NOOKSACK SALMON ENHANCEMENT ASSOCIATION

Keystone Preschool Family Handbook

2026 - 2027

This Handbook outlines our policies and procedures for Keystone Preschool, along with what you need to know to be prepared. For more information, or with any specific questions or reasonable requests for accommodation, please see contact information.

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About Keystone Preschool

Contact Information

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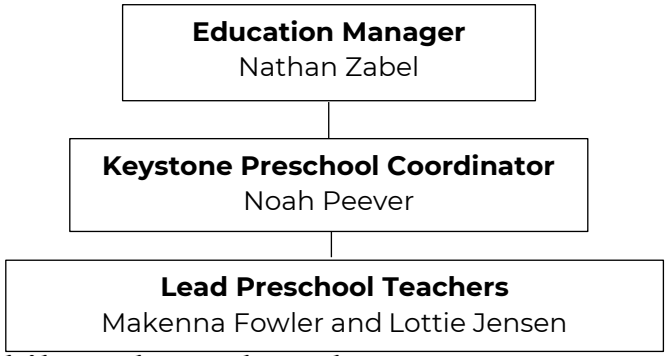
Keystone Preschool Organization Chart



Keystone Preschool Philosophy and Goals

Keystone Preschool is a fully outdoors, nature-based preschool where youth 3-5 years old will uncover the wonders of the natural world while engaging in critical thinking, investigations, and actions that build awareness of the wellbeing of people and our planet. We encourage children to dive into creativity and grow past their comfort zones. As teachers we guide our instruction to foster curiosity and focus on every child's interests to ask big questions and encourage problem solving. Our focus is to show children that we all belong together on this earth, and we can become stewards of our lands and waters at any age.
NSEA does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, sexual orientation, veteran status, or marital status in the provision of services. We provide families in Whatcom County with equitable access and culturally responsive instruction to increase environmental literacy.

Curriculum

Curriculum for Keystone Preschool is centered around the goals and the outdoor-based instruction method which will benefit children and their development. We will utilize emergent learning curriculum to focus on their natural interests by focusing on outdoor instruction, unstructured play, and open-ended activities that encourage curiosity. By following seasonal themes, we will support both child development and conservation values, cultivating confidence, social skills, and resilience through interactions in nature.

Nature Preschool Preparation

Nature preschool is a wonderful option for most children ages 3-5 years old and allows for big body movement and creative freedom in a safe outdoor environment. We have found that children who enjoy spending time outdoors and like exploring & imagination can flourish in NSEA's nature classroom. These are the exceptions we have discovered:

- If your child tends to run in response to conflict or over-stimulation and will not stop when instructed. This could be a safety issue on NSEA's working campus.
- If your child regularly has 3 or more accidents per week, we recommend delaying their nature preschool start time.

Our staff know that children grow and develop differently, so please chat with Nathan to evaluate if your child is ready for nature preschool.

School Year Calendar and Hours

Keystone Preschool will operate Monday – Thursday from September 9th through June 3rd, following the Bellingham Public School Calendar.

Observed breaks/holidays

- *September 3rd* — *Optional Open House 9am-12pm*
- September 9th — First Day of School
- October — Fall Party – Date TBD
- November 11th — No School - Veteran's Day
- November 26th – 27th — No School - Fall Break
- December 21st – Jan 1st — No School - Winter Break
- January 4th — Preschool Resumes
- January 18th - 19th — No School - MLK Day and Teacher Work Day
- February 15th + 16th — No School – Presidents Day and Teacher Work Day
- April 5th – 9th — No School - Spring Break
- May 31st — No School - Memorial Day
- May/June — End of Year Celebration – Date TBD
- June 3rd — Last Day of School

Drop Off & Pick Up

- Drop off and pick up is at the NSEA campus – 3057 E. Bakerview Rd. For directions, view this map.
- Drop off is from 8:30am – 9:00am and is located at the Preschool Shed on NSEA's campus. You may park along the driveway as you drop off your child. Please make sure you **drive slowly in our driveway**.
- Pick up is from 1:30pm – 1:45pm and is in the same area as drop off. You will need to sign out your child with one of the teachers.
- A parent or authorized adult must sign in and out their child every day when arriving and leaving. Children will be released only to those individuals authorized. Be prepared to show a valid ID, such as a Driver's License. Please keep NSEA staff updated on changes, as any person not listed on the registration paperwork will not be able to pick up any child.

