

# **Poker Hill School Family Handbook**

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## **PURPOSE OF THE 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 to 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](http://dcf.vermont.gov/sites/dcf/files/CDD/Docs/Licensing/CBCCPP_Regulations_FINAL.pdf)

## **ABOUT POKER HILL SCHOOL**

### **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 1500 children, and today many “second generation” students attend. The State of Vermont has recognized Poker Hill School with awards for early childhood excellence. Since 2014 , 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 5-star rating since 2022.

## **Philosophy Statement:**

At Poker Hill School we are a circle of families and teachers that support and learn from one another. We know that children learn through play and support play-based learning in everything we do. We believe that young children learn best when they feel safe, valued and respected. We support trusting relationships with all stakeholders including families, teachers, staff and children. We believe that it is the role of each family to foster a child's development, and acknowledge that each family's culture is valuable and should be respected. We understand that the basis for all learning is a strong sense of self. For this reason, we support social-emotional development above all else and work to help children build skills which create a strong foundation in this domain of development. We believe that children benefit from engaging in experiences which act as mirrors of their authentic selves as well as those that serve as windows to discovery about cultures and people which are examples of diversity in our world. We draw inspiration from the NAEYC's position statement on [Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education](#). We believe that children who are curious and engaged will learn more from the things and people around them and encourage teachers to curate themes and topics which are of interest to the whole group. We seek to support each child's innate sense of joy and wonder. We support this by reflecting the children's interests and needs in curriculum planning and responding to learning opportunities as they arise throughout each season, week and day. We believe that a rich environment fosters a passion for learning and that this environment includes safe spaces, trusting relationships, responsive caregivers and a variety of experiences available for all. We know that the natural environment provides countless opportunities for children to explore, grow and develop an understanding of the world around them. We nurture and support each child's individual learning path and facilitate their growth and development by encouraging them to make significant decisions about their days at Poker Hill School. We strive to create for children a sense of responsibility both for their school community and also for the broader world around them. We encourage each child to select their own chores, engage in long blocks of free play time, and choose many of their own activities. We support each child's growth as an autonomous individual within a caring and democratic community and strive to make each child realize their important place in an interconnected world where they can make a difference.

## **Mission Statement:**

*We support an environment where children learn through play so that love of learning and kindness toward others are the foundations for life.*

\*\* We support, rather than direct, learning by providing time and space for each child to play freely, exploring a variety of materials as well as the natural world.

\*\* We believe that a rich environment fosters a passion for learning, so provide open-ended and inclusive materials and spaces which inspire interest, enthusiasm and curiosity.

\*\* We believe that access to the natural world inspires in children a sense of awe, wonder and joy and so we offer long periods of time outdoors for children to learn through playful interactions with the world around them.

\*\* We utilize all of the spaces of our school and grounds, including a large garden, farm animals, a pond, woods and meadows, in order to experience a variety of activities, build a respect for our world, and an understanding of stewardship.

\*\* We teach children to be global citizens by reinforcing the joy of caring for our spaces and by asking all participants to take on roles that develop responsibility for our school community.

\*\* Teachers observe children at play to build a shared curriculum, which is focused on cultivating inquiry.

\*\* We encourage children to express their own feelings and ideas creatively and so offer open-ended art and music experiences daily.

\*\* We believe that children have innate abilities, therefore rather than offering activities with explicit academic outcomes, we invite children to explore academic concepts in math, reading and writing through play.

\*\* We provide children with opportunities and strategies for developing healthy social and emotional growth, supporting children in their interactions with one another as well as the adults in our learning community, and we encourage children to talk through their feelings as they arise.

\*\* We support children in building skills by meeting each child where they are at in their own development, encouraging next steps, and scaffolding new learning.

\*\* We support children in building self-help skills with the belief that this approach builds perseverance and encourages children to build independence and pride in their achievements.

\*\* We encourage children to engage in real work so that they see the value of their efforts as well as the outcome of a sustainable community.

\*\* In order to show respect for each child, we allow every voice to be heard and support children in making their own decisions whenever possible.

\*\* We encourage families to engage in our program in ways that feel comfortable and trusting, through sharing talents and knowledge as well as time in our program.

\*\* We foster trusting, responsive, reciprocal relationships with each child and family with the understanding that open communication supports optimum learning and success for each child.

