

2025/26

Outdoor

Preschool

Handbook



A Wild Approach To Pre-K



BLACKBERRY
ACADEMY

OUTDOOR SCHOOL

Welcome Message



Thank you for trusting Blackberry Academy with your child's outdoor education. You have joined a community of like-minded families who believe in the power of nature to help children thrive in today's fast paced world. Together we will help your child build social and emotional skills and help them to create a deeply rooted connection to nature.



Miss Yessie

Founder & Lead
nature mentor
Blackberry Academy
Outdoor School
541-292-4147



Our Guiding pillars

Blackberry Academy Outdoor School was founded to address two issues. 1) Accessibility and Equity in early outdoor education. 2) General unhealthy nationwide trends toward more screen time and less unstructured outdoor play for young children. These issues are the pillars of the school's mission, every choice we make is made with these in mind.

Mentoring Philosophy

Staff see their role as Mentors and guides rather than teachers. Our mentors embrace each child's unique needs and learning styles to convey social and emotional lessons and help students build deep connections to the world around them. Curriculum is emergent, child-led, and play & place based. It is inspired by a knowledge that children are **born to learn** and have an **innate** desire to be part of community. They are **capable**, and thrive under dedicated mentorship and connection.





Daily Schedule



- 9:00 AM: Circle time begins, enveloping the children in a world of stories, songs, and lessons that reflect the seasons and their burgeoning interests.
- 9:30-10:30: Child led play and exploration.
- 10:30 AM: Lunchtime provides a moment of rest and replenishment, as we enjoy our meals together in the fresh air. A story is read while the children enjoy their lunches.
- 11:00 AM - 11:30 AM: Nature Walk and nature journaling. We wander slowly through the various natural spaces in the park and along the green way. Children each find a special sit spot and spend a few quiet moments drawing, reading, or listening to the sound of nature.
- 11:45 AM - 12:30 PM: Child led play and exploration with access to tools and curriculum-based activities/crafts.
- 12:45: Children help clean up tools and lesson items and we walk back to the native plant garden for pick up.
- 1:00 PM: Parents arrive to pick up their joyful explorers, ready to hear tales of their day's natural escapades.



Hours

School is in session September 2nd 2025- June 12th 2026 Tuesday-Friday 9am-1pm

Holidays/breaks

School is closed the week of Christmas and for Thursday and Friday of Thanksgiving. We take One week off in March for spring break.

Holiday Celebrations:

At Blackberry Academy, we intentionally move away from traditional American holiday celebrations in favor of honoring the rhythms of nature and our shared community. We celebrate the changing seasons with non-denominational community gatherings near each solstice. These events are held outside of school hours, are optional, and are designed to foster joy, connection, and a sense of belonging for children and their families.

While we do not formally observe national holidays within our daily program, children's birthdays are recognized with simple, meaningful rituals.

Additionally, discussions about cultural holidays may emerge organically through conversation or learning experiences. When this happens, we welcome thoughtful, age-appropriate dialogue about the significance and traditions of various celebrations, rooted in curiosity and respect.

Staffing Ratios

Our Licensing allows for class sizes up to 16. With a staff to child ratio of 8:1. However we limit class size to 14 students and 7:1 ratio. We find this most appropriate for our location and philosophy.

Staff & Volunteer Requirements

All staff and volunteers must pass a full background check before working with children. All staff must consent to a in home visit prior to employment. Staff and volunteers must also take the following trainings: Introduction to Child Care Health and Safety training, Recognizing and Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect, Foundations for Learning (FFL). Staff require Pediatric first aid & CRP certifications.

Feild trips/ Transportation

Off-site field trips are rare. In the event that a feild trip off site is planned you will be given advance notice. No Transportation will be available. Caregivers are responsible for transporting their own child or coordinating with other caregivers

Emergency transportation will be provided as listed in the Emergency action plan.

Lunches

No food or Beverages are provided by the school.

Lunch should be packed by families and follow a food as fuel principle. At its core, this means including:

- Carbohydrates (like whole grain bread, rice, or pasta) for quick energy.
- Proteins (such as beans, cheese, or turkey) to build strong muscles and keep them full longer.
- Fruits and vegetables for vitamins, fiber, and hydration.
- Healthy fats (like avocado or nut butters) to support brain development.
- And of course, **water** to keep everything running smoothly. Please pack at minimum **10oz** of water each day. If your child runs out bottled water is kept onsite to refill their bottles.
- Please ensure your child's lunch can be held at safe temperature until it is consumed. I.E. ice/heat packs when needed.

Allergies/sensitivities:

- Parents are responsible for providing all allergen and sensitivity info via Jovial
- Children do not share food or beverages with each other to prevent accidental exposure to allergens

Food service:

Children serve themselves picnic style. Staff do not handle children's food.

Parent responsibilities

Information: Parents are responsible for providing accurate and up to date student information and immunization records, as well as caregiver contact information and emergency contact information.

Collaboration:

We ask that parents take an active role in their child's learning by attending scheduled parent-teacher conferences, engaging in brief check-ins as needed, and supporting learning goals and emotional development at home. This collaboration helps us provide consistent support across environments and reinforces each child's progress toward key milestones.

Community Participation:

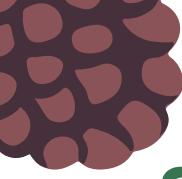
We invite families to participate in seasonal volunteer clean-up days and community celebration events throughout the year. These shared experiences not only strengthen our program community but also model for children the value of stewardship, teamwork, and celebration. When children see the adults in their lives investing time and care into their learning environment, it deepens their sense of belonging and pride in the world they're helping to shape.

