

Clark Fork School

STUDENT FAMILY

HANDBOOK



Revised July 2009

Welcome to Clark Fork School

We are delighted to have your family join our school community! This handbook contains information you'll need throughout the school year. Please keep it handy and refer to it first when you have questions about our school and procedures. We also encourage you to visit our website (www.clarkforkschool.org).

OUR SCHOOL

Clark Fork School began with a cooperative effort by parents and teachers nearly 25 years ago. This spirit of cooperation and lots of hard work has allowed the school to grow, giving many hundreds of children a sound and positive start to their education, from preschool through fifth grade.

Clark Fork School offers children the opportunity to explore the world around them, learn to work cooperatively with adults and other children, and acquire developmentally-appropriate intellectual skills through concept-based activities. We are an independent parent cooperative school, dedicated to developing the whole child and to furthering the vital role parents play in the education of their children. At Clark Fork School, parents are encouraged to participate in classroom activities and are expected to volunteer regularly in service to the school. Caring, concerned, and involved parents make this school a unique learning environment.

The Building Blocks of Our Philosophy

Each student's unique skills and talents are developed in a multi-age, continuous-progress program based on the following components:

Emotional Growth

Clark Fork School nurtures emotional growth by creating a safe, supportive environment that fosters confidence and independence in problem-solving and decision-making, self-awareness, pride, and a sense of responsibility.

Social Growth

Clark Fork School fosters social growth by encouraging children to learn about themselves and others and to respect everyone's unique qualities; to listen to others; to compromise personal desires for group goals, when appropriate; to play together and become friends in a cooperative and caring way; and to be aware of and show active concern for the local and global community. We are committed to teaching an appreciation for diversity and encouraging each student to develop a strong sense of self in a multi-cultural world.

Cognitive Growth

Clark Fork School promotes cognitive growth by implementing a stimulating and individualized daily curriculum that encompasses varied academic pursuits, hands-on activities, special workshops, and numerous field trips.

Physical Growth and Fitness

Clark Fork School encourages physical growth and fitness by providing a variety of activities, which may include: movement, dance, and drama; cooperative play in the classroom; and vigorous playground recreation in our large outdoor play yard. In addition, individual programs offer age-appropriate off-site instruction in swimming and skiing.

Creative Growth

Clark Fork School focuses on individual creative expression, critical thinking, and problem-solving. Music, art, creative writing, drama, and movement are integrated into the children's activities throughout the school year.

Place-Based Education

Clark Fork School primarily uses a place-based approach to education. The definitions “sense of place” and “place-based” have variations from person to person, so CFS addressed this topic and defined what it means to us.

Definition

A real-world learning experience which provides time, ideas, and ways of approaching learning that will be life-long and are transferable from place to place.

Ways of Teaching

- Use our home to inform our life experience and our way of looking at the world
- Explore relationships to both the human environment and the natural world
- Develop heightened awareness of detail
- Explore with purpose and intention
- Teach respect for learning, for each other, and for our community
- Promote an investigative approach to life
- Expand the classroom to include the schoolyard, community, and watershed
- Learn to approach the world with curiosity and humanity
- Help students feel that they are a part of the natural world, not apart from it

Because of Clark Fork School’s low student-teacher ratios, our teachers have the time to work with each student to develop the skill of careful observation. They explore, document, and discuss detailed changes in their classroom projects, the schoolyard, or the Rattlesnake Creek system. But these ways of observing and understanding do not simply apply to their development as scientists. The same skills help them to quickly identify and understand each other’s emotions and give them the eye of an artist or photographer.

As children progress through Clark Fork School, they are offered increasingly greater and more detailed exposure to the world around them. The preschool starts by introducing exploration skills primarily in the neighborhood around CFS and nearby wilderness spaces, the kindergarten moves up and into the hills of Missoula, and the primary explores the town and hills of Missoula in greater depth.

At Clark Fork School, children work to make purposeful products. For example, after studying Missoula using their history, social studies, math, and art skills, the primary class produced a book of Missoula history which they then donated to the Missoula Public Library. After thoroughly investigating, researching, and exploring the Tom Green Trail and the community surrounding it, they erected an interpretive sign for the community at the trailhead at Pineview Park.

Learn More

We encourage everyone to explore place-based education to understand what it is, why we choose to use it, and how it is implemented in real classrooms. We have compiled this list of reading resources.

