Thank you for investing in your child's future by enrolling in the Natural Beginnings Early Childhood Program from the Kendall County Forest Preserve District! We hope that you and your family find the Natural Beginnings Early Childhood Program to be a “natural” fit for your family’s educational needs. It is also our hope that you enjoy your time spent with us as much as we will enjoy taking this journey with your child.
About the Program

Mission and Goals

Mission:

To nurture whole child development through primary experiences with nature while initiating them into a life-long, meaningful relationship with the natural world.

Educational Philosophy:

Our curriculum is designed to promote learning by providing an environment that encourages discovery and experimentation. While exploring eleven different inquiry units throughout the year, children will have the chance to help shape the content by communicating their interests in the theme. We explore each theme by taking nature walks, studying natural phenomena, and engaging in reinforcing activities to build physical, emotional, and academic skills. Developing a love of learning is of the utmost importance to our staff and is always the basis of our curriculum. Our curriculum will include activities intended to take the children to the next level of understanding based on the children's abilities and interests. We encourage divergent thinking and reflection by asking open-ended questions and providing information in response to children's ideas and insights.

Goals:

- Foster curiosity through hands-on projects and play.
- Stimulate intellectual and physical development while participating in authentic learning opportunities.
- Develop respect and appreciation for the natural world by way of meaningful primary nature encounters.
- Encourage language development by letting children express themselves creatively.
- Develop social skills as children make friends and work collaboratively.
- Develop self confidence and a sense of success.
Facilities:

As Kendall County’s largest forest preserve, Hoover Forest Preserve provides an unparalleled location for nature-based learning. Children will discover the wonder and beauty found in Hoover’s nearly 350 acres of prairies, woodland trails, and creeks, as well as the Fox River. This program is designed to encourage children to explore the connections between their lives and the world around them.

By locating Natural Beginnings inside the preserve, the children have access to numerous daily experiences with plant life both inside and outside the physical classroom. Aside from daily hikes amid the native plant life, the children will tend the outdoor gardens as well as care for the indoor plants. Natural Beginning students are inspired and guided by naturalists and teachers trained in nature education and experienced in sharing their enthusiasm for the natural world.

During outdoor exploration, children frequently have the opportunity to observe native wildlife, including White-tailed deer, Cooper’s Hawks, Eastern Tiger Swallowtail butterflies and hundreds more. In addition to those organic experiences, children will have daily experiences with animals inside the classroom. Children are taught the correct way of handling the classroom’s educational animals and to wash their hands thoroughly after every contact. Direct contact is always under the close supervision of an educator. The following animals are current residents of the classroom:

- Tiger Salamander
- Eastern Box Turtle
- Fish
- Walking Sticks
- Button Quail

The additional program animals that live in our Laws of Nature Museum may also visit from time to time.

We also have many other mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians and insects visit our classroom throughout the school year.
Daily Schedule

At Natural Beginnings, we value spontaneity in activity and take advantage of the “teachable moments” that we are afforded. We also know that many children who are first experiencing regular activity away from home benefit from knowing what to expect as they are in our program. Although every day promises to be a new adventure for our class, we maintain a loose, but structured schedule with predictable events throughout the day. The following is an example of a possible classroom schedule:

Arrival: Guardians walk children to Eagle’s Nest Pavilion to sign in with the teacher.

Active Play: Children could play a game, participate in large motor skill activities or perform science experiments.

Hike: Most days children will explore the vast trails or natural areas of Hoover Forest Preserve. They will discover the wonder and beauty of prairies, creeks, rivers and woodland trails. While exploring, children could be climbing, fort building, digging, engaging in water play or acting out dramatic play. Many hikes are intended to enhance the scheduled unit and will focus on various themes through the year.

Circle Time/Literacy Development: Circle time includes singing our good morning song, discussing weather, calendar or our Jolly Phonics letter of the week. Children may take part in thematic conversations, listen to stories or poems, explore movement or receive special visits from naturalists or from the Laws of Nature Museum inhabitants (animals).

Snack: This is a great time for social interaction and practicing table manners and good health and safety practices. Only healthy snacks are allowed at Natural Beginnings. Please send in either a fruit or a vegetable in reusable containers. Snack is not intended to be a meal, but rather a small snack. We will send out a class allergy list prior to the start of school. Please send in a small water bottle in your child’s backpack. The bottle will need to be securely sealable as we may carry these on hikes.

Responsibilities: Children are encouraged to take ownership in tasks that help the classroom as a community. Some tasks include: animal care, plant care, sweeping and table washing.

Reinforcing Activity: Following the thematic curriculum schedule, children will study the unit further through art, crafts, journaling or science experiments.

Free Choice: Children will have the ability to choose from several different “stations” in the classroom. Examples of stations include: nature blocks, sensory activities, science experiments, dramatic play activities, math manipulatives, music and movement activities, writing activities, arts and crafts, reading activities and more. These stations change frequently throughout the year and can be based on thematic materials.

