

NATURE CENTER PRESCHOOL: Comprehensive Self-Assessment Rubric

Section I: Program Goals, Curriculum Practices

Indicators	1	2	3	4
<p><u>Program Goals</u> Dual goals for both child development and conservation values, based on high quality practices of ECE & EE, grounded in sustainable practices</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Program focuses on early literacy and math -Teacher directed -Topics are learned by direct instruction & memorization -No sustainable practices or in planning stage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Program focus is on child development -Mix of teacher and child directed learning -Mix of play and direct instruction -1 sustainable practice evident* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Goals are focused on child development with some nature engagement -Primarily child directed -Some topics are learned through play -2 sustainable practices evident* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Goals of the program are integrated, both child development and conservation values – whole child focus -Place-based orientation -Play based, child directed -Integrated learning guided by interest -3 + sustainable practices evident*
<p><u>Curriculum</u> Central organizing concept is nature, based on local, seasonal, authentic experiences, academically integrated, learning in the context of reality</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Nature included as part of a science corner or other limited area (not available at all times) -No “choice time” provided for children to choose activities in which to participate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Mix of local and non-local nature included in classroom activities -Units of study are mix of local/seasonal and other -“Choice time” for children is provided for 25% of indoor class time or less 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Focus on nearby nature play and engagement -Authentic experiences are evident-ie some projects in response to children’s interests -“Choice time” is provided for 26-50% of indoor class time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Authentic experiences are locally and seasonally based -Weekly themes/units of study/projects are nature-based (inside & outside) -“Choice time” is a large part (51% or more) of the indoor time -Experientially based activities
<p><u>Program Practices</u> Start outside, child initiated, unstructured nature play, exploration in wild areas, inquiry based</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Day starts inside -Daily outdoor time is up to 15% of class time -No hikes in semi-wild areas -Nature is present via books & videos -Use of worksheets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Start day inside -Daily outdoor time 15-30% of class time -Visit natural habitat once a month -Science involves direct teaching primarily 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Start day inside -Daily, unstructured outdoor time in natural area 30-45% of class time -Visit natural habitats at least once a week -Inquiry-based science 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Begin the day outside -Daily, unstructured outdoor time in natural area is at least 45% of the class time -Daily hikes to explore in a variety of natural habitats (wild areas) -Children reflect on their experiences/documentation -Inquiry-based activities -Project based learning present

* Examples of sustainable practices include: using real plates, utensils, cloth napkins, recycling, composting, rain barrels, etc.

Section II: Staffing

Indicators	1	2	3	4
<p><u>Teacher's Role</u> Authentic engagement of teacher, facilitator, provides "nature time" for children and play in natural environments</p>	<p>-Teachers direct learning and provide small amounts of nature time either indoors or outdoors - Staff does not show comfort w/nature immersion (e.g. lack of suitable outdoor clothing, does not interact with natural environment) -Teachers complain about the weather</p>	<p>-Teachers provide monthly opportunities for play in natural environments -Staff shows some comfort w/nature immersion by wearing mostly suitable outdoor clothing, interacting with the natural environment in 1 way* -Teachers do not complain or praise the weather</p>	<p>-Teachers provide weekly opportunities for play in natural environments -Staff shows moderate comfort w/nature immersion by wearing suitable outdoor clothing, interacting with natural environments in 2 ways* -Teachers are mostly positive about the weather</p>	<p>-Teachers provide daily opportunities for child centered learning through play in natural environments -Staff shows comfort w/nature immersion by dressing appropriately for the weather, interacting with natural environments in 3+ ways* -Teachers express positive aspects of the weather and communicate these to the children</p>
<p><u>Professional Development</u> Cultivation of own interest in nature, visit model programs, attend workshops & training to develop ECE and/or EE skills</p>	<p>Teachers have little interest in nature and do not attend workshops or trainings related to nature topics</p>	<p>Teachers are interested in nature but do not cultivate own interests and rarely attend workshops or trainings related to nature topics</p>	<p>Teachers have cultivated own interests in nature and attend workshops and trainings related to nature at least once a year</p>	<p>Teachers have cultivated own interests in nature, visit model programs and attend workshops & trainings at least twice a year</p>
<p><u>Formal Education</u> Directors and teachers are trained in both ECE and EE with an integration of methods</p>	<p>-Teachers not trained in either ECE or EE. -Teachers appear disinterested in work environment</p>	<p>Teachers have either ECE or EE background with the other discipline not represented in the classroom</p>	<p>Teachers have either ECE or EE background and both disciplines are represented in the classroom</p>	<p>Directors and teachers have formal training in ECE and EE and are able to integrate the methods associated with each</p>

*Examples of interacting with natural environments include: lying on the ground, raking leaves, catching insects, picking up worms, catching tadpoles and frogs, turning over logs, planting and/or harvesting gardens, tapping maple trees, etc.

