

PARENT HANDBOOK (2024 – 2025)

Welcome to the LAB!

The University of Montana’s **Learning and Belonging (LAB) School** staff welcomes you. We are delighted that your child will be participating and learning in our program. We value your expertise as your child’s first, and most important, teacher and invite you to visit often and share your ideas, interests, talents, and energy with us. It is a privilege to share with you these precious and important years of your child’s development.

This handbook has been prepared to introduce your family to the LAB School and to acquaint you with the program’s policies and procedures. We hope it answers your most important and immediate questions. Please reach out to any of us should you still have questions, or need further clarification.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

[History](#)

[Mission](#)

[Philosophy](#)

[Curriculum and
Assessment](#)

[Hours of Operation and
School Closures](#)

[Enrollment](#)

[LAB Class Options](#)

[Tuition](#)

[Classroom Environment](#)

[Daily Schedule](#)

[Field Trips](#)

[What to Bring to School](#)

[Parent Involvement](#)

[Arrival and Departure](#)

[Behavior Guidance](#)

[Health and Safety](#)

[Toileting](#)

[LAB Staff Qualifications](#)

[Conflict or Concerns](#)

[Further LAB Policies](#)

[LAB Staff Contact
Information](#)

WHAT IS THE HISTORY OF THE LAB SCHOOL?

The Learning and Belonging (LAB) School has a rich history on the University of Montana campus serving as a clinical-experience site for College of Education teacher candidates and other human service degree practicum students while simultaneously providing best practice early care and education for Missoula area children. The program began its operation as a nursery school affiliated with the former Home Economics department back in the 1930s.

Operations transitioned to the College of Education in 1988. In 2009, the program moved from McGill Hall to its current location in the Phyllis J. Washington College of Education building. A 2019 addition includes two more classrooms with accompanying observation rooms. Today the LAB continues to meet the needs of young children, their families, and future early childhood professionals. Mixed-age preschool sessions are offered for groups of three- to five-year-olds as is a Transitional Kindergarten for children age four and a half through six.

WHAT IS THE LAB'S MISSION?

Provide University of Montana students opportunity to enhance understanding of young children and the teaching/learning process.

Invite children of all abilities, and their families, to participate in a caring community designed to promote lifelong learning (L) and (A) belonging (B).

The Learning and Belonging (LAB) School is a model early childhood program supported by the Phyllis J. Washington College of Education. The LAB's two-part mission intentionally addresses the unique attributes of a college-based laboratory school. First, the LAB works in partnership with the Department of Teaching and Learning and the Institute for Early Childhood Education to provide University of Montana students an opportunity to enhance their understanding of young children and the teaching/learning process. The LAB provides academic course support, resources, mentoring and key practicum learning experiences for students studying early childhood and elementary education as well as other human service degree programs at the University of Montana.

Secondly, and at its core, the LAB's multi-age early childhood program invites children of all abilities and their families to participate in a caring community designed to promote lifelong learning (L) and (A) belonging (B) in terms of self-acceptance and as a member of a group.

WHAT IS THE LAB'S PHILOSOPHY?

The LAB maintains a small group size in each session in order to support our goal of meeting the individual strengths, interests, and needs of every child in the program. The classroom

environment and expectations are created with respect for child development and the individuality of children. In order to achieve our goal, we:

- Welcome and value the uniqueness of each child.
- Support each child’s active participation in real, meaningful projects designed to allow success and challenge at individual developmental levels.
- Introduce activities and materials that foster development of the whole child in multiple areas including creative arts, language and literacy, mathematics and numeracy, physical development and health, science, social and emotional development, and social studies.
- Offer multiple opportunities for self-selected exploration, social interaction, and problem solving to enhance children’s natural motivation to learn.
- Use positive child guidance techniques that teach skills and support children’s emerging self-control.
- Understand that parents/guardians are the child’s most important teacher(s). We respect families’ expertise regarding their individual cultural beliefs and practices and welcome all to the LAB School community.

WHAT IS THE LAB’S CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK? HOW ARE CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT TIED TOGETHER AT THE LAB?

