

Catoctin Sun Nature Preschool



Welcome! We are so happy to have you join our wonderful, nature-based, educational community!

Education and administration of early learning post-COVID paints a colorful picture for us all, as we return for a brand-new school year (our 10th !) at Catoctin Sun. As the pandemic recedes, we remain grateful for your patience, grace, and extra communication as we work together to offer a safe, nurturing, communicative learning environment for children. Our families have been amazing to work with as we plan for a brand-new school year – We will communicate with you every step of the way!

Thank you for joining Catoctin Sun along this important educational journey, one based on Harvard brain-based research teachings, and activities “scaffolded” in the style of Lev Vygotsky and other developmental theorists. The building block of our curriculum lies in a well-known guidebook called *The Hundred Languages of Children*, by Reggio Emilia founders and teachers. The Project Approach model, along with Math Their Way, and Montessori-inspired classroom centers at Catoctin Sun are lovingly-designed with a rich language approach to learning; teachers are trained to cultivate both receptive and expressive communication in young children.

Catoctin Sun’s programming bridges a social-emotional gap for children & families as we pass into endemic times while minding current, local COVID transmission rates via guidance through County Health Department and MSDE regulations, with input from the Center for Disease Control (CDC).

Our Cat Sun families keep classroom updates at hand, by daily checks to our private parent Facebook page. Additionally, feel free to message Founder/ Head of School and Co-Atelierista, Ms. Natalie at 240-457-3143; you may also send an email via catoctinsunpreschool@gmail.com.

Catoctin Sun is proud of our reputation as an amiable, warm, nurturing place. Thank you for joining us as we build programs to help restore balance in our lives post-pandemic, and for choosing us as your child’s early learning educators – ones that are fully dedicated to your child’s social-emotional growth.

LEARNING PODS at CATOCTIN SUN

POD LEARNING in the Reggio Emilia-style classroom during pre/endemic times aligns with Reggio's mixed-age classroom philosophy. We rotate indoor & outdoor explorations, and lunch groupings based on pod age, student : teacher ratio, and other developmental factors.

A limited number of spots are available (per age grouping, or "pod"), which instills balance in daily learning blocks and group interaction. Additionally, classroom materials and play environments are viewed as an important, natural aesthetic. In the Reggio World, we say "Environment is the third teacher." Our school differentiates activities per pod and per individual learning styles. There is no "one way" to teach! As one of our favorite school mottos states, "There's more than one way to learn—and more than one way to be smart."



A Note About Post-COVID and Transmission/Risk Level Assessment - School Protocol & Decision Aids

Catoctin Sun administration periodically receives updated guidance from MSDE, in accordance with our local health department, and the CDC. Should local and regional transmission levels increase, so likely will our school protocol. Catoctin Sun Nature Preschool & Kindergarten reserves the right to adjust indoor masking guidelines, COVID sanitation, and other protocol.

Additionally, as we enter the endemic phase of COVID-19, children and staff are welcome to wear a mask. This is a highly personal decision and should be respected. If you see a member of our community wearing a mask, please allow them additional space and kindly observe social distancing in their presence.

Since the implementation of masking in the classroom began two years ago, Catoctin Sun has seen an unprecedented drop in childhood illness. Teachers and children have had fewer colds & tummy bugs, as viral contagion / respiratory droplets were significantly reduced. If your child returns to school with a cough or other respiratory symptoms, s/he may be asked to temporarily wear a mask; if you do not wish for your child to wear a mask, please do not return until coughing or other residual symptoms completely recede. Health & safety of ALL children is our number one priority.

During pandemic or endemic, a limited number of make-up days can be scheduled in advance, depending upon daily classroom numbers. For staffing purposes, kindly note that our school needs a full 24-48 hour notice to schedule a make-up day.



ENROLLMENT GUIDELINES for POD GROUPINGS

T TH Little Acorns Pod turn 2 ½ years of age by September 1

MWF Sunflowers Pod turn 3 ½ years of age by September 1

Nature Kindergarten Pod turn 4 ½ - 5 ½ years of age by September 1

Maple Tree Pod - Elementary-Aged Learners turn 6 years of age by September 1

*Catoctin Sun accepts a limited number of enrollment slots for each pod, as an effort to keep ratios, activities, and age-groupings in-balance. This may be altered from year-to-year, and at the discretion of the Owner/Head of School & Co-Atelierista Ms. Natalie.



Program Offerings – 2022-2023

Welcome to Nature Preschool & Kindergarten, friends!

PRESCHOOL FOR YOUNG 3's – LITTLE ACORNS POD

For children in our Little Acorns pod, preschool is a social-personal call! It is their first experience in a preschool group dynamic. We practice following a routine, self-help skills, and stretch our expressive & receptive language. This pod engages in a play-based Project Approach and emergent learning. We develop pre-literacy skills through nature, nursery rhyme cadence and beginning recognition of the first letter/s of their name. Little Acorns practice hands-on math art, math play, plus science exploration. Teachers will engage children by modeling interactions and turn-taking in a warm, nurturing way.

- **LITTLE ACORNS POD – T TH:** 9:15 – 1:30 (\$92/wk; \$368/mo)
- **LITTLE ACORNS FULL DAY – T TH:** 9:15 – 3:00 (\$98/wk; \$392/mo)

PRESCHOOL for 3 ½ – 5 year olds – SUNFLOWERS POD

Children in this pod will participate in a project approach/emergent style of hands-on curriculum, based on *The Hundred Languages of Children*, a primer written by Reggio founders. This pod will focus on building wonder through play as learning, via multiple developmental domains while exploring the natural world - including pre-literacy, mathematical/cognitive & scientific reasoning skills.

