



Nature Preschool Teacher

Department: Education

Supervisor: Jennie McGuigan, Education Director

Position: Full time; Exempt

Summary

Ijams Nature Preschool (INP) provides a hands-on, experiential approach to learning that is based on the needs and curiosity of young children. Its mission is to inspire children, families, and educators to connect more deeply with the world around them. Through INP research and programs, children and families develop a profound engagement with the natural world, where nature is an integral part of daily learning. All of these efforts focus on safety, customer service, and effective educational methods in a supportive environment.

Ijams Nature Center is seeking a dynamic, curious, and professionally organized educator to lead and develop nature preschool programming. The teacher is responsible for adding to a cohesive teaching team, helping Lead Teachers write/coordinate the curriculum, and managing the day-to-day operational activities of the classroom (outdoor and indoor spaces). Teachers must understand children's cognitive, social, emotional and physical development in order to ensure a safe and stimulating classroom environment where children are actively engaged and encouraged to succeed. The teacher must be skilled in communicating with both children and adults in order to meet the needs of the children, and resolve parental concerns.

An ideal candidate enjoys being outdoors in nature year-round, is well versed in early childhood education practices, and infinitely curious about the changing social and emotional needs of preschool-aged children ages 3-5 years. Candidates must possess a strong respect for young children and families, a love of teaching young children, and a strong desire to provide meaningful and innovative learning experiences in nature for children, their caregivers, and the teaching team. They must possess the ability to help support diverse team members in executing daily multi-sensory, play and nature-based, anti-bias, emergent and developmentally appropriate curriculum, incorporating a variety of hands-on experiences as they maintain warm, professional relationships with children, their parents, and caregivers.

Position Responsibilities and Duties

The Preschool Teacher will work as part of a team of Preschool Teachers, volunteers, the Early Learning Programs Manager, the Education Director, and the Ijams Nature Center staff to foster the social, emotional, environmental, and academic development of students at our school during our regular school year. Preschool teachers will support Ijams educational philosophy to provide high quality outdoor experiential programming in the East TN region that is relevant, impactful, and builds individual sense of place and community involvement in the natural landscape through a place-based, student-centered, and multi-touch point approach to education.

Teachers at INP

1. Are 'co-learners' or 'facilitators' of learning and are curious learners with their students
2. Protect and not dominate learning opportunities for children's growth and empowerment
3. Are strong observers of child development and behavior and intrinsically ask many questions
4. Are reflective, active, and intensely curious life-long learners
5. Are protectors of staff and student space, thinking, respect, autonomy, and unique contributions to our community
6. Remain open and accepting of new growth within oneself and others
7. Embrace diverse communications and expressions
8. Share creative thoughts and perspectives for the benefit of others
9. Mentor and support the growth of adults and children within the INP community
10. Believe in promoting good quality education using the natural environment and outdoor classroom space
11. Share unique skills and talents and seek out development in areas of growth

Detailed duties are as follows:

Teaching

- Lead students in daily curriculum activities
- Focus on outdoor exploration and nature-based learning
- Encourage and guide children's academic progress
- Maintain records of student progress
- Assist and lead guided hikes, outdoor unstructured free play, and outdoor classroom lessons at the discretion of the Lead Teachers
- Assist and lead indoor classroom lessons at the discretion of the Lead Teachers

Aftercare

- Lead students who participate in aftercare
- Prepare lessons and activities for students in aftercare
- Communicate with parents at pick up
- Communicate any and all important information to other preschool team members for the following day
- Close the school at the end of the day

Classroom Setup

- Prepare and maintain preschool materials
- Arrange and organize classroom per Lead Teachers' requirements
- Organize and straighten materials on shelves
- Organize and prepare materials for outdoor learning on the porch and in the outdoor classroom
- Photocopy materials
- Clean indoor classroom, outdoor classroom, and bathrooms

Maintaining Proper Learning Environment

- Work with other teachers in directing children's activities
- Model appropriate behavior
- Encourage independence and self-esteem
- Work with students to correct inappropriate behavior
- Ensure safety of students
- Assist students with snacks, lunch, and nap
- Supervise playground activities

- Maintain tidy, clean, and organized storage areas and common staff areas such as bathrooms, staff kitchen, and office
- Communicate verbally or written to leadership and work with them to adjust problematic environment aspects that affect children's needs

School Administration

- As a part of the Preschool Team, all educators will have responsibilities to record student attendance/behavior/injury, gather information and help prepare progress reports, communicate necessary information to parents, communicate to and rely on Ijams leadership for overall support of the school function, help with the writing of weekly newsletters, and other clerical duties
- The teacher may be assigned other duties, reasonably related to the position, which are needed to help drive to the INP vision, fulfill our mission, and abide by the Ijams Values detailed in the Employee Handbook. These assigned tasks are at the discretion of Lead Teachers, the Early Learning Programs Manager, and the Education Director.