Project Based Learning: Grounded in Project Based Learning (PBL), the LAB School’s curriculum is play-based, experiential, developmentally appropriate, and aligns with state standards. PBL is a teaching method in which children and teachers gain knowledge and skills by working for an extended period of time to investigate and respond to an authentic, engaging, and complex question, problem, or challenge. PBL units are focused explorations of topics that solve real-life problems or answer a driving question. Through ongoing hands-on experiential learning, PBL units provide an opportunity for children and teachers to explore topics at a deeper level across all developmental domains and content learning areas; social-emotional, physical, language, cognitive, literacy, mathematics, science and technology, social studies, the arts, and even English language acquisition.

Authentic Child Assessment: Authentic assessment that is conducted while children are engaged in play and routine activities is a critical component of the LAB’s curriculum. Authentic assessment informs curriculum development and measures its effectiveness. The LAB’s primary assessment tool, [Teaching Strategies GOLD \(TSG\)](#), is conducted using the digital TSG application on LAB School iPads. Teachers begin documenting skills they observe within TSG at the beginning of, and throughout, the school year to build and inform PBL units that will ensure opportunities exist that foster individual child growth and development. The [TSG Objectives](#) are in alignment with the [Montana Early Learning Standards \(MELS\)](#).

Integrating PBL and Authentic Child Assessment: Teachers initiate and facilitate projects based

on child inquiry and assessment results. They propose driving questions such as *How can we make sure our little library is full of children's books?* Knowledge and curiosities expressed by individual children, or the group, are valued, explored and expanded upon. *"There's a little library on my street". "My best part of story hour is the elevator". "How do authors make books?"*.

The classroom environment, center choices, activities, and lessons shift to reflect current PBL units. *Teachers embellish the Dramatic Play Center with a library theme. Posts and boxes for building little libraries are added to the Block Center. A variety of materials are made available at the Writing Center for children to make their own little library signage.*

PBL units may take place over a period of several weeks, or a full semester. They enable teachers to act as guides, not experts, in the learning process. Since they are led by child inquiry, teachers participate alongside children in topic research as well as in the ongoing documentation of learning. Utilizing TSG, teachers continue to document newly acquired skill sets throughout the project. Documentation of learning is also displayed within the classroom so that children can engage with, and reflect on, what they've learned and update it accordingly as their learning progresses. Teacher developed resources such as word walls and illustrated anchor charts, visual teaching guides, are created to prompt children's writing or remind them how to engage with related materials and tools. *1st Select a piece of wood, 2nd Put on safety glasses, 3rd Secure wood to vice, 4th Saw back and forth carefully!*

The LAB teachers utilize resources and engage experts from within the class's current families. *A mother with wood working skills volunteers to help children make a child-height little library. The UM campus and the greater Missoula community enrich experiential learning. A trip to the public library is scheduled and children are responsible for mapping the route to and from. Or, beyond Missoula! A children's book illustrator Zooms in at Circle Time to introduce a class-time art workshop on oil pastel techniques.*

PBL units conclude with a public product, or presentation, for a real audience demonstrating growth in knowledge, skills, and development. *The class creates and stars in a YouTube video explaining the protocol for the little library and is shared out across UM's campus community.*

Creative Curriculum: In addition to teacher developed PBL units is the Creative Curriculum, a purchased curriculum aligned with the TSG assessment. The LAB teaching team has access to the [Creative Curriculum's array of Teaching Guides and Studies](#) that support and enhance teaching and learning within their classrooms. Studies (e.g., *Music Making, Roads, Bread, or Getting Ready for Kindergarten*) may be implemented in lieu of, or in alongside of, a PBL unit.

Please see the LAB School Assessment Policy copied below for detailed information specific to child and program assessment process.

