

Early-Childhood-Policy-Handb ook

Early Childhood Policy Handbook



*“Receive the child in reverence. Educate them in love.
Let them go forth in freedom.”*

– Rudolf Steiner

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“The best preparation for being a happy and useful adult is to live fully as a child.”

– Plowden Report

Dear Early Childhood Families,

Thank you for partnering with **Prairie Hill Waldorf School** in gifting your children their childhood. Our children’s early years offer us a unique opportunity to create meaningful memories, form lasting habits, and enrich their futures.

This handbook will serve as an introduction to our Early Childhood Programs, acquainting you and reminding you about the information and ideas that we believe are important for the wellbeing of our young children.

We encourage you to refer to our [*Prairie Hill Waldorf School Parent Handbook*](#) for further information on school policies throughout the year. Please ask your child’s teacher any questions as they arise. To quote Joan Almon, founder of the Alliance for Childhood and longtime Waldorf kindergarten teacher: “The best protection for Waldorf education is the ever-deepening commitment and on-going learning of teachers and parents.” We hope this *Early Childhood Family Handbook* will provide such support.

Thank you,

The Early Childhood Teachers

Prairie Hill Waldorf School Early Childhood Mission Statement

We believe that early childhood, birth to age seven, is a unique period of life that deserves respect, guidance, nurture, and time.

We work out of Rudolf Steiner's pedagogy, believing that children have not only a physical nature, but a soul and spiritual one as well.

Meaningful work and creative play in a structured environment are the pillars upon which a healthy life can be built.

Of utmost importance is the development of social-emotional skills that serve the children in one day realizing their potential in relation to others and themselves.

Prairie Hill Waldorf School Human Dignity & Belonging Statement

Prairie Hill Waldorf School exists within the larger community of Waldorf schools with a long-standing commitment to social renewal. We strive to create a conscious, and collaborative learning community that provides our students with the necessary foundation for adapting to our ever-changing world. In accordance with these values, we are committed to supporting human dignity and belonging as a pathway to social justice and to rectify the explicit and implicit biases that undermine the efforts of building a healthy social life. We are dedicated to the self-reflection needed to strengthen this mission. We are committed to awakening to the needs of all and ensuring that our school addresses human dignity and belonging in ways that are meaningful and impactful.

Prairie Hill Waldorf School Early Childhood Tenets

Young Children Have the Right To:

- 1. Master the Physical World:** Young children are gradually “moving into” their physical bodies, and so need plenty of opportunities and space to move, work, and play. They are also building up their physical bodies in the early years, requiring warmth and movement. Their education takes place primarily through an active participation in the life around them.
- 2. Be supported by a daily, weekly, and yearly rhythm:** Consistency and predictability are foundational to children’s health, development, sense of self, confidence, and future learning. A breathing, unhurried unfolding of the day, the week, and the year benefits both children and the caregiver.
- 3. Develop in a mixed-age environment with a consistent caregiver:** Ongoing, nurturing relationships are essential to a child’s sense of security and emotional well-being. A setting that includes diverse ages allows younger children to aspire to their future and the older ones to serve, lead and nurture the little ones.
- 4. Develop social-emotional skills:** In the early years, much of children’s work is about learning healthy social skills: meeting new friends, sharing, waiting, asking, thanking, helping those in need, etc.
- 5. Experience a sense of inclusion and diversity:** We strive to create an inclusive community that respects and affirms each of its members, honoring their diversity of culture, ethnicity, race, religion, family structure, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, gender identity, physical abilities, and unique learning styles.
- 6. Have extensive time for creative, social play:** Imaginative, uninterrupted play with open-ended toys that can be continually transformed is the cornerstone of childhood and the foundation of their social-emotional development.

