



Parent Handbook
2025-2026



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Welcome

Dear Parents,

Welcome to The Outdoor Learning School. We are excited to have the opportunity to share in your child's journey. Each year we are blessed with the opportunity to watch children develop and grow into independent thinkers and problem solvers. We have an exciting year ahead full of opportunities to learn, inside and outside of the classroom. We look forward to partnering with you in your child's education this year and want to welcome you to The Outdoor Learning School family.

If we can ever be of service to you please feel free to contact Jennifer Sheriff, Assistant Director of The Outdoor Learning School, at jsheriff@thelearningtreeacademy.com.

Sincerely,

The Outdoor Learning School Team



Mission

To support holistic development in a safe and nurturing environment through authentic high quality educational experiences both in the classroom and outdoors.

Vision

To develop adaptable, life-long learners who are rooted in faith, and are confident in their ability to solve problems, create solutions, and effect change both in their local communities and around the world.

Motto

We are the keepers of knowledge, community, environment, and faith.

Our Beliefs

We believe that education must address the whole child - mind, body, soul.

We provide education that meets the needs of each child based on their physical, emotional, and cognitive development. Every child has the opportunity for success, and instruction is geared towards obtaining optimal student growth.

We believe children learn best when actively engaged in their natural environments. Our program emphasizes hands-on experiential learning that engages the whole child and prioritizes time outside of the classroom. We believe strengthening of the body is important to the strengthening of the mind and spirit.

We believe making meaningful connections between subject content and the child fosters a love for learning. Instruction is delivered in a way that teaches all subjects are interconnected and part of a meaningful whole, not a collection of fragmented subjects.

We believe education is about more than acquiring facts and skills. We work to foster the development of strong character and a solid faith-based moral foundation for life. With this foundation, students can grow to be confident, capable critical thinkers and contributing members of their communities.

We believe that life-long learning is inspired by cultivating in our students a sense of wonder and appreciation toward the natural world. We work to teach our



students practices that support sustainability and foster a value of environmental stewardship.

We believe in providing a safe environment where children are allowed and encouraged to take risks. Through these risks, children gain confidence in themselves, adaptability, and are better prepared for facing challenging situations.

We believe that it takes a village to educate a child and value the support and involvement of parents and community.

Yearly Registration Process

The Outdoor Learning School will open the application window in January each year for the following school year. All students will need to apply yearly. Applicants for 1st through 5th grade from outside of The Outdoor Learning School will be required to submit attendance, discipline, and testing records as well as a copy of the most recent report card from the school they currently attend. Homeschool students will be required to schedule an appointment with the Assistant Director for screening. The primary caregivers of all new applicants will be required to participate in a parent meeting. An application fee will be charged at the time the application is submitted.

Acceptance notices will go out in March. Upon notification of acceptance the application fee, curriculum fee, assessment fee and the first week's tuition will be due. Once registration fees have been processed, students will be added to the roster for the coming school year. Student resource fees are due the first week of August.

All fees are reviewed annually. Current fees are as follows:

Application - \$60 at time of application

Curriculum - \$200 paid yearly

Tuition - \$160 paid weekly

Assessment - \$45 paid yearly

Resource - \$60 paid yearly



Curriculum, Assessment, and Reporting

In this section you will find information about curriculum programs that are used, instructional strategies that we employ, assessments used, and how progress is reported.

Reading

K-5 Fountas & Pinnell Guided Reading

Guiding reading is a small-group instructional context in which a teacher supports each reader's development of systems of strategic actions for processing new texts at increasingly challenging levels of difficulty. During guided reading, students in a small-group setting individually read a text that the teacher has selected at their instructional reading level. Teachers provide teaching across the lesson to support students in building the internal networks of strategic actions for processing increasingly challenging texts. Through guided reading, students learn how to engage in every facet of the reading process and apply that literacy power to all instructional contexts.

K-5 Heggerty

Heggerty Bridge to Reading combines phonemic awareness lessons with explicit phonics instruction, decodable texts, hands-on, multisensory learning aids, and an online learning library to provide teachers with the resources and knowledge they need to support students' word recognition abilities and letter formation.

