nature kindergarten

PARKLAND SCHOOL DIVISION

PROGRAM GUIDE

2023–2024

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1 PARKLAND SCHOOL DIVISION

VISION

Our students possess the confidence, resilience, insight and skills required to thrive in, and positively impact, the world.

MISSION

We assure supportive learning environments, meaningful experiences and healthy relationships that create opportunities to develop resilience, to gain diversity in perspectives and to achieve enduring success.

OUR ULTIMATE GOAL

Student Success & Well-being

WE VALUE:

- Learning opportunities that are purposeful, essential, relevant, authentic and responsive
- Excellence in achievement
- Trustworthy, respectful relationships
- Resilience with self-awareness

Learn more about PSD at psd.ca/division

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3 PROGRAM CONCEPT

WHAT IS NATURE-BASED KINDERGARTEN?

Nature-Based Kindergarten is an optional program of choice offered by Parkland School Division (PSD).

Children collaborate to create a safe, supportive, encouraging and respectful community where they feel comfortable to play, explore, learn and connect—all while gaining an appreciation for the natural world.

The program responds to identified early childhood indicators that demonstrate a need for additional social and physical development programming within PSD. It also explores the impact on early learning using the natural environment as a place where curiosity, play, problem-solving and calculated risk-taking can safely take place.

CERTIFICATED STAFF

Children are supported by trained, certificated teaching staff (for the full-curriculum stream) who follow the Alberta Programs of Study and plan to include activities and learning experiences that occur outside. In order to ensure an optimal environment for the children, a teacher and educational assistant will be available to support the kindergarten students.

In preparation to lead Nature Kindergarten, teachers undertake Forest and Nature School Practitioner certification, which focuses on outdoor play and education. This specialized training is administered by Forest School Canada, the flagship educational project of the Child and Nature Alliance of Canada. In the certification course, teachers immerse themselves in the natural environment and explore best practices for outdoor education. Similar to what students experience, teachers are taught through self-directed, experiential and inquiry-driven learning.

The Nature Enrichment stream is led by experienced recreation staff with support from a qualified educational assistant.

As a part of their duties, staff conduct regular benefit assessments of the program site and student experiences. These assessments feed into the Risk Benefit Plan that is maintained at the division level. Together these checkpoints ensure quality and safety for students, staff and the program as a whole. The Risk Benefit Plan is available to parents/guardians upon request.

PLAY-BASED LEARNING

Educators nurture wonder and elicit learning through a curriculum-guided, play-based approach. They actively display care and respect for the natural world that fosters similar connections for students.

Wellness is a significant aspect of the curriculum and positive physical and mental well-being are at the core of our activities. Students are physically active and engaged in movement skills that facilitate their balance, stamina and strength. Additional learning opportunities are established through an emergent inquiry-based approach (i.e. formed by students' interests in the natural environment).

Learning is administered and facilitated by a certificated teacher and educational assistant Together, these educators guide student learning using the natural environment and encourage development by fostering students' abilities to investigate and collaborate outdoors.

Benefits of Nature-Based Programming

Emotional Health

Try new activities, engage with others/collaborate/make friends, solve problems, develop resilience and social emotional literacy.

Physical Health

Participate in running, jumping, chasing and climbing activities that aid the development of fitness, agility, stamina, bone density, strength, stability, coordination and balance.

Cognitive Development

Increase focus and problem-solving skills, grow imagination and creativity, and cultivate an appreciation for nature and environmental sustainability.

Children are encouraged to:

- develop personal and social-emotional skills
- improve their language skills and communication
- improve physical motor skills
- regularly experience achievement and success
- celebrate success in themselves and others
- work through practical problems and challenges
- discover how they learn best
- pursue knowledge that interests them
- use tools to create, build or manage
- reflect on learning and experiences
- build confidence in decision-making and evaluating risk
- understand the benefits of a balanced and healthy lifestyle
- explore connections between humans, wildlife and the earth
- explore the world through all the senses available to them
- become more motivated
- become global citizens

NATURE KINDERGARTEN

(full-curriculum)

- Full-curriculum, including core academics that cover all aspects of the kindergarten programs of study.
- Learning takes place outside, as much as possible, where authentic learning is abundant.
- Taught by a certificated teacher with support from a qualified educational assistant.
- Classes are on Mondays and Wednesdays, plus some Fridays.
- Open to all families who reside within PSD's attendance boundaries.
- Students enrolled at Muir Lake School for their main kindergarten programming that live within the Muir Lake School attendance area will be able to apply for busing. However, no busing is available for students who live outside the Muir Lake attendance area for this school of choice program.
- Government-funded program of choice that delivers the full kindergarten programs of study with no education fee charged to families.
- Additional educational visit fees may apply and will be in line with other kindergarten classrooms.

