

# Nature-based Preschool Pilot

A Highlight of the past three years



# Who?

## **Vicki Thompson**

Deep Roots in MPS, Reggio Emilia Inspired/ Nature-based Teacher, Nature Mentor (Family Nature Playgroups), Board Member for Everyone Outside 501c3



Room 128 Paraprofessionals: Sydni Stafford, Samia Taleb

## **Sigrid Atherton**

MPS Teacher and parent with over a decade of experience in nature based learning.



Room 110 Paraprofessionals: Laura Girasuolo, Luke Piqol



# Timeline of Process

Planning	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Midyear SLO meetings with Administrator (Angela Caputo) - <b>March 2023</b></li><li>• Support from Principal (Colleen Fitzpatrick) and Preschool Coordinator (Jennifer Larson) - <b>April 2023</b></li><li>• Attended Child &amp; Nature Network conference in Colorado - <b>June 2023</b></li><li>• Outdoor Classroom Construction &amp; Indoor NB Classroom Setup - <b>Summer 2023</b></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>2023 - 2024 (Monthly hikes)</b></li><li>• Collaboration with Mrs. A adding second NBL classroom - <b>mid year in 2024</b></li><li>• <b>Implementation of Rockfall Grant</b></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>2024 - 2025 (Bi-weekly hikes)</b></li><li>• <b>Wesleyan Sustainability Dept.</b> student volunteers helped to create worm composting unit study</li><li>• Seasonal walking trips to LLF</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>2025 - present (Weekly Forest Friday hikes)</b></li><li>• <b>Wesleyan Education dept:</b> Early childhood practicum partnership</li></ul>

# Timeline of Process

**Special thanks to Natalie Forbes, Director of Grant Services, for her support and knowledge to move the project forward! (& Tara Connolly)**



# Pilot Year 1 2023-2024



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# Pilot Year 2 2024-2025





# Pilot Year 3 2025-2026



# Nature for All

## MPS Preschool Program

3 & 4 year olds

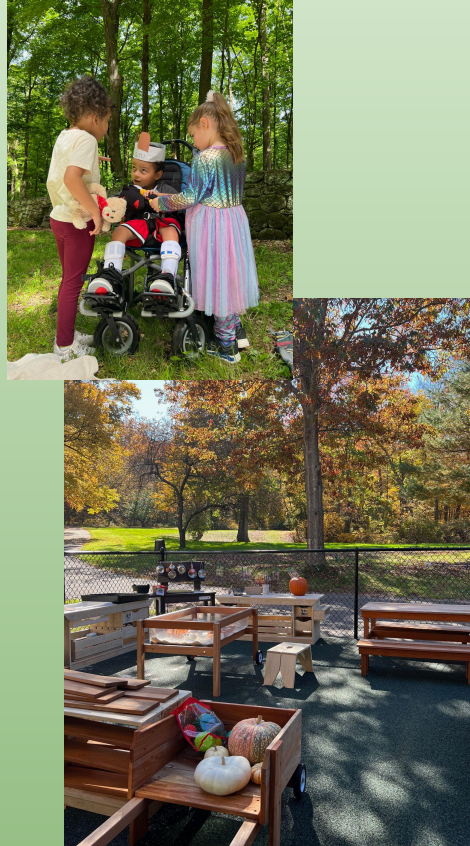
12 children in AM class

12 children in PM class

## Who we serve?

50% Children with IEP's

50% Role Models



## What makes our classrooms different for preschoolers and families?

- Outdoor Classroom space & natural learning areas
- Weekly hikes
- Community Partners & Field Trips
- Place-based/ Nature-based learning & Curriculum
- All-weather gear & learning tools from grant funding
- Daily nature routines



# Why nature-based?

- Natural way of learning, naturally occurring and seasonal topics of study
- Hands on learning experiences
- Place-based learning: Middletown, Snow School/ Wadsworth grounds
- Social-emotional wellbeing
- Real life experiences: Nature-based speakers and trips
- Eco-friendly practices and materials, natural materials
- Three nature-based environments for learning (inside, outside, and the beyond)

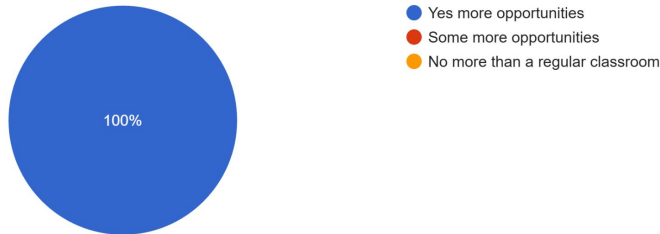


# BUILDING COMMUNITY: Classroom

- Parent participation
- Family learning (scavenger hunts, nature info, nature newsletters)
- UNIQUE OPPORTUNITIES IMPROVE PARENT FEEDBACK
  - Family Feedback

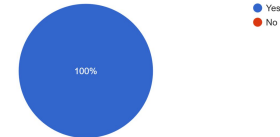
Do you feel "nature-based"/ "hands on learning" provides your child with more opportunities to support their learning and development?

18 responses



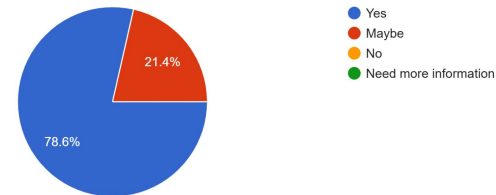
Middletown Public Schools provides gear for all-weather nature-based play and learning. By having this gear does your child have opportunities to explore in nature that they would otherwise not have?

