, extreme humidity etc.) The temperatures in which we will go outside vary, for example there could be a day that is 30 degrees and freezing rain and feels frigid vs a day that is 15 degrees but the sun is warm and there is no wind that feels refreshing! Children should be appropriately dressed for outdoor play for all seasons of the year. The key is layers so your child can adapt their own comfort throughout the day. We will check in with your child to ensure comfort and safety is met.

Our rule of thumb is under 20 degrees, we thoroughly assess the other conditions such as: is it very windy? what is the wind chill? Is it wet? Is it just generally frigid? Unless the sun is wonderfully warm and sitting by the fire, we generally do not eat our snack outside under 20 degrees so no one has to remove gloves in unsafe temperatures. Above 90 degrees we also assess the conditions, is there a breeze? What's the heat index and humidity level?

Procedure for Personal Belongings

Each student will have a designated hook and a designated cubby for personal belongings. After the student arrives, has used the restroom, and is dressed in weather appropriate attire to begin outdoor field station studies, parents may put extra belongings in either spot to be stored and accessed throughout the day. Feel free to bring indoor shoes or hard sole slippers that your child can change into from winter boots.

Seasonal Clothing Suggestions

Fall:

Rain Boots with a liner or sturdy Waterproof Boots
Crew/Knee Socks
Jacket/Sweatshirt
Rain Pants and Rain Jacket/ Rain Suit with Hood

Winter: When the air temperature is 45 degrees or lower, 3 layers of clothing are required for the students' safety and the wellbeing of the whole class. Layers and Waterproof items are essential in the winter.

Upper Body: Base Layer + Thick Sweater + Insulated and Waterproof Coat
Head: Hat + Balaclava, Scarf/Neck Warmers, or Hood
Legs: Wool Blend Leggings + Warm Pants + confirmed Waterproof/Windproof Bib Overalls
Hands: Cotton Mittens + Waterproof top layer Mittens
Feet: Insulated Waterproof Boots (truly waterproof is key!) + Wool/Fleece socks
Lighter weight Rain Gear may be used in Winter if all other warming layers are met underneath

Spring:

Rain Boots with a liner or sturdy Waterproof Boots
Crew/Knee Socks
Waterproof Mittens
Rain Pants and Rain Jacket/ Rain Suit with Hood
Sun hat with a brim

All children must also have a labeled change of clothes to be kept at school for emergencies and to change soiled/wet clothes. This should include underwear, pants, shirt, and socks. This extra set of clothes should be changed to be seasonally appropriate. We will do our best to keep track of all clothing and any misplaced items will be put in our lost and found box to be claimed.

Lunch

For our 2026-2027 school year, families will need to provide their child's lunch daily. We welcome different foods from all cultures! Lunch should be hearty and wholesome to fill the little bellies for a long day of exuberant prairie learning. Students will use their daily water bottles for lunch; additional drinks are not required. Our school is **not** nut free, yet, but upon the enrollment of a child who needs this policy, we may adjust lunch requirements. Children are not allowed to share their lunch items. We do not have the capacity to heat or cool food items, so please plan accordingly with an ice pack or thermos. Please repackage items for easy opening with little fingers, students should be able to open and unpack all their food items independently (within reason of course). Some explanations/lessons at home may be helpful for their confidence in this.

Please pack a large cloth napkin to be used as a placemat/wipe. Replace with a fresh cloth daily.

We are a neutral zone for food judgement in the way we speak about food with the students, there is not good/healthy food and bad/unhealthy food. We do expect parents to provide a diverse menu for their students that allow for multiple food groups to be met: fruits, vegetables, grains, protein, and dairy/dairy alternatives. For the sake of keeping the peace in the lunch environment, we're going to ask that dessert items are saved for after school and served by the parent. Thank you for understanding!

Please wash your child's school water bottle regularly at home.

Snacks will be provided by the school. This includes a morning snack and an afternoon snack.

Morning snack example- plain cereal and cranberries

Afternoon snack example- crackers and nuts

Behavior and Discipline

With systematic support for our students to have healthy experiences with trust and empowerment, we hope to have a place where every child can thrive intellectually, socially, and emotionally. There are no bad emotions, but some emotions can bring about challenging behavior. Most of this will be within the normal and healthy range of squabbling, bickering, determining boundaries and ownership (mine/yours, taking turns etc) and establishing their

own emotions and identities within the group. Healthy and authentic dynamics are not always smiles and laughter (it can be easy to forget this) and allowing children the space to express their emotions in a safe and healthy environment is crucial to their wellness both as children now and the adults they become in the future.

