2026-27 Enrollment
Frequently Asked Questions

Questions about Enrollment

When will we know if my child has a spot next school year? Currently enrolled students eligible to return for the 2026-27 SY have priority at enrollment and will receive contracts by the end of January. New student applications will be considered after returning student contracts are due, with priority given to siblings of returning students. New student contracts will be emailed by mid- February.

When is our contract and down payment due? Once you receive your contract, you will have 10 business days to submit the contract and the non-refundable down payment (10% of tuition).

What if we are not offered a spot in a class we are interested in? Is there a waitlist? If you are not offered a spot in your first choice, you will be offered a spot in your second or third choice. You may decline that contract and ask to be placed on the waitlist for your first choice. If we are unable to offer you a spot in any class, we will keep your application on file and keep your child on a waitlist for all interested classes.

What happens if we enroll and then we change our minds? Contracts are for the full school year regardless of attendance. If, however, you decide to withdraw before the start of the year *and we can fill your child's spot*, we will forgive the remaining balance on your contract. Down payments are non-refundable.

We have two children we would like to enroll. Is there a sibling discount? There is a $200 sibling discount on the full cost of tuition on every second or subsequent child enrolled simultaneously in The Nature Preschool. This discount will be reflected on your contracts.

We love your program, but the tuition is simply out of reach for our family. Do you offer any financial assistance? Yes, we do! The Woodpecker Tuition Assistance (TAP) Program offers financial assistance of up to 40% of tuition and Before/AfterCare balances after the down payment. You must complete the **TAP application and submit all relevant documentation by Jan. 9** to be considered for assistance. In addition, look into the CCS (next question).

Do you participate in the MSDE Child Care Scholarship Program (CCS) or Child Care Aware? Yes, we do! CCS is a state program for eligible families to assist with paying for childcare. To learn more visit https://earlychildhood.marylandpublicschools.org/child-care-providers/child-care-scholarship-program. Child Care Aware offers aid for military families. You can learn more about the program at https://www.childcareaware.org/families/. Please note, families that receive either form of aid must pay the outstanding balance on the tuition (minus any awarded TAP). As a nonprofit, Irvine is unable to waive the remaining tuition balance currently. Families that qualify for either program may still be eligible for Woodpecker TAP!

Questions Related to Class Structures

Why isn't there a stand-alone 5-day class? Space limitations! Maryland requires all licensed programs to have an approved classroom for each class. Currently, we do not have a third classroom available. But

if you enroll your child in 5 *full*-days (a 3-day class and a 2-day class), they will have some friends that are consistent across the two classes and two consistent teachers.

Who will my child's teachers be? Class teachers are announced in the summer when families receive Welcome Packets. However, all classes always have two teachers, providing a staff-to-child ratio of 2:14. All teachers have studied education, child development, and environmental science and have background checks. At times, classes may have an additional aide or college intern resulting in even lower ratios. We love our dedicated staff!

Are classes really mostly outdoors? Yes! We thrive outside and are out as much as possible! Classes go in for bathroom breaks, during inclement weather, and occasionally to complete special projects. Full-day classes also have snack and rest time indoors.

What do you consider inclement weather? "There's no such thing as bad weather- only bad clothing!" We go out despite the heat, cold, rain, and snow. We come indoors during lightning, thunder, and during periods of sustained extreme temperatures (especially if combined with wet conditions). During strong winds Irvine may close its trails and we may need to move part of our day indoors due to sharing the limited non-trail space with all of Irvine's programs. We rely on appropriate gear and movement to stay warm!

What is the daily schedule like? Because we truly believe in meeting each child's needs and honoring the child, we do not follow a rigidly set schedule, but more of a daily rhythm. Please see below for the flow of a typical day.

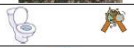
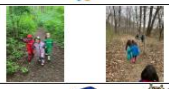
A Day at Nature Preschool

(half day schedule)

Imagination Stations		
Clean-Up		
Circle Time		
Potty + Handwashing		
Snack Time + Handwashing		
Trail Time		
Class Grove and Goodbye		

A Day at Nature Preschool

(full day schedule)

Imagination Stations		
Clean-Up		
Circle Time		
Potty + Handwashing		
Lunch + Handwashing		
Trail Time		
Snack Time + Handwashing		
Rest Time		
Goodbye		

Questions about Extended Care

What is Early Bird Care? Families may drop their children off 30 min early (at 8:30) for a nominal fee. Children spend this time with a preschool staff member in short activities or visiting the animals in the exhibit hall.

What is Fern Club AfterCare like? A dedicated Early Childhood Teacher will accompany children on even more outdoor adventures and provide ample opportunities to explore music, art, movement, yoga, and play! We will also provide a snack and will be back in the classroom before pick up at 5pm.

I need AfterCare, but not until 5pm. Can I pick up early? Yes! Parents can pick up children earlier. However, Fern Club is offered at a flat rate, regardless of when children are picked up.

We are not sure if we want to sign up for Early Bird Care or Fern Club AfterCare yet. Can we sign up later? Yes! But please let us know as soon as possible so that we can plan accordingly!

Are Early Bird Care and Fern Club be available on an occasional basis? These add-on programs are typically offered on a monthly basis, but occasional use is available at a higher rate. To have a one-off or occasional use, you must contact The Nature Preschool at least two business days before to ensure space is available.

Can a child who is enrolled in half-day preschool attend Fern Club? No, Fern Club, which begins at 2pm, is only for full-day students.

I Want to Know More!

What about the school calendar? A draft of the calendar will be included with your initial contract. A finalized calendar will be included in the Welcome Packet sent over summer. Classes start after Labor Day and run through May.

Who else will be in my child's class? We will send a tentative class list in the Welcome Packet.

What gear does my child need? A full Recommended Gear List is provided in the Welcome Packet, but all students will need appropriate outdoor gear, including rain wear, boots, and snow suits. Irvine offers an Adventure Apparel Gear Lending Program from which families can borrow gear for the year.

Will there be any open houses or tours? We host tours every second/third Thursday of the month at 9:30am. To sign up please complete this online registration form.

Will we get a Family Handbook? Yes! The current handbook is already up on the website!

What about other ECE programs like Little Birds Caregiver and Child and Earth Friends Outdoors Homeschool? When can we register for those and what will they look like next year? Plans for other ECE programs are in the works and are typically announced in May prior to the following school year.

I still have lingering questions! Who can I contact? Please contact Priscila Andrade, Director of Early Childhood Education at AndradeP@ExploreNature.org or 443-738-9225.