Departure: Children will wait at Eagle’s Nest Pavilion for guardians to meet them, sign out, and walk the children safely back to the vehicles.
Program Information

Tuition

Tuition for 2016-2017 school year is $1,425 for 2 days a week and $1,725 for 3 days a week. There is an early payment discount of $25 if paid in full by July 22, 2016. If multiple siblings attend Natural Beginnings concurrently, you will receive a sibling discount of 20% off yearly tuition for the second child. A non-refundable pre-registration fee of $150 is required upon registration. Installments can be made on a quarterly schedule and are due on July 22, 2016; October 21, 2016; January 20, 2017; and April 21, 2017. Installment payments must be set up with a credit card and will be deducted automatically on the due dates. If a payment is declined, the charge will be sent through again. A $5 processing fee will be assessed when a card is declined due to negligence of updating credit card information with the business department. You will be contacted and payment will then be due within 5 days. Non-payment for class may result in a disruption of your child’s education. Registration fees are non-refundable. Quarterly payments are non-refundable. Tuition refunds will be granted for payments that have been made in full provided a valid physician’s written excuse is submitted or proof of relocation out of the area is submitted. Refunds will be pro-rated based upon the remaining number of quarters left in the year. Scholarships may be available if funding exists. Please see a staff member for more information.

Arrivals

All children are to be walked to the Eagle’s Nest Pavilion where you will need to sign your child in with an instructor when you arrive. Our daily outdoor activities will start promptly at 9:00am. Children need to be dressed appropriately for the weather. Natural Beginnings’ responsibility for the child begins when he or she is signed in. Instructors will be ready to receive children at 8:55am. Please make sure that your child has had access to a restroom recently prior to the start of class.

Departures

We will not dismiss your child to an unauthorized person or someone not indicated on your Enrollment Form. You may add people to your list at any time. A handwritten and signed note from the parent or guardian is acceptable to add people to your list. For identification purposes, a driver’s license may be required prior to departure. All children must be signed out before leaving the premises. Please be prompt when picking up your child. Children become worried when parents are late. If a parent is later that 15 minutes and has not called, the staff will begin to contact the child’s emergency contacts. If you are running late, please contact a staff member at the Rookery Building at 630-553-3939, text your child’s teacher, or call 630-553-4025 and have the Education Department office contact your child’s teacher via cell phone.
**Speed Limit**

Please respect the posted speed limit of 10mph. This protects the wildlife and your children from being injured. Classes are often out on the trails and crossing the road or walking through the parking lot. Hoover Forest Preserve is home to many local school field trips and there can be numerous classes out on any given day. Please make sure that you watch for school buses that are parked in the road with a red flashing sign. We may not pass these buses while the children are loading and unloading. When entering the forest preserve, slow down and enjoy the drive while your child looks for animals along the way.

**Absences**

If your child will be absent from class, please contact Natural Beginnings at 630-553-3939 or contact your child's instructor via text.

**Personal Belongings**

We understand that your child's personal belongings are special. Because we do not wish that their items are lost or damaged, we do not permit them in the classroom and we discourage bringing them in a backpack. Please leave all personal items at home.
Health and Safety Concerns

Communicable Diseases

The parents of any child that develops a communicable disease must notify the classroom teacher. A notice will be sent home with students in that classroom to alert parents to observe for symptoms. We will in no circumstance identify the ill child to other parents.

Medicine Administration

Prescription and non-prescription medicine may be administered during classes. You and your doctor must complete the proper forms in your registration packet. Medicines must come in original containers with directions for administration and must be marked with an expiration date indicating that the medicine is current. Please take note of expiration dates and plan accordingly to replace expiring medicine during the school year. If you wish your child to have bug spray or sunscreen, the parent or caregiver must apply it before class. Instructors are not permitted to apply these to the children.

First Aid and CPR

The staff at Natural Beginnings is fully trained in First Aid and CPR procedures. If your child gets injured while at Natural Beginnings, the instructor will administer first aid and you will be notified at pick-up or by phone after class for minor accidents. For major medical emergencies, we will contact you or your emergency contacts right away to come pick your child up or to alert you to emergency treatment. Should emergency treatment be required, staff will have your medical information on hand and follow the procedures. An accident report will be filled out by a staff member and kept on file.

First Aid equipment will be on hand at all times during class.

Keep your child home if:

- Your child has a temperature greater than 100* and continue to keep them home for 24 hours after the temperature is back to normal.
- Your child has a severe cold.
- Your child has an inflammation of the eyes.
- Your child has been vomiting or has had diarrhea.
- Your child has any rashes.
- Your child has lice.