Our day will be structured so that most of that dynamic and vibrant energy that this age group is famous for will have many varied ways to be expressed. Because we have an abundance of space and a more minimal philosophy on the items we provide, there will be less emphasis on the ownership of objects than the experience the children are having. The adults of our school are there to shepherd these experiences and to ensure that the social / emotional / physical wellbeing of all students are being met. We will not tolerate abusive behavior or bullying of any kind. We will absolutely never use physical punishment, bribery, threats, or other methods that would harm, frighten, or humiliate children.

Compliance is not the goal with our students or a philosophy we subscribe to. The ability for students to recognize the need for community thinking and respect the learning of others is crucial, however. For example, a student that frequently runs away from their teachers or the group without returning upon request will cause an unsafe experience for the whole school in our open prairie environment. In order to participate in our unique nature-based program, safety cannot be compromised repeatedly. In order to safely and effectively attend our program, each student must be able to exercise some self-governance in making safe and healthy choices physically, emotionally, logistically, and socially. We will contact parents swiftly and with seriousness if your student struggles to follow our safety requirements.

If a behavioral situation escalates to the point that the classroom wellbeing is being compromised on a regular basis, we expect the full support and cooperation of that child's parents / guardians. Staff will help develop a plan to redirect inappropriate behavior with continued positive reinforcement. Should disruptive behavior not improve, we will schedule an Initial Consultation. This meeting requires the parent(s) of an enrolled child with chronic behavioral concerns to talk with the Lead Teacher to discuss the problem and together, establish solutions or goals for correcting the behavior. A Second Consultation would be scheduled if the initial plan fails. Again, the parent(s)/ guardians will be required to meet with the Lead Teacher and the Executive Director. The problem will be identified, and a new approach will be outlined to correct the problem. Both consultations will be summarized by the Lead Teacher and presented for signature. After the Second Consultation and after having exhausted all resources which may include social services and behavior specialists (parent facilitation and financial support required), should progress not be achieved, we will begin a Transition Plan.

While we will do our very best to meet the needs of every student, our teaching staff is not equipped to provide therapeutic services. We honor and respect the work of professionals such as occupational therapists, counselors, and psychologists and we also know that our teaching staff cannot compensate for those complex professions or adopt their practices to mitigate behavioral concerns. It is critical that our teaching staff can provide time, energy, and resources to each student equitably. In the case of a student needing considerable 1:1 support, the student must come with the support of an aide. Our staff may require the meeting and approval of the aide to determine that they can successfully join class and that the expectations around their involvement are clear.

In the rare event that a child's ongoing disruptive behavior does not improve despite the best efforts of the staff and this behavior has a continued negative effect on the classroom climate, the Lead Teacher or Executive Director may determine that our program cannot meet the child's needs, and we will begin a Transition Plan. During this Plan, we will provide resources for other childcare and school programs and provide 2 weeks for your child to transition to another program successfully. In the case of violence or physical aggression, our staff may require a caregiver's attendance during the two week Transition Plan. If a caregiver's support system cannot be established, immediate removal from the program may be required.

In cases of special educational or behavioral needs, school staff may suggest a referral to a medical or mental health professional. It is expected that any referral costs are the responsibility of the parent(s) and that the process involves a strong, interactive partnership between home and school.

Transition Plan

Bluestem Hall Nature School reserves the right to begin a Transition Plan for a student including but not limited to the following reasons:

- Physical, verbal, or emotional abuse of children or staff by a student or parent
- Failure of a student or parent to observe the rules of the School or Parent Handbook
- Failure of the parent to schedule and attend the Initial and Second Consultations
- Failure of the parent to complete and return all required forms
- Failure to pay or consistent lateness paying the student's tuition fee
- Repeatedly bringing a sick child to school and/or not taking daily health screenings seriously
- Failure of the student or parent to adhere to safety requirements
- Ongoing compromised class wellbeing, safety, or peace
- Failure of the parent to provide a behavioral aide upon request of the school
- A student repeatedly engaging in unwanted touch with classmates or staff or a continued lack of understanding around consensual touch

Upon the discretion of the Executive Director and after reasonable efforts on the part of the school staff and the child's parents to integrate the child into the school, a Transition Plan will be in effect if there are behavioral or developmental concerns beyond the scope of what the program is able to manage.

Insurance

Bluestem Hall Nature School, NFP carries liability insurance through Country Financial (agent, Dawn Babb) as required by the state.

