

Poker Hill School Family Handbook
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Purpose of Handbook

The Family Handbook is intended to provide families with general information about Poker Hill School. The procedures, policies and practices described are subject to change as organizational needs and structures within Poker Hill School evolve. While it is not possible to foresee or attempt comment on every situation that may occur, we follow the State of Vermont Early Childhood Program Licensing Regulations. A copy can be reviewed at school or at the following website:

http://dcf.vermont.gov/sites/dcf/files/CDD/Docs/Licensing/CBCCPP_Regulations_FINAL.pdf

Mission Statement

- At Poker Hill School we are a circle of families and teachers that support and learn from each other.
- We believe that a rich environment fosters a passion for learning.
- We believe in the innate wisdom of children to choose their own learning path.
- We believe that access to the natural world inspires children's sense of wonder.
- We believe music and art bring children joy and create pathways for self-expression.
- We believe imaginative play is every child's right and is essential to healthy development.
- At Poker Hill School we grow, harvest, prepare, and serve healthy food, and we encourage children to be physically active every day.
- We believe children benefit and grow from having real chores, which contribute to the sustainability of the entire community.
- We encourage children to talk through problems as they arise.
- We believe in helping children realize that they are an important part of an interconnected world and that they can make a difference.

History

Poker Hill School, founded in 1972 by Lucille Ingalls and Ann Crocker, opened in a remodeled old barn in Underhill, Vermont. Lucille and Ann, two experienced educators, shared a commitment to child-directed learning, a philosophy that continues today. In 1978 Beth and David London and Gay Steimle purchased the school from Lu and Ann and continued to evolve the philosophy of child-directed learning in a farm-based setting. In March 1983, a fire destroyed the original school building, a renovated 100-year-old barn. The program relocated to St. Thomas Church while the school was rebuilt. After reopening in our current building in September 1983 the partnership of Steimle and the Londons was dissolved and a non-profit corporation, Poker Hill School, Inc. was established. During the 2011-2012 school year, the Board of Directors launched a Capital

Campaign to purchase the school building and grounds from Beth and David London.

Since its inception, Poker Hill School has served more than 1400 children, and today many “second generation” students attend. The State of Vermont has recognized Poker Hill School with awards for early childhood excellence. For the past four years, Poker Hill School has participated in Step Ahead Recognition System (STARS), Vermont’s quality recognition system for childcare, preschool, and afterschool programs. Poker Hill School has maintained a 4-star rating each year.

Philosophy

At Poker Hill School we are a circle of families and teachers that support and learn from each other. We believe that a rich environment fosters a passion for learning. We facilitate children’s growth by encouraging the children to make significant decisions that set their own individual paths of learning. We nurture and support each child’s learning rather than directing it. Children select their own chores, have large blocks of free playtime, and choose many of their own activities. Teachers reflect the children’s interests and needs in both our large and small group curriculum planning and respond to learning opportunities that arise over the course of each day. We support each child’s growth as an autonomous individual within a caring and democratic community. We strive to make each child feel respected and valued. We believe in helping children realize that they are an important part of an interconnected world and that they can make a difference. We strive to create for children a sense of responsibility both for their school community and also for the larger world around them. Children have real chores that contribute to the sustainability of the entire community and together with their families and the staff they participate in a number of community service activities. We believe that music, literacy, and the arts bring children joy and create essential pathways for self-expression. Music and art are an integral part of every day at Poker Hill School. We believe that imaginative play is every child’s right and is essential to his or her healthy development. Dramatic play is at the core of our curriculum. We believe that access to the natural world inspires children’s sense of wonder. We spend a lot of time outdoors in our extensive playground, exploring the rich natural environment of our fields, woods, ponds and stream. Children are also invited and encouraged to help in the gardens. At Poker Hill School we grow, harvest, prepare, and serve healthy food. We also encourage children to be physically active every day and provide many opportunities for large motor play.

Discipline

At Poker Hill School, we focus on preventing discipline problems from arising. This involves setting rules, informing children of consequences, enforcing rules consistently, and redirecting problematic behavior. We encourage children to feel empathy for each other, and we emphasize the Golden Rule: **treat others the way you would like to be treated**. Teachers mediate conflict situations, looking for win/win solutions whenever possible. We support children in talking through problems as they arise and engaging in conflict resolution. During large group meetings, the children help us develop other rules as needed. We aim to teach children to own their behavior and to make good choices.

Curriculum

The emotional and social well-being of each child is of prime importance to all of us at Poker Hill School. Secure and happy children can grow and flourish. Our goal is to help children separate comfortably from their parents and find school a safe and happy place to be. We value sociodramatic play because it stimulates children to play cooperatively together and to develop friendships. This play also allows children to express feelings, anxieties and work through emotional challenges.

The arts are also an integral part of the daily Poker Hill School experience. We value the process of art for its own sake, because through art the child is able to express his or her inner world of fantasies and feelings and can explore and order his or her perceptions of the world. We provide the time, space and materials for self-initiated art projects throughout the day. Our art projects, whether teacher-directed or child-initiated, are open-ended and allow each child to discover his or her own way without correction, comparison, or interruption. Music fills our days as we sing, play instruments, and dance. We believe that if we awaken the artist and the musician within each child, their lives will be incomparably enriched and fulfilled.

