



Director of Early Childhood Education Irvine Nature Center

Position Summary

The Director of Early Childhood Education oversees Irvine Nature Center's early childhood programs serving children from birth through age six. This includes Irvine's Nature Preschool and related early childhood offerings such as Little Birds (Caregiver and Child Program) and other programs designed for young children and families. The Director also supervises Irvine's Earth Friends homeschool program, which serves children through age 12, ensuring alignment with Irvine's educational philosophy and program quality standards.

The Director of ECE is responsible for the day-to-day leadership, management, and growth of Irvine's early childhood programs. This includes supervising program leads and educators, maintaining high-quality educational experiences rooted in nature-based learning, ensuring compliance with licensing and accreditation standards, and supporting strong program enrollment and financial performance. The Director of ECE should have a strong understanding of nature-based ECE philosophy and practices, Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) preschool licensing guidelines and the NAEYC accreditation process. They should remain informed about current trends and best practices in early childhood education and environmental education.

The Director works closely with Irvine's leadership team and reports to the Deputy Director. This position plays an important role in implementing Irvine's educational vision while ensuring programs operate effectively and sustainably. This is a full-time (12 month) salaried position. As a leadership role, this position requires flexibility and may occasionally include evenings or weekend commitments to support programs, events and organizational initiatives.

Position Responsibilities:

Program Leadership & Management

- Oversee the day-to-day operations of Irvine's Nature Preschool and related early childhood programs during the academic year, while providing year-round leadership including program planning, staffing, enrollment management and administrative oversight.
- Ensure programs reflect Irvine's philosophy of nature-based, child-centered learning and align with best practices in early childhood and environmental education.
- Maintain high standards for program quality and safety.
- Develop, maintain, and regularly review program policies, procedures, and operational systems that support effective program delivery.
- Establish and nurture strong collaborative relationships with prospective and enrolled families.
- Develop, maintain and regularly review program policies, procedures, teaching practices and operational systems that support effective program delivery.

Staff Supervision & Support

- Supervise and support program leads, educators, and early childhood staff.
- Conduct staff evaluations and provide regular coaching, feedback and professional development opportunities.
- Foster a collaborative and supportive team culture within the early childhood department.
- Oversee hiring, onboarding and training of early childhood staff.

Enrollment & Program Sustainability

- Monitor program enrollment and work collaboratively with Irvine's marketing team to support recruitment and retention of families.
- Monitor enrollment trends and work collaboratively across departments to support strong enrollment and the long-term sustainability of Irvine's early childhood programs.
- Lead the planning of program schedules, classroom offerings and future program expansion.
- Coordinate and lead evaluation of preschool financial aid applications

Curriculum & Program Quality

- Support the implementation of Irvine's nature-based, play-based, emergent curriculum approach across early childhood programs.
- Observe classrooms and programs regularly to ensure high-quality teaching practices and alignment with Irvine's educational philosophy.
- Provide guidance and feedback to educators to support strong child-centered, outdoor learning experiences.
- Provide guidance and support to educators in addressing developmental, learning and behavioral challenges within the program.
- Partner with educators to identify developmental concerns, communicate with families and support the process of seeking appropriate evaluations or resources.
- Educate families on program values, philosophy, practice and child development.
- Stay informed about current research and trends in early childhood and environmental education and incorporate relevant practices into program development.

Licensing, Accreditation & Compliance

- Ensure the Nature Preschool remains in compliance with Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) preschool licensing requirements.
- Lead Preschool staff in maintaining NAEYC accreditation standards and ensure completion of all required documentation.
- Ensure Preschool staff meet all training, certification and regulatory requirements.

Budget & Administrative Oversight

- Create and manage the early childhood program budgets in collaboration with Irvine leadership.
- Monitor program revenue and expenses and support responsible financial management of programs.
- Maintain program records and documentation related to enrollment, program outcomes and evaluation.
- Supply program documentation and information to support grant reporting and funding requirements in collaboration with Irvine's development team.

Collaboration & Organizational Support

- Work collaboratively with Irvine's leadership team and other departments including education, marketing and development.
- Support organizational initiatives, events, and cross-departmental projects as appropriate.
- Represent Irvine's early childhood programs within the broader early childhood and environmental education community when appropriate.

Qualifications

- Minimum of Associates degree in Early Childhood Education, Environmental Education, Child Development, or a related field.
- Minimum 5 years of experience working in early childhood education.
- Must qualify as a child care center director per Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) licensing requirements.
- Experience working in nature-based, outdoor, or environmental early childhood education programs.
- Experience managing program budgets, enrollment planning, or program operations.
- Demonstrated knowledge of MSDE preschool licensing regulations.

- Familiarity with NAEYC accreditation standards and processes.
- Strong understanding of child development and developmentally appropriate practices and a deep respect and appreciation for play.
- Extensive understanding and experience teaching neurodivergent children and/or with developmental delays.
- Experience supervising and supporting early childhood educators or program staff.
- Experience in supervising, advocating for, and training others on risky play.
- Strong organizational, communication, and leadership skills.
- Ability to work collaboratively with colleagues across departments and build positive relationships with families.
- Current First Aid and CPR certification, or ability to obtain upon hire.
- Ability and enthusiasm to work outdoors in a variety of weather conditions, walk moderate distances on Irvine's trails and carry children and program equipment up to 50 pounds.
- Proficiency with Microsoft Office and standard administrative systems.
- Strong commitment to welcoming children and families with diverse abilities and backgrounds and a commitment to regularly examining their own beliefs and practices.

Preferred Qualifications

- Master's degree in Early Childhood Education, Environmental Education, Child Development, or a related field.
- Experience supporting or managing NAEYC accreditation or reaccreditation processes.
- Experience managing program budgets, enrollment planning, or program operations.
- Familiarity with current research and emerging trends in early childhood education and environmental education.
- Experience with establishing or reviewing financial aid programs.

To Apply: Please send cover letter and resume to the attention of Courtney Sagal, Irvine Nature Center, 11201 Garrison Forest Road, Owings Mills, MD 21117 or email HR@ExploreNature.org

Salary: \$68,000-\$73,000 Annually

Please note: Employment is contingent upon completing and passing a criminal background check

Irvine is proud to be an Equal Employment Opportunity employer. We celebrate diversity and do not discriminate based on race, religion, color, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, age, veteran status, disability status, or any other applicable characteristics protected by federal state or local laws. This policy applies to all terms and conditions of employment, including recruiting, hiring, placement, promotion, termination, layoff, recall, transfer, leaves of absence, compensation, and training.