Health and Illness Policy

Family assistance in the health of our school community is critical. We strive to maintain a healthy school environment and to reduce or eliminate the spread of illnesses between children, their families, and staff. The following is a list of symptoms for which children must remain home. This is also a guideline of symptoms for which we reserve the right to notify a parent or guardian for immediate pickup. Symptoms include but are not limited to:

- Persistent Cough, wet or dry
- Sore Throat
- Heavy Nasal Discharge requiring frequent wiping every 10- 15 minutes or more
- Heavy Nasal Discharge that prohibits the comfortable and sanitary use of a face mask
- Inflammation of the Eyes
- Lice
- Rash
- Vomiting
- Stomach Pain
- Diarrhea
- Lethargy or Unusual Demeanor
- Symptoms of a communicable disease such as Pink Eye, Measles, Chicken Pox, Mumps, Croup, or Strep Throat
- Fever of 99.5 degrees F or more

Children must be free of all symptoms and show a normal temperature for at least 24 hours before returning to school. For example if a child's fever breaks at 2 pm on Sunday, Monday at 2 pm would be the full 24 hours and they could return Tuesday.

In the case of vomiting, 48 hours will be required to return due to the rebound symptoms that often occur with norovirus and adenovirus (meaning a child feels better for 12-24 hours and then starts vomiting again).

If a child's condition is suspected to be contagious or is not feeling well the staff will put the student's personal face mask on immediately to begin a health assessment. If minor symptoms are present that indicate the possibility of an oncoming illness, then the student will need to remain masked until their symptoms resolve. If any of the symptoms above (or other symptoms) are present the child will be made comfortable in a location away from other children but where he or she can be supervised by a member of the school staff. The parent or legal guardian will be notified for immediate pick up of the child. If we are unable to contact the parent then an emergency contact will be notified.

Parents will be notified if a bug or illness, minor, moderate, or severe seems to be spreading through the school community. The reason for this notification is for parents to diligently

- Monitor your child for symptoms
- Make informed decisions on the health of your child and family

- Keep your child home if symptoms, even minor, do appear to stop the communal spread

Medication is dispensed by school staff only if the following conditions are met:

- A Medical Form must be completed and signed by the parent. This form gives authorization and instructions for dispensing medication.
- All medications must be in their original containers and marked with an expiration date indicating that it is current.
- All medications must include a prescription label with the child's name.
- All medication must be given directly to a staff member so it may be stored in a locked medicine cabinet.

Written permission from a parent to call the family physician or to refer the child for medical care in case of accident or emergency shall be on file at school. This permission shall be used only when the parent or guardian cannot be reached.

Covid-19 Policy: We are asking that families take the temperature of their child every morning before coming. If your child has a fever of 99.5 F or above, they must stay home. Please do not put everyone at risk by bringing a sick child – even if we are outdoors and even if you do not think they're sick with Covid-19 or one of its contagious strains. We are working as a community to protect our students from positive infection. Signing in to confirm with your child's temperature will be a part of morning check-in.

- If a student is experiencing symptoms of Covid (fever, chills, cough, shortness of breath, fatigue, muscle aches, headache, loss of taste or smell, congestion or runny nose, nausea or vomiting, or diarrhea) the student must remain absent until they have been symptom and fever-free for 2 days. Families should report health concerns immediately to the Executive Director for guidance and tracing efforts. **A student cannot return to school for a minimum of 5 days from when the test that resulted in a positive covid-19 infection was administered. This remains true even for asymptomatic cases. After 5 days, the student may return once they are free of symptoms and show a normal temperature for 2 full days.**

Calculating the timeline: The timeline for return should be calculated in 24 hour increments. The time the test was taken is considered Day 0 and all subsequent days should be counted in the 24 hour increments. For example, if a positive covid test was taken at noon on a Saturday, then Sunday at noon would be Day 1 (a full 24 hour period), Monday Day 2, Tuesday Day 3, Wednesday Day 4, and Thursday Day 5. Return may take place Friday morning if the student has been symptom free with a normal Temperature since Wednesday morning.

- If one or more persons in a student's household has tested positive for Covid, then the student will be absent from school until all members of the household have been symptom free with a normal temperature for 2 full days and no members of the household have had their initial positive test within the previous 5 days (retesting positive will not extend the timeline, the schedule is calculated off the initial positive test). This rule is in place because of the level to which parents, guardians, siblings etc have to enter our facility and interact with others to bring their child to school.

*Given the custom and circumstantial details of each family, you can contact the Executive Director to speak about the details of who is sick and in what order the people at home are recovering/displaying symptoms. They may or may not allow a front door drop off for your student.