Please notify the staff if your child will miss school. No refunds will be issued for any sick days.
Daily Screening of Illness

If your child displays obvious signs of illness, depending upon the symptoms displayed, a decision will be made on the advisability of the child remaining at Natural Beginnings. The parent or guardian will be notified if the child needs to return home. Your child will be sent home if there is a fever, vomiting, diarrhea or if he or she is not participating in the classroom or unable to walk during outdoor hikes and requires a lot of extra attention from an adult. Our main goal is to keep the children healthy by preventing unnecessary spreading of illnesses.

Proper hand washing is a simple and extremely effective way to stop the spread of unwanted germs. During class, we practice good hand washing habits before snack, after animal care and after using the bathroom.

Snacks

An additional healthy habit that we promote at Natural Beginnings is eating nutritious snacks. Your child's snacks should only consist of fresh fruits and/or vegetables. We feel that modeling a habit of eating foods that provide good nutrition is a healthy habit for life.

Allergy Information

Here at Natural Beginnings, students will come in contact with many different allergens in the natural world outside. We have a vast forest preserve to explore and numerous chances to come in contact with tree nuts, egg shells, shellfish (crayfish), pollen, seeds and grass. If your child has allergies to these things or anything else, you must make the Education Department aware of this issue prior to enrollment. While we are always vigilant about your child's safety, due to the nature of outdoor education, we may not always be able to prevent accidental contact.

Change of Address or Phone Number

Please notify the staff when you experience a change so that your emergency information can be updated.

Safety

All teachers and volunteers have undergone a thorough background check through the State of Illinois and have received training in CPR and first aid. Classroom doors will be closed and locked during class. Weather and safety drills will be practiced throughout the school year.
Class Cancellations and Weather Conditions

Natural Beginnings follows the same protocols as Yorkville School District 115 for weather related school closings. If the Yorkville School District is closed, then Natural Beginnings is closed. You can find this information on the district website or by visiting www.emergencyclosingcenter.com. We also will send out a text message. If you change cell phone numbers, please notify the staff so that we can make the change for our emergency text system. No refunds will be issued for weather related closings nor will any additional days will be added to the school calendar to make up for snow days due to the building being used for other programs immediately following the last day of school.

Since your child's safety is our priority during class, we will not explore the outdoors during a thunderstorm with lightning, on bitterly cold days or on extremely windy days when branches might fall from trees. If there is a light rain, we will stay close to the building or indoors depending upon the instructors' discretion.

In keeping with our educational philosophy, we wish to encourage your child to explore the outdoors at a level he or she is comfortable with. By forcing children to be outdoors in disagreeable weather, we feel that the child will not develop a desire to spend time outside. Our goal is to inspire children go outside not because they are forced to, but because they enjoy it.

Cold Weather Policy

The instructors at Natural Beginnings will make judgment calls every morning at 9am as to whether or not the children will be taking a hike or engaging in outdoor activities that morning. Several factors go into making that decision. Instructors base their decisions off of wind chill, temperature and sunlight. Due to incorrect weather forecasts or weather changes that may occur during a class allowing us to play outside later in the class, we advise that you dress your child for the weather as specified in the handbook. If temperatures fall below 15 degrees, we will stay inside, but due to the nature of our outdoor drop off, you will still need to dress your child appropriately so that they can participate in the opening activity until their friends arrive and they make their way to the building.

In extreme weather conditions, we will attempt to text parents prior to class to advise of an indoor drop off; however, due to unexpected weather conditions, we may place a weather placard at the shelter indicating an indoor drop off.
Being Prepared for Class

Clothing

Clothing should be kept simple, comfortable and washable. Students will be involved in many different types of activities while at Natural Beginnings and should be dressed accordingly. Active exploration of the outdoors is encouraged during class time and children will be permitted to splash in mud puddles, dig in the soil, make mud pies, play with paint and other things of that nature. We encourage sending your child to school in clothes that can get dirty. Discovery learning requires freedom from restrictive clothing as well. This includes tight clothing and fancy dresses. Children should wear clothing that they can manage themselves in a washroom or in the case that they need to change into dry clothes. Students need comfortable, protective shoes with gripping soles for climbing, running and jumping. Sneakers or well fitting hiking boots are best. Sandals with closed toes and heel straps are acceptable for warm weather. Flip flops are not acceptable footwear for trails and are deemed a safety hazard. All children should be dressed appropriately for the weather. We spend much of our day outside, so please plan accordingly.

All clothing must be labeled including boots, mittens, snow pants, coats, etc. Although staff members will do their best to keep track of clothing, many look the same and Natural Beginnings is not responsible for lost articles of clothing. A lost and found is kept in the entryway in a labeled basket.

Please do not send an umbrella with your child.

Bathroom Time

Please make sure that your child has recently used the bathroom prior to drop off. The bathrooms at the Rookery also will be available for you to use with your child when you arrive. We start our day outside with outdoor play or a hike and it is conducive to the outdoor experience that we don’t interrupt the play or hike to return for bathroom visits.