Section III: Environment

Indicators	1	2	3	4
<p><u>Indoors</u> Nature is infused into all areas of the classroom, plenty of natural light, wood and natural materials, animals & plants</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -No natural light -Difficult transition to outdoors -Few natural materials -Plastic furnishings and toys -No plants or animals in the classroom -No nature-based books 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Little natural light -No door to outside from classroom -Photos of natural materials -Small, dedicated space includes natural materials -Mix of plastic and wood furnishings - Either plants or animals in the classroom, but not both -Few books are nature-based 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Some natural light -Easy transition to outdoors, but not from classroom -Natural materials in two areas of the classroom -Primarily wood furnishings, but some plastic - One plant and animal in the classroom -Some books are nature-based 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Plenty of windows & natural light -Door from classroom to outdoors -Natural materials present in all areas of the classroom and reflect a variety of nature (not stereotypes) -Animal puppets, manipulatives, dramatic play based on nature -Diverse textures/earth based colors -Organized play areas/collections -Wood and natural furnishings -Two or more plants & animals in the classroom -All books are nature-based/field guides present <p>(At least 7 of the above are evident)</p>
<p><u>Outdoors</u> Natural play area with loose parts, climbing areas, digging sand & soil, gardening, water</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Traditional play ground with simple climbing structures, sandbox, few natural features 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Traditional playground with some trees and bushes, sand area, water table. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Naturalized outdoor area with some traditional playground equipment -Trees, bushes, sand area, gardens, water table -Loose parts include logs and sticks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Garden/quiet areas -Sensory rich environment -All natural objects (loose parts) including logs, sticks, rocks, etc. -Trees for climbing -Sand and soil for digging -Water feature -Logs for balancing -Hills and open spaces
<p><u>Diverse Habitats</u> Wild areas of natural habitats for exploration outside of the play area - woods, prairie, wetlands, ponds, etc.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -No access to natural habitats* outside play area. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Access to 1 natural habitat* nearby to explore 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Access to 2 natural habitats* nearby to explore 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Variety of trees, plants & wildlife to interact with -Access to 3+ natural habitats* nearby to explore -Stewardship to remove invasives & introduce balance

*Examples of natural habitats include: pond, river, wetland, marsh, meadow, field, prairie, lake/beach, woodlands, etc.

Section IV: Nature Center Resources

Indicators	1	2	3	4
<p><u>Naturalists</u> Naturalists provide special programs and regularly scheduled visits to classes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Little regular interaction with naturalists -Few special programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Naturalist visits seasonally and brings animals for special programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Naturalist visits once a month and brings animals for special programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Naturalist visits at least once a week and hikes with the children, visit includes an outdoor activity -Special programs at least twice a month
<p><u>Special programs/Resources</u> Such as maple sugaring, raptors, animals, gardening, collections, greenhouses, etc.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Limited habitats -Few extra resources -Few special programs offered 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Yearly field trip to nature center for special program (i.e. maple sugaring or animal program and hike) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Seasonal field trip to nature center for special program (i.e. fall hike, winter animal tracks, spring maple sugaring) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Diverse habitats, greenhouses, apiary, raptors, sugarhouse, gardens, etc. available as part of the program on site.
<p><u>Animals & Artifacts</u> Access to wild and domestic animals and nature artifacts for education</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Little access to animals or artifacts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Yearly access to natural artifacts through nature trunks that are borrowed -Wild and domestic animals seen during seasonal naturalist visit or yearly field trip 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Collections of nature artifacts available through a nature trunk on a monthly basis -Wild and domestic animals seen on field trips seasonally or naturalist visits monthly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Collections of nature artifacts available on an ongoing basis to support seasonal nature topics such as bird parts, animals bones, bird nests, tree seeds, etc. -Wild & domestic animals available on a regular basis to support programs

Section V: Parents and Community

Indicators	1	2	3	4
<p><u>Parents</u> Clear communication and education with parents of benefits of nature for young children, resources for parents to provide nature experiences for their children</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -No parent manual -Infrequent newsletter or resource list -No parent/teacher conferences -No parent workshops -Little documentation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Parent manual provided, but incomplete -Annual parent newsletter -Seasonal reports of classroom activities -One parent/teacher conference per year -One parent workshop but not on nature 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Parent manual provided* -Seasonal parent newsletter -Monthly reports of classroom activities -Two parent/teacher conferences per year -Two parent workshops (one on nature) -Photo documentation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Parent manual provided* -Monthly parent newsletter -Weekly reports of classroom activities to parents -Seasonal (3) parent/teacher conferences -Seasonal parent workshops of benefits of nature for children -Photo documentation of projects posted
<p><u>Family Programs</u> Seasonal programs allow children to share nature with their families</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -No family day visits -No family gatherings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One family program per year but might not be focused on nature 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two family programs per year with one focused on nature 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seasonal (3) family programs (all nature based) such as owl hikes, camping, catching frogs or insects
<p><u>Sharing Knowledge</u> Program models appropriate nature-based early childhood practices for other educators and is a resource for the community</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -No educator classes -No volunteer calendar -No community calendar 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -One workshop per year for educators in the community on various topics (not necessarily nature) -Volunteer calendar for opportunities to volunteer occasionally -Little connection to the community is apparent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Two workshops per year for educators in the community where one is focused on providing nature for young children -Volunteer calendar for opportunities to volunteer monthly -Connection to the community is through a calendar 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Seasonal (3) workshops provided for educators in the community to learn about nature based approach -Volunteer calendar for opportunities to volunteer weekly -Connection to the community is evident (calendar, notices, community reps visit, etc.)

*Parent manual includes mission statement and program philosophy related to nature and appropriate clothing to wear for the weather.