

EARLY CHILDHOOD COMMUNITY HANDBOOK 2026-2027

The ECC handbook contains important elaborations, refinements, or changes to the NWMS Parent Handbook, Toddler–Upper Elementary Communities. Please find the 2026-2027 TC-UE Parent Handbook on our website. Both manuals are revised as needed.

EARLY CHILDHOOD COMMUNITY STAFF

ECC 1 Staff

Annie Rebori: Lead Guide (annie.rebori@natureswaymontessori.com)

Caitlin Crowley: Assistant Guide

ECC 2 Staff

Kelly Denton: Lead Guide (kelly.denton@natureswaymontessori.com)

Kimberly Sotelo: Assistant Guide

ECC Support Staff

Ollie Moder: Support Guide and Extended Day Lead Guide

Marikate Abuhelweh: Support Guide and Extended Day Guide

RESOURCE STAFF AND SCHEDULE

Isabel Zuniga: Spanish

Wednesdays 8:40-9:10 ECC2 1st and 2nd year students

Wednesdays 10:30-11:00 ECC1 1st and 2nd year students

Wednesdays 11:00-11:30 Kindergarten students

Dawn Kunkel: Art

Thursdays 10:50-11:30 ECC1

Fridays 10:50-11:30 ECC2

Sarah Ringer: Music

Thursdays 11:00-11:30 ECC2 1st and 2nd years

Fridays 10:15-10:45 Kindergarteners

Fridays 11:00-11:30 ECC1 1st and 2nd years

EARLY MORNING CARE (7:30-8:00; Drop-off stops at 7:45)

Children who arrive before 7:45 need to be enrolled in Early Morning Care, which is held on the playground starting at 7:30 am. Please follow the regular drop-off procedures (see below); a staff member will be in front of the Middle Building to greet you.

MORNING ARRIVAL (8:15-8:30)

Arrival begins at 8:15 and ends ***promptly*** at 8:30. **Please do not send your child to the classroom before 8:15.** All families will follow drop-off procedures. Please drive to the designated drop-off greeter. Please be sure your child is seated on the side closest to the sidewalk and has their lunch box and backpack ready. Your child will be invited to exit the car and proceed to their classroom.

Let your child know ahead of time about the drop-off procedure (for example, “In ECC, I say goodbye to you in the car”). Children feel comfortable when they know the routine in the morning and it doesn’t change. Know that we are experts at tears and at helping a child integrate into their new environment with ease. Please review these procedures with anyone responsible for dropping off your child.

If your child arrives after 8:30 and a staff member is no longer at the car line, please proceed to the office to sign your child in. Office staff will call the classroom so we are aware your child has arrived on campus. **You may not escort your child to the classroom yourself.** We encourage you to make every effort to arrive *on time*, as it is highly important for your child’s day. They can experience the personal greeting by staff members and will not miss early morning transition routines with friends. Most importantly, it relieves anxiety on the part of the child and does not disrupt the normal progress of the classroom. **We are not a drop-in facility and we expect students to arrive during our greeting time unless there is a valid excuse such as a doctor’s appointment. Please contact the school or your child’s Lead Guide if you will be late.**

Our goal is for your child to feel welcomed and cared for. It is normal for a parent to leave school worried about their child’s transition. Please feel free to call the school and ask how your child is doing if you are concerned and let us know about any transition problems you have.

MORNING WORK TIME (8:15-11:30)

During the morning work cycle children will be given lessons individually and in groups. They will move through periods of intense concentration using classroom materials, socializing with their peers, caring for themselves, and caring for their classroom.

This will be a three-hour uninterrupted work time. For that reason, staff will not be available for parent communication in the mornings. Please leave a note in your child's bag, email, or contact the office if you need to be in touch with the Lead Guide. If your child has forgotten something (lunch, backpack, pizza money, etc.), please drop these items off in the office.

SNACK

We provide time and space for each child to eat during the morning work cycle. This is a time for students to practice skills such as serving food and table manners. Each month, a calendar will be sent home, a hard copy will be in your child's bag and a copy will be sent via email. This calendar will note important dates and events as well as whose turn it is to bring in the group snack. The evening before your child's snack day, the snack tote bag will be sent home with them. You will provide the requested snack items and send them to school with your child the next morning. On their snack day, the child will select a peer to assist them in preparing the food for service as well as set the snack table for the day. We choose the same snack items for a full month in order to allow each student to practice the skills needed for that item as well as encourage eating from hunger, not the excitement of a new or preferred snack.

Students who participate in Extended Day will also have a shared snack time. If your child needs more than one afternoon snack during this time, please send an extra snack in their lunch box for Extended Day.