Archibald, Steve

Journeys: A Sense of Place Guide

(see a CFS teacher to borrow this curriculum)

Hass, Toni and Payl Nachtigal

Place Value

Leslie, Clare Walker, John Tallmadge, and Tom Wessels

Into the Field: A Guide to Locally Focused Teaching

Louv, Richard

Last Child in the Woods: Saving our Children from Nature Deficit Disorder

Nabhan, Gary Paul and Trimble Stephen

The Geography of Childhood

Sobel, David

Ecophobia

Beyond Ecophobia

Place-based Education

Children’s Special Places

Mapmaking with Children

Smith, Gregory

“Place-Based Education: Learning to Be Where We Are”

Phi Delta Kappan

Program-Specific Philosophies

In addition to this overall philosophy, the individual programs operate under the following specific philosophies:

Preschool Program

The preschool program offers learning environments rich in materials and activities to facilitate discovery for children ages 3-5 with different interests and learning styles. There are many and varied opportunities for hands-on projects, exploration, and discovery through art materials, books, block-building, math and storytelling manipulatives, dramatic play, movement, music, and science. We adhere to a process-oriented philosophy; that is, we recognize that the child’s experience in trying something new is as important as the end result or “doing it right.”

In our developmentally-appropriate classroom, teachers introduce basic concepts and encourage children to explore and expand upon them according to their interests and growing skill levels. We emphasize the natural environment, laying the foundation for a strong sense of place; building strong oral skills, the cornerstone of literacy; and learning to perceive the many available resources to satisfy curiosity, including other children, teachers, and the larger community, as well as the many books and other classroom materials.

Social and emotional development is fostered by opportunities to work individually as well as to experience being part of a group. Each child's growing sense of independence and community is fostered through large and small group storytelling, songs, games, and discussions; shared meal times; and field trips and free play, both indoors and out.

While we have rules in place to ensure safety and respect for self, others, and our classroom, behavior management is individualized to best meet the child's needs according to the teachers' growing understanding of the child's personality, family dynamics, and learning style.

Kindergarten Program

The kindergarten program presents academic, social, emotional, and physical education in a developmental process, allowing each child the freedom to progress in a non-competitive, learner-centered environment. We emphasize the importance of the natural world through frequent outdoor experiences that are enhanced through the use of all senses, time for quiet reflection, and journaling.

We strive to nurture curiosity, creativity, and positive social relationships while working on fundamental academic skills. Social development is centered on respect; at the beginning of the school year the children design a collection of guidelines called "community agreements" which they are responsible for adhering to throughout the school year.

Art and music are integral parts of kindergarten. We incorporate outside resources and parent talents to enhance the learning environment when possible. Skiing and swimming are a regular part of the program.

Primary Program

The core of the primary program is the idea that children are individuals with varied talents, interests, abilities, and needs, and an education program should evolve and reshape itself to meet and support those differences while encouraging a sense of belonging. By creating a learning community of mixed ages and abilities, Clark Fork School hopes to nurture the concept of cooperative learning in the best sense: that we know more together than individually; that everyone has something to contribute; and that everyone is strengthened and supported when we share our knowledge, talents, and encouragement with one another.

Education is not a fixed collection of data to be memorized, but a process to be explored and nurtured. Our goal is to cultivate an insatiable desire to learn about the world around us, to equip our students with tools they need to find out what they need to know when they need to know it, and to develop the ability to communicate that knowledge with others. The primary program includes the following unique components:

- Multi-age settings where everyone has something to teach and something to learn;
- Mosaic of independent and cooperative small group opportunities;
- Continuous progress through core curriculum (such as math and language arts) at the child's pace;
- Collaborative thematic studies integrated throughout the curriculum where possible, and focusing on students' sense of place in both the social and natural environments;
- Variety of instructional activities including hands-on explorations, oral expression, and written seat-work; and
- Multiple opportunities to express what is being learned, explored, or felt through art, music, storytelling, and drama.

Before- and After-care Programs

In addition to our regular academic programs, Clark Fork School provides extended-hours care to children both before and after regular school hours. The hours of before- and after-care may vary from year depending on the needs of current families. We employ separate caregivers for these programs, and children from all age groups participate together. Before and after care are open only to currently enrolled students and their siblings. All siblings must be of an appropriate age and have immunization records and emergency cards on file at Clark Fork School before they may utilize this service.