Math

K-5 Eureka Math

Eureka Math is a rigorous and comprehensive program that is fully aligned with the Common Core State Standards. It was written by teachers to close learning gaps, promote critical thinking, and prepare students for advanced mathematics. Eureka also focuses on the "why" and not just the process for solving a problem. Students engage in a story of units that build upon each other and prepare our students to be thinkers and problem solvers.

Grammar/ELA

K-3

Heggerty Bridge to Writing

Bridge to Writing is a comprehensive writing curriculum that develops strong writers through research-based instruction, making writing instruction easy for teachers and engaging for students.

4-5 Rainbow Resource Grammar & Writing

Rainbow Resource provides a comprehensive introduction to grammar, usage, and mechanics. It includes incremental lessons, spiral teaching, and continual review. Instruction involves daily teacher-student interaction coupled with independent student work. Lessons thoroughly cover types of sentences, parts of sentences, parts of speech and

include diagramming. Periodic lessons review spelling rules and provide comprehensive instruction in capitalization and punctuation. A "Grammar Meeting" is conducted as part of each lesson that is designed to strengthen listening skills, practice correct word usage, develop effective speaking habits, and introduce root-based vocabulary studies.

K-5 Writer's Workshop

Writing Workshop is an instructional practice designed to help children become confident and capable writers. During Writing Workshop, children have time to work independently and with their peers. They engage in the writing process by selecting topics, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing their original work. They receive explicit instruction in the craft of writing from exploring genre, to organizing their pieces, to word choice, style, and mechanics.

Science/Social Studies and Cross-Curricular Connections

K-5 Open Learning Centers

This concept of learning allows students to learn in a space that is intentionally designed for students to reap the benefits of inquiry, exploration, and play-based learning. Open-ended centers allow students of different abilities to self-differentiate and explore the learning concepts and skills they are developmentally ready for. Teachers capitalize on the opportunity to teach into the child's area of interest by fostering connections between new concepts and the child's chosen activity. These centers allow students to construct their own meaning, collaborate with their peers and engage in authentic conversations about their learning. Open learning centers also give teachers the ability to observe and collect assessment data in a non-threatening, stress-free environment.

K-5 Project Based Learning

Project Based Learning is a teaching method in which students gain knowledge and skills by working for an extended period of time to investigate and respond to an authentic, engaging, and complex question, problem, or challenge. They demonstrate their knowledge and skills by creating a public product or presentation that often serves the community. As a result, students develop deep content knowledge as well as critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, and communication skills. Project Based Learning unleashes a contagious, creative



energy among students and teachers and allows opportunities for authentic learning that calls on students to demonstrate all that they have learned.

K-5 Outdoor Learning and Farm to School Program

Outdoor learning is an umbrella term for actively inclusive facilitated approaches that predominately use activities and experiences in the outdoors which lead to learning.

Teachers are able to extend classroom teaching into the many outdoor learning areas where students are able to engage in application of their classroom learning. The Outdoor Learning School features opportunities to learn in vegetable and fruit gardens, the composting station, pollinator gardens, on the nature trail, at the creek, and in the mud kitchen. Our Farm to School Program is a large part of outdoor learning, allowing students to engage in the processes of agriculture from top to bottom. These experiences often involve a cross curricular approach allowing students to demonstrate and apply the learning that takes place in the classroom setting. Students have the opportunity to engage in cross age group interaction and learn from and alongside others. These are times of free exploration and discovery that leads to a natural joy of communing with nature and appreciating all that it has to offer.

Progress Reporting

Instruction

All instruction is based on the Georgia Standards of Excellence and delivered with a focus on place based education methodology. Instruction is delivered with a combination of research based curriculum and strategies to accomplish grade level goals. One of the main goals in our program is to offer learning experiences that are student centered and authentic in nature. We strive to create students who are inquisitive, healthy, well-rounded problem solvers who are actively engaged in bettering their community.