- If a student or a member of a student's family has close contact with a person who is experiencing Covid symptoms at the time of contact, begins showing Covid symptoms within 2 days after the contact, or tests positive for Covid within 2 days after contact, then testing and/or a quarantine period (away from school) may be required. If a close contact is suspected, families will contact the Executive Director for guidance.

- If a student or staff member has been at school while they were showing symptoms or within 2 days prior to being tested and receiving a positive result, a staff member will alert all families to the exposure at school for thorough monitoring to take place with every family.

- Advanced sanitization procedures will remain in place. Parents acknowledge that in the course of the year, it may be necessary to impose additional mitigations related to the covid-19 pandemic, including potentially a closure of the school for a period of time over concerns of transmission and to ensure the safety of our school community.

The reason we ask that you reach out to us directly with any health concerns of any kind is because the unique circumstances around every infection or exposure will require clear communication for your student's safe return.

Our facility is equipped with an upgrade to a hospital-level virus busting HVAC technology. We take sanitation of our facility seriously and will also maintain a cleaning schedule of shared items indoors and outdoors.

Bluestem Hall Nature School reserves the right to adjust our Covid policy at any time to meet current guidelines and create a safe space for students, their families, and our staff.

Mask Policy:

Masks are optional for the Bluestem Hall Nature School community. This includes students, parents, guardians, staff, and visitors unless a health alert has been issued.

Parents must still provide masks for their students. One should be kept inside their backpack and extras can be stored at their cubby. If a student arrives and is either not feeling well or displaying mild symptoms, the staff will put the student's personal face mask on immediately and follow our health protocol to monitor the child and/or notify a Parent. Bluestem Hall Nature School staff reserve the right to mask a student for any health concern, including mild symptoms such as a runny nose or a lingering cough. A student displaying symptoms considered more than "mild" should refrain from attending and must stay home.

Indoor mask use may be required by all when the school has endured an in-school covid exposure or a bug or illness seems to be passing through the school community. If indoor masks are required by all, parents will get a message and at that point parents, students, and staff will wear masks indoors until further notified.

Sniffle Report: In an effort to loop in parents so that informed decisions can be made for every family, staff will institute a general health report called the "sniffle report." The levels of "risk" are low, medium, and high. Parents will be notified if we reach medium status in which masks are recommended or high status in which masks are required. The "high" category means there seems to be some illness(es) spreading through the school or the likelihood of others getting sick is strong, then all parents, students, and staff will wear masks indoors until further notified.

Medical Policy

The wellbeing of your child is important to you, to us, and the State of Illinois. Therefore, there are certain laws established by the State for our benefit. Each child must have a completed medical form signed by his/her doctor prior to attendance- should be dated no later than 6 months from the time of enrollment. Public Health mandates that your child must have:

1. An up-to-date medical form, which must be updated every year.
2. A TB test with results.
3. DPT must have physician's signature and date.
4. Polio, measles, and mumps must be up to date. A second dose of MMR is to be given between the ages of 4 and 6.
5. HIB must be up to date.
6. Lead Screening with results.
7. Physician form must have a physician's signature and dated.
8. Any allergies (food, medication, etc.) must be listed.
9. Medical forms must be filled out completely

Students are to be excluded from school by October 15th if requirements for health examinations and immunizations have not been met.

Student Medical Rights: A parent or guardian or other designated caregiver may administer medical asthma, diabetes, seizure medication, and epinephrine injectors to a student who is a registered qualifying patient. Upon receipts of the necessary documents, a school administrator may administer the product and may also allow a student who is a registered qualifying patient to self administer the product under the supervision of a school administrator.

Release of Information Policy

No records will be released outside the school staff and nonprofit board without written consent of the parent or guardians. Except in the event of extreme emergency, when there is evidence of child abuse or neglect, information will be given to authorized individuals at the Department of Children and Family Services.

Risk Management Plan

Every effort is made to provide a safe environment for our students. The building has one way locking doors, so that exiting is always possible but entering is only available to those with a key. We are equipped with a smoke detection system. Evacuation routes are posted throughout the center. Exits are clearly marked with emergency lighting systems throughout the building. Teacher is trained in CPR and First Aid. We will conduct fire drills once a month and tornado drills every six months seasonally.

Communication

Communication is extremely important to us. Regular communication between school and home can improve your child's preschool experience. We ask parents to keep staff notified of significant events and changes in their children's lives (such as moving to a new house, the loss of a pet, or serious family illness) as this will also impact on your child at school.