School Communications

School communications to individual families may be delivered via Email, phone call or Text. Important notices and messages regarding past due tuition and updates to a student's enrollment will be notified by two methods.

Class DOJO and group communications:

We use class DOJO a free app that helps facilitate group messages and sharing of information to the whole group. **Any important changes to the class schedule or cancellations, delayed starts or early starts will be sent via Class DOJO.** We hope that you will use this app to connect with other families outside of school as well. Community is at the heart of our school.



Safety Measures

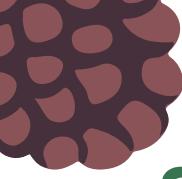
Injury prevention: We prioritize proactive safety in our outdoor learning environment. Staff conduct daily site checks to identify and address potential hazards, maintain appropriate child-to-adult ratios for supervision, and model safe behaviors during exploration and play. Activities are thoughtfully planned to balance developmental challenge with manageable risk, helping children build physical confidence while minimizing the likelihood of injury. Regular training and ongoing observation ensure that prevention practices remain responsive and effective.

Prohibited Substances:

We prohibit the presence or use of the following substances on site or in children's belongings:

- Tobacco and nicotine products (including vapes)
- Alcohol
- Cannabis or cannabis-derived products
- Illegal drugs
- Firearms, ammunition, or weapons
- Prescription or over-the-counter medications not authorized for a child's use
- Aerosol sprays and chemical cleaners not approved for use around children
- Perfumes or strong fragrances that may trigger sensitivities





Safety Measures

Environmental Safety Measures Policy:

we are committed to maintaining a safe and healthy outdoor learning environment. While we do not use pesticides or herbicides, we maintain open communication with city and park staff to stay informed of any scheduled applications.

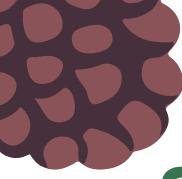
When notified, we adjust our site use accordingly to avoid exposure.

Children are taught to recognize and avoid toxic plants through regular, age-appropriate identification activities. We treat this as an ongoing safety skill, much like learning to navigate terrain or use tools responsibly.

When encountering animals in public spaces, we teach children to give all animals respectful space and to keep hands at their sides, especially around unfamiliar dogs. Staff remain vigilant and guide children in calm, safe responses

.





Safety Measures

Supervision and Premises Safety Policy

We implement consistent visual and procedural safeguards to ensure that children remain safely within our licensed outdoor space at all times.

Each child wears a high-visibility vest throughout the day; vests are put on by a parent or guardian at drop-off and may only be removed by that same adult at pick-up. This simple ritual reinforces accountability and visibility throughout the day.

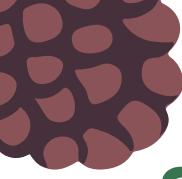
Our play and learning areas are clearly marked with brightly colored boundary cones,

establishing a visual "safety circle" that children learn to recognize and respect. Staff actively guide children in understanding these limits through modeling and regular reinforcement.

Children remain within the safety circle as a cohesive group unless transitioning as a whole class. During these transitions, we move in a line with staff positioned in front and back to maintain supervision and clear boundaries.

These practices, paired with attentive supervision and consistent communication among staff, help ensure each child's safety and support their understanding of spatial awareness and group cooperation.





Safety Measures

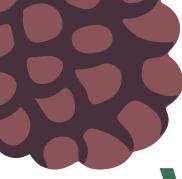
Non-program visitors/guests:

To ensure the safety of all children, does not permit any individual who is not enrolled in the Oregon Criminal Background Registry to have unsupervised access to children. All visitors to the program area are announced to staff via two-way radio prior to entry, and their presence is documented in our visitor log. These logs are accessible to families through the class Google Drive for transparency.

If an incident involving a visitor occurs, it is recorded in an incident report, also shared via the Google Drive. Any behavior deemed suspicious, aggressive, hostile, threatening, inappropriate, or indicative of intoxication is reported immediately to the Phoenix Police Department, whose response time averages three minutes. This protocol ensures swift response and maintains a safe, secure environment for all children and staff

.





Weather policies

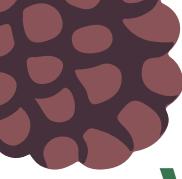
Heat:

- School will be cancelled, or run with modified schedules to avoid peak heat on days with heat over 105 degrees
- On days with heat over 95 degrees staff will have access to instant cool packs and water spray bottles. Children will seek shade and take frequent water breaks

Cold:

- School may be cancelled or run on a modified schedule to allow for more ambient daytime warmth on day with temps under 20 degrees.
- In colder months instant heat packs are readily available
- We will help children remain active during cold months
- Ensure children are dressed appropriately for the conditions.





Wearther policies

Winds:

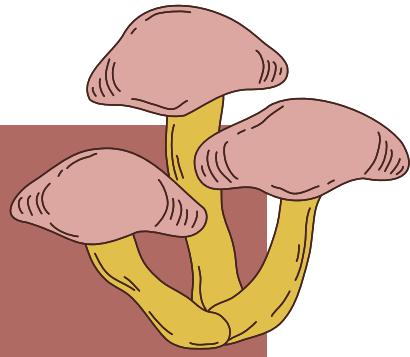
- School may be cancelled on days with strong winds over 25Mph
- We will avoid tall trees on windy or gusty days

Smoke air quality:

- In order to keep our students safe from excessive smoke students will be allowed to attend class if the AQI at the start of our day is below 110. Children are more sensitive to wild re smoke. They breathe more air relative to their size, are more active than adults, and are still growing and developing.
- With this in mind, if the AQI reaches 120 Parents will be notified that school is canceled, and their child needs to be picked up.
- If at the start of the day we are seeing an AQI of 100 or higher than parents will be notified, and school will be canceled for the day. **Notifications will be sent via Class DOJO by 7am.**



Tuition Financial agreements



Tuition payments

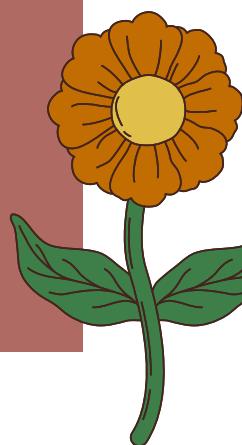
Tuition for preschool is an **autopay** subscription style enrollment. Your Tuition pricing is set at the time of your enrollment as agreed upon in your Jovial financial agreements.

If you **do not** wish to set up auto pay you must pay for your school year **in full or by the term**. There are **NO-REFUNDS** for this option.

Non-Refundable Enrollment Fees

When you set up your monthly enrollment there is a one-time **\$250 Non-Refundable** enrollment fee per child. This fee serves Several purposes: first it shows us your commitment to enrollment. Once paid we will save your child a space in class for the full school year. Second, it covers tuition in June which is a partial month. It also helps to off-set the cost of supplies and materials.

There are **NO-REFUNDS** and **NOEXCEPTIONS** for enrollment fees.



Tuition Pricing breakdown

Full-Time: \$550/mo*
Tuesday-Friday 9am-1pm \$4950/yr

Part-Time: \$300/mo*
Tuesday/Wednesday
or Thursday/Friday
9am-1pm \$2700/yr

Sibling Price: Full-time \$400
Part-time \$200

**Sibling pricing applies to each Co-Enrolled sibling after the first student.
No discounts are available on enrollment fees.

Paid in full: Full-time \$4,702**
Part-time \$2,565

**Tuition paid in full will receive a 5% discount. Please consider this option if it is available to your family. These advance payments help our financial planning tremendously.

Paid by the term: Fall-\$2,200
Winter-\$1,650
Spring-\$1,100

Fall term= Sept-Dec

Winter Term= Jan-Mar

Spring Term= April-June*

There are no discounts available for pay-by-the-term option as it creates additional processing fees as well as admin time and effort.

*Unless otherwise stated in your enrollment contract

Automatic payments Processing

Our school has made the decision to use JOVIAL automatic payment system for ALL monthly enrollment tuition payments.

Tuition is **pre-paid** at the end of each month and covers your child's outdoor education for the following month. IE: Tuition for Sept is paid at the end of Aug. Automatic payments can be set up using ACH or credit card.

Payments for the month begin processing on the **27th each month**, you will receive automatic reminder emails prior to transactions.

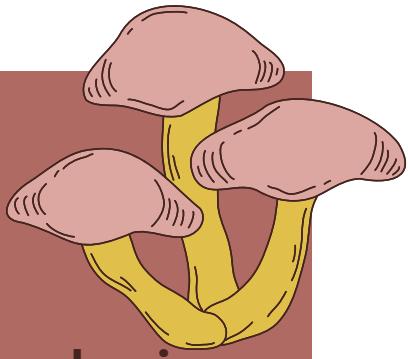
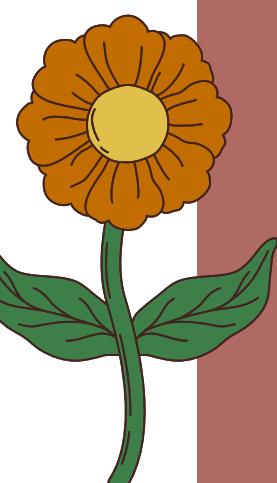
Cancelation/Drop Notices

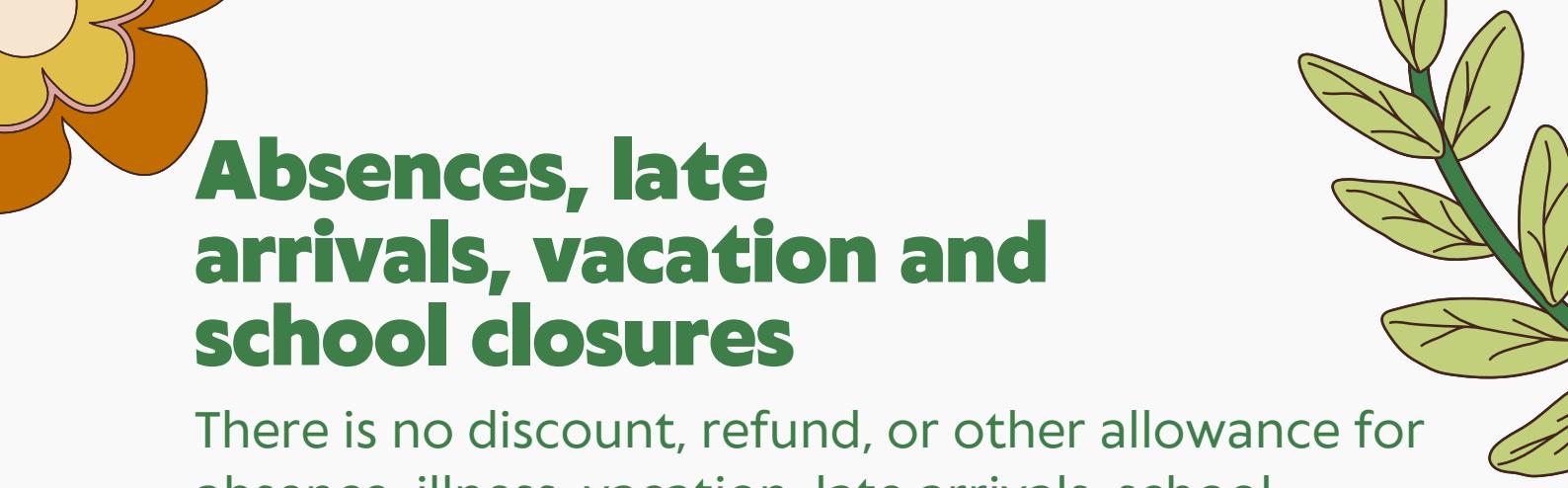
You may cancel your enrollment at any time, by giving a **minimum 30 days' notice** of intent to cancel. Guardians will pay tuition during their drop notice period, even if your child does not attend school during that period. IE: If notice is given on Oct first you will pay for all of Oct & will be dropped on Nov first, regardless of if your child is attending.