NATURE ENRICHMENT

- Serves as an extension to a regular kindergarten program, with a strong focus on health and life skills. Programming focuses on outdoor education including arts, crafts, bush skills, tool use, stewardship.
- Led by recreation staff with support from a qualified educational assistant.
- Classes are on Tuesdays and Thursdays, plus some Fridays.
- Open to all families; however, you must be registered for a kindergarten class with a recognized Alberta kindergarten program (this could be the Nature Kindergarten class).
- Students enrolled at Muir Lake for their main kindergarten programming that live within the Muir Lake School boundaries will be able to apply for PSD transport on enrichment days.
- Families will be charged a fee of $400 per month (September through June) to attend this program of choice.
- No transportation is available to any students outside of the Muir Lake attendance area.

7 ENVIRONMENT

LOCATION & EXTREME WEATHER PLAN

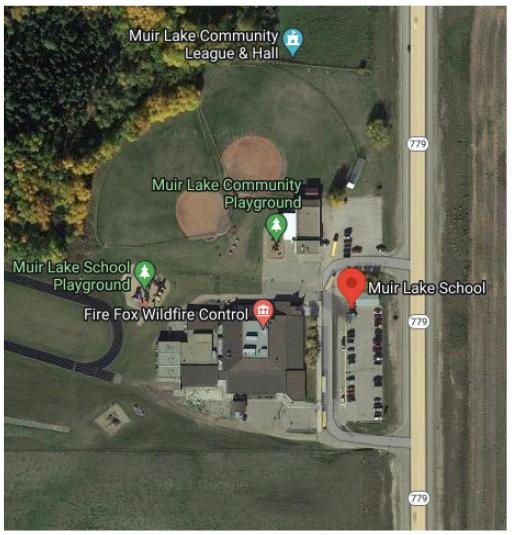
The program is primarily taught at Muir Lake School where staff and students have access to an indoor classroom as well as the outdoor forest classroom.

The site offers wide open and treed terrain to form a rich natural learning environment. The children are able to observe a range of wildlife habitats, including a beaver pond.

Educators consult the forecast regularly and weather-related safety is considered in all decisions (e.g. how far to venture away from the main camp or shelter, how long to be outside, etc.).

In cases of extreme cold (–23 °C or below, including wind chill) or extreme heat (+30 °C or above) staff will limit students' length of exposure and constantly assess the children's comfort and safety (watching for signs of frostbite, hypothermia, heat exhaustion, etc.).

An on-site warming shelter (for colder days) and access to indoor shelter, washrooms and learning labs ensure that learning can safely continue in such conditions.



ADVENTURE DAYS

Some Fridays (weather permitting) classes will travel to nearby nature spaces, including the Chickakoo Lake Recreation Area and Muir Lake Day Use Park, to expand their exploration, discovery and fun!

ENVIRONMENTAL COMMITMENT

One of the special features of the program is that classes are held at the same natural area over a period of time, allowing students to become comfortable in, connected to and knowledgeable about the area. They learn about their environmental footprint and how the way they play, learn and explore has an impact on the natural spaces around them.

From there, they learn to limit harm to those spaces through such actions as packing bagless lunches.

HOME & SCHOOL MESSAGING

General communication related to Nature-Based Kindergarten will be conducted through Muir Lake School.

Absent, Late or Have an appointment

If your child is going to miss class, arrive late or be picked up for a daytime appointment on their Nature-Based Kindergarten designated day, please contact the main office at Muir Lake School with as much advanced notice as possible.

Office staff will relay the appropriate message to your child's teacher.

Urgent Need

If you have an urgent need to contact your child during a Nature-Based Kindergarten day, please call the main office of Muir Lake School for assistance.

SUPPLIES & GEAR

Students need to come appropriately dressed/supplied with gear for any potential weather situations, in any given season. When in doubt, pack extra clothing options and supplies.

All-Season Supplies

- hat
- lightweight, breathable clothing
- one complete change of clothes (including socks and underwear)
- rain gear (waterproof boots, pants, jacket)
- indoor shoes (no slippers)
- sneakers for running outside on dry days
- lunch kit with two meals and two snacks
- water bottles (two 500 mL)
- large reusable bag for muddy/wet gear
- backpack

Considerations for HOT weather

- lightweight
- breathable
- sun-shielding (sleeves, hats, sunblock, etc.)

NOT ALLOWED ANYTIME

- open-toed shoes/sandals
- soft plastic shoes (e.g. Crocs)
- scarves (due to risk of strangulation)

Considerations for COLD weather

Insulation: Natural fabrics work well (except for cotton) as a base layer and fleece makes a good alternative. The key is for this first layer to be breathable so moisture can escape but also be able to trap warmth.