7. **Experience meaningful, purposeful, practical life-skills:** Ideally, children have the opportunity to join in, as they are able, with the adults around them as they engage in the daily tasks of life: cooking, cleaning, gardening, washing, woodworking, etc.
8. **Have daily, extended contact with the natural world:** Indoors, the children's senses are deepened and developed when surrounded by playthings made of natural materials. Outdoors, the seasons, discoveries, and transformations in nature are a healing balm to the young child. Children are able to form bonds with the earth, which later transforms into stewardship.
9. **Experience the nurturing arts:** Children know they are loved when they are washed, sung to, given a rest, bandaged, have their hair brushed, feet massaged or back rubbed.
10. **Help prepare, serve and eat nutritious, mind and body-building food:** Knowing the source of their food and being a part of its preparation are skills that will serve them throughout their lives.
11. **Be exposed to and take part in artistic offerings:** Puppet shows, live music, song, verse, and storytelling, provide children with a language-rich environment that builds their imagination, gives them pictures to inform their moral intelligence, and provide soothing human connections. Drawing, watercolor painting, and simple handwork projects allow them to connect their inner and outer world while developing important fine-motor skills and neural pathways necessary for later learning.

Classroom Placement Policy

“From the very beginning of their education, children should experience the joy of discovery.”

–Alfred North Whitehead

Discovering new friends is one of the first and deepest joys young children learn. In Waldorf schools, the teachers make a concerted effort to build up each class as a strong social body. Of utmost importance to Waldorf education is the emphasis its founder, Rudolf Steiner, placed on social renewal. His ideals were far-reaching and included the knowledge that the needs of the whole are to be considered alongside the needs of the individual. We can begin to work with the idea that it is not only our own child we have a responsibility towards, but also all of the children in our community.

The Early Childhood Faculty is committed to creating a healthy physical, social, and pre-academic environment for all students enrolled. To this end, we collectively review applications and evaluate feedback about the children from the applications, and where applicable, from the previous teacher(s) or caregiver(s). It is our policy to assign children to a classroom based on a myriad of factors such as age, gender, birth order, our observations; and with the intention of creating a balanced and diverse social dynamic in all of our early childhood classrooms. When applicable, we consider assigning a child to the same kindergarten which their older sibling attended. This helps to further build the family and child's familiarity with the teacher and/or classroom. The parents/guardians and teachers are also able to deepen their work and relationships with already-established foundations.

By mid-August you will receive a letter from your child's teacher, welcoming your child and family to the class. We have found that through trusting in the school's process and the destiny of the children, a healthy class is formed and all of the children benefit. When needed, we (the Admissions Coordinator, Learning Support Specialist, and the Early Childhood Faculty) may revisit a particular constellation and recommend transferring a student into another classroom. If this is the case, you will be contacted to discuss this decision so that you remain supported in each step of this process.

Transitioning from Home to School

"We shape our buildings, thereafter, they shape us."

– Winston Churchill

Stepping over the threshold of the school community offers a unique opportunity to instill lifelong habits in children. In order to begin building a feeling that school is a special place with special rules, we ask that you help support our community as we work toward an environment that respects people, as well as property. It is important that the adults uphold the following courtesies for our children until they are able to take them up on their own:

- Staying next to Mom, Dad, caregiver or the carpooling adult's side until delivered to the class teacher at arrival time, or to the car at dismissal, is of utmost importance.
- "Walking feet" (as opposed to running ones) are the preferred mode of transportation indoors.
- Stairway manners include holding on to railings as needed (as opposed to sliding down them a la Mary Poppins) and stepping down stairs (as opposed to leaping like Spiderman.)
- "Indoor voices" are requested unless the children are outside under the "Big Blue Sky" which can hold their "big" voices.
- Respecting our shared spaces, both indoors and outdoors. This includes the hallways, cubby areas, bathrooms, community center/gym, and indoor and outdoor classrooms, which promotes both outer and inner order and ensures that areas are picked up accordingly. In the bathrooms, we encourage potty independence and children cleaning up after themselves independently in order to keep our bathrooms clean.

Arrival and Dismissal

“Our job as early childhood teachers is to be with the children and create a space for them to feel exactly how they feel for as long as they need to feel it.”

~ Teacher Tom

Beginnings are full of lasting implications, thus how we begin our day is important. Please make sure children have eaten a healthy breakfast before school (ideally this will include protein), are dressed for the elements, and arrive at school on time. It is difficult for young children to enter a space once the activity has already begun. If your commute is long, please make a stop at the bathroom before departing or upon arrival, and allow time for children to take an adult supervised walk or run outdoors before entering the classroom, if/when the class is beginning indoors. A quick drop-off eases transition worries and models to children our trust in their teachers.