Preschoolers with siblings in one of the Primary programs may attend before-care between 8:30 and 9:00 at no charge. Primary grades students with siblings in one of the Preschool programs may attend aftercare between 2:30 and 3:00 at no charge. This policy is to alleviate the inconvenience to parents of having different start and end times for the various programs.

As a general rule, advance registration is necessary to ensure a spot in either program, although drop-in care is sometimes available (at a slightly higher cost). Please keep in mind that considerable planning is necessary to provide staffing for before- and after-care services in addition to our academic programs. Families are asked to provide one week's notice of any changes to their before- or after-care use schedules. To reserve or change regular care or to confirm same-day drop-in care, please contact the Office Manager. All other registrations or changes should be done by parents on the posted lists.

Our Teachers

Clark Fork School's educational program is learner-centered. That is, we believe that learning occurs through social interaction, inquiry, and discussion, both in guided and independent activities. Our programs challenge each student to achieve his or her personal best and encourage children to become competent, caring, productive, independent students who love learning. We are proud of our low student-teacher ratios and the opportunity this presents for individualized attention. Our students are also encouraged to think of themselves as part of the larger school community, and enjoy frequent all-school, multi-age group activities.

Our teachers bring diverse experiences and skills to the school. In order to encourage their continued growth and development, we provide our teachers with opportunities for enhanced training through in-service days, off-site training, and conference attendance. When teachers are involved in those activities, the school employs substitute teachers in the classroom. In addition, Thursdays are "early-out" days in which students are excused at 2:00 p.m. to allow the teachers to engage in whole-school planning meetings. Except for students signed up for after-care, all children must be picked up at 2:00 on Thursdays.

In recent years we have developed a mutually beneficial partnership with the Teton Science School, one of the nation's premier natural science learning centers based in Wyoming. Our teachers are trained in the acclaimed Journeys Program, a sense-of-place curriculum with experiential learning opportunities appropriate for children at all of our grade levels. Your child will experience the wonder of the outdoors through frequent "saunters," journaling, and guided observations. For more information on the Journeys Program, please visit the Teton Science School web site, www.tetonscience.org.

Parent-Teacher Conferences

Watch the newsletter and classroom postings for parent-teacher conferences in the fall and spring. There is no school on parent-teacher conference days. Our teachers meet with each family at the school; 20 minutes for each Preschool student and 30 minutes for Kindergarten and Primary students. Most conferences are scheduled during the day, but occasionally evening conferences are available.

The fall conference provides an opportunity for parents and teachers to talk about the school year's beginning, and to learn about how each child is expressing his or her learning style in the classroom and at home. This is a great opportunity for new parents to ask questions about curriculum and daily activities and to share expectations and special concerns. The spring conference focuses on the child's growth and development over the school year, with a discussion of options for the following year.

Parents or teachers may at any time request a special conference to discuss concerns, issues, or strategies to work cooperatively to meet a child's individual needs. Either an executive board member or the Director may be available to join any special parent-teacher conference at the request of the teacher or parent.

Summer Camp Programs

Clark Fork School's summer camp program is available to the general public. Programs for older children are generally longer than those for younger children, and camps vary from year to year. The summer program is run separately from our academic programs, but our regular teachers typically teach at least a few of the sessions. You will hear about upcoming summer programs and will have an opportunity to register early for the programs in the spring. Please contact our Office Manager for details.

Code of Conduct

We maintain high behavioral expectations for all children at Clark Fork School. We are committed to communicating with children in a developmentally appropriate manner our expectations of them and believe them to be highly capable of understanding and being accountable for their behavior. It is our opinion that we do them an injustice by asking less of them and believe each child can contribute to an atmosphere of respect and consideration.

Students are taught planning, decision making, and problem solving skills to develop their abilities to make sound personal, academic and citizenship choices. We respect the rights of students to make choices and experience the consequences of those choices when it is appropriate.

Students are always expected to conduct themselves in an orderly, polite and safe manner and as such are expected to adhere to the following behavior guidelines:

- Guideline # 1: Show respect for yourself, others, your environment, and all living things.
- Guideline # 2: Demonstrate personal responsibility for your actions, personal and community belongings, and your learning.
- Guideline # 3: Demonstrate self control. Use your body and words in the kindest manner possible. Be honest.