Policy Title: Assessment Policy

NAEYC Criteria: 2A.8, 4A.1, 4A.2, 4D.5, 4D.6, 4E.2, 4E.3, 4E.4, 10F.2, 10F.3, 10F.4

References: Teaching Strategies GOLD Assessment System, Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ), Montana Early Learning Standards, Developmentally Appropriate Practice, The Handbook of Early Childhood Intervention

Procedure/practice: *The Learning and Belonging Preschool is committed to conducting authentic, on-going, observational and standardized screening and assessment of each child as an integral part of the program. Throughout the school year, children are observed in order to document their interests as well as developmental strengths and needs. Assessment documentation and results are used to appropriately plan instruction, to communicate with families, identify children who may be in need of specialized services or intervention, and to inform program development.*

The assessments used align specifically with LAB Preschool’s philosophy, goals, and the play-based emergent curriculum. Most assessments are unobtrusive as they can be conducted by classroom teachers through observations during play and routine activities over the course of the school year.

*The LAB Preschool practices a **family-focused** approach to assessment. The knowledge that families have regarding their own child’s development is crucial to gaining accurate assessment results. Families are informed of how and when assessments will take place and teaching staff work with families to determine assessment methods that will best meet the needs of individual children. Communication with families about their child’s assessment is sensitive to family values, culture, identity, and home language. Teachers and families discuss the purpose, value, and uses of assessment beginning at the first family event of the year (typically the orientation), via written information provided regarding assessment throughout the school year and at family-teacher conferences held at least twice in a given school year.*

A combination of assessment methods and tools are used depending upon the individual needs of each child. Anecdotal observations, checklists, rating scales, and individually administered tests are all available to teachers and parents in the assessment process.

Examples of assessment tools, methods and resources include:

- *Parent completed standardized screening tools such as the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ)*
- *A comprehensive observational assessment system such as Teaching Strategies GOLD (TSG) developmental continuum*
- *Child portfolio which may include checklists, developmental continuum, anecdotal records, progress reports, and samples of work such as drawings, paintings, writing, stories, photos and video*
- *Individually administered teacher developed tests typically in alignment with TSG*
- *Video and photos of children partaking in classroom activities*
- *Classroom observations and reflections*

- *Daily/weekly (on-going) communication with families about assessment tools, results, concerns or strengths, and how the results are used in refining the curriculum*

Observational assessments are conducted in group settings (both large and small) during regular daily activities. Occasionally, children may be assessed individually aside from the group in order to accurately determine skill level. All testing is conducted in an age and developmentally appropriate manner within the play-based environment.

Assessments obtain information on all areas of children’s development and learning, including cognitive skills, language, social-emotional development, learning styles, health, and physical development (including self-help skills).

Assessments are inclusive of all children including those with disabilities, children who are English-language or dual-language learners, and children who demonstrate competencies beyond typical developmental expectations. Objectives for English language acquisition are included within the TSG system as it offers guidance on assessing children who do not speak English.

The Teaching Strategies GOLD (TSG) assessment system is the primary assessment tool used at LAB. TSG is updated throughout the school year on each child and serves as the framework that guides teachers to understand strengths, interests, and needs of children in the LAB program. Thus, children’s learning is supported by intentionally planned engaging experiences that are responsive to individual and group needs. As summarized in the assessment process below (as well as stated above in the examples of assessment tools, methods and resources), TSG is supplemented by numerous other tools and methods.

The LAB’s assessment process is detailed below. At any time during the process, families may raise questions or concerns about how assessment methods will meet their child's needs by addressing their child’s teacher directly, talking to the director, or submitting a comment in the suggestion box.

Assessment process:

1. *Family information gathering and screening*
 1. *Teachers gather family and child information via the LAB Preschool Intake Form that families complete.*
 2. *During Fall and Spring semesters, the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) is distributed to families who individually screen their own child. As appropriate, teachers may also use the ASQ to screen children. This initial screening takes place during the first few weeks of school and must be completed within the first two months.*
 3. *Teachers continue to gather information about the child’s growth and development by visiting informally with parents.*