Daily Schedule

No two days of preschool are alike, thanks to NSEA's emergent learning curriculum. Teachers will facilitate activities based on the needs of the group. This will lead to enhanced exploration and discovery, supporting unique needs, developing social and communication skills, and encouraging decision-making and problem-solving; all important social-emotional skills at this age. The sample schedule below is an idea of what a typical day of preschool will be.

Schedule

8:30am	Drop Off & Free Play
9:15am	Morning Circle + Snack
9:45am	Learning Stations or Group Activity
11:30am	Lunch Time
12pm	Rest Time + Read Aloud
12:30pm	Afternoon Forest Exploration
1:15pm	Closing Circle
1:30pm	Pick Up

What to Pack

First Day:

In a large Ziploc bag labeled with child's name, pack clothes:
child's name labeled on clothing tags is helpful

- 2 pairs of warm socks
- 2 pairs of underwear
- 2 pairs of pants or shorts
- 2 shirts
- 1 sweater/sweatshirt

Daily:

- Small backpack labeled with child's name
- Enough food for 2 snack breaks and lunch (extra snacks are best!)
- Outdoor shoes, including boots every day
- Full water bottle
- Warm layer and dry layer
- Hand mittens or gloves – cold months
- Raincoat or winter jacket – seasonally

Please ensure you send enough food for your preschooler to eat during snack times and lunch time. There will not be access to a refrigerator and food will be kept in backpacks when not being eaten. Snacks will not be shared with others, to accommodate food sensitivities or allergies.

Behavior Expectations

To maintain a safe and cooperative setting, NSEA staff will outline behavior expectations, set boundaries, and establish routines. Staff will be trained in positive reinforcement and group management tactics to promote appropriate behavior. Children at all times will be

under the supervision of one of the staff leading their group, or another staff in the absence of one of their typical leaders.
By enrolling in preschool, you and your child agree to the following guiding behavioral principles:

- Be Kind
- Be Safe
- Be Helpful

At no time will children be physically restrained, unless if a child's safety or the safety of others is threatened. If a child must be physically restrained, it will be done in a way that limits the restraint to be as gentle as possible, limited to the minimum amount of time necessary, be developmentally appropriate, and only done by trained NSEA staff.

If a child is not following these guidelines, and behavior is a challenge to the respect, safety, and equity of all children, the following system will be put into effect:

- First Incident – parent/guardian will be notified of the incident, and a collective course of action will be laid out for that child.
- Second Incident – parent/guardian will be notified of the incident, and any modifications to the course of action will be laid out for that child.
- Third Incident – parent/guardian will be notified of the incident, and a refund will be given.

NSEA staff will work with children and consistently communicate with their parents/guardians at drop off and pick up to take steps to address any issues and avoid dismissal from Keystone Preschool. However, expulsion will occur if a child repeatedly exhibits behavior that threatens the physical, emotional, or mental well-being of the other children attending or NSEA staff. Additionally, inappropriate or unsafe behavior from a child's parents/guardians will not be tolerated on NSEA's campus and may result in dismissal from preschool.

Communication

If your child will be late or absent, please notify us by calling Noah (253-328-0566), Nathan (360-306-0772), or the NSEA office (360-715-0283). If there is a future day when you know your child will be late or absent, you may also email us at npeever@n-sea.org.

Newsletter

Each seasonal quarter, the Preschool Coordinator will email out a newsletter to parents and guardians that includes learning highlights, upcoming class information, and photos from our forest adventures.

Conferences

Parents and guardians are invited to join teachers for a virtual parent/guardian teacher conference once each term. In the fall, we will meet sometime in October or November, and in the spring around March or April. This gives everyone the chance to discuss any particular needs, highlight accomplishments and growth, and have open communication between teachers and caregivers.

Policies & Procedures

Registration and Enrollment

Registration for Keystone Nature Preschool opens in the Spring of each year. Current preschoolers will be given priority to enroll in the next school year. Enrollment is done through our online registration system. To get a head start, you can create an account to complete your family and child profile, and complete required forms. Once you have created an account, you will be able to access your profile via your parent dashboard.