Our Disciplinary Philosophy

By providing an environment rich in interesting and creative materials and activities, behavior issues at Clark Fork School are kept to a minimum. We assume that children wish to be engaged in a positive, supportive school community.

When children are unable to abide by our agreements to show Respect, Demonstrate Personal Responsibility, and Demonstrate Self-Control, resulting in unsafe or disruptive behaviors, teachers, staff, and parents on site have many tools upon which to draw in order to assist students. In general these strategies are listed somewhat sequentially, but teachers may choose to adjust the sequence based on what they know of the child's particular needs and/or previous behavior history of the child in question.

- CFS Code of Conduct: This document, which should be read, discussed, and signed by both parent and child, is the baseline for our discipline strategies.
- Modeling: We assume that all adults will model appropriate, respectful, and safety-conscious behavior in their words and actions during their interactions with one another and with our students.
- Involvement of children in development and implementation of program behavior guidelines: At the beginning of the school year, there is extensive discussion within programs between students and teachers describing behavior expectations. These discussions are designed bring the children ownership in the kind of community that we all wish to participate in at Clark Fork School.
- Classroom or Whole School Meetings: Sometimes when there is confusion or conflict involving a large number of children, a classroom or whole school meeting may be called in order to identify the source of the conflict, brainstorm possible solutions, and adopt a standard of behavior.
- Positive reinforcement of desired behaviors: In order to clarify expectations, adults may often compliment a child who is exhibiting the desired behavior aloud and with a specific description. Other children overhearing the compliment will often choose to adopt similar behavior. Example: "Thank you for putting your toys away so neatly, Charlie."
- Verbal reminders of appropriate behavior: Specific descriptions of what behaviors are desired are needed. "Aaron, I need you to put your toys neatly and gently on the shelf where they belong now."
- Redirecting behavior into appropriate channels by offering children choices, all of which achieve the desired behavior: "Mandy, would you like to play gently with that toy, or would you like to put it away and find something else to do?"
- Release and Set Your Dial: When children become emotionally overwrought, they often cannot participate meaningfully in conflict resolution or make appropriate choices about behavior. Adults are encouraged to help the children become calm and focused by asking them to do a "release" (deep breath and relaxation of body) followed by "set your dial" to the appropriate level for being wholly present ("Please set your dial to a 4 or 5.")
- Conflict Resolution: We wish to equip our students with the tools necessary to resolve conflict in an appropriate manner, including using words to express feelings and viewpoints as "I statements", attentive listening, and finding consensus in solutions. Sometimes this requires an adult as facilitator, and sometimes the children who have practiced these techniques learn to initiate and conduct such a discussion on their own. The following is a brief outline of the technique that we call "Circle Up."
 - Gather the offended parties together to one side of on-going activity where they will sit in a circle (all on the same eye level if possible, including adults.)
 - Ask everyone to do a release and set their dials so that they can fully participate in the discussion.
 - One at a time, each person involved is encouraged to explain their feelings and perspective of the problem, using "I statements" and respectful language.
 - Each person must listen without interrupting while the others are speaking.
 - Each person may clarify his/her position if needed.
 - The group is encouraged to brainstorm possible solutions to the conflict.
 - The child (or children) is asked to state what he/she needs to have happen in order to feel taken care of and the others are asked if they can meet that need. This is done for all parties involved.
 - Finally, each participant is asked "Do you feel taken care of?" to be sure that the issue is now closed and that relationships are being mended.
- Take a Break: Sometimes a child is unable to make appropriate behavior choices despite all of the strategies listed above. If this occurs, a supervising adult may request that the child "take a break" away from the current activity to give the child time to think about their choices and to adjust their behavior. When the child and adult agree that the child is ready to resume the activity appropriately, the child is welcome to rejoin the group.
- Parent contact: Finally, if none of the strategies above assist the child in joining appropriately in the social and academic environment that best serves the community as a whole, a parent or guardian may be contacted for consultation and assistance.

Accommodating Children with Special Needs

Clark Fork School is an inclusive community which strives to serve a diverse group of children. We hire teachers who are interested in working with children in an integrated environment, and we promote quality learning for all children. All children are eligible to register for placement at Clark Fork School. So long as there are program openings, we accept any child who does not pose a direct threat to others and whose needs we can meet without putting an undue burden on the school or fundamentally altering the program, service, or operation.