2. *Simultaneously, teacher facilitated assessment occurs from the start of school.*
 1. *Teachers conduct classroom observations to gather antidotal documentation of child growth and development.*
 2. *The TSG assessment is used to guide the assessment process and acts as LAB's primary assessment tool.*
 3. *Additional assessment tools/methods are utilized as appropriate.*
3. *Fall family-teacher conferences are held*
 1. *Results of initial assessments are discussed*
 2. *Written assessment results are shared*
 3. *Families and teachers establish mutually agreed upon individual learning goals/plans for the child*
4. *Teachers continue to observe and document children's learning in a variety of ways throughout the year*
 1. *Teaching staff reflect on classroom observations and assessments during weekly staff planning meetings.*
 2. *They align curriculum, teaching strategies, and environment to meet the interests and needs of the children.*
 3. *On-going assessment data is analyzed to inform curriculum goals and support individual learning goals/plans.*
 4. *Evaluation of individual children's progress is continued and weekly plans are shaped accordingly.*
 5. *Families are consulted informally, yet regularly, in order for teachers to accurately understand the skills children demonstrate at home, and vice versa.*
5. *In the spring:*
 1. *Parents are asked to re-screen using the ASQ.*
 2. *Teachers compile current/recent assessment documentation.*
6. *Spring Family-Teacher conferences are held*
 1. *Results of assessments are discussed.*
 2. *Written assessment results are shared.*
 3. *Families and teachers establish mutually agreed upon individual learning goals/plans for each child.*

The sharing of assessment information and confidentiality:

- *Assessment results are shared with families during private family-teacher conferences.*
- *Regardless of attendance at family-teacher conferences, all families are given written assessment results towards the end of fall and spring semesters. Additionally, families are welcome to view their child's portfolio at any time.*
- *All child and family information collected is handled in a strictly confidential manner. The TSG website is secure and password protected. Hard copies of assessment materials are stored in locked teacher and/or director offices and accessed only by such.*

- *Assessment information is only shared with other providers or agencies upon parent request and with written parent consent. Should parents elect to share their child's assessment information it will be for the purposes of enhancing the child's overall care and development.*
- *Occasionally, LAB hosts faculty or graduate student research projects. All families are informed of any such projects ahead of time. Parents choose whether or not to have their own child participate via a signed consent form. Parents are free to discontinue consent at any time. Research-based assessment processes adhere to strict confidentiality measures. For further information refer to the University of Montana's Institutional Review Board (IRB).*

Referral process:

Should concerns arise regarding a child's developmental progress, or behavior, teachers communicate with the family and director in order to insure needs are appropriately assessed and addressed.

- *Team meetings and communications are held with the family at the core to discuss the observations, current efforts taking place to support the child and to plan for appropriate referrals, further assessment and intervention as determined necessary.*
- *A current list of community-based resources for children in need of more specialized assessment and services is provided to the family.*
- *LAB Preschool supports the family in the referral process as needed. Families are encouraged to contact community-based providers for further assessment and intervention. Teaching staff may make the referral per request of the family, but only when release-of-information forms are signed.*
- *LAB employees adhere to strict confidentiality measures throughout the process per signed confidentiality statement.*
- *Diagnostic assessments are conducted by appropriately trained professionals requested by the family.*

Program Assessment: *In addition to child-focused assessment, the LAB Preschool conducts programmatic assessments to ensure the quality of best early childhood education practices. Annually, the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) and the Program Administration Scale (PAS) are conducted. Additionally, family, field-experience student, and staff surveys may be conducted. Results from these measures are shared with the LAB teaching staff, families and the LAB Advisory Board.*

Staff Assessment: *The performance of all LAB teaching and support staff is evaluated annually. Staff may use the Montana Early Care and Education Knowledge Base Self-Assessment to identify strengths, needs and to set goals for professional development. Teaching staff and the director are evaluated further by their supervisor(s) via the University of Montana's Performance Review format that is individually linked to job descriptions. Assessment of the ECS and ECCS may also include tools such as the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS).*

WHEN IS THE LAB SCHOOL IN SESSION? WHEN DOES THE SCHOOL CLOSE?

The Learning and Belonging School is in operation during the University of Montana's academic school year, September through mid-May. The program follows UM's calendar and observes all UM holidays.

The LAB **closes for weather or other emergencies** if the University of Montana (UM) cancels classes or if Missoula County Public Schools (MCPS) close. It is smart to stay tuned to your favorite local network, or check [UM's](#) and [MCPS's](#) websites.