We believe that reading and writing, just like the spoken language skills that precede them, are developmental skills that emerge according to an internal clock within each learner. Our goal is to stimulate that emergence by providing an environment rich in print and in which reading and writing are used in meaningful ways. We read to the children every day, and we attempt to make books come alive through dramatizations and by using books as springboards for many other activities.

Our emphasis in mathematics is on laying the experiential foundation for mathematical concepts and relationships essential for later learning. This foundation is developed through the repeated manipulation, classification, and comparison of a multitude of concrete objects.

We support each child's physical development each day, emphasizing the development of strength, flexibility, balance, and body awareness as well as the development of specific skills. We offer large motor activities and provide large motor play during free time in both the morning and the afternoon. Our outdoor environment, including the playground, driveway for trike, bike and scooter riding, gardens, fields, stream, pond, and woods provide rich learning opportunities for all curriculum areas throughout the seasons. Teachers share responsibility for curriculum. We draw both from emergent curriculum practices as well as from *The Creative Curriculum for Preschool* to ensure we are developing and implementing rich curriculum for every child.

Board of Directors and Board Meetings

The Board is comprised of Poker Hill School community members, including current and former parents and guardians as well as staff. The Board governs Poker Hill School by developing, maintaining, and following policies and objectives, acquiring and approving allocation for sufficient resources, and is accountable to the public for the services of the school. **Board meetings are held once each month throughout the school year, typically the second Tuesday of each month (7-9 p.m. at Poker Hill School). All parents and guardians are invited to attend board meetings at any time throughout the school year.** There are up to nineteen Voting Members on the board at any time and you are eligible to become a Voting Member after attending three board meetings. Being a Voting Member is not a requirement-- parents and guardians are welcome to come to a board meeting at any time.

Meet the Poker Hill School Staff

Grace Marek, Director

Grace graduated from Oklahoma State University in 2000 with a degree in English Literature. She is currently pursuing a Master's Degree in Early Childhood Education Administration. Grace worked as a children's programming assistant at several libraries. She served as the Secretary and President of the Poker Hill Board of Directors. Grace taught at Poker Hill School from 2014 to 2017. She lives in Underhill with her husband, Tony, daughters, Annie and Zoey and dogs, Linus and Luna. She enjoys volunteering in the community, reading, traveling, and camping.

Stephanie Brogle, Full Time Teacher

Stephanie graduated from UVM in 2004 with a degree in Early Childhood Education with a concentration in Psychology. She has been working with children ages birth through kindergarten since graduation from UVM. She has been a licensed teacher since 2006 and continues to work on professional development credits. Stephanie joined Poker Hill School in 2011. She lives in Underhill with her partner Jake, and son Tate. When not busy with the kids she likes to hike, and run.—She also loves spending time with friends, and working on craft and repurpose projects. Family is also very important to her so she travels often throughout New England.

Katina Combs, Full-time teacher

Katina, mother of three former Poker Hill School students, Austin, 19, Mason, 16, and Dylan, 13, has a bachelor's degree in Elementary Education from Johnson State College. Katina joined Poker Hill School as a teacher in 2010. Katina enjoys scrap-booking, biking, and camping with her family.

Sandra Soucy, Full-time teacher

Sandra earned a Bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education from Boston College, her Master's in Early Childhood Education at Champlain College and has maintained a teaching license in New England since 1990. She has worked with young children for over thirty years in settings as diverse as a state-run home for children in Bethel, Alaska to a Jewish Community Center preschool in Brookline, MA. But she considers her greatest teaching accomplishment to be home schooling her own four children. Sandra lives in Fairfield with her husband. Sandra spends time outdoors in all seasons, and keeps active by running, skiing, biking, hiking and snowshoeing. She especially treasures time spent with her family.

Kat Hamilton, Part-time teacher and Aide

Kat has been teaching at Poker Hill School since 2008. Kat graduated from The University of Vermont in 2007 with a Bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education and Early Childhood Special Education. She concentrated her studies in Art and Communication, focusing on American Sign Language. Kat and her family, which includes her husband Jon,-step-daughter Satori, and daughters Ember and Nova, live in Underhill. Kat and her family enjoy animals, the outdoors, camping, and gardening.

Thea Korczykowski, Part-time teacher

Thea graduated from Northeastern University with a degree in Psychology in 2000. She moved to Alaska with her husband, Mike, where she taught preschool and studied Early Childhood Education at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. In 2010 they moved to Richmond, where they currently live with their two daughters, Lily and Charlotte, and their two dogs, husky Merlin and Oko. Thea enjoys sewing, reading, art projects with her girls, restoring old furniture, and being outside.

Kristen Vella, *Part-time teacher*

Kristen lives in Essex with her husband, Chuck, and two children, William and Kate. She graduated from Johnson State College with a double major in Elementary Education and Psychology in 2004. After working as a preschool teacher for several years, Kristen decided to stay home with her children as they both attended Poker Hill School. Currently Kristen is pursuing her Master's Degree in Early Childhood Education through Champlain College. She enjoys nature, reading, camping, and traveling the world with her family.

Meghan Conroy, *Part-time Teacher*

Meghan graduated from St. Lawrence University in 2004 with a degree in English Literature and a minor in Outdoor Studies. In 2009, she graduated from Oregon State University with a Master of Arts in Teaching with the focus on Early Childhood and Elementary Education. Meghan has worked in a variety of school settings including preschool, elementary school, and high school. Meghan lives in Underhill with her husband, Joe, their three children, River, Eden, and Wilder and their two dogs, Petey and Jakey. She enjoys reading, running, baking, and being outdoors.