## Discipline

At Poker Hill School, we focus on preventing discipline problems from arising. This involves setting expectations, discussing consequences with children, enforcing consistency in our routines and throughout our days and redirecting problematic behavior. We model empathy, and we emphasize the Golden Rule: **treat others the way you, and they, 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 discuss topics of concern and possible solutions as needed. We aim to teach children to own their behavior and to make good choices.

## Curriculum

Teachers are expected to develop curricula that are in alignment with the school's philosophy and mission statements, the developmental stages of the children, and in concert with the other teachers within the school.

For all of our preschoolers, we develop and support a **curriculum of care**, which focuses on the social and emotional development of early preschoolers. In order to do this, we develop routines and expectations for the group which support a healthy understanding of relating to others as well as caring for oneself. We specifically teach the following:

- Expectations around joining in group meetings, such as daily music meeting and morning meetings, including sitting throughout, focusing on the speaker, and taking turns to respond.
- Expectations around group activities, such as staying with the group while on outdoor explorations, how to use materials appropriately, and how to look at books independently during quiet time.
- Managing transitions which revolve around a consistent daily schedule, including cleaning up play spaces, learning the order of daily events, and managing belongings.
- Caring for one's individual needs, such as independent toileting, hand washing, dressing and undressing.
- Caring for one's belongings, including independently putting clothes into cubbies, keeping belongings in their proper places, and cleaning up group spaces.
- Forming relationships between peers and with adults, including clearly expressing needs and wants.

- Managing conflicts, including finding solutions which are suitable for both parties, compromising, and expressing oneself verbally.

Additionally, teachers develop activities and curriculum ideas to meet the changing developmental needs of all children. We recognize that children's development unfolds in a progressive manner as they grow and build on existing skills. Teachers strive to provide a wide variety of experiences that provide children with opportunities to explore while also scaffolding learning across the domains. Teachers create learning experiences with recognized goals in mind, understanding that all development happens on a continuum. It bears noting that our stated goals are for *the end of a child's second year* at Poker Hill School. We understand that not all children will reach these goals but may be working toward them throughout the school year. Poker Hill School focuses on monthly and seasonal changes in the world around us and in our school. In order to develop a curriculum which meets the common goals, teachers provide experiences which reflect what children observe as well as those topics that children express an interest in. We believe strongly in our connection to the land and our location. As such we create a place-based curriculum that informs how and what we provide for learning experiences. We understand that seasonal changes around us should be the primary inspiration when building curriculum.

For more information about curriculum, including topics and skills which teachers develop, you may ask any teacher or director at Poker Hill School for the complete curriculum guide.

### **Board of Directors and Board Meetings**

The Board is composed 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 (7-8:30 p.m. at Poker Hill School with Zoom option). All parents and guardians are invited to attend board meetings at any time throughout the school year.** There may be up to nineteen Voting Members on the board at any time and one is 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. Please reach out to the PHS Board at [pokerhillboard@gmail.com](mailto:pokerhillboard@gmail.com).

## **Meet the Poker Hill School Staff**

### **Sandra Soucy, *Director of Educational Programming***

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.

### **Leanne Deschenes, *Director of Operations***

Leanne graduated from the University of Vermont in 2009 with a Bachelor of Science in Environmental Studies. She earned a Master of Education in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies and a Graduate Certificate in Fundraising Management from Boston University in her home state of Massachusetts in 2019. Leanne worked as an Environmental Educator in Massachusetts and Colorado, and studied abroad in Namibia with Save the Rhino Trust. She lives in Bolton Valley with her partner Jay, their cat, and many plants. Leanne and Jay share nine nieces and nephews whom they are very proud of. She enjoys outdoor activities, live music, cooking, and cheering on New England sports teams.

### **Katina Combs, *Full-time teacher***

Katina, mother of three former Poker Hill School students, Austin, Mason, and Dylan, 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.

### **Kat Hamilton, *Full-Time Teacher***

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 daughters Ember and Nova, live in Underhill. Kat and her family enjoy animals, the outdoors, camping, and gardening.

**Meghan Conroy, *Full-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 three children, River, Eden, and Wilder, their two dogs, and three cats. She enjoys reading, running, baking, and being outdoors.