Quarterly Report Cards

Parents will receive a report card at the end of each quarter that indicates student progress in each big idea of learning for all subject areas. The scores they receive are measured on the following scale:

Academic Scale (Based on percent of standards mastered that were taught that quarter within that big idea.)
95% - 100% = 5
85% - 94.9% = 4
70% - 84.9% = 3
55% - 69.9% = 2

54.9% or lower = 1

Students will also receive a mark for each of the keeper behaviors that they display according to our core values. These marks measure a student's traits of behavior and learning. That scale is as follows:

Keeper Scale
O = Outstanding
S = Satisfactory
U = Unsatisfactory

STAR Testing

STAR testing parent reports will be sent home 3 times per year as indicated in the STAR testing schedule. STAR assessments are computer adaptive measures of a child's reading and math skills that will be given at 3 points in the school year. **STAR is only one measure that is used to track student progress and is primarily used to plan instruction. We understand that no single assessment presents the full picture of a child's learning.** We also give a number of one on one assessments to students that help teachers plan instruction and know where each student is performing in their individual learning progression. Any time you have questions about your student's performance please contact their teacher.

What are computer adaptive tests?

Computer adaptive tests continually adjust the difficulty of each child's test by choosing each test question based on the child's previous response. If the child answers a question correctly, the test difficulty level of the next item is increased. If the child misses a question, the difficulty level is decreased. These types of tests spare your child the frustration of items that are too difficult and the boredom of items that are too easy.

Activities

The center shall provide daily lesson plans of varied and developmentally appropriate activities that promote the social, emotional, physical, cognitive, language, and literacy development of each child. Center staff shall use a variety of teaching methods to accommodate the needs of each individual student's learning styles. Opportunities for each child to make choices in a variety of activities shall be offered. Children with special needs shall be integrated into the activities provided by the center unless contraindicated medically or by written parental agreement. We encourage parent participation in extracurricular activities.



Activities shall be planned for each group to allow for:

- Indoor and outdoor play
- A balance of quiet and active periods
- A balance of supervised free choice and teacher-directed activities
- Individual, small group, and large group activities
- Large and small muscle activities
- Language experiences
- Art
- Dramatic play
- Rhythm and music
- Nature and science experiences

Outdoor activities, weather permitting, shall be provided daily:

- Each child for at least one and one-half (1 1/2) hours
- A child may be excused from outdoor activities for a limited period of time (1-2 days) if there is documentation that outdoor activity is medically inadvisable or there is an occasional written request by the parent that the child be excused from outdoor activities for a very limited amount of time because of special circumstances.

Discipline Policies

In order to provide all children with a safe and enjoyable experience, the following guidelines and strategies have been developed. A caring and positive approach will be taken regarding discipline, and expectations for students are formed in reference to age-specific developmental milestones and in age-appropriate practices.

Guidance and Discipline Strategies

1. Provide a safe environment.
2. Establish and maintain a predictable routine.
3. Set a positive example for the children.
4. Practice using effective praise. Be specific, use praise to instill self-worth.
5. Remove from environment (i.e. cooling off period, provide opportunity to practice correct behavior.)
6. Natural or logical consequence. Help child see connection between their actions and the results of their behavior.
7. Problem solving through active listening. Dialogue with the child to develop solutions.
8. Redirect. Provide another choice/call attention to another activity.
9. Model same activity in an appropriate manner.
10. Ignore. Behavior that is not harmful to the child or others can be ignored. The goal is to have the child stop the undesirable behavior by not paying attention to it.
11. Practice positive reinforcement. Routinely acknowledge good behavior and/or reward it.

Discipline Procedures for Recurring Inappropriate Behaviors

Step 1: Verbal warning to student. (Beginning of documentation)

Step 2: Note to parent or phone call listing offense and applied discipline strategy.

Step 3: Conference with Administrator, Teacher, and Parent to discuss problem solving log and plan of action for recurring inappropriate behavior.

Step 4: Phone call to parent which may result in temporary suspension.