Buddy Dubay, *Music Teacher and After School Teacher*

Buddy graduated from Mount Mansfield Union High School in 1979 and then earned a degree in Elementary Education from the University of Vermont. He has been teaching young children in Vermont since 1984. He has been a teacher at Poker Hill School since 1998. Buddy loves music. He plays several instruments and sings. He likes gardening, swimming, and traveling.

Katie Amadon, *Administrative Director*

Katie joined Poker Hill School as the director in 2011 after working with children and families for over 15 years in many different capacities, including teaching preschool. Katie graduated from UVM with a degree in Early Childhood Education and received a Master of Social Work degree from Wheelock College. Katie and her husband Rob live in Cambridge with their daughters Charlotte and Willa, and black lab Calvin. Katie enjoys sharing her love for the outdoors with her family, reading, gardening, and cooking.

Beth & David London, *Buildings & Grounds Maintenance*

Beth and David both graduated from the University of Pennsylvania with degrees in education. Together they ran Poker Hill School from 1978-2012. They have two daughters and three grandchildren. They continue to live across the street from the school caring for the animals, gardens and grounds. Your children will see them often and work with them in the gardens.

Important Phone Numbers

Poker Hill School	899-3716
Grace Marek, Director	777-2983
Chantal Cardinal, Board President	734-4757
David London (Buildings & Grounds)	355-9395

The Role of Families at Poker Hill School

Poker Hill School is a community of families: parents, guardians, children, staff, siblings and extended family, all contributing to a vibrant, caring school environment for three to five-year-old children. Families play an essential role by supporting their child's school experience. While we can not welcome families to participate in our program during the 2020-2021 school year, we do encourage all families to work with staff and find creative ways to share home to school connections. If you have a special story, tradition, or custom that you would like to share, please be in touch with any of the teachers to create a way to integrate this into an in-school activity. Teachers will share information and snapshots of daily activities so that families can talk about in-school happenings at home.

Communication

- At Poker Hill School, we will use the Brightwheel app to share information about your child's day. Teachers will use the app to provide you with a brief list of the activities offered as well as occasional photos so that you can see your child at play. Teachers will update information daily. Please be sure to check the Brightwheel app daily for important messages as well as information about your child's day to day activities.
- The director will use email communicating key information about the school, policies, or changes to our schedule. Please be sure that your contact information is updated so that you do not miss any important notices.
- All families are invited and encouraged to maintain contact with the staff by using Brightwheel or through email. Since adults will not be allowed to enter the building during the 2020-2021 school year, it is more important than ever that teachers and families work together to support regular communication. Please realize that the teachers' priority is to be present with children throughout the school day, but we will make every effort to respond to parent requests and communication as quickly as possible.
- At Poker Hill School, we support families in many ways. We have a lending library of family resources. We offer a book group throughout the year. We work together to support our community and to care for others. We also take part in other community events throughout the year and families are invited to participate.

Conferences

Teachers will write progress reports for each child twice a year, in the fall and in the spring. Conferences will be offered by each child's group teacher in the fall and spring. Teachers will contact families to schedule a convenient time.

Conferences can also be set up throughout the year to discuss your child's development. Conferences will be conducted via video conferencing to minimize contact within the school.

Due to COVID-19, pick up and drop off policies have been amended. Please note that the following procedures will be in place for the duration of the 2020-2021 school year:

Drop Off

- All adults must be wearing facial coverings at all times on Poker Hill grounds. Families must remember to have masks with them as they should be wearing them any time that they are on the school property and we will not have them available for you.
- Families will be required to check in their child(ren) using the Brightwheel app. This documents child(ren)'s time of arrival and completion of health screening. All families must have access to the Brightwheel app for the 2020-2021 school year. Once your child has gone through the health screening process, you will be reminded to check in your child using the app. More information and an invitation to use the Brightwheel app will be available soon.
- Families will park and approach the health check-in station with their child(ren), where a staff member will greet the child(ren). Parents and other family members will not be allowed inside the building. Prior to parents leaving the site, a trained staff member will take the temperature of their child(ren) and complete a health screening if parents have not already completed the screening in Brightwheel.
- Families will walk their child(ren) to the designated entrance or play-ground area to deliver their child(ren) and child(ren)'s lunchbox, water bottle, extra clothes, etc. to a teacher and say goodbye. While we understand that transitions are challenging, please do not linger on the play-ground or at the door.
- If another family is at the check-in station when you arrive, please wait in or at your car until they have finished. While you wait please answer the health screening questions and check your child in on the Brightwheel app.
- Children and staff will be required to wash their hands immediately upon entering the building and regularly throughout the day. When children are received for drop-off, they will be escorted into the nearest bathroom where their hands will be washed prior to being brought to their classroom/child care area.