In the event either UM or MCPS has a **delayed start** to their day, the LAB's Morning Preschool class will close, the Transitional Kindergarten class will follow the delayed start as indicated by MCPS, and the Afternoon Preschool class will begin as usual.

HOW ARE CHILDREN ENROLLED IN THE LAB?

Enrollment in each Preschool class is limited to 16 children. The Transitional Kindergarten class accommodates up to 18 children. We are committed to developing a connected community for young children supported by the small group size. In addition, all children are enrolled for the full four-day session. This means that you and your child can anticipate interacting with the same group of teachers, children and their families consistently throughout the school year.

Age Requirements and Eligibility: All three- through six-year-olds of the greater Missoula community are eligible for enrollment. Affiliation with the University of Montana is NOT a requirement.

Enrollment Process: A waiting list is maintained on an ongoing basis at the LAB. Families can request to be added to the waiting list at any time by contacting the director. Enrollment for the upcoming school year takes place in four phases:

1. Near the beginning of spring semester, enrollment for the next year is opened to children who are currently enrolled, as well as their age eligible siblings.
2. The next enrollment phase is open to siblings of children who were enrolled at the LAB in previous years.
3. Children qualifying with "high needs" per Montana's STARS to Quality program are offered enrollment during the third phase. The LAB is committed to reserving 20% of our slots for children with high needs.
4. The final phase invites all remaining families. Vacant slots are offered in order of intake date on the waiting list until all three class lists are filled.

WHAT CLASS OPTIONS ARE AVAILABLE AT THE LAB?

Class Option	Times
Morning Preschool	9:00 am – 12:00 pm
Afternoon Preschool	12:30 pm – 3:00 pm
Extended Preschool, includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Morning & Afternoon PreK sessions • Lunch care between sessions 	9:00 am – 3:00 pm
Transitional Kindergarten	8:45 am – 2:45 pm

All classes are in session Mondays through Thursdays. Fridays are reserved for UM student seminars, teacher reflection and program planning.

HOW MUCH IS THE LAB’S TUITION AND HOW ARE PAYMENTS MADE?

Tuition is charged on an annual basis. An annual tuition-based approach is important to the LAB’s sustainability allowing us to meet daily and monthly expenses, which remain consistent even when your child is absent.

For your convenience, the annual tuition amount is divided into 10 equal payments. The **first of the 10 payments serves as a non-refundable deposit** and is collected upon enrollment. This first payment secures your child’s slot.

The **nine remaining tuition payments are due by the 15th of every month, September – May**. Payment (in form of check or cash) can be dropped in the orange locked box located in the hall towards the playground doors. Credit card payments may be made on the [LAB’s website](#). It is also possible to line up direct billing payments through your financial institution. Simply instruct your bank or credit union to issue a monthly payment to:

Learning and Belonging School
32 Campus Drive
Missoula, Mt 59812

Class	Total Annual Tuition	10 Payments of:
Morning Preschool	\$ 3230.00	\$ 323
Afternoon Preschool	\$ 2690.00	\$ 269
Extended Preschool	\$6460.00	\$646
Transitional Kindergarten	\$6460.00	\$646

For those with financial need, the LAB School accepts [Montana’s Best Beginnings Scholarship](#).

WHY ARE CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENTS SO IMPORTANT?

The LAB classrooms are large, open light filled spaces. Each has an exterior door that leads to a patio or playground in order to extend the learning environment outdoors. Materials and furnishings have a natural aesthetic. Centers within each classroom invite small groups of children to engage in play-based learning. Learning centers include block play, art, reading and writing, science and math, dramatic play, and sensory exploration. Each classroom has a bathroom with child-sized sinks and toilets. Every child has an individual cubby to store personal belongings.

The Environment as the Third Teacher: The LAB considers the role of a classroom’s physical environment counterpart to that of a teacher’s role in supporting child outcomes. The LAB teachers maintain a safe, inclusive, and nurturing learning environment. Within the environment, the LAB teachers introduce activities and materials that foster development of the whole child in multiple areas including creative arts, language and literacy, mathematics and numeracy, physical development and health, science, social and emotional development, and social studies. Teachers intentionally select and arrange learning materials, equipment, furniture and routines that honor children’s interests, set clear messages and boundaries that help guide behavior, and appropriately challenge children to master new skills.