Recurrence of the same behavior following temporary suspension may result in permanent suspension.

*These policies and guidelines exist to correct problematic behaviors and create and maintain an environment that is safe and healthy for all. If the steps listed above do not result in corrected behavior, your child may be permanently suspended from The Outdoor Learning School.

We use a responsive classroom approach to management. Responsive Classroom rests on 4 key principles:

1. Engaging Academics - learner-centered lessons that are participatory, appropriately challenging, fun, and relevant and promote curiosity, wonder, and interest.
2. Positive Community - a safe, predictable, joyful, and inclusive environment where all students have a sense of belonging and significance.
3. Effective Management - a calm and orderly learning environment that promotes autonomy, responsibility, and high engagement in learning.
4. Developmentally Responsive Teaching - basing all decisions for teaching and discipline upon research and knowledge of students' social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development.



Family and Communication

Attendance

Attendance plays a very important role in a student being successful in learning. Students must maintain regular attendance and arrive by 8:15AM each school day to remain enrolled. A notice will be sent home notifying parents when a student reaches 5 unexcused absences. If a student misses more than 7 days (unexcused) or is consistently tardy, the student may be withdrawn from the program. Please submit all parent notes and/or doctor's excuses to the child's teacher on the first day returning to school.

Parent Communication

Student agendas will be used for daily notes and communication. Monthly newsletters will be sent home. Parents can request or teachers can schedule a conference at any time. Mid-Year conferences will be held with parents to discuss student progress. Mid-Year STAR Results will also be shared at this time. Parent Letters will go home after each testing window. Opportunities for parent engagement will allow for further communication. Please feel free to reach out at any time with questions or concerns.

Community Engagement

Showing our students and families the importance of community and our community's development and growth is an essential part of our program. We seek to serve our local community and develop partnerships with other local organizations. This is done through the purposeful planning of events for our students, for our families, for other organizations, and for the community. The Outdoor Learning School works to continuously engage our families, our staff, and our community in order to create a sense of community that lasts generations.

Field Trips

Both off-campus field trips and in house programs are conducted on a regular basis at The Outdoor Learning School. These trips and programs are valuable opportunities to extend the students' learning beyond the classroom. Parents will be notified of all trips in advance and are often welcome to join in our adventures. Permission sheets will be at the front entrance for signatures prior to the day of the trip. Information on students traveling with parents to or from field trips must be provided to an administrator at least 24 hours prior to the field trip. Students leaving field trips with parents must be signed off on with an administrator before their departure.

Drop Offs and Dismissal

Parents will be registered to sign students in and out during enrollment. It is



required that you come into the facility and sign your child in and out daily. Parents are responsible for their children until a face to face hand off is made with a member of our staff. Georgia law requires that you sign your student in and out each day.

Student Records and Portfolios

Your child's shot record must be current and on file in order to attend. It is the parent's responsibility to keep student records current to reflect any significant changes as they occur, e.g. telephone numbers, work location, emergency contacts, child's physician, child's health status, immunization records, etc. Each student will have a portfolio on file in the classroom that will roll up with the student year to year. For each school year, the following items should be included in this portfolio:

- Most current running record
- Sight word inventories
- Phonological Awareness/Phonics Assessments (if applicable)
- Copy of each report card
- Copy of individual STAR Test Record Report for the school year
- Module Tests in Math
- Sample of each genre of writing: narrative, informational, and opinion

Parents may request to view their child's portfolio at any time.

School Calendar

An updated school calendar can be found at theoutdoorlearningschool.com under the resources tab. School camps will not be available for fall and spring break.



Child Health and Safety

Technology Use

A comprehensive study published by the National Library of Medicine found that excessive internet use is transversally associated with lower cognitive functioning and reduced volume of several areas of the brain. In longitudinal analyses, a higher frequency of internet use was associated with a decrease in verbal intelligence and a smaller increase in the regional volume of gray/white matter in several brain areas after a few years. These areas relate to language processing, attention and executive functions, emotion and reward.