**Sharon Gilmer, *T/Th Teacher, MWF assistant teacher***

Sharon graduated from Murray State University in 2003 with a Bachelors of Science in Health and Physical Education (K-12). She started subbing at Poker Hill School in 2014 while her daughter attended and has been subbing ever since. Sharon lives in Jericho with her husband Andrew and daughter Quinn. Her hobbies include travel, baking, crafting, reading, and loves being in nature.

**Jessica Bortz, *MWF Teacher, T/Th assistant teacher***

Jessica graduated from Northern Vermont University in 2023 with an Interdisciplinary degree with a focus in Education and Psychology. She has worked with children for over six years and is working on achieving her Vermont teacher's license. Jessica lives with her boyfriend and dog in Underhill. She likes photography, hiking, expanding her knowledge of teaching and playing with her dog.

**Claire Costin, *MWF Teacher***

Claire graduated from Green Mountain College with a B.S. in Elementary Education in 2016. She started working in childcare as a teen and never stopped! She has spent time in various childcare settings over the years but is happiest when exploring the world with preschoolers using music, art, and galivants in the woods. Claire lives in Mallet's Bay with her husband, dog, two cats, and small flock of chickens. In her down time you might find her exploring various fiber arts, building an overly detailed spreadsheet, or puttering around her garden.

**McKinley Fagan-Barry, T/Th Teacher**

McKinley lives in Johnson with her partner, Julienne, and their two daughters, Reason and Lyla. She graduated from Hawaii Pacific University in 2009 with a B.S. in Marine Biology. In 2016 she completed Champlain College's Teacher Apprenticeship Program with a focus on middle level math and science. Since graduating from TAP, she has worked throughout MMUUSD while also homeschooling her oldest. McKinley loves to swim, hike, and snowboard.

**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.

**Eleanor Soucy, Full time Teacher Aide**

Eleanor graduated from Bard College in 2023 with a degree in Human Rights and a concentration on cross-listed Education courses that deal with equity, disability, and identity within the classroom. She has been working in children's education environments since 2015, inspired most by nature-based programs such as Farm and Wilderness in Plymouth, VT. Engaging with young learners about how big and diverse our world is drives her work at Poker Hill, relishing any opportunity to empower the voices they are growing into. When she's away from her position as an aide, she loves music, activism, spending time in community with family, friends, and the Green Mountains.

**Laura Sundstrom, full time Teacher Aide**

Laura

**Alana Callens, part-time assistant teacher**

Alana hails from the drastically different mountains of the Arizona desert and graduated from Arizona State University in 2011 with her bachelor's degree in Political Science, with emphasis on Mass Communication and International Relations. She switched gears and earned her post-baccalaureate in Elementary Education from Rio Salado College and has worked in various capacities in the education field as a kindergarten aide, substitute teacher, and second grade teacher before moving to Vermont with her family in 2015. Motherhood was the catalyst that piqued her interest in early childhood education. She joined the Poker Hill team after her children began elementary school, drawn to its philosophy in crafting a first schooling experience for children that celebrates their innate curiosity and develops a lifelong appreciation for the natural world. In her down time, Alana enjoys photography, sewing, drawing, running, yoga, skiing, camping, and any time spent outdoors with her family. She resides in Richmond with her husband Trevor, sons Levi and Silas, and a menagerie of many creatures, furry, scaled, and feathered.

**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 Contacts**

**Poker Hill School**

**899-3716**

Sandra Soucy, Director of Educational Programming

Leanne Deschenes, Director of Operations

Miranda Sweeney, Board President

David London (Buildings & Grounds)

**355-9395**

**TUITION AND FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE**

**Preschool Programs.** Poker Hill School offers two programs based on age. Children turning 3 years old by September 1st of the school year attend two days a week (Tuesday and Thursday). Children turning 4 years old by September 1st of the school year attend three days a week (Monday, Wednesday and Friday). We have 2 additional program options for families. It is important that you understand the options and select your preference based on the needs of your child(ren) and family. Options include a Regular Preschool Program, and an Extended Preschool Program. The main difference

is the length of the day. **Regular Preschool Program hours are 8-2:30, with pick-up time between 2:30-3:00** and **Extended Preschool Program hours are 7:30-4:30.**