LUNCH (11:30-12:00)

We eat lunch as a group in the classroom or deck areas. As this is an essential practical life experience. The adults will model appropriate eating habits, clean-up procedures, and polite conversation by eating with the students. Adults and older children are available to assist with opening containers, cleaning spills, or any need that arises.

Please **label** your child's lunchbox and every container you send, both the top and bottom. Lunch boxes and food containers should be simple and easy for your child to open and close. We suggest allowing the child to practice at home so they are confident in their skills. Containers should fit in the lunch box with room to spare so your child can successfully repack all items independently. Lunchboxes are stored in a space approximately 12in. x 12in. large and are shared with one other student. Please avoid cumbersome lunch boxes and ensure that all containers and water bottles are leak-proof, as children may turn lunchboxes on their side to fit.

Wednesdays will be "Waste Free Wednesdays," but we strive for limited or zero waste lunches on a daily basis. Reusable, recyclable, or compostable containers are preferred. Please be aware of the amount of landfill waste in your child's lunch and limit the use of plastic pouches, individually wrapped snacks, and squeeze tubes.

Food items should follow the Nature's Way food policy outlined in the Parent Handbook, page 6. We do not allow desserts, candies, or juices with less than 90% fruit juice. Please reach out to your child's Lead Guide with any questions. Any uneaten items will be sent home so you are aware of what your child is eating during the school day.

See p. 7 in the *NWMS Parent Handbook Toddler –Upper Elementary Communities* for information about the content of lunches, appropriate containers, etc.

PIZZA FRIDAY

We offer an optional pizza lunch on Fridays for \$5. Along with pizza, we will serve a variety of fruit, veggies, and grains. You can either pay weekly, monthly, or for the entire school year. Those students paying weekly should bring pizza money (***in cash only – no checks, please***) to class Friday morning in their bag. If you are paying monthly or for the whole year, you may do so by check ***payable to Nature's Way for \$165*** (33 Fridays x \$5). We use this as a fundraiser for the classroom.

If your child does not want to eat pizza, you may pack a lunch per usual.

OUTDOOR TIME (12:00-1:00)

Children are dismissed to the outdoor area after restoring their lunch space and dressing for the weather. Outdoor and classroom guides will be supervising our community.

We try to get outside every day. We require your child to have appropriate outdoor wear for all types of weather. In the case of inclement weather, we may have an abbreviated outdoor time. The tree canopy provides a nice buffer from the rain and we are often outside during periods of light showers. Please send rubber boots and a raincoat when rain is forecasted; children will store these items at school. A warm coat, hat, and gloves are essential for winter weather and allow your child to enjoy their time outside. Close-toed shoes help children to feel comfortable running, hiking the nature trail, and doing more active games. *We encourage full exploration of our outdoor environment and your child may come home with dirty clothing. Please send them in appropriate attire and pack changes of clothing that match the season.*

NAP TIME (12:45-2:15)

Any child needing a nap will rest on a mat in the Extended Day classroom. They will come in from the playground to rest by 12:45 pm. and will wake up no later than 2:15 pm. Students will be asked to stay on their nap mats for adequate time to achieve sleep. If the child does not sleep, we will invite the child to remain resting or return to work.

The school provides nap mats. Please send a fitted crib sheet and a light blanket; you may also send a small stuffed animal if needed for comfort. We ask that students who nap pack a separate set of extra clothes to be stored in the nap space. During the first week of school, we will provide a bag for transporting nap items. All nap items should be sent in this bag Monday morning and

will remain at school during the week. All nap items will be sent home on Friday in the nap bag to be washed and returned Monday morning.

Please notify your child's teacher before the first day of school if your child will be napping.

AFTERNOON WORK TIME (1:00-2:30)

All children who do not nap will return to their classroom after their outside time at 1 pm for an afternoon work period. This time is generally designated for a book workshop; students will receive a short language lesson followed by an extended free reading time. Children may also be outside with outdoor staff during this time for various lessons and work opportunities. Other students may choose lessons individually.

DISMISSAL (2:30-2:40)

- Staff will dismiss students from the entrance area in front of the Middle Building.
- **Remain in your vehicle** and a staff member will place your child in their seat.
 - *Exiting your vehicle at this time slows down the process and causes back ups.*
- To ensure safety and efficiency, after receiving your child, please pull past the car line and park on the left hand side of the driveway to buckle your child's car seat.
- Staff members are not available for conversation at this time. If you would like a check-in about your child's day, please let us know and we will be in contact with you when we are available.

Any children not picked up promptly by 2:40 will be escorted back to the playground and enrolled in Extended Day. You will be billed for this time according to the Extended Day fee schedule.

EXTENDED DAY (2:30-5:30)

Those enrolled spend time outside and in the Extended Day room where a variety of materials and lessons are available. Students who participate in Extended Day will also have a shared snack time. If your child needs more than one afternoon snack during this time, please send an extra snack in their lunch box for Extended Day.