Due Dates and Late Fees

Tuition payments for each month are **due in full by 1st of the month**. This should happen automatically. However, if your bank declines our attempts it could result in late payments.

If tuition is **not received** by the close of the **5th day of the month**, **AND** if prior arrangements have **not** been discussed and agreed upon with Blackberry Academy program director Yessie Verbena, a **\$10** fee will be enacted for **each session your child attends without payment**. If \$50 in late fees is incurred, your **child's outdoor education** will be **postponed** until account becomes **current**. Payment arrangements may be made. Communication is key. We don't like charging fees.





Absences, late arrivals, vacation and school closures

There is no discount, refund, or other allowance for absence, illness, vacation, late arrivals, school closures, or any other reason.

The only exception to this rule is if school is cancelled due to staffing reasons OR environmental concerns that inhibit our ability to attend school safely lasting TWO or more days. In these cases, "Make-up days" will be added to June's schedule. Failure to attend make-up days does not constitute a refund. Remember, no tuition is due in June, regardless of how many make-up days are added.

Parent volunteers

Please consider working as a parent volunteer. Parent volunteers help in cases where staff are sick or injured, or on days where we have more in-depth activities planned and need additional adult support.

ALL parent volunteers must pass a background check and have fingerprints added to the CBR Registry as well as take the following free childcare trainings: Recognizing and Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect, Introduction to Child Care Health and Safety, Foundations for Learning. An up to date First aid and CPR is preferred and can be reduced from your tuition cost.

School grounds Map

We meet @ 9:0am near the little school bus icon for group. If you arrive late you will have to call Miss Yessie OR follow the sounds of play to find us, as we may travel.

Blackberry Academy Map

-  Pollinator garden
-  Backpack tree
-  School garden plot
-  Creek access point
-  Pick up & Drop off
-  Primary play areas



Health & Safety Agreements

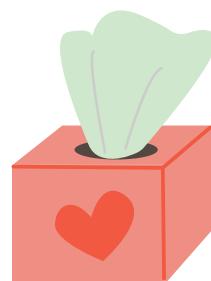


For the health and safety of all students and staff please do not bring your child to school if:

- They have had a fever in the last 24 hours
- They have vomited in the last 48 hours
- Your child has had unexplained Diarrhea for more than 48hrs
- Your child has brightly colored green or yellow discharge.
- Your child has an uncontrollable cough. coughs linger with littles, we get it. Please send them with a mask, cough drops, or give medication prior to school to control lingering coughs.
- Your child has an unexplained spotted rash or any crusty/goopy eye discharge or red/pink eye issues
- Your child or anyone in your household has tested positive for or is suspected to have covid19. (Please do not return to school until your house has been covid free for 5 days)

We expect that families have done a health and safety check PRIOR to drop off. By Dropping off your child you are agreeing that your child is healthy and there is NO known risk of viral or contagion spread to staff or students.

If your child develops symptoms while at school you will be contacted to pick up your child.



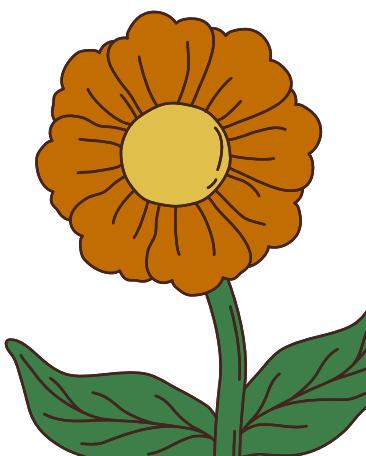
Drop Off agreements and procedures:

- Please arrive at **no later than 8:50** to drop off your child.
- Upon arrival, please scan the QR code to complete the check-in health and safety check. This allows us to keep accurate attendance records and maintains accountability for group health among all families.
- It is your responsibility to put on your child's high-visibility vest upon arrival.
- We say our prompt goodbyes to caregivers at 9am. The period between 8:50-9am is your "transition time" use this time for long hugs and goodbye messages.
- We highly encourage you begin a "goodbye ritual" at the beginning of the year and stick with it at each drop off.
- Please do your best not to linger beyond our morning welcome songs **When one mommy or daddy stays longer other children tend to try convincing their caregivers to stay as well. Cue the waterworks and meltdowns. Of course, we understand that sometimes it can't be helped, and our children need additional support. Our staff are trained to provide emotional support for your child.*



Pick-up agreements and procedures:

- Please arrive to pick up your child at 12:55
- We sing our goodbye song at 12:55 and students are released to their caregivers at 1pm. *Caregivers are welcome and encouraged to join us in our gratitude circle song.
- It is your responsibility to remove your child's high visibility vest at the end of day.
- Please give ample notice if you will be late. This message is passed along to your child to ease discomfort associated with being the last child at school. While not all children experience this as discomfort we like to give your child advance notice of changes in the norm.
- If late pickups become a reoccurring issue, we reserve the right to exact a FEE of \$1 per minute late beginning at 1:05pm. Again, we don't like charging fees. Communication is key and arrangements can be made.





