



New Canaan Nature Center
Preschool
Strategic Plan
2023-2027



“Nature is imperfectly perfect, filled with loose parts and possibilities, with mud and dust, nettles and sky, transcendent hands-on moments and skinned knees.”

~ Richard Louv, author, Last Child in the Woods - Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder



Mission Statement

The New Canaan Nature Center Preschool is committed to high quality early childhood education with a deep respect for children and families. With nature as the pivotal element of our curriculum, we lay the foundation for eager learners to be lifelong contributors to their communities.

Vision Statement

The New Canaan Nature Center Preschool will be a nationally recognized leader in nature-based early childhood education.



Our preschool celebrates a child's natural sense of wonder and their innate love of play in order to build foundational skills needed for a successful life.

The New Canaan Nature Center (NCNC) Preschool (formerly the Beginner's Nature Program), was founded in 1967, making it the oldest nature-based preschool in the country. We emphasize hands-on, indoor and outdoor sensory experiences, incorporating the natural settings of the Nature Center, as an integral part of our curriculum. We encourage the children to engage in nature through thoughtful activities like hiking, gardening, puddle jumping and observing wildlife. We focus on developing the whole child, including cognitive, physical, social, and emotional skills, so that they are not only ready for kindergarten, but have a strong foundation for a lifetime of learning.

Our philosophy is that children learn best through play in an environment that is suited to their age and developmental needs. Nature provides the best venue for children to play, learn, and experience life. These experiences in their early years will last a lifetime.

The Preschool offers **programs** for 2 through 5 year old children. At all age levels, we use guidelines and benchmarks provided by the State of Connecticut and maintain accreditation through NAEYC (National Association for the Education of Young Children). What makes us unique is that we integrate nature and science into our curriculum – not as a separate subject, but as a pivotal element of language, literacy, math and social- emotional learning. Our nature-based curriculum addresses skills across all developmental areas. Most of all we strive to teach children to love and value themselves, each other and the world around them.

The Preschool campus experience is special. The New Canaan Nature Center (NCNC) is a 40-acre oasis of charming buildings, gardens, greenhouses, meadows, woodlands, ponds, an apple orchard and a cattail marsh. Children experience the beauty of these environments daily.

The NCNC is dedicated to managing the land without the use of chemicals and has implemented a multi-year project to eliminate invasive species, naturally. This creates a safe environment for children to explore and is a great opportunity for our educators to teach children about land sustainability in hands-on, age appropriate ways. Because the Preschool is part of the NCNC, we have access to all that the Nature Center has to offer: Environmental Educators, a beautiful visitors center, exciting exhibits, and an array of animals, all of which make the learning experience for our students unique and memorable.

The Preschool is overseen and supported by the NCNC Board of Trustees and the NCNC administration.

Strategic Objectives

Focus on developing the whole child including cognitive, physical, social, and emotional skills:

- Maintain NAEYC accreditation.
- Build strong nature-based learning plans.
- Emphasize the importance of play and discovery in the learning process.
- Ensure curriculum aligns with state standards for early childhood education.
- Promote respect and care of the natural environment through hands-on activities.
- Formalize curriculum and growth points per age.

Employ highly capable teachers who embody the core values of the Preschool:

- Continue to advance capabilities of all faculty and staff through education and workshops.
- Maintain a low student-teacher ratio that allows for individualized attention and instruction.
- Ensure hiring processes are appropriate to build a team of the most qualified teachers.
- Improve knowledge-sharing between classes and teachers.

Continually educate stakeholders on the benefits of nature-based education:

- Provide opportunities for parents and families to be included in the education of their children and nature-based activities.
- Ensure transparency with parents through regular communication and teacher conferences.
- Create and ensure the use of consistent messaging to stakeholders.
- Create online parent onboarding materials.

Improve Learning Spaces to allow the children to best interact with each other, their teachers and nature:

- Create a multi-year master plan for the indoor and outdoor classroom spaces.
- Continually evaluate the functionality of the classroom spaces and upgrade as appropriate.