Pick up

- Upon your arrival to pick up your child, adults will wait outside of the building at your designated pick-up point to pick up children. They will then message your child(ren)'s teacher using the Brightwheel app, then sign your child(ren) out on the app. Doing so will limit direct contact and help us to maintain physical distancing. The child(ren)'s teacher will bring the child(ren) to the designated pick-up point, entrance or exit. All information about your child's day will be shared through the Brightwheel app.
- Playgrounds will not be open for family use after a child has been picked up. Families must leave the school property after their child has been signed out and picked up.
- Staff shall release a child only to persons authorized by the parents or guardians. When a person authorized to pick up a child is unknown to staff, his/her identity must be verified prior to releasing the child. Names for all persons authorized to pick the child up should be listed on the medical and emergency form.

Also, please note the following:

- Any adult dropping off or picking up a child, including grandparents, babysitters, nannies, and friends must have access to the Brightwheel app so that they can complete the online check-in and drop-off procedure.
 - No idling vehicles allowed.
 - Road parking must be on the school side of the road.
 - **No parking on the road between November 1 and April 30.** The town will tow at your expense.
 - We have a small parking lot so please park respectfully.
 - We also have a second parking lot just beyond the barn and garden.
 - Drive slowly and cautiously while entering the parking lot.

Typical Daily Schedule for 2020-2021 school year

7:30-8:00am	drop off for children in extended care
8:15-9:00am	drop off for children in regular preschool
8:00-9:00am	morning free play in child's mega-group space
9:00am	bell rings for clean up/ hand washing/ toileting
9:15am	morning snack (provided by families)
9:30-11:30am	morning activity time
11:30am	bell rings for clean up/ hand washing/toileting
11:45am	lunch (provided by families)
12:15-1:00pm	outdoor free play time with child's mega-group
1:00pm	bell rings for transition to indoors/hand washing/toileting
1:15-2:30pm	small group time/quiet time
2:30-3:00pm	pick-up/ families will be assigned pick-up times
2:30-4:30	extended care

Snow Days and Delayed Openings

Snow days and weather related delayed openings are called in conjunction with the Mount Mansfield Unified Union School District (MMUUSD). If there is a delayed opening, Poker Hill School will open at 8:30 (no before care). Drop off times will remain staggered. Your drop off time will be 1 hour later. We never have early closings and we do not make up snow days in June.

Prolonged School Closures

- Prolonged cancellation periods of public school systems, such as the COVID-19 closures, will be announced by the Governor of Vermont. Poker Hill School will close in conjunction with the MMUUSD.
- **Please understand that due to the constantly evolving nature of state and local responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, Poker Hill school may close for a number of reasons, including an incidence or outbreak of the virus within the school or lack of staffing. School closures will be communicated with families as quickly as possible.**
- If Poker Hill School is closed for an extended period of time, longer than one week, we will implement a distance learning plan. This will include emailing resources for home learning and engagement, weekly curriculum ideas, as well as weekly video conferencing/group time with group teachers.
- An extended closure may result in Poker Hill School closing for the school year.
- There will be no make-up days offered due to school closure, illness, snow days or any other reason.

Attendance Policy

Poker Hill School has contractual agreements with school districts for the purpose of providing high quality and developmentally appropriate early education services to pre-kindergarten aged children. Under this contract we are required to report daily attendance records to the school districts and notify them if your child has been absent for an average of one pre-k day/week over the course of one month. We are required to communicate to you in writing that you risk the loss of pre-k funding, and where necessary develop a plan for attendance and tuition payment. There will be no make-up days offered.

Wellness Policy

Due to COVID-19, special measures will be taken to maintain a healthy environment for all members of the Poker Hill community. We ask that you read, understand, and follow the guidelines set by the CDC, the State of Vermont, and in this handbook.

Understanding of Risk: COVID-19 is easily transmitted and has spread within our Vermont community. As the Health Department works on contact tracing, increased testing, and eventually-- vaccines, physical distancing, and proper hand hygiene are the main ways for communities to limit the spread of this virus. Children, Families, and Staff understand that there is a potential risk of COVID-19 exposure in attending community programs such as ours and do so under their own free will and with understanding of the following policies and procedures. Our program is not able to guarantee an environment free of COVID-19, or any other viruses, sickness or disease. We will do our best to adhere to the health and safety guidelines set forth by the Vermont Department of Health:

<https://www.healthvermont.gov/sites/default/files/documents/pdf/COVID19-Health-Guidance-Childcare-Summer-Programs.pdf>

In order to provide an environment which promotes health and safety for all, we will be observing the following state recommended guidelines:

- We will separate children into group sizes that meet VDH guidelines and Child Care Regulations.
- We will not share equipment between classrooms and will clean equipment between uses.
- All groups will remain consistent and separated from other groups to reduce the number of children in one area and to reduce the possibility of viral transmission.
- Staff will wear facial coverings. Children are not required to wear facial coverings.
- Staff will disinfect high-touch surfaces, such as door handles, light switches, faucets, toys and games that children play with according to the Caring for our Children National Health and Safety Performance Standards checklist.
- We will perform an enhanced deep cleaning every night in all areas, on all touched surfaces.
- Staff will have access to anti-bacterial hand sanitizers and disposable gloves and use them as needed.
- Staff will wash/scrub their hands and children's hands regularly throughout the day (noted by the CDC as the most effective preventive measure).
- No program tours will be given until further notice to reduce the number of visitors in the building.