Behavior Guidance

At Blackberry Academy, we view all behavior as a form of communication. Our role is to respond with curiosity, empathy, and creativity—seeking to understand the needs behind each child's actions. We prioritize consistent and respectful guidance, with all staff aligned in approach and trained regularly in evidence-based strategies for supporting social-emotional development and addressing challenging behaviors.

When behavioral challenges arise, we focus on support rather than punishment. This may include proactive planning, emotional coaching, and collaborative problem-solving with the child and family. Natural consequences are used when appropriate to reinforce safety and accountability—for example, if a child is unable to remain within the designated safety circle, they may need to be picked up early and pause participation until they are ready to rejoin safely.

We believe that strong partnerships with families are essential to effective behavior support. Open communication, shared strategies, and mutual respect help us create a consistent, nurturing environment in which every child can thrive.



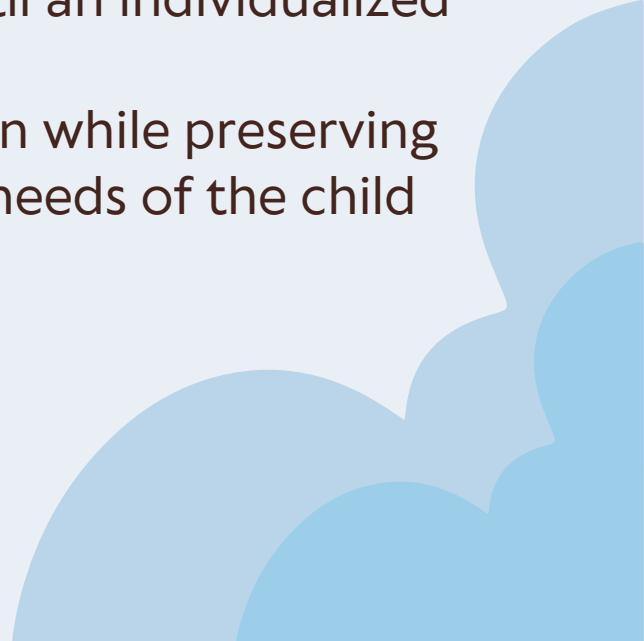


Endangering Behaviors

Any behavior that poses a risk to a child's own safety or the safety of others is treated with urgency, care, and consistency. Staff are trained to respond immediately with calm, clear direction to remove danger and restore safety. This may include physically guiding a child away from a situation, signaling for additional support via two-way radio, or pausing the activity until safe conditions are re-established.

Following any such incident, staff assess what contributed to the behavior, document what occurred, and communicate with the child's family that same day. We use these moments to strengthen support systems, not to punish—focusing instead on teaching safer alternatives, reinforcing expectations, and identifying any patterns that may require proactive adjustments. When necessary, a temporary break from the program may be considered until an individualized safety plan is in place.

Our goal is to protect all children while preserving the dignity and developmental needs of the child exhibiting the behavior.



Student suspensions

While we hope we never have to enact this, Blackberry Academy reserves the right to temporarily suspend any student, under any circumstances deemed to be interfering with the health, safety, or educational development of the child or fellow students. We firmly believe that ALL behavior is communication and commit to seeking understanding, that will allow us to support your child.

Blackberry Academy further reserves the right to deny continued enrollment or re-enrollment to any student if staff reasonably conclude that the actions of that student's parent or guardian are inconsistent or in nonsupport of the educational environment, or counterproductive to a positive working relationship between the School and parent/guardian.

Suspension Prevention Process

Step 1: Initiate a Collaborative Support Meeting

When a parent/guardian or educator expresses concern about a child's behavior that may impact safety or community well-being, a meeting will be scheduled by the Director or Program Lead with the parent/guardian and school team. At this meeting, the team may discuss:

1. Any relevant outside evaluations or professional insights
2. The child's previous care or school experiences
3. Current strategies—what is working at home, what has worked in other settings, and what is currently effective in the classroom

Together, we co-create a plan of support that reflects the child's strengths, needs, and communication style. The plan may include classroom adaptations, increased adult presence, sensory supports, and/or home-school communication strategies.

Step 2: Implement and Document Interventions

The educator and parent/guardian work together to implement the agreed-upon support plan. During this time, the educator (and parent/guardian, when applicable) will document observations and outcomes to assess whether the interventions are helping the child remain regulated and connected. A follow-up meeting will be scheduled to review this data.

Step 3: Review Progress and Adjust Supports

If the child is showing progress, the team will discuss next steps to sustain and deepen that growth. If the child is not yet progressing, the team will reconvene to revise the plan. This may include:

- Additional adult support
- Adjustments to the environment or schedule
- Consultation with outside professionals (with family consent)
- A temporary pause in attendance to allow for restabilization and planning

Step 4: Pause as a Protective Measure (if needed)

If, after multiple collaborative efforts, the child's behavior continues to pose a safety risk or disrupts the well-being of the group, a temporary pause or modified attendance may be recommended. This is not a punishment, but a protective measure to allow time for:

- Further assessment
- Additional planning
- Restoration of safety and regulation

During this pause, the family will receive a clear re-entry plan and timeline. The school remains committed to the child's return and continued belonging in the community.