The teacher will inform you where to drop off and pick up the children prior to the start of the school year. The official school day starts promptly at 8:00am sharp for the Kindergarten classes. During drop off the teachers' attention is focused on the children and the work of the day, so please save any "adult talk" for non-class hours. If something important needs to be communicated, passing a written note to the teacher is advised and/or contacting the school office at (262) 646-7497.

At dismissal, please make sure that the teacher knows when you are leaving with your child. Pick up time on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday is at 3:15pm and on Thursday at 2:45pm. Faculty are asked not to dismiss students before 3:15pm (2:45pm on Thursdays) If parents/guardians are unable to pick up a child within 10 minutes after the end of the day (M/T/W/F by 3:25pm and Thursday by 2:55pm), we will escort your child to our Aftercare Program. If you know in advance that you will be late, our After Care Program is available and can be scheduled by contacting the School Office. There is a charge for this service.

NOTE: If you need to pick up your child early, please contact the teacher and call the

front office. When you arrive at school, go to the front office where you will sign your child out.

If children will be carpooling, provide the teacher with a written schedule of the carpool arrangements and inform the fellow drivers of our arrival and dismissal policies. If someone other than a parent/guardian or carpooling adult will be picking up, please inform the teacher and school office in advance.

In the case of inclement weather, your child's teacher will communicate any changes to the arrival/dismissal procedure.

Absences

If children will be absent from class, we ask the parent/guardian to call the School Office and leave a message, including the reason for the absence, as well as contacting your child's teacher directly, e.g. email or text message. This helps the teachers keep abreast of the child's condition and/or what may be happening in the child's life. Please refer to the section on Absences from [The PHWS Parent Handbook](#) for more information.

Illnesses

"We can begin to understand illness at a deeper level and see it as a challenge to the organism which, to be overcome, involves the child in a kind of bodily process of learning."

– Michaela Glockler, M.D.

The children's health is important to us. Each morning at arrival time, we pay special attention to how the children are doing. We are not equipped to care for sick children at school, and if children develop symptoms of illness during the day, we'll contact you to take the child home.

We have a zero-tolerance policy for illness at Prairie Hill. Please refer to [The PHWS](#)

[Parent Handbook](#) for our school's full illness policy.

If your children come to school with any of the following, they will be sent home:

- a fever (a child can not return to school until they are fever free for 24 hours straight and without the aid of fever-reducing medication.)
- heavy nasal discharge or yellowish-green nasal discharge
- a persistent cough or sneeze not related to a known allergy
- symptoms associated with a communicable disease: red eyes, sore throat, headache, abdominal pain, fever
- impetigo, pink eye, chicken pox, head lice, or pinworms

If a child develops a communicable disease, please notify the school at once. The office will then send out a message to alert the other families in the class, while keeping the child's name confidential. If a child vomits at school, parents/guardians will be contacted and plans will be made based on the teacher's discretion.

We will also contact you if, in our opinion, a child is unable to participate fully in a normal day, whether due to illness, fatigue, or unusual distress. Young children can be especially overwhelmed by school activity if they are tired or not feeling well.

Vomiting and/or Diarrhea: If a child vomits or has diarrhea, they must remain at home until all symptoms are gone and no vomiting or diarrhea for 24 hours. If the vomiting or diarrhea occurs at school, and is unrelated to illness (e.g., a response to food, caused by anxiety, etc), and the child has no other symptoms, the child may remain at school and you will be notified. Teachers will use common sense and evaluate this on a case by case basis. Keep in mind, when a child has been vomiting, they may be exhausted for at least a day with little energy. **Please make sure that you have a back-up plan for picking up your child, per our policy of within 30 minutes, if you are not available.**

Clothing

"There is no such thing as bad weather,

only poor clothing choices."

– Ulrike Schnaar, Forest Kindergarten Teacher

Mother Nature is said to be the archetypal teacher, and we encourage the children to explore her as fully as possible. The puddles, mud, and snow call out to be played in, and as we have so few years to fully immerse ourselves in them, we take full advantage of these opportunities. At Prairie Hill, we want the children to experience the joy of exploration, so it is important to dress them in sturdy clothes, appropriate for the weather conditions. Dressing in layers is usually the best way to ensure that they are ready for anything.