**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 (a minimum of 10 hours a week, for 35 weeks during the school year). PHS offers 36 weeks of instruction for all children in our program. 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 2025-26 school year is \$3982. If your child attends another preschool program in addition to PHS, you will have to designate which program will receive ACT 166 funds. You will be responsible for the full tuition if PHS does not receive those funds. Visit this website for more info: <https://www.vtpublicprek.info/act-166>

**Tuition and Payment Schedule 2025-26**

Annual tuition is set each year by the Board of Directors, and is then split evenly into ten payments. The first payment due is a non-refundable deposit to secure your child’s spot. The deposit is due by May 26<sup>h</sup>. The remaining nine payments are billed September through May. Families will receive all bills and make payments through Brightwheel. Financial assistance is available, see below and reach out to the director if you would like more information.

**PAYMENT SCHEDULE**

	<b><u>Annual Tuition</u></b>	<b><u>Deposit</u></b>	<b><u>ACT 166 / PreK Tuition</u></b>	<b><u>Remaining Tuition</u></b>	<b><u>Monthly Tuition WITH ACT166</u></b>	<b><u>Monthly Tuition WITHOUT ACT166</u></b>
<b>TTH Regular</b>	\$5,872	\$365	\$3,982	\$1,890	\$210	<b>\$652</b>

Preschool Program						
TTH <b>Extended</b> Preschool Program	\$6,797	\$365	\$3,982	\$2,815	\$313	<b>\$755</b>
MWF <b>Regular</b> Preschool Program	\$8,559	\$535	\$3,982	\$4,577	\$509	<b>\$951</b>
MWF <b>Extended</b> Preschool Program	\$9,911	\$535	\$3,982	\$5,929	\$659	<b>\$1,101</b>

- Payments to be made through Brightwheel
- The Tax Identification # for Poker Hill School is 03-0289409

**Poker Hill School Tuition Policies due to Unforeseen Circumstances or extended closures**

PHS remains prepared for short (a few days) and extended closures.

- 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. 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 Sandra and Leanne 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. If you have a change in circumstances, we encourage you to apply at any time during the school year. Reach out to the directors for more information. Applications are reviewed, and awards are determined by the Financial officers

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. The link for the PHS Financial Assistance Application is here: [PHS Financial Assistance Application](#)

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.

### **Act 76 - Vermont State Child Care Financial Assistance**

Thanks to Act 76, the threshold for income for families to be eligible for receiving state assistance has changed drastically. We have found that many of our families with two working parents or other eligible reasons may be approved for state assistance. *All families are encouraged to apply for this benefit.* Families who receive assistance from the state can greatly reduce their share of tuition and support our school, as Act 76 also subsidizes Poker Hill School and helps to sustain our internal scholarship fund. 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 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 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 officers to waive the tuition cost beyond the initial 60 days. Please see the director with any questions about this policy.

## **POLICY AND PROCEDURE**

### **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's absences exceed what is permitted in the district policy. 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.

If your child is absent from PreK for:

- an average of one PreK day per week over the course of two months or
- more than 2 consecutive weeks or
- the equivalent of 3 weeks

You may be at risk of losing your Universal PreK funding. If a family loses Universal Pre-K funding due to attendance or other reasons, such as failure to register with the district in which they reside, Poker Hill will invoice the family the amount of the forfeited Act 166 funds. **In order to fulfill Act 166 requirements and maintain your funding, please be diligent around your communication with Poker Hill in the case of prolonged absences or relocating/moving between school districts mid-year.**

### **Wellness Policy**

The focus of our program is to provide children with a wide variety of experiences and activities each day so that they are able to fully engage in both our indoor and outdoor environments while directing their own learning. We spend time outdoors every day and often walk on steep trails or for long distances. *Therefore, it is important for children to be healthy and ready to be physically and intellectually active each day that they come to school.* If a child is not well enough to participate in the daily activities offered, then we ask that you keep them home until they are able to. Additionally, we ask that you carefully review our sickness policies, below, when making decisions about whether or not your child is well enough to attend school.