Prospective families will enroll through a three-step process:
Step One: Complete NSEA's Keystone Nature Preschool Interest Form. This will reserve a spot for you, and Noah will email you with next steps.
Step Two: Noah will schedule a 30-minute phone call to talk about Keystone Nature Preschool, learn about your child, and provide you with an opportunity to ask questions.
Step Three: We will schedule a 1-hour visit to NSEA for you and your prospective preschooler to meet the teachers, see the site, and ask any further questions.
Upon completion of these three steps, if you feel Keystone Nature Preschool is a good fit for your child, and NSEA's Education Team thinks it will be a good fit, we will add this to your online account, and you are officially enrolled in the program.

Tuition Payment Schedule

2-Day Week/Half time: $525/month
4-Day Week/ Full time: $1050/month
Tuition is due on the 1st of each month. If paying online, you can pay via your parent dashboard. Checks can be delivered at drop off in the black Payment Box at the Shed. We offer a 7-day grace period for payment, after which point a $25 late fee will be added. We are happy to work with each family on a payment plan, including bi-monthly, if needed – please reach out to Nathan to set that up.

For families receiving DCYF subsidy to attend camp:
You and NSEA will receive a letter identifying how much is owed per month, and what DCYF will be subsidizing per day. Your monthly payment is due on the 1st of each month, and the same grace period and late fee applies.

Health & Safety

Boundaries

Keystone Preschool operates on NSEA's working campus. We utilize many nature areas around our restoration shop, plant nursery, and office buildings. The preschool class will get to learn about some of the restoration impacts NSEA supports while engaging in the outdoors. When playing in our Forest or Tree Grove, we use logs and red/green rocks to

mark the boundaries that students will stay in. Combining visual and auditory boundaries allows students to be in one area and for staff to keep the class safe.

Bathrooms

- Our nature classroom has a composting toilet in our outhouse building.
- Nature potty is optional in the forest. Children have a private area to use and clean their hands afterwards.
- Otherwise, children are welcome to use our office bathrooms.
- Children coming to preschool should be potty trained. For our program, this means:
    - Children know when they need to go to the bathroom and are able to communicate that with teachers.
    - Children can pull down their layers on their own and pull them back up.
    - Children can wipe themselves, and wash and dry their hands independently.
- We know, however, that accidents do happen and reminders on steps are helpful.
    - Staff will verbally guide children in hand washing and toilet procedures.
    - If there are accidents/wet clothes, they will be placed in plastic bags and sent home with child.
        - Children will be given the opportunity to clean/change themselves.
        - Staff will help children to clean up and change only when absolutely necessary.
    - Staff will remain outside of the closed bathroom when a child is inside. If a teacher does enter the bathroom, the door will remain fully open.

We are happy to implement the above steps, and will work with families on an individual basis, if needed, to help in your child's potty training journey in a way that is supportive of your child and aligns with our capacity. This could include checking after children have used the bathroom to make sure all steps are done, more frequent reminders to use the bathroom, and increased assistance. Please coordinate this with the Preschool Coordinator if needed.

Accidents and Injuries

Injuries: All staff will be certified in Adult and Child First Aid, CPR, and AED. Staff will have first aid kits with them at all times. All injuries will be assessed and handled utilizing the following 3 tiers:

- Light (cuts and scrapes) - First aid will be administered, and parent/guardian will be notified at pickup. Incident will be documented.
- Moderate (headache, vomiting) – Initial first aid will be administered, and child will be separated from the group if necessary. Parent/guardian will be notified immediately, and course of action will be agreed upon. Incident will be documented.
- Severe (broken bone, head trauma) – emergency services will be contacted, and parent/guardian will be notified immediately. Incident will be documented.

All incidents will be documented by staff and kept in a secure location.

Emergency Preparedness

NSEA staff will be trained to respond to all emergencies, and the protocol for an emergency will be to ensure the safety of children and then contact parents/guardians. NSEA's campus is equipped with a building that can be used as an emergency shelter and is large enough to safely and comfortably fit all children and staff. The staff have a designated backpack that will include a first aid kit and medication (if applicable). Outlined below are procedures that will be followed in the event of specific emergencies.

Inclement Weather

Fire: In the event of a fire that is discovered indoors, such as the bathroom facilities, NSEA staff will immediately sound the alarm, get the backpack with first aid kit and medication (if applicable), and evacuate youth out of the space. Assistance will be given to any child who cannot walk independently to ensure everyone vacates the space. NSEA staff are trained on evacuation routes out of each space. Other NSEA staff will be notified and 911 will be called. Preschoolers will be monitored for safety while emergency personnel are en route and on site.