Technology use will be limited to assessment and research only. We believe that students learn better when they are actively engaged in a real world environment. We encourage parents to limit their children's screen time. The Outdoor Learning School provides students with access to various technology resources at times that are appropriate for assessment and research within the classroom setting. The Outdoor Learning School uses content filtering technology in compliance with the Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA) on all school computers with Internet access to protect against unacceptable web content. However, because no web filtering technology is 100% safe, we make every effort to monitor online activity.

We favor opportunities for outdoor and experiential learning over the learning of keyboarding and technology use.

Medication/Child Health

The state's current communicable disease chart of recommendations for exclusion of sick children from the center and their readmission shall be followed. This can be found in the front lobby. A child shall not be accepted nor allowed to remain at the center if the child has the equivalent of a 101 degree or higher temperature or other contagious symptoms such as, but not limited to, a rash, diarrhea, vomiting, a sore throat, or discharge from the eyes. Parents of any child who becomes ill or incurs an injury that requires professional medical attention shall be notified immediately through contacts listed on the child emergency information card. Parent's specific instructions shall be obtained, and followed if appropriate, until the child is picked up.

Parents will be notified if there is an occurrence of any illness on the communicable disease chart within 24 hours or the next working day of when the center becomes aware of the illness.

Only prescription medications with specific doctor's orders will be given. Before any medication is dispensed, a written authorization form must be completed by the parent. Medicine must be in the original container with the child's name marked on it.



For medications that are not routine and are required in the event of an emergency, parents must complete and return an Emergency Action Plan Form with a doctor's signature.

Documentation will be kept on file for all medication given by personnel, and parents will be notified in the event of an adverse reaction. In the event of a medical emergency, local emergency services will be called and parents will be notified immediately according to contacts on the child emergency information card.

Student Dress

All students should have a pair of rain boots that are kept at The Learning Tree Academy Outdoor Learning School. Please be sure that students are dressed appropriately for the weather each day as we do go outside in all types of weather. Students engage in active play and learning on a daily basis. Shoes worn must be strap-on and have backs. It is not unusual for students to get dirty or wet during active play and learning, so please send an extra set of clothes for your child to keep in the event that this occurs.

Student Services

We do offer academic intervention services for students who may be struggling in reading or math. Specialized instruction will be planned to assist students in filling in any gaps in learning and parent meetings will be held periodically to update the intervention plan and discuss student progress.

We also contract with Ashley Lowe, M.Ed., CCC-SLP to offer speech services at parent cost. Speech referrals for an evaluation can be made by parents or the Assistant Director of the Outdoor Learning School. Parents will always be contacted prior to a referral being made.

Nutrition

FOR THE SAFETY OF ALL CHILDREN, No outside food may be brought into the center. Breakfast, lunch and snack are served in the center according to CACFP guidelines. Food exceptions are not made for individual children, except in case of allergies or a special diet prescribed by a physician. A note from a physician stating specific dietary needs is required on file.

Children shall be encouraged but not forced to eat a variety of foods in order to develop good nutritional habits. Weekly menus are posted in the front lobby.



Rights and Policies

Non-Discrimination

It is the policy of The Outdoor Learning School to accept all children without regard to race, color, gender or national origin.

Mandated Reporting

All staff are mandated reporters and are required by law to report suspected child abuse/neglect to the local DFACS agency.

Inclusion Policy

OLS supports the right of children with disabilities to grow and learn alongside their typically developing peers. Integrating children with and without disabilities in the classroom increases opportunities for all children to learn about and accept individual differences.

Parental Rights

The custodial parent(s) of a child, at any time the child is in attendance, shall be permitted access to all child care areas of the center and shall make his or her presence known to center staff prior to removing the child from the center. Questions or concerns may be brought to the administrative staff at any time.

School Rights

The Outdoor Learning School reserves the right to withdraw any student from our program. The Outdoor Learning School also reserves the right to incorporate prayer and exploration of the Bible into the school day.