WHAT CAN BE EXPECTED IN A TYPICAL LAB SCHOOL DAILY SCHEDULE?

Consistent, but flexible, schedules and routines are apparent within the classroom environment. Ample play time in free-choice centers (Dramatic Play, Blocks, Art, Writing, Discovery, Library, Manipulatives, Sensory) where teachers have intentionally set opportunities to reach the range of content within the MELS and TSG objectives, allow for self-selected exploration, social interaction, and problem-solving to enhance children’s natural motivation to learn.

While free-choice play-based *centers* make up the bulk of the school day, *whole group* and *small group* times allow for a balance of child and teacher-directed activities. Throughout the day children are engaged in active hands-on learning. This blending of play, authentic learning experiences, and direct instruction provides children with multiple opportunities for learning. The LAB supports each child’s active participation in real, meaningful experiences designed to support individual developmental levels. The LAB teachers are careful to scaffold experiences in order to meet children where they are and provide developmentally appropriate challenges.

While the schedule remains flexible to meet the daily interests and needs of the group, a typical day includes:

- WORK JOBS and GATHERING: Children engage with manipulative toys, writing materials, books and one another while waiting for everyone to arrive. The teacher then gathers the group to describe the day’s center choices and activities.

- **LEARNING CENTERS:** Children choose from a range of play areas presenting opportunities for social interaction, project work, and learning. A nutritious daily snack is offered during center time and gives children an energy boost for a busy day.
- **CIRCLE:** A large group meeting time used to build community through sharing, songs, and stories. Project topics and investigations are often introduced through books, discussions, and presentations from visiting experts.
- **SMALL GROUP:** Children gather in small groups to complete a teacher-planned activity that often relates to the project topic and introduces social, science, math, and/or literacy concepts using age-appropriate materials and methods.
- **OUTDOOR PLAY:** Opportunities to run, jump, and climb are provided on the playground daily.

The Extended Preschool and Transitional Kindergarten day includes lunch. Children enjoy a lunch brought from home. Teachers eat with the children to model healthy eating habits and take advantage of this natural opportunity to converse, expand on language, and connect about the day's events.

- Extended Preschool Lunch Transition:
 - At noon, the Afternoon Preschool teachers meet the Morning Preschool children to greet and gather pertinent information about the day. They support children in collecting their belongings, and enter the afternoon classroom.
 - All children wash hands prior to eating.
 - After lunch, all children clear their lunch area and brush their teeth.

DO LAB SCHOOL CLASSES TAKE FIELD TRIPS?

Learning within the campus environment is supported by many opportunities to move beyond the walls of the classroom. Children enjoy a spacious playground as well as opportunities to use campus facilities. Most all of our field trips are within walking distance. Parents sign a field trip permission slip at the beginning of the school year. When an event is planned in advance, you receive notice of the date, location, and times of the excursion. There are, however, times when we choose to take advantage of spontaneous events, interest or perhaps a glimpse of good weather. In this case, teachers will do their best to keep you fully informed of where on campus the group is adventuring outside the classroom.

Should a field trip be arranged for off campus, advanced notification from the teacher will be provided along with a separate field-trip permission slip.

WHAT DO CHILDREN NEED TO BRING TO SCHOOL?

Every child will need:

- A family photo, printed or sent classroom teacher by email
- A helmet, sized and fitted to your child's head. This helmet will remain at school and only be worn by your child. Please label it.
- A labeled bag (such as a gallon-size Ziplock) containing **one change of clothes**; shirt, pants, socks and underwear. *Children attending the Extended Preschool option should bring two bags each with a spare set of clothing.* This bag(s) will be stored in the bathroom throughout the school year. If an item is used, the soiled piece of clothing will be placed in your child's cubby. Montana Child Care Licensing policy requires soiled clothing be wrapped in plastic and set home for laundering. Simply bring a replacement of the clothing item back to school the next day to replenish the supply in the Ziplock bag.
- **Shoes or sturdy slippers** are required inside the classroom. During inclement weather it is helpful to keep a pair of house shoes/non-slip slippers at school to change into in order to keep the floors clean and safe to play on.
- Weather-appropriate **outdoor clothing** is essential. Please pay attention to seasonal and daily temperatures. We go outside everyday unless in the case of the following extremes:
 - Wind chill at or below 0° Fahrenheit
 - Heat index at or above 95° Fahrenheit
 - For air pollution/smoke levels the LAB follows the [Department of Environmental Quality's "Today's Air" website](#) and keeps children indoors when the air quality is deemed Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups, orange zone.