All growing things need warmth, so we ask that the children always have their back, stomach, legs, and feet covered. There may be a few warm days in the fall and spring when shorts are warranted. Our policy states that shorts can be worn when the temperature is above 65 degrees in the morning by drop-off time. An outdoor hat is important no matter what the season: a wide-brimmed hat and sunscreen for warm days, and a warm hat and scarf, or face mask (balaclava) for chilly weather.

Media-influenced clothing, such as clothes with TV or movie characters, is not appropriate for school. Sports teams, large product logos or brand names are also discouraged. This includes underwear and undershirts. These types of clothes tend to influence the child and the play in the classroom. Prairie Hill's school spirit wear can be worn at school.

All clothing and gear need to be clearly labeled with the child's name. You must provide the school with a labeled bag for your child's change-of seasonally appropriate clothes. Each bag needs to include multiples of: pants, shirts, sweaters, underwear, and socks all labeled for those days when the elements get the best of us. Some parents/guardians have found it helpful to keep large garbage bags in their cars for muddy outerwear at dismissal time.

[Here](#) is an article about how to layer and recommendations on specific gear from a seasoned parent.

Items To Keep at Home

“If you want to see what children can do, stop giving them things.” -

Norman Douglas

In order to encourage as much freedom of play as possible, we ask that you make sure that all personal belongings are left at home or in the car. This includes items such as toys, treasures, jewelry, candy, gum, money, keychains, sunglasses, and umbrellas.

Media Policy

*“At the empathetic stage, 0-7 years, the child is intensely sensitive, even vulnerable, to anything that comes to him from his surroundings.
The child is affected even in his physical organism.”*

– Margaret Meyerkort, Master Waldorf Kindergarten Teacher

Prairie Hill Waldorf School is dedicated to nurturing children’s capacities of imagination, healthy emotional development, independent thinking and positive action. In recognizing the harmful effects that electronic entertainment can have on the development of these capacities, we ask parents/ guardians to safeguard their children from such exposure. Electronic media includes but is not limited to television, cell phones, movies, videos, video games, radio, computer programs, and screen-time technology. One could say that the premise of Waldorf education is: “to everything there is a season,” and the season of Childhood is for learning about the world firsthand.

Children must experience physical reality at the most basic level before they are removed from it by the media’s interpretation of reality. They need to create in the

world and to hear and see the world's response to their "creating." They also need to get bored, and learn how, when, and if to get out of their boredom. All of this is lost when they are being "entertained" passively in front of a screen. The content alone is not even the most damaging part of screen exposure. The effect on the child's developing brain and physical body is debilitating. Current brain research points to the all-important need for young children to move, play, and experience real human relationships, all of which they are robbed of by ever-increasing screen-time.

Beyond our own child's experience, the social network of the classroom and school are affected by our personal media choices on behalf of our child. Just as the creative, open free play and imagination of one child can enhance the experience of all, so too can undigested television, movie, or computer content negatively affect the quality of play, the content and tone of classroom and playground conversations, the creative thinking, and the innocence of all of our children. We put great value on the education our children receive here at Prairie Hill, and exposure to the media largely undermines our efforts.

You are strongly encouraged to become aware of the growing body of research about the negative effects of exposure to electronic media on children's brain development, social interactions, and learning capabilities and limit your child(ren)'s exposure to such.

Discipline

"The heart can think of no devotion better than being shore to the ocean; holding the line of one position, counting on endless repetition."

– Robert Frost

The teachers at Prairie Hill are devoted to being the steady "shore" to the vicissitudes of childhood. We strive to maintain an atmosphere of safety, respect, and community to support an imaginative learning environment. Each child is respected for the unique individual they are. Guidance is provided to the children in a positive manner to help them develop self-discipline, self-esteem, and respect for others.

Our approach to discipline is based on the Waldorf early childhood principles of **rhythm, imitation and reverence**. Maintaining a strong and reliable rhythm to each day and an orderly and predictable classroom environment resolves most discipline issues through prevention. The teachers seek first to model correct behavior, bringing the children along to right action. When inappropriate behavior occurs, the children are addressed according to their age and the nature of their disruption. Wherever possible, the children are involved in righting their wrongs, for instance, helping to mend a broken toy, or rubbing soothing lotion on a friend who was hurt. If inappropriate behavior continues, the child will stay close to the teacher, helping with their work.