“KWL” (**K**now, **W**ant to Know, and **L**earn) charts will be used to facilitate cumulative learning in child-led/teacher - guided themes. Problem-solving, expressive & receptive communication skills are of focus, as are the virtues of kindness and compassion toward self, nature. Emergent learning is built into every day at Catoctin Sun!

- **SUNFLOWERS POD – M W F:** 9:15 – 1:30 pm (\$101/wk; \$405/mo)
- **SUNFLOWERS FULL DAY – M W F:** 9:15 – 3:00 (\$146/wk; \$585/mo)

NATURE KINDERGARTEN POD (4 ½ -5 year-olds)

- **M T W Th F:** 9:15 – 3:00 (\$242/week; \$968/mo)

Our Kindergarten programs are full of rich language, differentiated, hands-on learning. NATURE/LITERACY JOURNALS will be a focus in this pod. Open-ended exploratories in nature, coupled with weekly fine motor and writing skills, literacy, mathematical & scientific reasoning activities. Social personal development is a big focus in our program; problem-solving skills, turn-taking, practicing compassion and kind words are key. Other aspects of our Kindergarten include:

- Kindergarteners also complete independent work and exploration in the classroom, along with parental commitment to nightly reading practice and sight words at home, as a supplement to school.
- Nature Kindergarten pod will receive 1 ½ - 2+ hours per day of small group & 1:1 guidance; outdoor nature walkabouts – both structured & unstructured are also included, as well as differentiated classroom table and group activities.
- Milestone assessment performed by a highly-experienced teacher. Quarterly Report Cards will be issued. Individual conferences are held virtually on a case-by-case basis, if needed. Daily parent-teacher communication; homework and class work folders sent home regularly along with reading material.
- Cat Sun utilizes a *Math Their Way* curriculum. Nature archiving, curation, and categorization is contextualized via regular outdoor walk-a-bouts.
- Catoctin Sun Nature Kindergarten is licensed through MSDE as an educational preschool & kindergarten program; parallel learning between the two groups occurs daily.
- Our school's Reggio Emilia philosophy encourages Kindergarteners to offer "helping hands" when appropriate, while interacting alongside younger children.

Kindergarten, cont'd –

Catoctin Sun Nature Kindergarten also includes:

- Curriculum that addresses standards for kindergarten, as found in ***Supporting Every Young Learner: Maryland's Guide to Early Childhood Pedagogy, Birth to Age 8:***
https://earlychildhood.marylandpublicschools.org/system/files/filedepot/3/pedagogyguide-learningstandards_042015_1.pdf
- Interpretation of the Common Core into a hands-on, nature-based program is key. We teach to the child, not to “the test.”

EXEMPTIONS TO KINDERGARTEN REQUIREMENT

A child who resides in Maryland and is 5 years old by September 1st shall attend a public or nonpublic kindergarten program regularly during the school year before entering first grade UNLESS the child is enrolled in an **alternative program setting**; this includes full-time in an MSDE-licensed childcare center's academic program. Catoctin Sun Nature Preschool can fulfill this requirement!

Parents, please notify FCPS or your local school system; you may be asked to submit:

- Your intention to enroll your 5-year-old in an alternative program.
- Some school systems may have a form to be completed.
- Verify enrollment in an alternative program by providing the name of the program – **Catoctin Sun Nature School**
- Location Address:
2 Chapel Place, Walkersville MD 21793
KINDLY NOTE: MAIL IS NOT DELIVERED to LOCATION ADDRESS
- MAILING address:
Catoctin Sun Nature Preschool & Kindergarten
4701 Sangamore Road
Suite 100N #2096
Bethesda, MD 20816
- Our license number: #161318

Additional info:

- The following year, and prior to enrolling in 1st grade, Catoctin Sun may be asked to provide **proof of attendance**; this is only upon request of the elementary school. This document may include enrollment dates & attendance record.
- Each school works a little differently; so far, none of our 1st graders' elementary schools have requested written documentation.

MAPLE TREE POD – ELEMENTARY LEARNERS (K-5)

Catoctin Sun's Maple Tree pod of elementary learners will attend two days per week, to offset the isolation of full-time virtual learning at home. Maple Tree pod will provide a social-emotional booster, breaks, snack, fresh-air, and 1:1 teacher time.

This program will:

- Monitor & check-in with your child as they work virtually at Cat Sun
- Encourage and check use of your child's daily planner to meet goals
- Support attendance of virtual classroom meetings, staying on task with projects, and schoolwork
- Encourage & monitor social-distancing measures & mask-wearing
- Provide additional school-age implements, including reading material, art/painting and crafting, games & activities, nature walkabouts, and other enrichments
- Breaktimes for "brain-breaks," hydration, and fresh air & green space
- Support each child in use of their personal (family provided) Chromebook / Wireless hot-spot
- Social-emotional interaction – connect with other children - in person!

NEED UNINTERRUPTED WORK-TIME?

The Maple Tree pod is a helpful option for parents needing blocks of uninterrupted time to work from home.

MAPLE TREE POD SCHEDULE

- **T TH** 9:00 – 3:00 (\$99/wk \$395/mo)
- Add +1 or more sibling for \$84/wk; \$335/mo – per each add'l child

MAPLE TREE POD, cont'd

NOTE: This pod has limited enrollment availability; siblings are encouraged to attend together at the discounted rate.

Daily goals include:

- Demonstrate effort & ability to accomplish daily school tasks via personal FCPS planner
- Participation in on-line class meetings
- Check-off daily class assignments
- Inspired by Character Counts, and the compassion of Mr. Rogers.
- Exercise and activity in large, grassy fields and under mature, shady trees
- Outdoor classroom time

Please reach out to Ms. Natalie at 240-457-3143 (text or call) or email catoctinsunpreschool@gmail.com for enrollment information, or any questions. See you in September!