For more details on our policy for accommodating children with special needs, please contact a board member to see the school's policy manual.

OUR NEIGHBORHOOD

Clark Fork School strives to be a good neighbor. We are located in a quiet residential neighborhood, and we ask that you respect those living around us by entering and leaving the school using Rattlesnake Drive rather than Gilbert Street. Our main parking lot is located on Dickinson Street. The small parking lot on Rattlesnake Drive is typically used by teachers and staff, but can be used as short-term overflow parking if space is available. In the larger Dickinson Street parking lot, there are four nested parking spots. These can be used at any time, but please be advised other cars may park behind you during school hours, blocking your exit. We also ask that you not park in front of our neighbors' houses or turn around in their driveways, and we strongly encourage carpooling or using alternative transportation to reach the school. Mountain Line Bus Route 5 stops directly across the street from Clark Fork School.

Our students enjoy frequent opportunities to visit Pineview Park, located just around the corner from our school. The park offers access to Rattlesnake Creek and the Tom Green Trail, as well as a play structure and covered picnic area. This city park is funded in part through a Special Improvement District tax, but is open to the general public, sports teams, and school children. In a small effort to give back to the neighborhood, we hold a Pineview Park litter pick-up event. We encourage you to join us in this fun and practical service project.

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

As a parent cooperative, Clark Fork School encourages parental and extended family participation in the classroom and at home. Children value what is important to the adults in their lives, which is best demonstrated by how we spend our time. The next section covers a variety of topics related to parental responsibilities and expectations.

Visiting the School

Parents, extended family, and adult family friends are welcome at Clark Fork School, whether as regular classroom helpers (see Parent Hours section below), extra helpers on field trips, special guests to share knowledge and skills, or as occasional visitors to observe daily activities at our school. In order to make these visits as successful as possible, we ask that you:

- Arrange the visit in advance with your child's teacher or the Director. Classroom space is limited, and certain times of the day are more appropriate for engaging in the children's activities.
- Plan visits carefully for children who are experiencing difficulty separating from parents. Talk in advance with your child's teacher to decide the best time to visit and to plan how to deal with separation issues.
- All visitors must check in at the office. We like to know who's hanging around our kids.

Let us know what skills, knowledge, abilities, and outside connections you might bring to enrich our learning environment. As a parent cooperative, we depend on parents to liven up the classroom and to expose our students to unique and diverse experiences. Please talk with your child's teacher or with the Parent Jobs Coordinator to explore what you might share with our children.

Parent Hours

Clark Fork School's everyday operations depend on the active involvement of all its families. Each family must provide a minimum of four (for preschool students enrolled two days a week) or six (all other students) hours per month of service to the school. Our Parent Job Coordinators and staff are available to help match your skills and availability to the jobs that need to be done to keep the school running. In addition, please watch the weekly newsletter and classroom postings for one-time jobs needing urgent attention. Teachers can often provide ideas for jobs if you are having trouble fulfilling your monthly minimum hours, and we encourage parents to take the initiative and suggest a task or project that they would like to take on to improve the school. We also maintain reporting requirements, so that we can best know what is being done at the school and what is realistically necessary to keep things going.

Most Clark Fork School parents gladly contribute more than the minimum hours, as they know that their contributions enrich the learning experience and the sense of community at our school. Because we occasionally have a problem with parents who do not fulfill their responsibilities, the board may impose a penalty of up to \$500 per year for families not providing the sweat equity that keeps our school running. We count on everyone feeling a sense of ownership in the school and a desire to do more than the minimum to make it a wonderful environment for our children. Please do not hesitate to contact the Parent Job Coordinator or a staff member with any questions.

Parent Communications

As a parent cooperative, communications at Clark Fork School are necessarily decentralized. Here are a few suggestions for staying on top of school news and issues:

- Read the school newsletter each week. It contains important information and updates about school activities. You may submit information for the newsletter in the designated pocket.
- Check the bulletin board located near the parent pockets daily.
- Check your parent pocket daily. If you carpool, please pick up the materials for the child for whom you are providing a ride.
- Use the student family directory to stay in touch with other school families and arrange play dates for your child and join the school e-mail list (contact the office for more information).
- Refer to the school calendar and watch for posted announcements of important dates, early-outs, parent meetings, and fund raising events.
- Attend the twice-yearly parent meetings and the orientation meeting, as well as any board meeting in which an agenda item interests you.
- Visit your child's classroom (check with the teachers to make sure the timing is convenient) and accompany the class on field trips.
- Periodically check our web site (www.clarkforkschool.org) for information and answers to general school questions.

