



Saplings

2021/2022 Family Handbook

Fernbrook Farms Environmental Education Center Mission and Purpose

The Environmental Education Center is a non-profit 501-c-3 organization with a mission to provide hands-on educational experiences for all young people by exploring the complex interconnectedness of our natural world. Our purpose is to educate children about food, agriculture, and the environment. We believe people should make meaningful connections with our natural world in order to become responsible stewards of local and global sustainability.

Saplings Philosophy

The Saplings program at Fernbrook Farms is a play-based nature program for young learners ages 3-5. Sapling students will have the unique opportunity to develop meaningful connections with their peers, teachers, and the natural world while immersed in the diverse ecosystems of Fernbrook Farms.

Our Saplings program is specially designed to provide the roots that will allow children to grow and develop at their own unique pace. Each day will follow a set routine that will provide opportunities for children to participate in activities where they will be encouraged to ask questions, seek their own answers, and openly explore the world around them.



Contact Information

Fernbrook Farms Environmental Education Center

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2021/2022 Saplings Calendar

- September 7: First day of Saplings
- November 24 – 26: Thanksgiving break
- December 23: Half day (12:30 dismissal), last day of first semester
- December 24 – January 2: Winter break
- January 3: First day of second semester
- January 17: Closed, MLK Day
- February 21: Closed, President's Day
- May 30: Closed, Memorial Day
- June 10: End-of-Year Family Party
- June 15: Last day of second semester

The Rhythm of Our Day

By creating and following a rhythm of our day, our teachers are able to accommodate the flexibility that comes with child-driven education while still providing students with the consistent, predictable routine they require to be successful. The times noted in the sample day below are meant as a guide and may not always be exact, but the order and routine of our daily activities will remain the same.

- ❖ 8:00 – 9:00 Optional before care
- ❖ 8:30 – 9:00 Drop-off time
- ❖ 9:00 – 9:45 Free time in one of our outdoor playspaces
- ❖ 9:45 – 10:15 Morning circle followed by bathroom, handwashing, and snack
 - Our morning circle helps establish our routine and set the expectations for the day. Following our morning circle, we will use the bathrooms and wash our hands. Our snack may be eaten at our picnic tables by the barn or taken with us on our adventure.
- ❖ 10:30 – 11:45 Morning exploration
 - A child-driven exploration of one of Fernbrook’s unique ecosystems – the forest, the creek, the pond, the meadow, or the garden
- ❖ 11:45 – 1:00 Bathroom, handwashing, lunch, and free play
- ❖ 12:30 Pick-up for AM-only students
- ❖ 1:00 – 2:00 Quiet time
 - Students will nap or rest, or participate in quiet, independent activities as they rest, relax, and re-energize their bodies to prepare for their afternoon adventures.
- ❖ 2:00 – 2:30 Bathroom, handwashing, and snack
- ❖ 2:30 – 3:15 Afternoon exploration or activity
- ❖ 3:30 Pick-up for full-day students
- ❖ 3:30 – 6:00 Optional after care

Drop-off Procedure

Drop-off time for Saplings students will be between 8:30 and 9:00am. Early morning extended care beginning at 8:00am can be added on at a rate of \$7/hour and must be scheduled ahead of time. Please contact us to schedule extended care.

Enter the farm at the farm's main entrance located at the intersection of Route 545 and White Pine Road. This entrance has a set of **red brick pillars** at the end of the driveway with a hanging white and green "Fernbrook Farms" sign. Once on the farm, follow the driveway all the way past the farm shop parking lot on the right. When you come to a split where you can turn left towards the Willow Parking or continue straight towards the barn, continue STRAIGHT to the pick up/drop off area behind the barn.

The Saplings "homebase" consists of two different outdoor play spaces on either side of the barn. At drop off, a teacher will meet you outside in the parking lot to take your child's temperature, and then you and your child can continue in to their cubby to drop their things off. After dropping off their belongings we ask that parents please **bring their child to use the bathroom and wash their hands before they join the group in one of our outdoor play spaces.** This will especially help children in the beginning of the school year get comfortable with using a new bathroom and will allow staff to fully focus on the students in the outdoor play space.

****Please always make sure you sign your child in and out with a staff****

Pick-up Procedure

Pick-up will also occur at our outdoor classroom space behind the barn. At the end of the day, staff will wait with students near the barn for pick up so that children do not walk through the parking lot unattended. Parents or guardians can help their child retrieve their things from their cubby.

Morning-only students will be ready for pick up at 12:30pm.

Full-day students have a pick-up window between 3:30 – 3:45pm.

Please communicate any changes in your child's schedule (early/late drop-off or pick-up) with a staff member ahead of time so that we can have your child ready. Oftentimes we are out on the farm on our adventures and we need to account for walking time to have your child ready for an early departure or to have a teacher meet you for a late drop-off.