Health Screenings and Monitoring for COVID-19 Exposure and Symptoms:

Each day a health screening for your child will include questions regarding COVID-19 exposure and symptoms. We will continue to follow up to date guidance for Vermont schools (found in A Strong and Healthy Start: Health Guidance for Vermont Schools). As of August 11, 2020, questions include:

- Has your child(ren) been exposed to anyone who has been diagnosed with COVID-19 within the past 14 days? (Exposure is defined as: close contact with a person who has COVID-19 within the last 14 days. Based on our current knowledge, a close contact is someone who was within 6 feet of an infected person for at least 15 minutes starting from 48 hours before illness onset until the time the patient is isolated.)
- Does your child show any COVID-19 symptoms?
Symptoms include:
 - Cough
 - Fever (100.4 or greater)
 - Shortness of breath
 - Chills
 - Fatigue
 - Muscle pain or body aches
 - Headache
 - Sore throat
 - Loss of taste or smell
 - Congestion or runny nose
 - Nausea, vomiting or diarrhea (diarrhea is defined as frequent loose or watery stools compared to child's normal pattern)

Children who have COVID-19 exposure, or signs/symptoms of COVID-19 must not come to school. If symptoms are identified at drop off, adult dropping off child will leave with child(ren).

If symptoms develop at school, parents/guardians will be notified immediately and children must be picked up as soon as possible.

Facial Coverings

Adults dropping off and picking up children are required to wear masks. Staff will also be wearing masks or face shields. At this time, children are not required to wear masks while at school as masks are not developmentally appropriate for all 3, 4 and 5 year olds. However, if your family prefers your child(ren) to wear a mask we will certainly support your choice. Please also realize that we will regularly reassess this policy and may require children to wear masks if governmental or health guidance changes. If your child brings a mask to school, the following must be followed:

- Masks should be clearly identified with their name or initials (labeling top/bottom and front/back is encouraged).
- Masks with ties are not recommended.
- Child should be able to put on and take off his/her mask by themselves.
- When not in use, masks should be stored in individually labeled containers or paper bags. Masks will be sent home each day and should be washed after every day of use and/or before being used again, or if visibly soiled.

- If a child is unable to keep the mask on, or is continually touching the mask or putting it in his/her mouth, the mask will be put away.

Sick Policy

- Anyone diagnosed with COVID-19 or awaiting test-results should self-isolate until:
 - It's been 3 full days of no fever without the use of fever-reducing medication, and
 - Other symptoms have improved, and
 - At least 7 days have passed since symptoms first appeared.
- If symptoms begin during our program we will contact you or your emergency contact to come pick-up your child immediately.
- People with a temperature greater than 100.4 F should be sent home until they have had no fever for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medications (e.g., Advil, Tylenol).
- **No sick children may attend school.**
- If there are specific health concerns, chronic disease, or complex social or emotional dynamics in the home that may affect your child's participation in our program, please contact us so we may discuss your specific situation.
- If there is a confirmed case of COVID in our program, we will consult with the Vermont Department of Health at 802-863-7240 and make further decisions regarding closure or dismissal according to their recommendations. We will communicate with families as soon as possible regarding any changes.

If a child has been treated with an antibiotic for an infection they may come to school 24 hours after the treatment has begun. We can administer medication but we do need written permission and instructions from a parent or guardian. A teacher can get you a medication permission form and sign-up sheet for medication. Please be sure to talk to a teacher, sign medication in, put the medication in the refrigerator or medication cabinet in the kitchen and pick it up there as well. Never put medication in a child's lunch box or cubby. For medications kept at school on an ongoing basis (such as an epi-pen), these are kept in the upper cabinet in the kitchen, and still need to be signed in when they first come to school. These medications also need to be in original prescribed boxes/bottle.

Children who travel to or arrive from out-of-state must follow Agency of Commerce and Community Development (ACCD) and Health Department guidance around quarantine before returning to childcare and/or school age camps/care, which includes travel out-of-state at any point during the year. More information is available on the Vermont Department of Health's COVID-19 travel site and the ACCD website.

Clothing for School

Please make sure that children are dressed properly for the weather because we plan to spend as much time outdoors as possible, including meals. We also paint, cook, and get involved with mud and other messy substances so we ask that children wear clothing that allows them to explore and play without worrying about getting their clothes dirty.. Please choose clothing that children can handle by themselves. Please **clearly label** all clothing. We often hike, run and climb outdoors so everyone needs sneakers or similar shoes so they can fully participate in this part of the program. **NO FLIP-FLOPS AT SCHOOL!** Flip-flops do not keep your child's feet safe while at school. Any sandals should have a back strap to hold them securely on their feet. Shoes are required at all times so when the weather requires boots please also send shoes to wear indoors.

Your child should come prepared for school with the following items (please note that these items may be returned at the end of each day for washing):

- At least 2 complete changes of clothing, including pants, socks, underwear and shirt
- One extra layer for extended days outdoors, such as a light jacket or sweatshirt
- Several pairs of extra socks and an extra pair of shoes, in case these get wet in morning dew or on extended hikes
- A nap roll or blanket and pillow for quiet time (will be returned at the end of each day for washing)

Each child will have a small plastic bin for keeping a change of clothes. We ask that each child also have a large tote bag or backpack for carrying additional clothing, outerwear, and their blanket or nap roll. Backpacks and tote bags must be clearly labeled and children should be able to manage them independently. Since families will not be allowed inside of the building this year, it is especially important for children to manage their own gear during drop off and pick up times. Please practice packing and unpacking backpacks and tote bags with your child in preparation for the school year.