14 responses



If provided the opportunity to enroll in a public nature-based learning program would you sign your child up?

14 responses

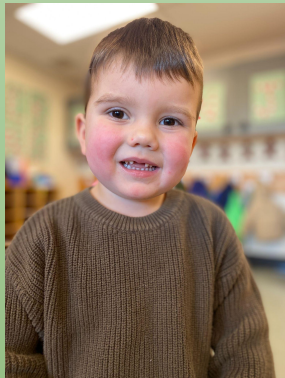


# Family Feedback

"The outdoor classroom and nature based learning is an incredible asset to N's learning and to the learning for the other students. I notice his behavior is more balanced when he's had time outside during the school day and I can attest personally that I was incredibly grateful for him to have had the opportunity to go out in the snow and explore because that's not something I am overly eager about to do in the winter. I think it's a fantastic way for kids to learn and I hope it stays for years to come."



"She learns a lot in exploring outside with her classmates. She asked us if we can go to forest this summer."



"I think all schools should have nature based learning"



"The nature based learning change has really helped our daughter continue to grow and open up more. The experiences have been invaluable to her development and she seems more engaged"



"My child loves this way of learning, as it aligns with his interests and keeps him engaged."



# Family Feedback

"Miss Thompson does a fantastic job to provide an amazing exploration based learned approach to her classroom. It's so beneficial to children to experience nature in a positive educational way. It's essential to keep this program going and growing for future generations of students."



"I love that he is now able to go on walks holding hands and follow directions. He doesn't run off as often as he did before he started the nature-based learning program."



"This program needs to be in every PreK in every school in Middletown! I understand Snow is unique in its landscape, but all students should have the opportunity to explore their surroundings and be able to make connections to their neighborhood. My son has gained vocabulary and understanding that he wouldn't have had otherwise if it weren't for Miss Vicki and this program. Miss Vicki included her families every single day with Parent Square updates which let our family have conversations about what my son was learning, as well as helping him expand his knowledge with conversations about nature topics that naturally happened while at home or even driving in the car. The unique opportunity that this program provided is going to help my child in years to come with understanding science, as well as created a love for science for him at an early age!"



We have enjoyed all aspects of this class. She tells us about all of the fun nature crafts and activities that they do on a daily basis. We have loved seeing the posts by Ms. Thompson and the pictures/videos that she shares.

# BUILDING COMMUNITY: Snow Preschool & Elementary

- Preschool opportunities
  - Nature-based speakers/ programs for all classes (live animals, nature programming, worm composting)
  - Shared science and nature tools/ materials
  - Preschool family hikes
- Snow School Green Team
  - Free Neighborhood Forest trees & indoor plants
  - Future plans include... greenhouse, school gardens/ grounds upkeep, school wide composting initiative



# BUILDING COMMUNITY: City of Middletown

- WESLEYAN
  - SUSTAINABILITY DEPT
  - LONG LANE FARM
  - EDUCATION DEPT
- EVERYONE OUTSIDE 501c3
- ROCKFALL FOUNDATION





# NEXT STEPS

- Program creation, possible expansion
  - Nature-based hands on experiences/ speakers (seasonal)
- Partnership with MHS VoAg



# Daily Dose of JOY







**Social & Emotional  
Development**



**Creative Arts**



**Science**



**Cognition**



**Physical Development &  
Health**



**Mathematics**



**Social Studies**

**Language & Literacy**

# Developmentally Appropriate Learning Across All Domains

*But make it active, hands on, and outdoors!*

VIDEO SLIDESHOW







September



October



November



December



January



February



March



April



May



June





THANK YOU!

# Handouts for BOE

Hike flyer invite

*Sledding 101*

*Math But Make It Active*

*Not just a walk in the woods!*

# MATHEMATICAL THINKING BUT MAKE IT **ACTIVE** and OUTDOORS



Today we were very busy in preschool.

We introduced a math activity that we called *the color sorting game*. We worked on identifying colors, matching colors, and sorting into groups. Starting with color cubes, then moving on to the autumn leaves!

We also worked really hard at staying with the group in the open grassy areas. This sorting activity can sometimes be done sitting at a table, but our nature-preschool teachers believe why sit and learn inside when you can learn the same things moving all around in peaceful beautiful nature!

Great job nature preschool class!

## CT ELDS STANDARDS

- SE.48.5 Regulation of Impulses and Behavior
- PH.36.1 Mobility
- M.48.10 Sorting and Classifying
- C.48.7 Attributes, Sorting, and Patterns
- C.48.17 Regulation of Attention and Impulses



# NOT JUST A WALK IN THE WOODS

## We are learning!

Every Friday we go for a walk in the woods. We call this weekly hike, **Forest Friday!** And we talk about it ALOT.



This routine embedded into the weekly schedule has created such an excitement for learning.

We wonder where we will hike to, what will we see or discover when we get there, what might we get to collect and take home?

Each week teachers plan some specific learning goals, a story, and sometimes a project. But in the 1.25 hours we head into the woods, the children truly take over and take agency in their own individual and group learning experiences. The possibilities are endless.

### CT ELDS STANDARDS

SE.48.11 Self concept and competency  
SE.48.14 Play/ friendship  
C.48.1 Curiosity and Initiative  
C.48.2 Engagement with environment, people and objects  
C.48.3 Eagerness to learn  
C.48.5 Cooperation with peers in learning experiences  
C.48.9 Problem Solving  
PH.36.1. Mobility  
PH.60.2 Large muscle movement and coordination  
S.36.5 Unity and diversity of life  
SS.48.5 People, places, environments  
S.36.9 Earth's features and the effects of weather and water  
& more!