Smoking Policies

There is a No Smoking policy on the premises of the center. This policy applies to personnel, parents, and visitors. Anyone who wishes to smoke must do so off the center's property. This same No Smoking policy applies to any facility vehicle used to transport children to and from the center.



Emergencies

Inclement Weather

The center shall be open every day except for designated holidays or when weather conditions warrant closing the facility. If the elements seem to make closing necessary BEFORE the center opens, parents should check The Learning Tree Academy's Facebook and Instagram pages for information concerning closings. If the elements seem to make closing necessary AFTER the center opens, then parents shall be notified by telephone.

Emergency Situations

Stranger On The Premises

Any unidentified individual who is seen loitering about the premises shall be cause for suspicion. Only authorized personnel or parents shall be on the premises. In the event that a staff member sees a stranger, the following steps shall be taken immediately:

- Every child shall be contained within the building. A roll check shall be made.
- All doors shall be secured.
- The police department shall be notified about the stranger's presence.
- The children shall be kept indoors until the stranger is no longer on the premises and the director deems that the area is safe.

Tornado Warnings

Means that a tornado has actually been sighted or indicated by weather radar. Immediately seek shelter. Teachers and children will move to the center of the building avoiding windows, doors and electrical appliances.

FIRE DRILLS ARE CONDUCTED MONTHLY; TORNADO DRILLS ARE CONDUCTED EVERY 6 MONTHS; OTHER EMERGENCY SITUATION DRILLS ARE CONDUCTED EVERY 6 MONTHS.

Fire

Instructions plus a diagram of the building is posted in each classroom. Each room will exit according to the posted fire plan in each classroom. Use exit doors indicated on plan. Teachers will walk children calmly to the doors and exit children to the front parking area closest to the road. Children will line up in a single file. Each teacher will take roll and count children immediately. The director



will be the last one out of the building. The director will check every area, including closets and restrooms, to make sure no children were left behind.

PARENTS, PLEASE DO NOT CALL DURING A STORM OR TORNADO WARNING. WE ARE VERY BUSY KEEPING YOUR CHILDREN CALM.

Serious Injury

Staff is trained in CPR and first aid. A parent will be notified immediately. 911 will be called and your child will be transported to the nearest hospital facility or transported to the designated hospital facility of your choice. No center personnel shall impede in any way the delivery of emergency care or services to a child by licensed or certified emergency health care professionals.

Missing Child

If a child becomes missing during the day, The Outdoor Learning School personnel will notify the police and the sheriff's department. Parents and or family members will be notified at this time also. To prevent your child leaving with someone not authorized, the staff at OLS does check identification when someone not customary is picking up your child. Parents must notify a staff member of OLS in writing, or by email, if someone will be picking their child up other than the contacts listed on the pick up list. Due to state law, parents will be required to sign their child(ren) in when you bring them and sign them out when you pick them up.

Loss of Electrical Power or Water

Emergency lights are installed in the building and come on automatically in the event of a power failure. In the event we are without water, the children's and teachers hands can be cleaned with a liquid hand sanitizer. Bottled water will be available for cooking and drinking in the event of water loss. If water or power cannot be restored within 2 hours, the center will close.

Emergency Transportation Plan

The emergency transportation plan is to call 911. But if immediate transportation is deemed necessary, an OLS van shall be used for such purposes. The copy of the vehicle inspection shall be on file at the center. If an OLS van is not on the premises, then a properly equipped state approved staff car(s) shall be available with copies of the children's transportation information contained in the vehicle.

Emergency Shelter

In the event that emergency shelter should be needed and the facilities should be evacuated due to fire, gas leak, bomb threat, or physical plant problems, then the children will be taken to Fernside Fire Department for temporary shelter, then the First United Methodist Church if needed. All parents shall be notified concerning the relocation of the children.



Emergency Medical Services

In the event of any serious illness, injury, or death, the services of 911 shall be used. The facility's primary emergency medical resource will be Stephens County Hospital.

Death of a Child or Staff Member

911 will be notified immediately. Our staff will notify parents and or family members immediately, as well as BFTS personnel.