### **Sick Policy**

- 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).
- Some minor symptoms may preclude your child from participating fully in our usual routines. These symptoms may include but are not limited to: runny nose, coughing, lethargy, or sneezing. Children who are not able to manage their symptoms throughout the day, i.e. need to wipe their noses repeatedly and need reminders to wash hands each time, or have bouts of coughing exacerbated by active play or exposure to cold air, may need to stay home.
- Children who may have a contagious illness will be excluded from attending school until they no longer pose a risk. Examples of exclusionary symptoms include but are not limited to, diarrhea (3 or more loose stools in a 24-hour period), vomiting (2 or more bouts of vomiting in a 24 hour period), bacterial conjunctivitis, excessive coughing, and fevers over 100F taken axillary (armpit) or 101F taken orally.
- In an effort to keep students and staff healthy, we encourage families to keep children home if their symptoms prohibit them from fully participating in the school day.
- 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 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 or in the office, and still need to be signed in when they first come to school. These medications also need to be in original prescribed boxes/bottle.

## Drop Off

- Families will be required to check in their child(ren) using the brightwheel app. This documents your child(ren)'s time of arrival. All families should have access to the brightwheel app for the 2025-26 school year.
- Families will walk their child(ren) to the designated entrance to say goodbye as they enter the school. Children should have with them their lunchbox, water bottle, extra clothes, etc. At the door, adults will say goodbye and leave children in the care of the teachers. *While we understand that transitions are challenging, please do not linger at the door.*
- 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

When completing enrollment paperwork, parents are asked to choose a program for their child. We offer two different programs to meet the needs of families including those who require extended care. It is also important for families to understand that drop-off and pick up may occur during a window of time. We encourage all families to drop off children no later than 9:00am so that they have time to settle in before any daily transitions occur. Additionally, we ask that all children are picked up promptly and before the 'no later than' time for your chosen enrollment. Adults are welcome to pick up their children any time before the end of their chosen time slot.

Our **regular day program operates from 8:00am until 2:30pm**. Children enrolled in the regular day program may be dropped off no earlier than 8:00am and must be picked up no later than 3:00pm.

Our **extended day program operates from 7:30am until 4:30pm**. Children enrolled in the extended day program may be dropped off no earlier than 7:30am and must be picked up no later than 4:30pm.

As our teachers work long days and often have their own personal commitments to attend to, it is important to remember that pick up must be completed by the 'no later than' stated time. This may mean that adults need to arrive several minutes before the end of the pick up window in order to collect a child's belongings and sign them out. Any adults who want to have time to check in with teachers at the end of the day should be mindful of arriving early enough to do so.

**Late fees:**

Late fees will be assessed as late pick-ups occur and will be reflected on the following month's tuition invoice. A fee of \$10 per five minutes will be assessed for those who pick up later than the 'no later than' time for their enrollment. **For those families whose children are in the extended care program, it is important that you pick up your child by 4:30pm.**

- Upon your arrival to pick up your child, adults will enter the cubby room to pick up your child's belongings. You will either meet your child on the playground, or enter the play area to collect your child. A teacher will touch base with you. All pertinent information about your child's day will also be shared through the brightwheel app.
- After 2:30pm, one playground will be designated for use by the teachers and children in the extended care group. Other families will not be allowed to use this playground after school but are otherwise welcome to use the grounds at pick up time. Please note, however, that our parking areas are small and others may be waiting for a parking space.
- Staff will 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 as contacts in brightwheel.

Also, please note the following:

- Any adult frequently dropping off or picking up a child, including grandparents, babysitters, nannies, and friends should 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 accordingly.
- We also have a second parking lot just beyond the barn and garden.
- Drive slowly and cautiously while entering the parking lot.

**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 follow the recommendation set forth by MMUUSD to

determine how long the opening will be delayed. We rarely have early closings and we do not make up snow days in June. While we expect families to be prompt when picking up their children at the end of every school day, we may send occasional requests or reminders about picking up in a timely fashion when travel is difficult and on early closure days ordered by MMUUSD due to inclement weather. We do this in order to ensure that families arrive before closing time and in an effort to allow our staff to leave early for their own comfort and safety. It is very important to check brightwheel or your email frequently in the case of inclement weather.

### **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 aggrieved 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 a 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.

## **INFORMATION FOR FAMILIES**

### **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. 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 to communicate 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. 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. When there is interest, 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.

### **The use of Brightwheel**

At Poker Hill School, we utilize the Brightwheel online platform for many of our administrative functions.