Contact your classroom representative, a staff member, a board member or the Director with general questions about the school or classroom, and contact a board member if you would like to raise a topic in a board meeting.

If you want to contact the teachers, you can leave a message at the school telephone number (728-3395) or with the office staff, or you may call them at home in the evenings.

In cases of extreme and immediate emergency, teachers can be contacted via their classroom cell phones. Since teachers will cease all instruction and classroom activity to answer these calls, please exercise judgment and refrain from use except in cases of **extreme and immediate emergency**.

Please understand that the teachers' attention is focused on the children's immediate needs during drop-off and pick-up, and they are typically not available for extended discussion at that time.

If your child is sick or otherwise will not be attending school, our teachers appreciate you letting them know of the absence. Please see the discussion below about the steps to take if your child has a communicable disease.

We anticipate having voicemail for each classroom in the near future.

Our teachers encourage you to use parent pockets, telephone calls, or the federal postal service to deliver birthday party invitations. We do not want any child to feel left out by seeing invitations in other children's cubbies.

SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION

Board and Staff

Clark Fork School is governed by an elected Board of Directors composed of parents with children in each of the school's programs and two or more classroom representatives. The board establishes policy guidelines for the operation of the school, including budget development, curriculum, enrollment, fund raising, teacher evaluations, and job coordination. Executive Board members (President, Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer) and classroom representatives are elected each spring at a parent meeting, when the parent body is also asked to approve the school's annual budget.

The board meets on the second Wednesday of each month at 6:30 p.m. at the school. Board meetings are open to all staff and parents, and all adults are encouraged to attend. An agenda is posted in advance of each meeting. The rules governing our school's operations are spelled out in more detail in our official by-laws. A copy of the by-laws is kept at the school and is available for review.

The board periodically forms committees to investigate and make recommendations on issues of concern to the parent body. Committee membership is open to all school parents.

Clark Fork School has recently created the position of Director. The Director assists the Board in implementation of all school policies and oversees administrative matters for the school.

Tuition and Financial Assistance

Clark Fork School is funded by tuition payments, charitable donations, and fundraising activities. Each is very important, and we ask parents to consider all the ways they can help make our school financially strong.

Tuition is due at the beginning of each month. For your convenience, you will find a statement in your parent pocket at the beginning of the month. Please review it carefully. If you believe there is an error in your bill, please contact the Office Manager immediately. Payment is due immediately, and is considered late after 1:00 p.m. on the 8th day of the month. Late payments are assessed a \$15 penalty.

If timely payment is a problem, please contact the Director immediately to work out a mutually agreeable payment plan. Please refer to your contract for details on the various penalty provisions that may apply to delinquent accounts.

If you change your child's program attendance, you must notify the Director in writing by the 25th day of the prior month to ensure timely tuition billing adjustments. Adding days or hours of attendance is contingent on space available in the program. We understand that children do not always "fit" with a new school program, so we provide a six-week period at the beginning of the school year during which you may change your child's enrollment (including withdrawal from the program) and will be released from the remaining contractual obligations for tuition payment. After that period, a request for reduced hours or days may be considered a withdrawal under our contractual provisions, leaving you liable for the full tuition amount. Please refer to your contract for details on this policy and for the procedure for requesting an exemption.

Limited financial assistance is available to families enrolled at Clark Fork School based on income eligibility and special family circumstances. The Scholarship Committee makes application packets available each spring and awards scholarships for the following school year early in the summer. Working parents may also be eligible for state-assisted childcare payments, as Clark Fork School is an approved childcare facility under state certification guidelines. For information and state-pay application procedures, contact Child Care Resources, 728-6446.

School Schedule

Clark Fork School typically maintains a 180-day school year, generally based on the Missoula public schools' schedule. Please refer to our school calendar and the weekly newsletter for holidays, parent-teacher conference days, early-out days, and other important school-closure dates during the school year.