Middle layer: This layer creates a mid-point between the skin and environmental elements. Wool sweaters and fleece pullovers/zip ups tend to work well.

Outer shell: Needs to be waterproof, windproof and breathable.

Essential winter gear includes:

- toque (should cover ears)
- face/neck cover up (balaclava, neck gaiter)
- two pairs of waterproof winter gloves/mittens
- waterproof snowsuit
- waterproof winter boots with removable liners

PLEASE REMEMBER TO LABEL ALL PERSONAL BELONGINGS.

MEALS & SNACKS

More Than You Might Think!

Students are very physically active and use up a lot of energy throughout their day. This means that children often eat more food than they would on a regular school day.

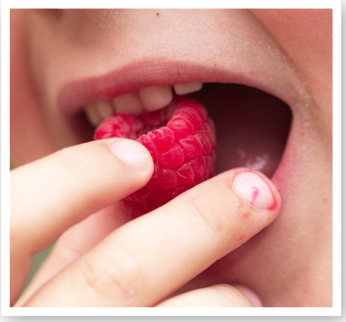
Ideally, students will bring two lunch-sized meals, two snacks and lots of drinking water (two 500 mL) with them.

At the same time, we ask that parents/guardians consider the size, weight and safety of the containers they pack their child's food in.

We empower students to carry their own snacks and water, as is needed on some adventures.

Nut-aware Zone & Allergies

Please be aware that it is the parent's/guardian's responsibility to inform the teacher of any allergies that their child has.



Due to the prevalence of life-threatening nut allergies, we ask that students not bring nuts with them. (Soy and sunflower seed substitutes for nut butters are welcome.)

Snack sharing

We ask students not to share or trade snacks, as this ensures the health and safety of the class.

Bagless lunches

We encourage parents/guardians to pack bagless lunches (garbage free) for their children.

This serves both an eco-friendly and necessary purpose, as there are no garbage cans available.

11 FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Are there program fees?

- **Nature Kindergarten (full-curriculum):** No education fee charged to families (Government-funded).
- **Nature Enrichment:** $400 per month (September through June).

Which days will my child attend?

- **Nature Kindergarten (full-curriculum):** Classes are on Mondays and Wednesdays, plus some Fridays.
- **Nature Enrichment:** Classes are on Tuesdays and Thursdays, plus some Fridays.

Can my child attend both streams?

Yes, but only if your child is registered for regular kindergarten within Parkland School Division.

How many students are in a class?

Classes typically have around 20 students.

How do you keep kids safe in an outdoor environment?

Staff carry out ongoing risk benefit assessments which support both site and experience assessments that are already in place. These checkpoints ensure safety for students and staff. Assessment plans are available to parents/guardians upon request.

Can I visit?

Yes! Parents/guardians will have the opportunity to visit on scheduled family event days. The teacher will let you know ahead of time when those events are to take place. All visitors must adhere to public health restrictions in place at the time and follow all related protocols.

How much food should I send with my child?

A student's day is very physically active and they use a lot of energy. This means that children often eat more food than they might on a regular school day. Ideally, they will have two lunch-size meals, two snacks and lots of drinking water (two 500 mL) with them each day.

How do I register my child for the program?

The registration process differs depending on the stream chosen.

- **Nature Kindergarten:** Registration for this stream must go through PowerSchool. Start by visiting **www.psd.ca** to complete online student registration (go to Our Schools **>>** Registration). During registration, select Muir Lake School and then Nature Kindergarten.
- **Nature Enrichment:** Registration is a two-step process.
    - **STEP ONE:** Register your child for regular kindergarten (for PSD families, this could be the Nature Kindergarten class). If your child will be attending a PSD school, visit **www.psd.ca** to complete online student registration (go to Our Schools **>>** Registration).
    - **STEP TWO:** Visit **www.psd.ca** (go to Our Programs **>>** Programs of Choice **>>** Nature-Based Kindergarten) and find the link for the Nature Enrichment Application Package. The package is stored on Google Drive and contains various Nature Enrichment information and documents, including an application. Click on the application form (Google Form) and follow the instructions to complete your submission.

My child doesn't attend a PSD school, can we apply?

Yes, but please note that out-of-division enrolment applications will only be considered for entry into the Nature Enrichment stream. Your child must be enrolled in a regular kindergarten program within their respective school division. Priority will be given to PSD students and out-of-division applicants are considered only if there is adequate space and resources available.

CONTACT US

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ONLINE

Go to **www.psd.ca** >> Our Programs >> Programs of Choice

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