First and foremost, a student must be able to follow the teacher's instructions while in a group. Teachers include: Lead Teachers, Assistant Teachers, Substitute Teachers and Aftercare Teachers. A student who is unable to follow instructions, displays behavior that is harmful to themselves or others, or engages in behavior that results in a major disruption to the classroom routine, will be sent home for the remainder of the school day. A child who is disruptive not only affects his own school experience, but that of their classmates. Therefore, if a child's behavior becomes a regular disruption or poses a safety risk to themselves or others, the following discipline process will be followed:

- 1) The teacher contacts you and describes the situation. You may be asked to pick up the child early from school. If you are not available to pick up your child, you must have a back-up plan in place for someone else to pick up your child within 30 minutes.
- 2) If the disruptive behavior continues, an **action plan** including a time frame will be developed and shared with you. The **action plan** could involve Prairie Hill's Care Group, the Learning Support Specialist, or others as needed.
- 3) A conference with the parents/guardians will be scheduled to discuss the situation.
- 4) The teacher will document (e.g., incident report form) and follow-up with the parents/guardians to communicate progress made based on the time frame outlined in the **action plan**. If progress is not being made, please refer to our Discipline-Dismissals Policy in [The PHWS Parent Handbook](#) as well as the Probation and Expulsion policies in your contract, for more

information.

Channels of Communication

"I do not like that man. I must get to know him better."

– Abraham Lincoln

Good, open communication is a key element in the success of a Waldorf school. To facilitate good communication:

- Teachers maintain regular office hours for parent/guardian conversations and concerns.
- Teachers send out a class letter on a regular basis that is written specifically for the parents/guardians.
- Early Childhood parent/guardian meetings are held throughout the year.
- Teacher-Family conferences are scheduled twice a year.
- Phone conversations are available by arrangement with the teacher when needed.
- The school's newsletter (*The Weekly Update*) is emailed weekly.
- Regular check-ins will be conducted by the class teacher to parents/guardians of all new incoming students. Please see the Probationary Period section from [The PHWS Parent Handbook](#).

It is vital for a healthy community that issues are brought to the appropriate person's attention for resolution and discussion. If your concern is with another member of the community, please go directly to the person(s) you have a concern with and have a conversation about your concerns/questions. If it does not get resolved, please follow our **Channels of Communication** process:

- 1) **Contact your Child's Teacher** – Your first point of contact should always be your child's teacher. The entire faculty has training in and a good understanding of the class and organizational structure within the school. The teacher may not be able to answer all questions but will direct you to

the most appropriate person within the school to get your questions answered promptly.

- 2) **Contact Chairperson of the Early Childhood Department** – Secondly, please reach out to one of the two co-chairs of the Early Childhood Dept for issues or questions that the class teacher is not able to address. (If your issue concerns 1 of the co-chairs, consult the other co-chair.) If we have a Community Liaison, the Chairperson will refer you to them.
- 3) **Contact The Administrator** – Lastly, contact the Administrator. The Administrator's role is to be a facilitator between all three bodies within the school – Board, Faculty and Families.

Rest and Sleep

“Take rest; a field that has rested gives a bountiful crop.”

– Ovid

Being in school is both exciting and tiring for the children. At home, you can help ease the transition by providing a nap or quiet time after lunch, and by using the time after dinner for calming activities leading into a bedtime ritual. We recommend that children take afternoon naps up until they reach first grade. However, if your child is no longer napping, we encourage you to provide quiet time every day after lunch. Pediatricians typically recommend 11 to 13 hours of sleep a night for children three to six years old.

[Nap time is an integral part of our Early Childhood curriculum.](#) Our young students spend a large portion of their morning outdoors engaged in robust work and play. Nap time is essential to the healthy development of young children, providing the physical restoration needed for their growing bodies to rest and breathe, so they are open to whatever may come to them during the rest of their day. Research shows that children who do not nap have elevated stress hormones that also cause increased alertness and irritability. Students in our Wonder Garden and Kindergarten programs need to be able to nap or rest quietly each day without disruption to our nap house

routine. If a student needs to be removed from the nap house on a consistent basis, the teacher, caregivers, and learning support specialist will work together to create a plan. Students who continue to display disruptive behavior during nap time, after a plan has been consistently carried out, may be asked to adjust their schedule from full days to half days or to find an alternative environment for their child.