- Teachers communicate with families through the app by posting photos and notes each day. We encourage you to take time to review the photos with your child so that they can provide a narrative of their time at school.
- Teachers and administrators also use the messaging function as a way to communicate directly with families. The general messaging function is great for getting messages to your child's teacher regarding attendance, your child's mood or needs, or any questions you may have. Any messages that you post in general messaging go only to your child's teachers. They can not be seen by any other families. Questions about tuition or policies can be sent using the parent->administration function.
- We keep track of attendance using the Brightwheel app, so it is important that you remember to check your child in/out using the app each day. Each family member on your child's account has their own unique 4-digit code. Please make note of your code as you will be asked to enter it for checking your child in/out. You can follow these instructions for checking your child in/out using the app: [Check in Students as a Guardian | Brightwheel Help Center](#)
- We also use Brightwheel for invoicing. You may use the app to pay all tuition invoices as well as additional charges such as merchandise or late pick-up fees.
- Please note that although teachers may use their personal cell phones in order to use the brightwheel app, such as for answering family messages, posting photos, or checking attendance, we strictly monitor teachers' use of their phones throughout the day. We ask teachers to remove themselves from the classroom if they need to use their phones for posting or answering messages and make note of the need to provide good modeling of appropriate cell phone usage as well as prioritizing supervision and engagement with children.

### **Conferences**

Teachers will complete 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.

### **Snacks and Lunches**

Families are responsible for sending afternoon snacks (for extended day students) and lunches. Please send your child with a lunchbox and drink container that they can open. Children attending the extended care day will need one snack. Please clearly label snacks so that we can help children recognize which foods are meant for snacks and which are meant for lunch. Clearly write your children's name on the outside of his/her lunchbox. We do not have a refrigerator for children's 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."
- 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 for learning about food allergies 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>

### **Toilet Training**

Children are encouraged, though not required, to be toilet trained prior to beginning the school year. Since we spend many hours outdoors each day, it is helpful for both children and teachers if children are able to complete toileting routines at school before heading outside. Additionally, it is much easier for us to help a child with their toileting needs outdoors than changing pull-ups. Please help your child by encouraging 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 Sandra or your child's teacher.

### **Clothing for School**

Because we spend long periods of time outdoors each day, it is important that children come to school dressed for the weather and for comfort.

We suggest that families consider dressing their children in well worn clothing since we are often engaging in messy activities both indoors and out. Please do not send your child in any clothes that you hope to keep pristine. We encourage children to explore without worrying about getting clothes dirty. Additionally, children who are still working on toileting independently will be more successful if their bottoms are easy for them to pull down and up without adult help. We recommend elastic waisted pants.

Please label all of your child's clothing, including extra clothes packed in their bags. We do our best to keep every child's belongings in their cubbies or bags, but when many children are working at the same time in the confined space of the cubby room, socks, pants and shirts are easily misplaced.

We also request that every child wears comfortable, sturdy shoes. We recommend sending your child with a pair of boots (rain boots for fall and spring, and snow boots for

the winter months) every day as even on the nicest of days the trails around our property stay pretty muddy. We do not recommend flip flops or open-backed shoes, but prefer something that makes it easy for children to run and play outside. Licensing regulations require that all children wear shoes while indoors. Some families find it easiest to provide a pair of outdoor shoes (sneakers or hiking shoes) along with boots for outdoor play and a pair of indoor shoes (slippers, crocs or light sneakers).

Your child should come prepared for school with the following items in their bag or backpack (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, along with a wet bag or reusable plastic bag for sending home wet items.
- 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
- Outerwear appropriate for rainy/wet days. We recommend the Tuffo brand Muddy Buddy coverall and have some available for purchase (at cost). When purchasing, please get one size up because it will often go over snow pants and jacket in the winter time.
- Children in the T/Th group who will be napping each day that they are at school may bring a nap mat or blanket and pillow. Poker Hill School will provide a blanket for quiet time for all other children.

We recommend that each child also have a large, open-topped tote bag for carrying additional clothing and outerwear. 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 at drop off, it is especially important for children to manage their own gear. Please practice packing and unpacking tote bags with your child in preparation for the school year.