Kindergarten and Primary programs begin at 8:30 a.m. and the Preschool programs begin at 9:00 a.m. Siblings enrolled on different schedules are eligible for free 30 minutes of before-care so children can be dropped off at the same time. Otherwise, before-care is available for an extra charge subject to availability.

Our teachers need their classroom preparation time, so early classroom drop-off is not allowed. Please do not drop your child off before five minutes prior to the start of the school day, unless you are signed up for before-care. Any children arriving early to their classroom will be escorted to the before-care room, and the appropriate charge will be made to the parent's account.

Please arrive promptly to pick up your child at the scheduled time. Kindergarten and Primary programs are dismissed at 2:30 p.m. and Preschool is dismissed at 1:00 p.m. or 3:00 p.m. All programs are dismissed by 2:00 on Thursdays. Unless your child is signed up for aftercare, you will incur a financial penalty for pick-ups occurring more than five minutes after the end of the school day. We understand that parents occasionally run into unexpected emergencies and must arrive late for pick-up, and we recommend that you make back-up arrangements with other Clark Fork School parents or trusted friends or relatives and leave a message on the school phone to let us know who is authorized to pick up your child. Our teachers should not be expected to remain after hours to watch children whose parents are delayed, and you cannot count on using our after-care services on a drop-in basis unless you have made explicit arrangements with the after-care program.

If someone other than his or her parents or legal guardians will be picking up your child, you must provide written permission for that person to do so. There is a space on the emergency contact form to provide permission at the beginning of the year.

Field Trip Procedures

As required by state law, all children attending field trips must have signed consent forms from their parents. Sometimes our children ride buses or walk on field trips, but we also use parent drivers to reach many of our destinations. Parents driving Clark Fork School children on a field trip are responsible for the safety of children they are transporting, and

- Must have a current valid driver's license and a safe driving record.
- Carry proof of liability insurance and do not allow anyone to drive who is under 18 years of age.
- Lock all car doors while the vehicle is in motion.
- Take a head-count of the children in their care, and check throughout the trip to make sure the children remain with the group.
- Encourage bathroom breaks at appropriate times.
- Keep track of clothing and other items children bring with them.
- Be sensitive to any child that is feeling afraid of a situation or place, and bring this to the teachers' attention.
- Require children to remain calm and act safely while riding in the vehicle and during the field trip.
- Use shoulder-harness seat belts and appropriate car seat restraints for all children in their care; no child may ride in the front seat of a car equipped with an airbag or with a safety restraint unfastened.
- With the exception of public transportation that is not required by law to be equipped with safety restraints, no vehicle may begin moving until all children are seated and secured in age and weight appropriate safety restraints, which must remain fastened at all times the vehicle is in motion. Each child shall have a safety restraint.
- Children shall not share a safety seat or a safety restraint. Any child under 60 pounds or not yet 6 years old may not travel without a booster seat or car seat. Any child brought to school on a field trip day without the proper seating restraints will not be allowed to go on the trip and will be sent home.
- Children shall never be left unattended in a vehicle.

If your child uses a car seat or booster seat, please make sure to bring it to school (label it clearly) on field trip days.

Parents will be advised if their child is unruly and disobeys field trip rules. A second infraction may mean exclusion from future field trips.

Attendance

We ask that parents commit to making every effort to have their children attend regularly, barring illness or family emergencies. Should scheduling conflicts arise, parents may discuss with the teachers how their child might best maintain their schooling during extended absences. Clark Fork School classrooms are communities, and as such, everyone benefits most from the regular participation of all who are enrolled.

Sick-Child Procedures

We understand that keeping your child home from school can be difficult, especially when he or she has what seems to be a mild illness. Nonetheless, the health and safety of all Clark Fork School children is our top priority, so we strictly follow the sickness exclusion policy developed by the Montana Department of Public Health. If you need to go to work when your child is excluded from school, we suggest that you contact Cuddles and Care (327-3050), a sick-child care service of St. Patrick Hospital.