Extended Preschool and Transitional Kindergarten children will need a lunch:

- We suggest a healthy and balanced variety of foods that do not require refrigeration or reheating.
- Filtered water is provided. We would prefer that children not bring juice or drinks.
- Please also ensure that packed food does not include typical choking hazards such as; whole grapes, nuts, popcorn, hard pretzels, or hot dogs.
- Per DPHHS Child Care Licensing Regulations, *lunch and supper for children who are between one and 12 years old must include one serving of meat or meat alternate, two vegetables or two fruits or one vegetable and one fruit, one serving of bread or bread alternate, and one serving of fluid milk.*

WHAT DOES PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN THE LAB LOOK LIKE?

Parent involvement is an important part of the LAB School. We look forward to partnering with you in your role at the first, and most important teacher in your child's life.

You are invited to:

- Share your goals, hopes, and dreams for your child. The LAB teaching staff is committed to hearing from and partnering with you.
- Complete the *Ages and Stages Questionnaire* screening tool with your child twice annually.
- Know, understand, and discuss with us the program’s mission, philosophy and goals.
- Stop in any time! Our observation rooms are the perfect place to be able to watch your child in our classrooms without disrupting the natural flow of the day. Of course, you are also always welcome to join in the classroom.
- Provide feedback and suggestions to teachers and the director via face-to-face communication, phone, email, annual surveys or the confidential suggestion box. The director has an “open door policy”. Feel free to stop by anytime.
- Work with your child’s classroom teachers to plan special activities or events based on your family traditions, celebrations, talents, and interests.
- Be involved in the parent planning committee or the LAB advisory committee. At minimum, two family events that include parent education are held each school year.
- Participate in conferences with your child’s teacher (fall and spring) to set goals and discuss your child’s progress in the program.
- Contact your child’s teacher to schedule a meeting at any time to share your celebrations and/or concerns about your child.

WHAT ARE THE LAB SCHOOL ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE ROUTINES?

Please plan to allow transition time for your child and to visit with your child’s teacher.

- Sign your child in and out each day on the posted attendance sheet. This is an important Montana Child Care Licensing requirement that ensures your child is accounted for.
- Please be certain to **always say goodbye to your child** and assure them that you will return.
- Complete and sign an authorized release permission slip if anyone other than the parent/guardian will be picking the child up from the LAB. We cannot allow a child to leave with anyone other than the parent/guardian unless we have signed consent. Inform those picking up that we ask for picture identification.
- It is important to arrive on time at the end of the day; 12:00, 2:45 or 3:00 dependent upon the class your child is enrolled in. Teachers are expected to be engaged in processing meetings with practicum students immediately following the session limiting their availability to provide quality child contact time after school hours.

HOW DO LAB TEACHERS GUIDE CHILDREN’S BEHAVIOR?

The LAB practices a proactive approach to child guidance in order to develop a caring community of young learners. [Conscious Discipline](#), a social-emotional curriculum, principles

are taught and practiced throughout our school family ensuring that adults and children gain self-regulation skills that enhance positive relationships.