Winter weather clothing is always a challenge for families, children and teachers alike. Encourage children to be as independent as possible when preparing for winter weather. Provide clothing that s/he can do her/himself like slip on or Velcro shoes and snaps rather than buttons. Please help children practice dressing skills at home. At school we will help children set up their cubby so that clothes can be easily accessed by the child without adult assistance. Everything will be taken out of the backpack and we hang the snow pants on the outside of the jacket so that the child puts these on first. We will check children's extra clothing box regularly and let you know if additional clothes are needed, but please send

clothes appropriate to the season as the seasons change. Please **LABEL** everything.

Toilet Training

Children should be toilet trained prior to beginning the school year. Please encourage independence in this area so they will be ready to begin the year with us. We strongly discourage the use of Pull-ups at Poker Hill School. This product, which may feel much like a diaper to many children, may inhibit a child's recognition of their toileting needs. If your child is not fully toilet trained at the start of school, we encourage you to review your child's needs and discuss a plan or solution with Grace.

Toys From Home

Toys from home should not be brought to school. If a child does bring a toy from home, they will be asked to keep it in their backpack until the end of the day. However, we understand that certain items (blankets etc.) are developmentally appropriate and function as a security item. If your child has an item like this, please let the preschool staff know, and it may be brought to school until your child is ready for gentle parting. No toys from home will be allowed in group spaces; they must be left in the child's cubby or backpack.

Snacks and Lunches

Families are responsible for sending snacks and lunches. Please send your child with a lunchbox and drink container that he/she can open. Children attending the regular preschool program will need one labeled morning snack. Children attending the extended care day will need two snacks, one labeled AM and one labeled PM. Please clearly label snacks so that we can help children recognize which foods are meant for snacks and which are meant for lunch. You might consider decorating your child's lunch box so that it is easily recognizable. Clearly write your children's name on the outside of his/her lunchbox. We will not be refrigerating or reheating lunches, so please pack a small cooler or ice pack and be sure that all foods packed may be eaten cold or at room temperature.

Please **label** all reusable containers as well. We highly recommend reusable containers instead of prepackaged foods. These foods are expensive and contribute to the excessive waste our society generates. Also, prepackaged foods are generally difficult for children to open themselves and have no way to close if the child doesn't finish eating it. If you forget to send lunch to school we will prepare one. Please also send a water bottle for children to use throughout the day at school.

Poker Hill School will decide before the start of each school year if there is a need to be peanut and tree nut free. This means that in order for school to be safe for everyone, families must read labels carefully.

If Poker Hill School needs to be peanut/tree nut free, please:

Do not send any foods (packaged or homemade) that have been made with peanuts or tree nuts, OR foods that “may contain” peanuts or tree nuts, OR are “manufactured in a plant with peanut or tree nut foods.” With everyone’s help we can keep Poker Hill School peanut and tree nut free.

See the following links for information about foods and ingredients to avoid. You may be surprised, this includes pesto and veggie burgers so please read carefully!

<http://www.eatingwithfoodallergies.com/treenutallergy.html><http://www.eatingwithfoodallergies.com/peanutallergy.html>

Also, here is a link to safe snacks free of peanuts and tree nuts:

<http://snacksafely.com/snacklist.pdf>

Another resource is <http://www.eatingwithfoodallergies.com>

This information will be available at school too, and we can always offer suggestions. We all have the responsibility for keeping our children safe, and we appreciate your help.

Foods that are round and about the size of a nickel are easy for preschoolers to choke on. Prevent choking by avoiding these foods or cutting them into small pieces or different shapes. **Pieces of food should not be round or bigger than ½ inch.** A few common hazards include grapes, cherry tomatoes, hot dogs, cheese sticks, carrots or baby carrots. If you send these foods to school, cut them small and lengthwise so they are not round. For more information visit: <http://www.choosemyplate.gov/preschoolers/food-safety/choking-hazards.html>

Holidays & Special Events

Holidays, customs, and traditions among Poker Hill School families are diverse and so we do not sponsor or endorse any particular set of holiday practices. We do however enjoy exposing the children to these diverse holiday traditions and so we encourage parents to share their specific traditions with the group. We recognize the common themes of light and giving that run through the December holidays and so with that in mind we offer a Solstice Celebration for the whole family (see below for more information).

Birthday Celebrations and Birthday Books

If a child's birthday is during our school year we generally celebrate it on the school day closest to the actual birthday. Summer birthday celebrations are arranged with the child's group teacher, and are typically celebrated at the child's half birthday. At Poker Hill School we celebrate birthdays with special songs, a special card or craft made by the children and a birthday book. **Birthday books** are gifts given by the birthday child's family to the school. These books are inscribed with a special plaque. They are an important part of our library and we are very grateful for them. We will keep a collection of birthday books we would like to receive at school that you may purchase (price is typically on the book), you may also choose a favorite from home or the bookstore, or our Amazon Wish List. We respectfully ask that birthday cupcakes or other treats **not** be sent to school. If every family sends in cupcakes it means over seventy different school days when sweet treats are served and this seems excessive. Also, we would like to promote the idea that celebrations can occur without sweet treats.