In the event of a fire that is discovered outdoors such as in the forest, NSEA staff will immediately sound the alarm, get the backpack with first aid kit and medication (if applicable), and evacuate children away from the location of the fire. Assistance will be given to any child who cannot walk independently to ensure everyone vacates the area. Other NSEA staff will be notified and 911 will be called. Children will be monitored for safety while emergency personnel are en route and on site.

Earthquake: In the event of an earthquake, if preschoolers are indoors, such as the bathroom facilities, NSEA staff will immediately ensure they take cover in an area that is away from windows, hanging objects, and exterior walls. This entails dropping to the ground and crawling under a sturdy table and then holding onto one of the table legs. In the absence of a table, youth will drop to the ground and crawl next to an interior wall that is away from windows. Children will stay covered until the earthquake has stopped, at which point NSEA staff will get the backpack with first aid kit and medication (if applicable) and evacuate children out of the space. Assistance will be given to any child who cannot walk independently to ensure everyone vacates the space. NSEA staff are trained on evacuation routes out of each space. Other NSEA staff will be notified and 911 will be called. The group will be monitored for safety while emergency personnel are en route and on site.

In the event of an earthquake, if children are outdoors, NSEA staff will immediately get the backpack with first aid kit and medication (if applicable), and evacuate the group to a location that is away from tall trees, buildings, and utility wires. Assistance will be given to any child who cannot walk independently to ensure everyone vacates the area. Other NSEA staff will be notified and 911 will be called. Children will be monitored for safety while emergency personnel are en route and on site.

Lockdown: In the event of a public safety concern where an individual is harming or attempting to harm others, a lockdown will occur. If near a building, teachers will immediately gather children indoors and will then close and lock all doors of the building they are in, lower the blinds on any windows, and turn off the lights. Preschoolers will stay in the room away from windows and doors and will stay there until an "all clear" is given.

If outdoors, teachers will immediately gather all children together in a group, stay outside, and find a sheltered place out of direct line of sight, such as in the forest and remain there until an "all clear" is given.

Strong winds: Dangerous high winds may affect the ability for the class to be safely outside. In the event of a wind advisory, teachers will take measures to prevent the group from going into areas affected by wind, which means not going anywhere under trees, and shifting to be in areas that are open or under cover. In the event of a high wind warning, or wind gusts at 35 mph or over, preschool will be canceled, and parents will be notified. In the event of dangerous conditions that occur due to wind while school is running, children will take shelter in the emergency shelter until it is safe enough to return outside.

Extreme cold: Prolonged exposure to cold temperatures can be unsafe for children and lead to serious health concerns including frostbite and hypothermia. Staff will consider the wind-chill factor when making decisions to adapt or cancel programming. If wind chill factors are between 10°F – 32°F, we will shift programming to be in areas that are more enclosed, utilize heat sources such as space heaters and campfires, and have access to warming stations that include warm beverages. If wind chill factor is below 10°F, school will be canceled and parents will be notified.

Extreme heat: Prolonged periods of time outdoors in hot weather can be unsafe for children and measures will be taken by staff to ensure children are staying hydrated. In the event of a heat advisory, staff will take more frequent water breaks with children and spend more time in the shade. In the event of an excessive heat warning, school will be canceled and parents will be notified.

Air quality: NSEA staff will monitor the air quality using the Washington Department of Ecology website. If the air quality is listed as unhealthy for sensitive groups or worse, school will be canceled and parents will be notified.

Any changes to school due to the extreme weather events listed above will be communicated in advance to parents. In the event school has to be canceled after drop-off has already occurred, or if one of the above emergencies occurs, parents/guardians will be immediately contacted by NSEA staff using information provided during registration. Teachers will ensure all children are safely picked up by an authorized person and continue to contact parent/guardians and/or emergency contacts until all children have been picked up.

Health Policy

NSEA's priority is to ensure children are safe and healthy, and will monitor children at all times, maintaining communication with parents/guardians if children are sick.
If your children is sick, do not bring them to school. This means they are exhibiting any of the following symptoms:

- Fever of 100° or more
- Sore throat or coughing
- Runny nose or watery eyes

- Vomiting in the past 24 hours
- Diarrhea in the past 24 hours
- Headache or Earache
- Eye discharge or pinkeye
- Lice, rash, or scabies (if lice was detected, needs to be picked and bug free for 48 hours)
- Symptoms associated with colds, flus, strep throat, chicken pox, or other contagious disease, including COVID-19

Adults must inform NSEA staff immediately if a child contracts contagious disease or exposed to one. NSEA will post a notice to alert others. Children being treated for a contagious disease may not return to our facility until danger of infecting others is over. All incidents of contagious disease are reported to the Public Health Department.