Non-discrimination Policy

We are committed to fostering an inclusive and welcoming environment for all children and families. We believe that every child deserves the opportunity to learn, grow, and thrive in a safe and supportive community.

We do not tolerate discrimination of any kind. No child, parent, or family member will ever be treated unfairly or excluded based on race, color, religion, national or ethnic origin, language, gender identity or expression, disability, family structure, socioeconomic status, or any other characteristic. Our preschool celebrates diversity and promotes equity as core values. We actively work to ensure that our practices, programs, and interactions reflect these principles, creating an enriching experience for all.



Potty Policy

We are a nature school. We Potty in nature. We use a portable potty for sitting pee-ers and for poos. This potty uses single use disposable bags to safely remove waste. Standing pee-ers will use a bucket with wood pellets to absorb urine. Because we will be outdoors privacy cannot be guaranteed. We place our potty in a discrete location. Children may need additional assistance in managing bulky outdoor gear and zippers. Staff maintain visuals of each other during potty breaks. No adult is EVER allowed to be alone with a child potty-breaks.

“Nature potty”

occasionally we may be away from our little potty/bucket system when... nature calls. in this case we potty directly on the ground in as discrete a location as possible.

Handwashing:

Students must wash hands with liquid soap and fresh warm water after using the potty. Single use towels are provided. Fresh warm water is transported in daily. Students must also wash hand before and after eating.



Risky Play

We support safe, age-appropriate risky play as vital to children's growth. Activities like climbing and exploring nature build physical skills, encourage decision-making, and foster confidence, creativity, and resilience. With close supervision, we ensure risks remain beneficial to learning—though occasional injuries may occur

Response to injuries

the safety and well-being of our children is our top priority. All staff members are trained in pediatric first aid and CPR, and fully stocked first aid kits are kept accessible at all times during outdoor activities. In the event of an injury, a trained staff member will assess the situation promptly, provide appropriate first aid, and comfort the child with calm, reassuring support. Small scrapes that involve bleeding are treated onsite with gentle cleaning, band-aids, and emotional support, while superficial scratches without bleeding are wiped clean and left uncovered to support natural healing. For minor injuries, parents are notified at pick-up with a detailed incident report. If a more serious injury occurs, we will contact parents immediately and follow established emergency procedures, including calling emergency services if needed. All incidents are documented, and we use these moments as learning opportunities to refine our safety practices while supporting the child's physical and emotional recovery

Risk-Benefit Assessments

Tree Climbing in Giant Desert willows near volleyball court in grassy field:

Potential Benefits

- Gross motor development: Enhances strength, coordination, and balance.
- Risk assessment skills: Children learn to judge height, branch strength, and personal limits.
- Confidence and independence: Success in climbing builds self-esteem and autonomy.
- Problem-solving: Navigating branches encourages spatial awareness and decision-making.
- Connection to nature: Fosters environmental appreciation and sensory engagement.

Potential Risks

- Falls: May result in bruises, sprains, or fractures.
- Scratches or cuts: From bark, branches, or surrounding vegetation.
- Injury from dead or weak branches: Risk of breakage under weight.
- Environmental hazards: Stinging insects, thorns, or uneven ground.

Control Measures

- Tree inspection before use: staff check for weak, loose, or dead branches and other hazards prior to climbing
- Remove or mitigate hazards in the surrounding area where a child might fall, including rocks, sharp edges, and harmful protrusions
- Limit climbing height to no more than 30 inches above ground unless a staff member is within reach of the child's midriff
- Provide close supervision at all times; staff must be within arm's reach of a climbing child to offer immediate assistance
- Children must be taught to test branch stability and avoid climbing on branches thinner than their wrist
- Avoid climbing when conditions are wet, windy, or visibility is reduced
- Conduct regular site inspections and document risk-benefit assessments for each climbing location
- Reinforce safety expectations and rules through modeling and verbal reminders

Risk Level After Controls: Low to Moderate with proper staff-to-child ratios, site selection, and adherence to safety protocols

Risk-Benefit Assessments

Tree Climbing in small willow grove:

Potential Benefits

- Gross motor development: Enhances strength, coordination, and balance.
- Risk assessment skills: Children learn to judge height, branch strength, and personal limits.
- Confidence and independence: Success in climbing builds self-esteem and autonomy.
- Problem-solving: Navigating branches while balancing on the fallen log encourages spatial awareness and decision-making while improving balance and teamwork skills.
- Connection to nature: Fosters environmental appreciation and sensory engagement.

Potential Risks

- Falls: May result in bruises, sprains, fractures.
- Scratches or cuts: From bark, branches, or surrounding vegetation.
- Injury from dead or weak branches: Risk of breakage under weight.
- Environmental hazards: Stinging insects, thorns, or uneven ground.