The best way to stay informed about what is happening here at Bluestem Hall Nature School is through our student management software called Brightwheel. Teachers will communicate highlights and class activities through the private sharing platform allowing you to view photos documenting your child's adventures at school. Parents can also track snacks and bathroom breaks on their Brightwheel app. You can always request more details about your child's day which can be delivered after class is over. Our Director and Teachers are engaged and present with students during instruction hours and can take minimal communication and photo requests. We will try to send what we can without disrupting the connection of being fully present with your children.

Teachers are always willing to discuss any issues, questions, or concerns you may have regarding your child. We are happy to stay engaged with all parents! We encourage parents to set up parent / teacher meetings for more in-depth evaluations.

Non Discrimination Statement:

Bluestem Hall Nature School will not base assignment and promotion decisions on stereotypes and assumptions about a person's race, color, religion, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, pregnancy, national origin, age, disability, or genetic information. Bluestem Hall Nature School is committed to being a site of equal opportunity for employment and education.

The school does not prohibit hairstyles that are historically associated with race, ethnicity, or hair texture including, but not limited to, protective hairstyles such as braids, locks, and twists.

Bluestem Hall Nature School believes that everyone has the right to be addressed by the name and pronouns that correspond to their gender identity, including non-binary pronouns. Chosen names and pronouns are to be respected at all times in the classroom and within our school community.

Executive Director is responsible for ensuring that these policies are followed or by what procedure a discrimination concern can be raised for resolution.

Firearms, Drugs, and Battery Policy

The use, sale, transfer, or possession of drugs, controlled substances, drug paraphernalia, or any combination thereof, on any organization premises or work site may be grounds for discharge.

Entry upon organization premises or being at work with drug paraphernalia or under the influence of alcohol, drugs, or controlled substances, or any combination thereof may be grounds for discharge.

"Under the influence" is defined as being unable to perform work in a safe and productive manner or being in a physical or mental condition that creates a risk to the safety and well-being of the individual, other employees, the public, or agency property.

The Executive Director shall immediately notify local law enforcement for any of the following reasons:

- Verified incidents involving drugs occurring on school grounds.
- Written complaints from school personnel concerning instances of battery committed against school personnel. Notice shall be posted within 3 days of each incident of battery through the School Incident Reporting System (SIRS)
- Firearm incidents on school grounds. If a student is in possession of a firearm, then the school administrator shall also immediately notify the students' parents or guardian.

Enrollment Process

Step 1: Email school@bluestemhall.com with any questions and to tell us about your child

Step 2: Schedule a phone call, request a private tour, or attend an open house

Step 3: Fill out our application for enrollment

*link found on our website under enrollment

This is a not an enrollment contract, just a way to get to know your family

Step 4: Review + sign parent handbook, and submit non-refundable first month's tuition deposit, and sign the enrollment and tuition contract

Step 5: Admissions acceptance, student is officially enrolled.

Tuition and Payment

For Preschool, Bluestem Hall Nature School has 2 day, 3 day, and 5 day a week options with our daily schedule being 8 am - 2 pm. For K+ Bluestem Hall Nature School has a 5 day a week option with the daily schedule being 8 am – 230 pm. Tuition is broken into 9 payments during the school year.

2 Days a week

\$164/week | \$728.88/month | \$6,560/year

3 Days a week

\$224/week | \$995.55/month | \$8,960/year

5 Days a week

\$272/week | \$1,208.88/month | \$10,880/year

The parent is responsible for payment of all scheduled days, whether or not the days are used. Credits will not be issued for vacations, holidays, weather-related closings, or covid-related closings. Tuition fees are based on enrollment, not attendance. To maintain your child's spot in the program, fees must be paid even during an absence.

If a family would like to enroll siblings, a 25% discount will be applied to the younger sibling's enrollment. Or in the case of twins, the discount will be applied to one enrollment contract.

The yearly tuition is split into equal monthly payments due by the 1st of every month beginning 9/1/26 and ending 5/1/27. Holidays, calendar breaks, and professional development days are already counted into the tuition. Payments will be due on a monthly basis unless otherwise stipulated in an amendment to the contract by both the Executive Director and the requesting family. Parents may request to pay biweekly.

Scholarship Information

We have taken our goals to provide scholarships and tuition support seriously. With multiple fundraising efforts in place, we hope that financial restrictions will not be the reason a family cannot enroll their child. Please reach out to our Executive Director directly at school@bluestemhall.com to inquire about scholarship opportunities.

Signature

Once this Handbook has been read thoroughly, please provide your digital signature to signify that you agree to the rules and policies of Bluestem Hall Nature School.