If your child becomes sick while they are at school, you will be notified immediately and asked to come pick them up ASAP, to reduce exposure to other children. If you cannot be reached, the emergency contact you listed on your registration paperwork will be notified and asked to pick up your child. Any children who need first aid, such as a bandage because of a cut or scrape, will be treated away from other children to prevent the exposure of blood or bodily fluids.

All parents/guardians of children filled out medical information during registration, including allergies, medication needs, medical conditions, and additional needs or accommodations. Teachers will be aware of any existing conditions and able to care for children with special needs or health needs.
At each day of school, opportunities will exist for children to access bathrooms with flush toilets and hand washing stations. These will be utilized at transition times, such as after drop off, before and after snacks and lunch, and before pick up. Handwashing will be done frequently and will always be done before and after eating snack and lunch, after using the bathroom, and before pickup at the end of day. In the event a handwashing station is not close and washing is needed (such as in the forest), hand sanitizer will be in the backpack teachers have with them and will be used as an alternative.

Food Allergies

Allergies were listed when you registered for preschool. If your child has specific food allergies, we will include that with other parents/guardians to try and limit that item at preschool. Children with food allergies will be given an appropriate distance away from others during lunch and snack times, and all children will wash hands before and after eating.

Medication Plans

Medications administered were listed when you registered for preschool. All medication must be in its original container and properly labeled with child’s name, date the prescription was filled or the medication's expiration date and legible instructions for administration. Teachers will administer medication to child following the instructions, document the medication administration, and communicate with you if your child needs medication during the school day.

Do not send any over-the-counter medication with your child. All unused medication will be returned to parents/guardians.

Sunscreen & Insect Repellent

We do not provide or apply sunscreen or bug spray – if you would like your child to have either or both, please make sure they are prepared for the sun and bugs before drop off.

Field Trips & Transportation

Throughout the school year, we will be transporting preschoolers offsite to various locations. Field trip sites include Birch Bay State Park, Larrabee State Park, Hovander Park, Hundred Acre Wood, and others that support the learning. We will leave from NSEA's campus after drop off and return before pick up. The following policies will be in place while children are being transported for the field trip:

- Transportation will be in NSEA's shuttle bus, which is regularly serviced and properly maintained, and has a current license and registration from Washington State.
- The bus will be driven by NSEA staff who are trained in the operation of the bus, along with have a safe driving record.
- The bus will be equipped with a first aid kit and NSEA staff will carry a separate first aid kit while on site at the field trip location.
- Transportation will be in compliance with Washington Child Restraint laws utilizing seat belts for all children and booster seats that are current and in good condition for children who need them. The use of booster seats will be based on height of each child.
- All child information and parent/guardian information, along with medication (if applicable) will be with NSEA staff at all times.
- NSEA staff will carry working radios and cell phones to communicate with each other and parents/guardians, if necessary.
- The ratio of adults to children will be maintained during the field trip, and children will be supervised at all times with no child left unattended either on the bus or at the field trip location.

Activity Risk Assessment

Below are policies addressing various potential risks to children.

Water Activities: There is access to an artificial stream along with wetland ponds at NSEA's campus. All of these are shallow (less than 2 feet deep). Children will not be wading or swimming in these bodies of water and teachers will ensure children are not entering the water. Teachers will be trained and able to enter the water in the event a child falls in, and each wetland pond is equipped with a life-saving flotation ring.

Tree climbing: Staff will monitor children at all times when they are climbing on trees or tree branches. They will inspect the forest area and remove hazardous objects, such as rocks or sharp objects, along with inspecting loose branches. Children will be allowed to climb to a height of 30 inches off the ground and will be within reach of teachers so any fall will not cause significant injury.

Wildlife: Children will not intentionally approach any wildlife either at NSEA's campus or while on the field trip. However, chance encounters may occur. Children will be respectful of wildlife and give them space while watching from a distance. Typical encounters include birds, frogs, and insects. In the event there is an encounter with a potentially dangerous animal, teachers will direct children away from that animal and ensure the area is clear of the animal before returning.