Control Measures

- Tree inspection before use: staff check for weak, loose, or dead branches and other hazards prior to climbing
- Remove or mitigate hazards in the surrounding area where a child might fall, including rocks, sharp edges, and harmful protrusions, regularly remove blackberry vines.
- Trim branches and foliage back to create more visibility and maneuverability for staff.
- Limit climbing height to no more than 30 inches above ground unless a staff member is within reach of the child's midriff
- Provide close supervision at all times; staff must be within arm's reach of a climbing child to offer immediate assistance
- Children must be taught to test branch stability and avoid climbing on branches thinner than their wrist
- Avoid climbing when visibility is reduced
- Conduct regular site inspections and document risk-benefit assessments for each climbing location
- Reinforce safety expectations and rules through modeling and verbal reminders

Risk Level After Controls: Low to Moderate with proper staff-to-child ratios, site selection, and adherence to safety protocols

Risk-Benefit Assessments

Wading in Blue Heron Creek:

Potential Benefits

- Sensory exploration: Engages touch, sound, and sight in a dynamic natural setting
- Scientific inquiry: Encourages curiosity about water flow, aquatic life, and natural materials
- Gross and fine motor development: Balancing on rocks, scooping water, and navigating uneven terrain
- Social-emotional growth: Promotes cooperation, turn-taking, and shared discovery
- Connection to nature: Deepens appreciation for ecosystems and environmental stewardship

Potential Risks

- Slips and falls: Wet rocks or uneven creek bed may cause minor injuries
- Cold exposure: Prolonged contact with cool water may lead to discomfort or mild hypothermia
- Waterborne irritants: Potential for contact with bacteria, algae, or insect bites
- Environmental hazards: Sharp rocks, submerged sticks, or debris

Control Measures

- Conduct daily site inspections to identify and remove hazards such as sharp rocks, broken glass, or debris
- Ensure water depth remains shallow (no more than 6 inches) and current is gentle
- Remove or mitigate hazards in the surrounding area where children might fall, including rocks, sharp edges, and harmful protrusions, per ONB licensing requirements
- Staff must inspect the creek area for potential hazards before each use, including water clarity, temperature, and presence of wildlife
- Children must wear secure, water-safe footwear to reduce slipping and protect feet
- Limit play to designated zones with soft, gradual entry points and no sudden drop-offs
- Maintain close supervision: ONB staff must be close proximity of children at all times and able to provide immediate assistance
- Limit the number of children in the creek at one time to ensure adequate supervision.
- Monitor exposure time to prevent chilling; provide dry towels and warm clothing post-play
- Reinforce safety expectations (e.g., no running, no drinking creek water, gentle hands with living creatures)
- Avoid creek play during or after heavy rain, which may increase water flow or contamination risk
- Avoid creek area on windy days to avoid tall trees or potential loose branches

Risk Level After Controls: Low, with consistent supervision and environmental monitoring

Confidentiality and exceptions to confidentiality

We appreciate you letting us get to know you and your family, and we will maintain your privacy. What we talk about is private, but there are important exceptions.

- Relevant family information is thoughtfully and respectfully shared between appropriate staff members here at Blackberry Academy. This sharing of information allows us to provide your family with the best possible service.
- People who work for Blackberry Academy LLC are mandated reporters of child abuse and neglect. This means that we are required by law to let DHS or a law enforcement agency know if we have any reason to believe a child is unsafe or has been harmed. If we are ever required to make a report, we will support your family through the process in whatever way possible. We know that parenting is hard work, and we will partner with you to keep your family safe.
- We also may share information without your consent if we have reason to believe that your child or someone else is in immediate danger or is a threat to self or others.

Staff duty to report suspected abuse

As a Certified Outdoor Nature-Based Child Care Program licensed by Oregon's Department of Early Learning and Care (DELC), we are legally required to report any suspected child abuse or neglect.

What This Means

All staff are mandated reporters and must contact the Oregon Child Abuse Hotline if they have reasonable cause to believe a child is being harmed. This includes concerns about physical, emotional, or sexual abuse, or neglect.

Our Approach

We approach this responsibility with care, confidentiality, and a trauma-informed lens. We strive to:

- Build trusting relationships with families
- Communicate concerns with compassion and clarity
- Honor children's voices and boundaries
- Partner with families whenever possible, unless doing so would compromise safety

Resources

If you have concerns about a child's safety—your own or another—you may also contact the Oregon Child Abuse Hotline directly: **1-855-503-SAFE (7233)**

The Dirt On Gear

My Key Points for gear

1. **Waterproof boots**- I recommend bogs [3 Season Boots](#) with wool socks they keep little feet comfortable and dry for most of the year. You may request a school discount code that will give you 40% off bogs.
2. **non cotton base layers**- think wool or polyester and skintight
3. **mid layer should provide insulation**- think puffy down or fleece jackets and pants
4. **Outer layer should be waterproof** - Not water resistant there's a big difference and toddlers will bust right through the water-resistant layer. Opt for **two-piece bibs style** choices not full body suits if possible. This allows you more flexibility to adjust the jackets for the season.
5. **Mittens. Not gloves**, mittens are warmer than gloves. Select mittens with zippers or Velcro all the way to the thumb hole so you can see where to put that wiggly little thumb. I keep a class set of unlined waterproof mittens, which are great over thinner mittens. Gloves are okay for older/more experienced explorers

Bonus tip: Get an extra tote and blanket to have in the car trunk for after class. So you can peel off the muddy gear and toss it all in the tote then wrap that little peanut up nice and cozy.

SCHOOL SUPPLY CHECKLIST

- Boots- fully waterproof (Bogs-recommended)
- Waterproof rain pants
- Waterproof rain jacket (with zippers not, snaps. snaps fill with mud and become difficult)
- Non-Cotton base layers
- Non-cotton mid layers (Puffy or fleece pants and top) *Avoid sherpa fabric unless you like picking seeds and twigs from it.
- Insulated Mittens (preferably waterproof)
- Thinner liner style mittens (Head brand is great)
- Lunch box (hopefully one your child can open with minimum support) With Ice pack or insulation to keep foods at safe temps as required by licensing.
- Water bottle (at least 8oz and NOT glass. Again, hopefully your child can open with minimum support)
- Backpack (Age-appropriate size. Front clip recommended for younger children. We want their lunch box to fit in this backpack.)