Publicly Funded Pre-Kindergarten (Act 166)

Poker Hill School is a qualified prekindergarten program through the State of Vermont and therefore children enrolled in Poker Hill School are encouraged to apply for and receive publicly funded tuition (10 hours a week, for 35 weeks during the school year). It is important that families apply through their school district in order to receive this funding. The state tuition rate to be paid to community-based private pre-K providers (such as Poker Hill School) on behalf of children attending prekindergarten during the 2020-21 school year is \$3,445.00. If you have any questions regarding Act 166, please visit <https://www.vtpublicprek.info/act-166>

Tuition 2020-2021

Annual tuition is set each year by the Board of Directors, and is then split evenly into nine payments after the 10% deposit is paid. Annual tuition covers the Poker Hill School day from 8:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. The first payment due is a non-refundable deposit (a payment equal to 10% of your total yearly tuition) to secure your child's spot. The deposit is due for new families on May 10th and for returning families on June 10th. The remaining nine payments are billed September through May. Families will be billed monthly by the first of the month. If your child is in the extended care preschool group, you will be billed for extended care in the following months invoice. We do have financial assistance through both cleaning barter and scholarship. Please email the director if you would like more information about financial assistance.

PAYMENT SCHEDULE

<u>Annual Tuition</u>	<u>10% Deposit</u>	<u>ACT 166 / PreK Tuition (paid by school district if approved)</u>	<u>Remaining Tuition</u>	<u>Monthly Tuition (due by the 10th of each month)</u>
<u>\$4970</u>	<u>\$497</u>	<u>\$3445</u>	<u>\$1028</u>	<u>\$114.22</u>

- Payments can be made directly from your bank, through our BrightWheel app, or mailed directly to PHS (208 Poker Hill Road Underhill, VT 05489).
- The Tax Identification # for Poker Hill School is 03-0289409

Extended Care

Poker Hill School provides extended care for children between 7:30-8:30 a.m. and 2:30-4:30. Extended care is used as needed and is billed separate from tuition at a rate of \$8.00/hour. We will not bill for morning extended care due to staggered drop off. Extended care is calculated at the end of the month, rounding up to the nearest half hour each day. Extended care costs will be included in the following monthly invoice.

Poker Hill School Tuition Policies 2020-2021

In order to prioritize the health and safety of your children and our community, PHS is prepared for short (a few days) and extended closures in the upcoming year. Closure may result from a positive COVID-19 case in the PHS community, state guidance to close, or inability to staff the program due to illness.

- If you disenroll your child (due to COVID related guidelines, regulations and/or policy) on or prior to August 10th your deposit will be refunded. If you disenroll your child after August 10th, your deposit will not be refunded.
- Families are responsible for paying full tuition if PHS is open at least half of the scheduled days of the month. If a closure period extends past 1/2 of the days of a month, families are responsible for paying 50% of their monthly tuition. (\$57.11 for 2 day program). If a family does not pay 50% of monthly tuition during an extended closure, their child will be disenrolled and their spot will not be available when PHS reopens later in the year.
- Paying 50% of monthly tuition during an extended closure (more than 1/2 of the days in a month) will hold a child's spot until PHS re-opens.

- We will provide online curriculum, support and resources for closures lasting more than one week to all families paying 50% of monthly tuition.
- If a family pays 50% tuition during an extended closure to hold their child's spot, but the extended closure results in closure for the year, the tuition paid will not be refunded. The portion of the tuition paid during closure not only held the spot but ensured delivery of online curriculum.
- If a child disenrolls at any point during the year, including during an extended closure, any payments made (including deposit and monthly tuition) will not be refunded. In addition, once a child is disenrolled, the family will not be included in the online curriculum, resources and support offered during closure. If you are considering disenrolling your child due to economic hardship at any point in the year, including during an extended closure, please talk with Grace as there may be scholarship funds available.
- If a family has already paid for a full month of tuition prior to extended closure within that same month, 50% of the payment will be automatically applied to the following month. If you choose to disenroll your child, you must do so before the first of the following month in order to receive a 50% refund.
- If an extended closure occurs in May, and you have already paid May tuition in full, you may request a refund for 50% of May tuition, apply the 50% to the following year or donate that amount to PHS. In this case, your child will remain enrolled through the end of the school year and receive the online curriculum.
- Tuition rates will still apply if a child is out sick.

Financial Assistance

Poker Hill School is committed to ensuring that children and families are not deterred from enrolling in or attending Poker Hill School due to financial barriers. We offer Financial Assistance in the form of scholarship and barter, and also encourage families to seek assistance through the state when eligible. Applications will be due in the spring, for the following year. Applications are reviewed and awards are determined by the Scholarship Committee.

The Lu Ingalls, Brooks Baker, Sam Leonard Memorial Scholarship Fund is in place to help families defray some of the tuition costs if needed. Scholarship funds are raised annually through fundraising efforts and through donations made to the school by families and friends of the school. The Scholarship Committee works hard to distribute available funds as equitably as possible, according to need. We ask families to pursue every means of raising tuition on their own, including additional employment, support from family and accessing other resources, including state financial assistance, before requesting financial assistance from Poker Hill School.

For information on **Vermont State Child Care Financial Assistance** eligibility requirements please visit <http://dcf.vermont.gov/benefits/ccfap>.