Potty Independence

Children in Wonder Garden and Kindergarten need to be completely potty independent before their first day of school. This means that they are expected to voice when they need to go to the [bathroom](#) and be capable of caring for their own hygienic needs, including wiping themselves and changing their own clothing. This policy is in place because we are not a licensed daycare center. **If a child has three or more accidents within a three week timeframe, you will be contacted to create an action plan.**

When accidents happen, the child will be removed from the classroom discreetly and escorted to the bathroom by a teacher who will assist the child in the removal of the soiled clothing. The child will be placed on the toilet and encouraged to complete the action to ensure that the bladder/bowels have been completely emptied and then to wipe. If the child's underpants are excessively soiled they will be thrown away and the remainder of the soiled clothing will be returned in a plastic bag. In some cases, when the child has a bowel movement that is not easily cleaned up, parents will be asked to come to school and pick up the child for the remainder of the day.

Children who have accidents will never be humiliated, shamed, or made to feel uncomfortable. Note this policy is in place for everyone, as potty accidents are time consuming and take teachers away from others in the class, and can be a sanitary/health issue.

Nourishment

“Let food be thy medicine and medicine be thy food”

~Hippocrates

We are pleased to offer wholesome, primarily organic lunches and morning snacks each day. Your teacher provides a copy of the planned meals as part of our weekly rhythm each year. **If a child has a food allergy or special dietary needs, please contact the teacher and we will arrange for you to provide and inventory an alternative meal.** We encourage “polite bites” in order for them to taste what is being served as we find that often a child welcomes new foods when they are introduced to it slowly and consistently. If there are concerns about eating habits, we will partner with you as well as our learning support specialist to determine an action plan for your child. Thank you for partnering with us to build healthy eating habits in such an enriching communal manner.

Visiting the Early Childhood Classrooms

Visitors are welcome when advance arrangements are made with the teachers and/or the school office. Visitors include parents, guardians, student teachers, teacher candidates, and others interested in Waldorf education. Visitors are usually given a task to perform while quietly joining the Wonder Garden or Kindergarten morning. A working adult brings a focused attention that enables the children to fully enter their play. Please refrain from using your cell phone, engaging in conversations and/or anything that could disrupt the teacher and students from their good work. Visitors will be asked to check in at the Front Office to receive a visitor's badge.

After School Care Program

The Aftercare program is open to students who are currently enrolled in the school and are able to successfully complete their Wonder Garden or Kindergarten school day. Requirements for this program include:

- attendance during the regular school-day program,
- ability to follow instructions in a group setting, and
- compliance to communicated rules.

This program has a lead teacher who is committed to working out of Waldorf principles, along with an assistant, depending on need. The program applies the same guiding Waldorf principles that are used in the classrooms so that the children feel secure in a caring environment which provides a regular rhythm to the day, periods of free play, structured activities, exercise, and nourishment.

Please remember that children who are sick are to remain at home. (See section on [illness](#).) The Aftercare program is available from 3:15 p.m. until 5:30 p.m and complements school-day activities with a healthy snack, outdoor activities, games, crafts, free play, and clean up.

NOTE: If a child is unable to make a successful transition from the classroom to the Aftercare program, the parents/guardians will be contacted and an action plan will be created together with the support of parents/guardians and our Care Group.

Festival Life

“Sound when stretched is music. Movement when stretched is dance. Mind when stretched is meditation. Life when stretched is celebration.”

– Ravi Shankar

We embrace the changing rhythms of the calendar year through a variety of festivals and seasonal activities. The festival motifs are introduced in the classroom through storytelling, songs, movement (e.g., Eurythmy and Circle Time), painting and crafting. Some of our festivals specifically focus on particular grade(s), while most are celebrated by the entire community in school-wide assemblies, student performances and entertaining fairs. It is the communal nature of the festivals that connect parents/guardians, caregivers, faculty, staff, and alumni to the students for meaningful celebration and bonding of community ties. Some of our significant festivals include: The Festival of Courage (Michaelmas), The Festival of Community (Martinmas/Lantern Walk), The Festival of Light (Advent Spiral), The Faire (Yuletide Faire), and Mayfaire. The Weekly Update newsletter that is emailed on Wednesdays, will provide additional information throughout the year.