The Dirt On Gear Videos and links

Please visit our [Blackberry Academy approved gear shop](#) where we have narrowed down the limitless choices to only the gear we know, love and have seen work well. Every item on this shop is outdoor school approved. Most items will last for over 3 hand me downs.

School Coupon Code - BLACKBERRY

This is a great video on layering for outdoor school. Please watch this as it perfectly explains how to dress for school.

<https://youtu.be/XOWtQRMIZ0I?feature=shared>

Here is an **amazon list** of gear options that I have used and recommend. You are welcome to purchase anything you like but this list should give you an idea of what we are looking for.

<https://a.co/5LNjgxu>

[Bogs boots](#) are the best all around waterproof boot option. The 3-season boot is great fall, winter and spring. Then we would switch to a closed toe sandal or a tennis shoe/hiking shoe
Email Miss Yessie for a 40% discount code

Recommended reading

- **Last Child in the Woods**

By Richard Louv

An excellent guide to “Saving our children from Nature deficit disorder”

- **How to raise a wild child**

By Scott D. Sampson

This one is full of practical tips on how to be a good nature mentor for your child during all stages of their development.

- **The whole brained child**

By Daniel Siegel and Tina Payne Bryson

This single book could change your entire perspective and experience of parenting and childcare.

- **The Anxious Generation**

By Jonatha Haidt

This Book will affirm your decision to enroll in outdoor school withing the first 15 pages.

Beware though- it's full of grim statistics about the direction our society is heading.

- **Elevating childcare**

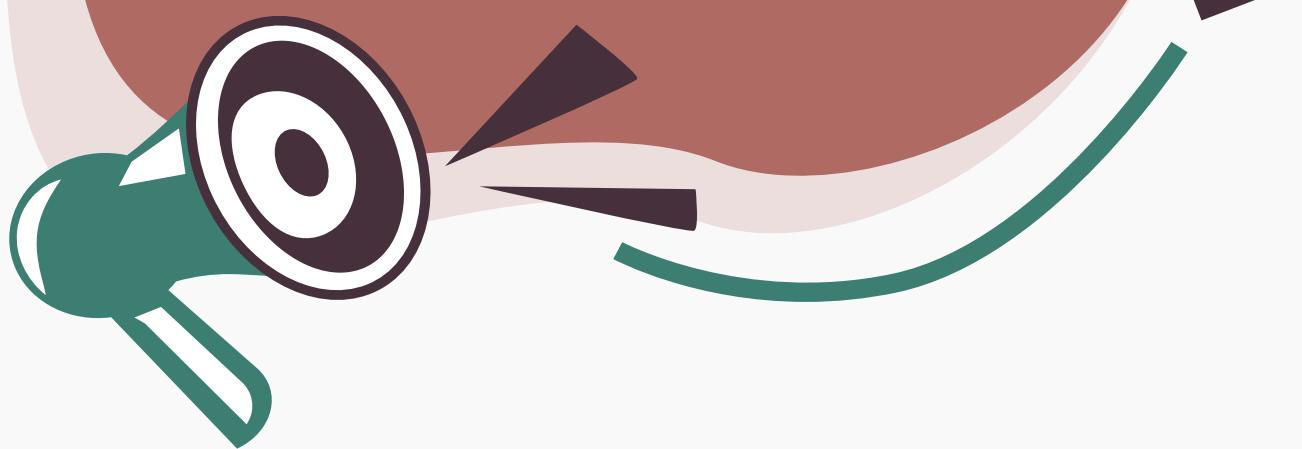
By Janet Lansbury

A beautiful guide to respectful parenting.





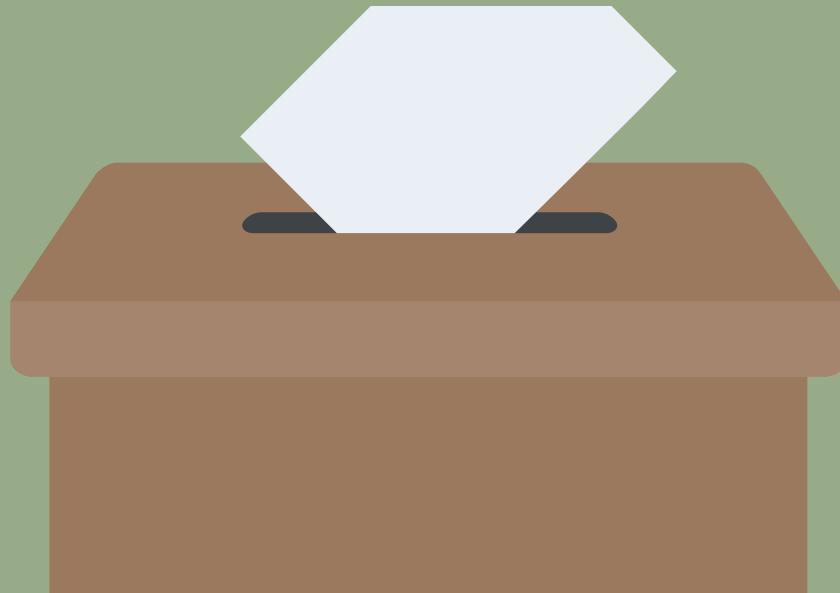
Tell Your friends!



For each friend you
refer your jovial
(payment account)
will be credited \$10.
No Limits.

**You may contact DELC
To get compliance
reports or file a
complaint about our
school***

call 1-800-556-6616
or [HERE](#)



**You may view staff information via the child
carte safety portal [here](#):**