Please note that every child shares a cubby at school. We ask that you be prepared to take your child's things home at the end of each school day so that their cubby is empty and ready for another child to use the following day. You may use this list for packing your child's school bag:

+lunch box (with ice pack if necessary)

+snack (if your child is in the extended-day program)

+water bottle

+boots (great to have every day as the trails stay muddy year round)

+rain gear (we recommend Tuffo Mud Buddy, but any one-piece suit or combination of rain pants and rain coat is great)

- +a full change of clothes (shirt, bottoms, underwear, socks)
- +outdoor clothing according to the weather (rain wear, snow pants, mittens, etc.)
- +indoor shoes

Dressing in appropriate winter weather clothing can be a challenge for families, children and teachers alike. We encourage children to be as independent as possible when preparing for winter weather. Families may support this by providing 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. The items that we will need for the day will be taken out of the tote bag. We teach children to hang their snow pants on the outside of the jacket so that the child puts these on first. Please remember to send clothes appropriate to the season as the seasons change. Again, it is especially important to **LABEL** everything.

### **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 teachers and/or directors know, and it may be brought to school until your child is ready for a gentle parting. No toys from home will be allowed in group spaces; they must be left in the child's cubby or backpack.

### **Summer Camp**

Poker Hill School Summer Camp is a wonderful introduction to Poker Hill School for your child. Incoming families are encouraged to choose one week for your child to attend. Camp is not mandatory, though it does provide opportunities for your child to learn the routine and meet their teachers and peers. The relationships that are formed at camp, both with teachers and other children, provide valuable support to children as they transition into the school year. After summer camp the transition to school in the fall is much easier for everyone. The staff is able to get to know your children and use this as a chance to match children to their small groups, because of this we highly recommend that students attend if they are able.

Poker Hill School holds one week of summer camp during the summer for incoming 3-year-old preschoolers in the T/Th program, and one week of camp for children in our

MWF (4-5 year old) program. These weeks feature four days of camp Monday through Thursday from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Each day will include free play, snack, morning meeting, organized activities, lunch and stories. Weather permitting, we will spend a lot of time outdoors. Children will interact with, and help care for, our animals and will explore our large garden, peeper pond, and hiking trails. Families provide lunch in a labeled lunch box/bag for their child. Poker Hill School will provide morning snack for every child. The Poker Hill School Camp Fee is \$180 for the week. Invoices for payment will be sent through brightwheel in late July or early August. Please email the directors if you have a need for a camp scholarship.

### **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.

### **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 shirt decorated 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 any item from our Amazon Wish List. We respectfully ask that birthday cupcakes or other treats **not** be sent to school. We would like to promote the idea that celebrations can occur without sweet treats, and rather that we celebrate each child similarly with a special shirt, birthday songs and birthday books.

### **Typical Daily Schedule for 2025-26school year**

- Daily schedule

- Poker Hill school runs two programs: our regular day program operates from 8:00 am until 3:00 pm. The extended day program opens at 7:30am and provides care until 4:30pm . Each program creates an individual timeline for their daily schedule, but will always include the following:
  - Morning snack time
  - 30 minutes of music
  - Lunch
  - One-hour of outdoor free-play
  - 30 minutes of teacher-led morning meeting
  - 30 minutes of quiet time and/or focused small-group activities
  - Teacher-guided exploration based on seasonal themes
- Individual team schedules are posted in your child’s learning space.
- Please be in touch with your child’s team of teachers to receive a detailed daily schedule.
  
- The following is an example of a typical daily schedule (regular preschool group leaves during outdoor free play time).

7:30-8:30am	drop off
7:30-9:30am	morning free play in group space
9:30am	clean up/transition to meeting
9:40-10:00am	morning meeting/group circle time
10:00am	handwashing/toileting/morning snack
10:30am-12:00pm	outdoor hike/group activity
12:15 pm	return to school/hand washing/toileting
12:20pmam	lunch
12:45-1:10	music meeting
1:15-2:00	transition to quiet time: reading, writing, resting
2:00-3:00pm	outdoor free play time
3:00pm	handwashing/toileting/afternoon snack
3:20-4:30	extended care/afternoon free play

**Calendar**

Please see the website for the current school year calendar. While we attempt to coordinate our school year calendar with the MMUUSD, there may be a number of days which do not align. Additionally, while we do our

best to set our calendar before the beginning of the school year, there may be changes made mid-year. It is a good idea to keep an eye on our shared Google Calendar as this will have the most up-to-date information about days off, school sponsored, events, and upcoming important dates.

[Calendar- Monthly - POKER HILL SCHOOL](#)