After care can be added on at a rate of \$7/hour with a pick-up time as late as 6:00pm. Please contact us to schedule extended care through our after school program ahead of time.

Gear List

Please remember to label EVERYTHING with your child's name so that should it get lost it can be returned to its rightful owner!

NEW THIS YEAR

We are excited to be providing every Sapling with an adventure backpack and a pair of bibbed rainpants to use during their time at Fernbrook Farms. We have partnered with REI and Oakiwear to provide these products in order to ensure that every child can get the most out of their time in the Saplings program. These will be assigned to your child during the beginning weeks of the program and will stay in their cubby throughout the course of the year to be returned upon completion of the program. Of course if you have your own gear, such as a full rain suit, you are free to use that as well.

Required Items

- Large backpack or duffel bag
 - This is the bag that will hold your child's remaining gear. Each child will have a cubby where they will keep their large pack and extra clothes and gear for when they need it throughout the day. See below for the additional gear!
- Lunch and snack
 - Morning and full-day students should bring a packed lunch each day. We encourage both healthy eating options as well as minimal waste, so please consider using reusable or recyclable containers to pack your child a well-balanced lunch. Lunches will not be refrigerated, so a cold pack especially during the warmer months is also a good idea.
 - We will have time for a snack in the morning and the afternoon. Please pack your child with a small nutritious snack, separate from their regular lunch, for these times. (One snack for morning or afternoon-only students, two snacks for full day). We will occasionally have fresh fruit or vegetables to offer to supplement their regular snack.
- Reusable water bottle
 - Staying hydrated is an essential part of a healthy and fun nature experience! In an effort to keep plastic water bottles out of landfills, we encourage all campers to use reusable water bottles. You can write your child's name on them and we will help your child keep track of them during the day. Students may refill water here at the farm all day long.
- Extra changes of clothes
 - There will be plenty of opportunities each day for kids to get muddy and messy! Please send them with at least one (for full day students two changes would not be a bad idea) full set of clean clothes. This includes shirt, pants/shorts, socks, and underwear. Should your child need to change clothes during the day, their dirty/wet clothes will be sent home in a plastic bag. Keep in mind as the seasons change you may need to update their extra clothes to suit the new weather accordingly!

- Creek/mud shoes
 - Wading in the creek and playing in the puddles is a favorite activity for many Fernbrook students. An old pair of sneakers is often a great choice for creek shoes but rain boots will also do the job. Really, any pair of shoes that can get wet and muddy will work. **Crocs are not appropriate creek shoes and should not be brought to Fernbrook, as they do not provide proper support and are not protective footwear in the creek.



- Quiet time blanket/sheet
 - After lunch, all afternoon Saplings will have an opportunity to rest their bodies and engage in quiet time. We will provide cots for children who will be napping. Quiet time may involve resting on a cot or in a personal tent (outside any time that weather allows) and/or engaging in quiet activities. All full-day students should be sent with a small fitted sheet to cover their cot and a blanket, or similar (a nap mat such as a Wildkin mat is also an option) so they can rest their bodies. All bedding will be sent home on the child's last day of the week to be washed and returned after the weekend.

Recommended/Optional Items

- Sunscreen and bug/tick repellent
 - For morning-only and afternoon-only students, please apply sunscreen and/or bug spray before drop-off if you would like your child to have it on. For full-day students, you may send sunscreen and bug spray to be reapplied by staff after lunch. Please ensure these are clearly labeled with your child's name. Parents are also encouraged to complete routine evening tick checks as this is the best defense against ticks.
- Hat
- Towel

Clothing List

Saplings students will need outdoor, weather appropriate clothing all year long. Please remember, this is a farm and we will be outside as much as possible, so clothes that can get dirty are best. On rainy days, please dress with shoes that can get wet (rain boots are often a good choice). Below is a helpful clothing guide for each of the seasons your child will experience throughout the year. While this list may seem extensive, it was thoughtfully put together with both your child's safety and comfort in mind to ensure they have a positive experience on the farm in any weather. If you have any questions about any of the items below or are looking for brand/store recommendations, please reach out and we will be happy to help.

Fall/Spring

- Layered t-shirt and/or long-sleeved shirt
- Long pants
- Socks
- Rain jacket and rain pants or a rain suit (ex: Tuffo Muddy Buddy, Jan + Jul, Grundens, Frogg Toggs, Oaki)
 - **Fernbrook Farms will provide a pair of Oakiwear bibbed rain pants for each student.**
- Hat for insect/sun protection
- Rubber rain boots
- Sturdy walking shoes or boots
- Fleece pullover or warm sweater
- Jacket or windbreaker



Winter

Wool, fleece, and silk make the best layers for cold and wet weather as they hold in heat and keep out moisture. While cotton is great for mild days, please avoid it for layering in the winter. When cotton gets wet, it takes a long time to dry and will make your child colder and keep them cold longer.