Collection of Tuition & Late Payment Policy

- Payment is due the 10th of every month.
- If payment isn't received by the end of the month, Poker Hill School (Director, Administrative Director, or Treasurer) will contact the family to create a payment plan for the full tuition.
- If by the 10th of the following month, payment has not been received and/or a payment plan hasn't been set, a second notice will be sent.
- By the end of the second month, if payment arrangements have not been set, a final notice will be sent and the child's enrollment will be reviewed by the board.
- If no payment plan can be established, the child may be withdrawn from the school as a result of the late tuition.
- Families may apply for (additional) scholarship funding as part of the payment plan, to be reviewed by the Poker Hill School Scholarship Committee.
- Families may contact Poker Hill School at any time to create a payment plan.
- If there is a balance due at the end of the year, the family may not enroll a child or sibling for the following years and their spot will be given to another child.

What happens if my child does not finish the school year?

When families accept a spot at Poker Hill School they are committing to paying tuition through the school year. All families are expected to pay a nonrefundable deposit of 10% of the annual tuition when accepting a spot at Poker Hill School. In the rare case that children leave prior to the end of the school year, 60 days notice is required and you are responsible for paying tuition through those 60 days. During this time Poker Hill School will try to fill your spot. In the case that the spot cannot be filled, you are responsible for paying tuition for the remainder of the school year. You may petition the Finance Committee of the Poker Hill School Board of Directors to waive the tuition cost beyond the initial 60 days. Please see the director with any questions about this policy.

Grievance Policy

Any Poker Hill School parent or guardian is entitled to bring a grievance before the Executive Committee of the Board. While acknowledging that it is always best to try to resolve problems through informal communications, if a person desires

to file a formal grievance, the grievance must be filed in writing to the Board President within thirty days after the person filing had knowledge of the occurrence that gave rise to the grievance. The Executive Committee of the Board will discuss the grievance and determine appropriate actions as necessary. The Board President must provide a written decision/follow-up within one week after the next Executive Committee meeting to the person who filed the grievance. In the event that there is a conflict-of-interest between the grievant and a member of the Executive Committee that member will remove him or herself from the final decision making process.

Child Abuse Reporting

All Poker Hill School employees are required by state law to report suspected child abuse or neglect to the Vermont Department for Children and Families, Family Services Division (DCF, FSD) within 24 hours of the suspected event. Vermont law (33.V.S.A. 49, § 4912) defines an abused or neglected child as one whose physical health, psychological growth and development, or welfare is harmed or is at substantial risk of harm by the acts or omissions of his or her parent or other person responsible for the child's welfare. An abused or neglected child also means a child who is sexually abused or at substantial risk of sexual abuse by any person. (For more information see <http://dcf.vermont.gov/protection/reporting/mandated>). Poker Hill School employees who suspect abuse or neglect must make concerted effort to inform the Director prior to making the report, or as soon after as possible. The employee will provide appropriate documentation to DCF, FSD, and discuss the case with the staff as a whole. The Director will maintain Specialized Child Care Provider status. Every teacher will receive training regarding Reporting Suspected Abuse & Neglect and will sign a statement of understanding.

Emergency Response Plan

The Emergency Response Plan provides basic preparedness and planning information in event of an emergency such as floods, ice storms, toxic spills, etc. It is the responsibility of Poker Hill School, Inc. to communicate changes in the ERP to all Poker Hill School, Inc. Staff and Families. If you would like to see the Emergency Response Plan, please email or speak with the director.

Emergency Fire Drills and Procedures

Emergency evacuation drills are practiced monthly by PHS students, staff and volunteers. All staff members are educated on the emergency response plan.

This includes, locations of all emergency phone numbers, and contacts for students. All teachers are CPR and First Aid certified.

Poker Hill School Calendar (2020-2021)

Tuesday, September 1 st	Board of Directors Meeting (7:00-9:00 pm) via ZOOM
Thursday, September 10 th	School opens for Monday Thursday group
Friday, September 11 th	School opens for Tuesday Friday group
Tuesday, October 13 th	Board of Directors Meeting (7:00-9:00 pm) via ZOOM
Tuesday, November 12 th	Board of Directors Meeting (7:00-9:00 pm) via ZOOM
November 23rd-27th	School Closed – School Recess
Tuesday, December 8 th	Board of Directors Meeting via ZOOM
December 23 st -January 1 st	School Closed - School Recess
Monday, January 4 nd	School Re-Opens
Tuesday, January 12 th	Board of Directors Meeting (7:00-9:00 pm) via ZOOM
Monday, January 18 th	School Closed – Staff Professional Development
Tuesday, February 9 th	Board of Directors Meeting (7:00-9:00 pm) via ZOOM
February 22 nd -March 2 nd	Winter Recess
Thursday, March 4 th	School Re-Opens
Tuesday, March 9 th	Board of Directors Meeting via ZOOM
Tuesday, April 13 th	Board of Directors Meeting via ZOOM
April 19 th - April 23 th	School Closed - Spring Recess
May 6th and 7th	Teacher Appreciation Days
Tuesday, May 11 th	Annual Meeting of the Board of Directors via ZOOM
Monday, May 31 th	School Closed- Memorial Day
Tuesday, June 8 th	Board of Directors Meeting - if needed
Thursday, June 10 th	Last day of school for Monday Thursday group
Friday, June 11 th	Last day of school for Tuesday Friday group
Monday, June 14th	Teacher In-Service