Children will be dismissed to the car line in front of the Middle Building only on the half-hour. Please pull up to the pickup point at your designated time to meet your child. *Please remain in your vehicle.* A staff member will help your child into their car. Please pull ahead to the left-hand side of the driveway to buckle your child.

Extended day ends promptly at 5:30.

BACKPACKS

Each child will have a backpack with their name on it provided by the school. The bag should come to school every day. It should contain at least one change of clothes and several pairs of

socks in a labeled one-gallon plastic zip lock bag. **ALL** of your child's clothing, including what they wear into the classroom, must be labeled so it can be sent home with the correct child if misplaced. Lost and found items are gone through frequently; any unclaimed items are donated throughout the school year.

We encourage you to use the small front pocket for notes to the teacher. We will also use it to send messages home. *Please assist your child in checking their bag every night.* Help them take out work or notes they may have brought home. This is a great opportunity to talk about their day. Periodically children will bring home a plastic folder containing their completed work. The folder should be emptied and returned to school the next day.

We highly recommend that your child be active in the process of packing their own backpacks. This increases independence, confidence, and care of the self. Often when a child does not pack their own belongings, they are not aware of what they have or where things are and will often ask for help locating frequently used items.

Before coming to school, please ensure toys and other distracting items have not made it into the bag (or their pockets!). **TOYS OF ANY KIND MAY NOT COME TO SCHOOL** (costume pieces and jewelry included). Such items can be highly distracting and children become upset if anything is lost or broken. If toys make it as far as the classroom, the teacher will carefully put them away until the end of the day.

CLOTHING

This is the age of independence. Please send your children in clothing and shoes that they can take on and off on their own. *Please do not send shoes with laces unless your child can tie them.* For the youngest students, elastic waistbands, loose-fitting shirts, and Velcro shoes are ideal. As their ability to work with fasteners develops, clothing with zippers, buttons, and snaps can be incorporated. Children take their shoes off upon entering the classroom but are required to have their feet covered. Most students choose to wear socks, but simple slippers are also acceptable. Be sure to send multiple pairs of extra socks, as they often get wet or dirty.

Learning to dress and care for oneself is an exciting process during this developmental stage. Many children will repeatedly change for the sake of mastering these skills. You might find your child's clothes are on backward or shoes on the wrong feet. *It is essential to be aware of not discouraging them by pointing out "mistakes." This is part of the normal process and they take great pride in being able to dress by themselves.*

Students will be engaging in many environments and situations each day. Please send weather-appropriate changes of clothing and outdoor gear. Children will store rain gear at school.

CONFERENCES/COMMUNICATION

We offer conferences in the fall and spring. Conferences are not mandatory but it is helpful to talk with you about your child's growth and progress. It is valuable for us to get to know your

family better and learn more about your child. If you would like to talk at any other time, please do not hesitate to request a meeting.

Communication with you about your child is vital to us. We encourage you to communicate any questions, concerns, or information that will help us as we work with your child. You are the expert on your child, and we value your feedback and collaboration. You may reach us via email, notes, and phone messages left in the office. We will return any messages as soon as we are able. Please know that we will also communicate any questions, concerns, or observations about your child to you as needed. *Please refrain from sending confidential or important information through text messages with Guides*; this information should be sent via email for privacy and documentation purposes. Our preferred method of communication is via email.

WALK AROUND THE SUN BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION

In ECC, the Walk Around the Sun ceremony is a simple way that we celebrate birthdays. This celebration is shared between guides and students of the classroom and it is a special moment for each child. This is not an event for parents to join, but Lead Guides will share pictures. Special birthday treats may not be brought to share with the class.

For the celebration, please provide a picture from each year of your child's life. If you want to use multiple pictures for each year, please mount them all onto one sheet. A single poster board can also be used. Provide a short description with any notable information and developmental milestones from each year or a brief description of the pictures. If your child has a summer birthday, please let us know if you would like us to celebrate it before the end of the school year.

PLEASE PRINT, FILL OUT, AND RETURN TO SCHOOL

Child's Name _____ Classroom _____

Please fill out the following form, sign it, and return it to your child's class at the beginning of the school year.

_____ I have labeled every item of clothing and have a full change of clothes in a labeled Ziploc bag.

_____ I have labeled every lunch box item & the lunch box and containers are simple, easy for my child to open and close, and will fit in the cubby space.

_____ I have read the ECC Parent Handbook & Nature's Way Parent Handbook.

_____ I understand that toys and distracting jewelry do not come to school.

_____ I understand the policy on nutritious lunches and snacks, which includes no desserts and an acceptable liquid (water, 90%+ juices, or plain milk).

_____ If my child naps, I have notified their teacher and have labeled all nap items.