- Waterproof, insulated mittens (warmer than gloves, which are fine for milder days)
- Wool socks
- Insulated snow boots (ex: Kamik, Sorel, or Northside)
- Base layer: wool, silk, or polyester top and bottom (cotton does not make a good base layer)
- Mid-layer: long-sleeved wool or fleece sweater. For extra cold days wear fleece pants and wool mitten mid-layers, too.
- Outer layer: Waterproof coat with hood, insulated, waterproof snow pants, wool socks, and insulated waterproof mittens
- Warm hat that covers the ears
- Neck warmer (better than long scarves as they can't get caught on things during our adventures)

Photo Policies

The Education Center uses photos from our adventures for promotional materials such as our website and brochures in order to give families an accurate and exciting representation of what their child's day at Fernbrook could look like. All families selected on their enrollment form whether or not they give permission for photos of their child to be used in this format.

In addition to promotional content, photos and video are often used by teachers in the nature setting to help document children's learning and experiences as well as their growth and progress throughout the program. Because we are so often on the move, it is often times easier for teachers to take undistruptive photo and video of interactions with the children to then return to later to add to your child's portfolio along with a written anecdote. If you have concerns over your child being photographed or videoed for the purpose of assessment, only to be used internally between you and their teachers, please talk to us.

We also will have a regular Saplings newsletter that will be shared only among families of the Saplings program where we can include photos of our adventures for you to see. If you selected "disagree" on the photo release agreement on the enrollment form but are comfortable with your child's photo being used in this context only between Saplings families, please talk to their teacher.

Communication with Families

We know that oftentimes children leave Fernbrook so excited over all of the things they did that day that it can be hard to get them to fully explain every piece of their day. Hopefully they will leave with many great stories to share, but in order to help you guide that conversation we will send home a regular newsletter with information about the activities your child has been participating in. In addition, there may be notes about upcoming events or plans, so be sure to check your email for our newsletters. You will also receive information at the beginning of the year about downloading the Homeroom app where we regularly post pictures from our day to be shared in a private class album.

Communication between staff and parents/guardians is essential to a child's success and enriches their education experiences. We value conversations between you and your child's teacher and are happy to talk about our day, provide feedback on your child's development, or answer any questions you may have. Please keep the communication lines open with us and also share with us any important changes or significant events going on in your child's life.

While we are happy to answer quick questions at drop-off or pick-up time, please know that when children are present they are the teachers' top priority. Should you have a concern or just would like to talk about something more in depth with your child's teacher please schedule a meeting time outside of class.

Student Assessment

Informal, authentic student evaluation is performed by your child's teachers every day. Authentic assessment is defined as the documentation and analysis of a student's actual work collected over time in his or her real world environment. Our outdoor, play-driven model of education places the child at the center of their learning and provides them with opportunities to engage in developmentally appropriate activities that will help them grow cognitively, physically, and social-emotionally. To document this growth over time, teachers will oftentimes use photo and video in addition to collections of their work to be kept in your child's portfolio. Additionally, teacher journals and written anecdotes will be added to further show how a child is progressing over time.

This type of assessment is informal and ongoing and conducted in a way that does not disrupt the natural behaviors and learning of the child. If you have questions about your child's progress, please feel free to schedule a meeting with their teacher to go over their portfolio and answer any question you may have.

Nap/Quiet Time

It is important for children to have the opportunity to rest their bodies and minds every day, especially when they are as active as they are here at Fernbrook. All full-day students will engage in quiet time after lunch. This may involve taking a nap, lying down to rest their bodies and/or participating in quiet activities such as looking at books. This helps the children re-energize and prepare for the afternoon adventures. During rest times, all students will be provided with a cot and/or personal tent. Please send your child with either a fitted sheet/blanket combo or a napmat regardless of if you expect them to nap in order to help keep our cots clean. Extra blankets in the wintertime are also a bonus!



Illness Policy

Fernbrook Farms takes precautions to prevent the spread of illness by maintaining a clean environment, frequent handwashing for both students and staff, and encouraging healthy habits such as covering coughs and sneezes with the elbow. To help us in preventing the spread of illness, please keep your child home if any of the following symptoms are present:

- Green or yellow runny nose
- Fever of 100.4°F OR if your child has had a fever in the last 24 hours
- Chronic or continuous coughing or wheezing
- Diarrhea, vomiting, or stomach complaints
- Symptoms of unknown origin, such as a rash
- An illness during its contagious stage, such as “pink eye”

Recovering children are more likely to pick up a new illness. One of the most important ways to help a child recover is to provide them with plenty of time to rest their bodies. Please keep in mind that we are outdoors daily and children in the Saplings program will be very active throughout the day. Please keep your child home if they are not well enough to comfortably spend extended periods of time outside so that they can fully recover from their illness.