If your child comes to school with any of the following signs or symptoms of illness, he or she will be required to go home immediately. Please do not bring your child to school if he or she shows any of the following symptoms:

- Fevers of 100.5°F (oral) or greater. Children should be without fever for 24 hours before returning to school. Thus, a fever one afternoon means no school the next morning, even if your child appears to feel fine.
- Vomiting or diarrhea (loose, watery stools more than 6 times in 24 hours). Children should not return until symptoms have subsided for 24 hours. Again, if your child has these symptoms one afternoon, he or she may not attend school the following day.
- Bacterial infections, including strep throat, scarlet fever, and other skin infections (draining burns and sores that cannot be covered), until they have been treated with antibiotics for a full 24 hours. Bacterial conjunctivitis, "pinkeye," (symptoms include reddened eyes with a colored pus discharge) deserves a special note. Pinkeye may also be caused by a virus, which usually has a less severe drainage. Both types of pinkeye (bacterial and viral) are extremely contagious. It is sometimes difficult to determine the cause of infection. Doctors will usually prescribe antibiotic eye drops and instruct parents to return their child to school after 24 hours of antibiotic treatment. However, this has not always ceased the spread of pinkeye since a viral pinkeye has an incubation period of 3-5 days and antibiotic drops do not halt the virus. If the school has a pinkeye outbreak and your child has been diagnosed with pinkeye, you may be asked to keep your child home for 3 days. Please teach your child the importance of good hand washing. This is the main defense in preventing pinkeye.

- Generalized rashes over multiple parts of the body, until they have been diagnosed by a doctor. Varicella (chicken pox) warrants exclusion until the sores dry up, usually 5-7 days.
- Head lice, scabies, ringworm, impetigo, or any other external body parasite, until treated.
- Thick green or yellow nasal discharge persisting longer than 3 days if accompanied by fever, persistent cough, eye drainage, or ear pain. Consult with your health care provider before returning your child to school.
- Jaundice or symptoms of severe illness such as breathing difficulty, uncontrolled coughing, or seizure.
- Any illness or injury that does not allow your child to participate in the usual activities or requires extra care.

If your child becomes sick while at school or if the child is suspected of having a communicable illness, the staff will separate him or her from the other children and contact you or your emergency contact for immediate pick-up. Please pick up your child within one hour of the call, using our main phone number to contact the office and notify them of your plans. In the case of a serious injury, we will notify parents immediately and will call 9-1-1 for treatment.

We appreciate your letting us know if your child is sick and will not be attending school, particularly if he or she has a contagious illness. Please use our regular school telephone number to leave this message. In the case of any communicable disease or condition identified among Clark Fork School students, the Director will post signs and distribute written information describing the nature of the condition, symptoms to watch for, and precautions to take.

If your child requires medication during school or after-care hours, please provide all instructions in writing. Include the name of the medication and instructions about the time, amount, and any dietary requirements. Specific forms that explicitly give the teachers permission to administer the medication are available and are required. If your child has a food or other severe allergy, please make a note on your health form and make sure the teachers are aware of the condition.

As a licensed child care center, Clark Fork School is required to keep records of all our children's immunization histories, and all enrolled children at all grade levels must be fully immunized in accordance with Montana law.

Food Allergy Precautions

We recognize that some students may have allergies to certain food products. Parents of these students are responsible for educating staff members and parents about necessary precautions. We ask all families to respect these guidelines.

Emergency Procedures

In deference to our children's safety, Clark Fork School will be closed when severe winter weather forces the closure or early dismissal of schools in District One. You may learn of such closures and early dismissals by tuning into local radio stations. If you learn of an early dismissal, please pick up your child as soon as possible.

In the event of an emergency requiring the complete evacuation of Clark Fork School (e.g. fire, broken gas main, winter power outage), children will be taken to Rattlesnake School, located a few blocks north of Clark Fork School at 1220 Pineview Drive. Teachers will call parents' daytime phone numbers as listed on the children's emergency contact cards, and children should be picked up as soon as possible.

In the case of any unusual national or local emergency, please pick up your child at Clark Fork School or call the school for further information.

Complaint/Concern Procedures

As a parent cooperative, we encourage open and frequent communication among parents and teachers. Our parent-teacher board structure recognizes the importance of parent representation, and all meetings are open to the entire parent body. If you have a concern or complaint and direct communications have not been effective, you may contact the Director, your classroom representative or another board member for attention. Our formal complaint procedure is outlined in the school's policy manual.

Non-Discrimination

Clark Fork School is committed to a policy of non-discrimination: No individual shall be discriminated against with regard to compensation, terms, conditions, or other privileges of employment or admission because of race, ancestry, color, handicap, religion, national origin, gender, age, marital status, creed, physical condition, political belief, public assistance status, or sexual orientation.