Make sure that the child’s clothing is conducive for easy care in the bathroom. Elastic waist pants or shorts are great. If your child has pants with zippers, snaps or buttons, make sure that they are able to do this on their own. This will give the child a feeling of empowerment and independence.

Potty training is required for participation in Natural Beginnings. Diapers or Pull-ups may not be worn to class. Please note that if a child has several toileting accidents within a short time frame, the staff will evaluate the child’s toileting skills and speak to the parents and may suggest the child’s withdrawal from the program until he or she has mastered independent toileting skills.
Behavior Guidelines

Optimal learning occurs when there is freedom for discovery, enough structure to allow everyone to learn, and physical and emotional safety. At Natural Beginnings, we will maintain a calm atmosphere with clear expectations from everyone while allowing the freedom to engage in exploration.

To achieve this, our daily program is structured to provide enough time for children to feel satisfied in play. With enough outdoor activities, children tend to expend their energy in appropriate ways and are then ready to be less physically active and more cognitively ready when they enter the indoor classroom.

Adults will be available to help children solve social problems. Some children need to be taught the language and skills necessary for dealing with issues such as sharing. Adults will serve as models and facilitate resolutions.

Adults will intervene in an educational manner, rather than punitive, when children are having a hard time controlling themselves. We want the child to see a connection between his behavior and the consequences. Methods of discipline include clear rules, redirection, planning ahead to prevent problems, encouragement, and the use of logical and natural consequences. Techniques NOT used at Natural Beginnings are: physical punishment, threats, bribery, and other methods that would hurt, frighten, belittle, or humiliate children.

It is expected that the parents will work with teachers in helping find solutions to persistent behavioral problems. In the rare event that a child’s ongoing disruptive behavior does not improve despite the best efforts of the staff and this behavior has a continuing negative effect on the classroom climate, the Education Supervisor may determine that Natural Beginnings cannot meet the child’s needs and the child may be disenrolled from the program. No tuition will be refunded for said child’s current quarter.
Special Events and Communication

Birthdays

Birthdays are very important for most young children. Because we all would like to participate in the celebration of your child's life, the students will join together for a special birthday celebration during class. At the start of our day, the birthday child will receive a special necklace and we will sing a song for your child. Then the birthday child will hold a globe as he or she walks around the sun once for every year of his or her life. The "sun" will consist of classmates wearing orange gloves and waving their "rays". Parents are welcome to stay for this portion of the class to participate in their child's celebration. Please do not send in birthday treats due to allergy restrictions. If you would like to honor your child's birthday, please purchase something from our school wish list and we will add it to our classroom in honor of your child. To make sure that we honor children with summer birthdays, we will celebrate half-birthdays. Your child's teacher will send home a birthday calendar at the beginnings of the school year so that you know when we will celebrate your child's special day at Natural Beginnings.

Parent Participation

Parent involvement is critical to the development of young children and we value working as a team for the benefit of your child. This is why we have included several opportunities for parents to participate in our Natural Beginnings program. There will be a signup sheet at the Orientation Night offering availabilities for assisting with class parties. There will be additional opportunities for parents to participate at Natural Beginnings through play-alongs, special events, fundraisers, and the Year-End Celebration.

Photographs

Please note that on the Enrollment Form you have signed, it states that "I give permission for my child to be interviewed/photographed/videoed for educational/news publicity purposes for use in any and all media." We have used photos in the past for our web page, the Kendall County Record, newsletters, brochures, display cases, a private parent group on Facebook and for presentations for the public to highlight Natural Beginnings. If you have any questions or reservations about this, please let us know.
Newsletters and Communication

Communication between staff and parents benefits the educational experience of children. Due to limitations on conversation during arrival and departure time, newsletters, email, phone calls, parent-teacher conferences and the private Facebook group will be the primary means used to communicate with parents. Newsletters will be sent home at the start of every season. Photos will be posted to the Facebook group every week. These forms of communication should keep you current with the happenings in your child’s classroom. If you have any additional questions, please call or email your child’s teacher.

We ask parents to keep staff notified of significant events and changes in their children’s lives. Visitors, moving, new babies, illness, divorce and death all affect a child’s life at home and at school.

Your comments, questions and concerns about the program are very important to us. Please feel free to contact a staff member and share your input. We are always looking for ways to improve our program and provide an excellent educational experience for your child.

Important Contact Information

Natural Beginnings Early Childhood Program is held in the Rookery Building at Hoover Forest Preserve. To reach the staff at Natural Beginnings call 630-553-3939. The main office for the Forest Preserve District is located at 110 W. Madison St., Yorkville, IL. For billing inquiries, please call 630-553-4025. You will receive emails and cell phone numbers for your child’s Lead Teacher at Parent Orientation.