If your child will be absent due to illness (or any other reason) please contact the Education Center via phone or email to let us know.

Getting Sick at Fernbrook

If your child becomes ill while in our care, experiences a fever of 100.4°F or higher, or if the child’s condition is suspected to be contagious, they will be isolated from the group to rest comfortably with a staff member. You will be contacted immediately to pick them up. If we can not reach you, we will call your emergency contacts.

COVID Protocols

This fall at Fernbrook, we will use groups to mitigate the spread of COVID-19, as we did very successfully over the summer during camp. Our groups will be the Saplings, Pre-K/K, Lower Level Homeschool (up to three groups), Upper Level Homeschool, and Afterschool. Within each group, students will be organized by age and grade as we have in years past. Each group will be able to comingle without masks but they will maintain social distance from other groups. There will also be additional handwashing stations and hand sanitizer placed in and around the Education Center. We have also ordered extra sanitation supplies to increase the amount of times per day any shared surfaces are disinfected.

Furthermore, we ask families and staff to do a self-screening process for 14 days prior to attending classes. We will send you a self-screening form that we will ask you complete. Please do not send your child to Saplings if they are experiencing, or have experienced, any of the COVID-19 specific symptoms in the last 14 days.

Symptoms include:

- Fever (100.4°F or greater) or chills
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Cough
- Fatigue
- Muscle or body aches
- Headache
- Sore throat
- New loss of taste or smell
- Congestion or runny nose
- Nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea

Please self-confirm the following statements before sending your child to Fernbrook

- My child has not been around anyone with any of the listed symptoms or diagnosis of COVID-19 in the last 14 days.
- My child has not experienced any of the symptoms above in the last 14 days, or has been cleared by a doctor (medical note required) to return if they have.
- No one in our household has been sick in the last 14 days.
- My child has not traveled to areas with increased exposure to COVID-19 in the last 14 days.
- My child has adhered to our state's guidelines regarding COVID-19.

We are all in this together and it is very important, now more than ever, that we self-monitor and stay home if we are sick or experiencing even the subtlest of symptoms.

Injury Policy

Staff members at Fernbrook Farms are trained in First Aid and CPR. It is our goal to provide a safe environment for all students, but playing outside always comes with risks and sometimes accidents happen. Minor scrapes and bumps are typically easily remedied with a band aid or ice pack, and the caring words and comfort of a teacher. For injuries that may require additional attention at home (such as further cleaning of a cut) you will be notified by a teacher at pick up. For more serious injuries or if a child appears to be in continued discomfort following our medical care, you will be notified via phone by the Education Director.

In the event of an accident that requires medical attention beyond basic first aid we will do one of the following:

- Call parents/guardians or emergency contacts to collect the child immediately to seek medical attention; or
- If severe and immediate help is deemed necessary, we will call 911 and a staff member will accompany the child to the emergency room until parents/guardians arrive.

Severe Weather

Our goal at Fernbrook is to spend as much of the day outside as possible. There will be days where we are outside in all types of weather – heat, cold, rain, wind. Staff will always take into account the safety and comfort of the children when determining when/how much time to spend outside.

In the case of severe or unsafe weather, such as a thunderstorm, Saplings will take shelter inside our classroom where they will participate in indoor activities until it is safe to return to our outdoor adventures.

Weather Closures

As part of living in New Jersey, we may occasionally experience weather, especially snowstorms in the winter, that create unsafe conditions both on the farm and on the roads for staff and families. Should we need to cancel class due to snow or another weather event, you will be notified via phone and/or email. We may sometimes operate on a delayed opening, which you will also be notified of as soon as our decision is made. If weather worsens during the day, we may need to close early in order to ensure families and staff can get home safely. We will call and/or email should any of these changes arise during the day. On days that the Education Center needs to operate on a delayed opening, there will be no before care. Likewise, if we need to close early there will be no after care.

Tuition and Payments

A 10% deposit is due to at the time of enrollment to secure your spot in the Saplings program. Fernbrook Farms offers payment plans to allow you to choose the option that works best for your family. Options include payment in full at the time of enrollment, a 10% deposit with 4 monthly installments to follow, or a 10% deposit with 10 monthly installments to follow for full-year enrollment. To discuss payment plan options or to come up with an alternate plan that works for you, call the Education Center at (609) 298-4028.