Desired Skills and Abilities

- A strong understanding of early childhood development, the different stages of growth, and an awareness of young children's needs.
- Desire and ability to engage children in learning experiences using developmentally appropriate pedagogy and group management techniques, and the ability to employ redirection and positive behavior modification strategies when confronted with challenging behaviors
- Interest in the natural sciences, local flora and fauna, and outdoor-based education.
- Excitement and tenacity towards working with others in a year-round outdoor classroom
- The ability to work well with others (staff, children, and parents) and to foster a team environment.
- Strong work ethic and personal integrity displaying initiative and ownership
- Adapt and be flexible with quickly changing environments
- Team-oriented with strong interpersonal skills; work collaboratively with fellow staff and ability to communicate in a timely and respectful manner
- Strong oral and written communication skills and basic computer skills.

Knowledge

- Understanding of early childhood development standards and benchmarks
- Understanding of outdoor experiential education standards and forest school models.
- Knowledge of educational approaches and strategies working with students with diverse needs
- Knowledge of Montessori, Reggio Emilia, and/or Waldorf approaches to learning desired
- Knowledge and experience regarding natural and cultural history of East Tennessee desired.
- General knowledge of biology, ecology, natural science, conservation, or related fields.

Skills

- Public speaking skills and the ability to work with people of all ages, especially children
- Leadership and facilitation skills, especially work with leading teams of teachers.
- Excellent written and verbal communication skills including the ability to communicate through multiple media (print, TV, radio, Internet, public events, etc.).
- Strong organizational skills, with attention to detail, accuracy, and deadlines.
- The ability to multitask, prioritize, and display excellent time management skills.
- Ability to speak, read, and/or write Spanish, French, or other languages is a plus

- The ability to carry out duties and directives independently under limited supervision.
- Responsible, creative, relational, enthusiastic, flexible, self-motivated and resourceful team player.

Experience

- Minimum of two years of experience teaching or child care experience in outdoor programs, camps, field trips, special education, and/or early learning programs (ages 3-5)
- Experience and demonstrated proficiency in using Google Suite, Canva, Microsoft Excel, Word, and PowerPoint software programs.
- Experience working with audiences who are diverse in culture, age, race, gender identities, and physical abilities.

Education

- Bachelor's degree (or equivalent experience) in a field related to natural history, education, early childhood development, science/ecology, special education, or environmental science. Master degree preferred.
- Two to four years of experience and/or training, or equivalent combination of education in early childhood development, outdoor education, special education, natural history, science education, Montessori, Reggio Emilia, and/or Waldorf approaches or other related fields.
- First Aid/CPR certification (or the ability to obtain certification upon employment) preferred.

Other Requirements

- Must successfully complete a pre-employment, post-offer background screen, and motor vehicle (MVR) screen.
- Must successfully complete DHS background check, director's training, physical, CPR, and other required training to work as a manager at a licensed childcare facility.
- Valid Driver's license
- Access to a personal computer and internet
- The ability to work some weekend and evenings throughout the year
- Energy and desire to work with diverse audiences
- Passion for nature and the ability to deliver programs in a pleasant, tactful, and enthusiastic manner.

Physical Requirements

- Spend the better part of their day outdoors
- Spend multiple hours outdoors in all weather (Heat, cold, rain, snow).
- Hike 2-5 miles a day on rough terrain, keeping pace with the children in their care.
- Engage in sustained physical activity throughout the day.
- Lift up to 50 pounds (size of a small child).
- Be able to hear, see, and guide children at all times.
- Must be able to work around small children including sitting, standing, running, and climbing.
- Must be able to see and respond to dangerous situations.
- Must be able to wear personal protective gear correctly most of the day.
- Must be able to use office equipment such as a computer, copier, hole punch, calculator, etc. .
- Must be in good physical condition, with the ability to stand, walk, and hike for extended periods of time without exhaustion.

Compensation/Benefits

The salary range for this position is \$32,000 - \$34,000 annually. Teachers will follow a standard school year schedule that includes up to 2 weeks of teacher training prior to the school year, 10 months of in-service work, and a variety of holidays and breaks. The position offers health insurance including medical, dental, and vision, sick leave, paid holidays based on school schedule, and a 403(b) retirement fund match. Please contact jmcguigan@ijams.org for more specific information on compensation.

About Ijams Nature Center

Ijams Nature Center is a nonprofit nature center located on the banks of the Tennessee River near Knoxville's urban center. Its mission is to encourage stewardship of the natural world by providing an urban greenspace for people to learn about and enjoy the outdoors through engaging experiences. Ijams Nature Center manages 318 acres of land with more than 12 miles of trails, a large Visitor Center, Mead's Quarry lake, mountain biking trails, river access, gardens, and much more. People of all ages attend educational programs, including school field trips, family programs, summer camps, and adult workshops. Ijams Nature Center partners with Knox County and the City of Knoxville as well as with multiple agencies to provide outstanding educational offerings. Visit the Ijams website at ijams.org for current program information.

Equal Opportunity Employment

Ijams Nature Center is an equal opportunity employer and does not discriminate against employees or job applicants on the basis of race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, national origin, mental or physical disability, veteran status, or any other status or condition protected by applicable state or federal laws. These anti-discrimination policies also apply to volunteers and program recipients. Ijams Nature Center provides reasonable accommodations to all applicants and employees. Applicants with disabilities may request reasonable accommodation at any point in the employment process.

To Apply

Send resume, cover letter, and three references (*will not be contacted without notice*) to Jennie McGuigan, Education Director, at jmcguigan@ijams.org. This position will remain open until filled.