First Grade Readiness

“Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts.”

– Rachel Carson

Prairie Hill’s school policy is that children must be 6 years of age by May 1st to be considered for first grade. While the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction requires that children be 6 years of age by September 1st, we believe adhering to the May 1st date is the best way to ensure your child’s developmental needs--academic, social, emotional, and physical--will be met by the Waldorf Curriculum. It is our belief that children more fully realize their potential when all four areas have reached a certain balance and maturity before beginning the formal academic rigors of first grade.

This guideline applies for first grade as well as all subsequent grades for children entering at a later grade level. First Grade Readiness Assessments will be completed for each child who meets the age requirements. Once the readiness assessment is completed, the Early Childhood Faculty will make a recommendation about grade placement for the upcoming school year. A collaborative decision will be made between faculty, administration, learning support, and parents/guardians. Please be

aware that kindergarten enrollment does not guarantee enrollment in the grades, as there are times when we are unable to meet a child's needs or space does not permit advancement. Your child's teacher will begin to discuss your child's placement with you at our October Teacher-Family Conferences and a placement decision will be communicated during March Teacher-Family Conferences.

First Grade Readiness Assessments

“Sensory-motor development through the early years primes the developing brain for later learning.”

– Sally Goddard Blythe, Institute for Neuro-Physiological Psychology

At Prairie Hill, it is our practice to conduct First Grade Assessments for those children moving on to first grade, or those we are considering for first grade entrance. This assessment allows us to note the tendencies, abilities, and challenges of the individual child and the class as a whole. It also helps us to more deeply understand the children, their strengths, and their needs.

The kindergarten teachers lead the children on an imaginative “journey” as they play their way through a story which asks them to perform a number of tasks, most of which are physical challenges, such as walking a balance beam or catching a ball. As current research reveals, academic learning rests on the foundation of a well integrated physical body. These activities are scheduled within their kindergarten day, to make it playful rather than feeling like a test. A summary of the observations gained from this assessment will be shared in the children's end-of-year reports and with the first grade class teacher to aid in future planning.

Parent/Guardian Opportunities

“Alone, we can do so little; together we can do so much.”

– Helen Keller

At Prairie Hill there are numerous ways for you to be involved. These include being on the Board of Trustees, participating on committees of interest (e.g., Advancement Committee, Building & Grounds, etc), attending meetings and/or events for fundraising, school or classroom cleaning days, festivals, and special projects announced in our *Weekly Update*. The class teachers, depending on need, may ask for assistance at various times throughout the year.

Several class meetings are held throughout the year for parents/guardians of each class. Teachers publish those dates on the [School Calendar](#) and will inform parents/guardians of the dates in advance. It is important for at least one parent/guardian of each child to be present as these meetings provide an opportunity for the teacher to present an overview of what the children have done and will be doing, and provide you with the opportunity to come together to discuss the children’s developmental stages and needs, ask questions, get to know one another and build community.

Social Inclusion

“A healthy social life is found only, when in the mirror of each soul the whole community finds its reflection, and when in the whole community the virtue of each one is living.”

– Rudolf Steiner

We are committed to promoting a social environment in which working, playing, and learning takes place in ways that foster inclusiveness and recognize mutual humanity, even while addressing conflict. With this goal in mind, our school has

adopted the Social Inclusion Approach brought to us by Kim John Payne - an educator who is respected worldwide for his work in justice without blame, building self-esteem and helping children deal with conflict and social issues. We invite you to actively participate in building and maintaining a healthy social life in our school community by being inclusive when planning your child(ren)'s activities. For example, when planning a birthday party, inviting all the children in the class so as not to exclude anyone.

The Early Childhood Department wants to thank you for taking the time to read this Early Childhood Policy Handbook. It is our intention it will help you gain a better understanding of our commitment to your children.

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