See the LAB's Positive Child Guidance policy below:

Policy Title: *Positive Child Guidance*

NAEYC Criteria: **1B.8, 1B.9, 1B.10, 1E.1, 6D.3, 10B.18, 10E.2,**

References: *Learning and Belonging School Positive Child Guidance Procedures, Guiding the Behavior of Young Children (Child Care plus+), Effective Practices in Early Childhood Education, by Sue Bredekamp, 2011.*

Guidance Philosophy: *A positive guidance approach is used in our classrooms to help children understand limits and to support their emerging self-regulation skills. Appropriate guidance allows children to value themselves and others and to cultivate respect for each other within a classroom setting. Children's behavior typically reflects what they are experiencing. It is vital to assess the function of behavior in order to understand the child's actions.*

Guidance Strategies: *The LAB's guidance approach begins even before children arrive through thoughtful planning of the environment, placement of materials, grouping of children, scheduling of activities and transitions within the classroom in order to prevent potential problems. Individual children and situations vary. Thus, it is important to follow a guidance approach that can be individualized as necessary.*

Our approach to guidance includes:

- *A focus on developing a positive relationship with each child and family,*
- *Reflecting on the antecedents (What happened before the behavior?)*
- *Use of strategies that support the development of a positive classroom community characterized by joy and respect for diversity*
- *Clear, consistent boundaries which are supported with encouragement, practice, and ongoing teaching*
- *Encouragement of internal self-regulation*
- *Modeling, as well as teaching, positive behaviors*
- *Facilitating positive self-esteem by accepting children's feelings*
- *Modeling multi-step problem-solving techniques**

A Positive Approach: *We teach and implement a multi-step problem-solving process* in our classrooms. We believe that children are capable of coming up with proactive solutions to most of the problems they encounter. We provide encouragement, offer choices, redirect and set reasonable limits. Isolated "time-out" practices are not utilized in the LAB School program.*

Physical punishment, psychological abuse, or coercion shall never be used in our program. *We do not equate guidance or discipline with punishment.*

- *Examples of physical punishment include: Shaking, hitting, spanking, slapping, jerking, squeezing, kicking, biting, pinching, excessive tickling, and pulling of*

- arms, hair, or ears; requiring a child to remain inactive for a long period of time.
- Examples of psychological abuse include shaming, name-calling, ridiculing, humiliation, sarcasm, cursing at, making threats, or frightening a child; ostracism, withholding affection.
 - Examples of coercion include Rough handling (shoving, pulling, pushing, grasping any body part); forcing a child to sit down, lie down, or stay down, except when restraint is necessary to protect the child or others from harm; physically forcing a child to perform an action (such as eating or cleaning up).

Family Involvement: The LAB staff values partnering with families (and as necessary professional service providers) to effectively problem-solve and jointly develop behavior action plans. Together, we discuss the child's successes and challenges at home and in the school. Teachers strive to incorporate the family's successful guidance strategies into the classroom as appropriate. Parents are encouraged to observe, ask for information, voice opinions and make recommendations.

Positive Child Guidance; Action Plan and Resource Binder:

The LAB's Positive Child Guidance; Action Plan and Resource Binder provides Positive Child Guidance Procedures and Resources for teaching staff. Staff will utilize the binder when developing behavior action plans.

LAB School Rules:

1. Take good care of yourself
2. Take good care of each other
3. Take good care of the school and the things in it

***Multi-Step Problem Solving Process:**

1. Identify the problem;
2. Brainstorm three ways to handle it;
3. Choose one;
4. Try out the strategy;
5. Evaluate how well the strategy worked.

Suspension/expulsion: The LAB School is an inclusive environment where staff strive to ensure all children are able to participate and thrive. The LAB views the suspension, expulsion, or other exclusionary practices to be the last possible scenario after all efforts have been made to meet the needs of the child within the program. The decision to suspend or expel will be an agreement made in collaboration with the family, any related-service team members, LAB teaching staff, and director that suspension/exclusion is in the best interest of the child.

Suspension, expulsion and other exclusionary measures may only occur after LAB teaching staff have attended to and followed the LAB's Positive Child Guidance

procedures.

If exclusionary measures must be taken, the LAB School will offer assistance to the family in accessing services and an alternative placement within the community.

HOW ARE CHILDREN KEPT HEALTHY AND SAFE?

Routine Health and Safety Practices:

Prevention is the focus of our health and safety practices. Children are supervised at all times. An **up-to-date immunization record per Montana Department of Health and Human Services regulations, is required on the first day of school.** Effective hand washing is used by teachers and repeatedly taught to both UM students and children to reduce the spread of illness in the program. Toys, materials and equipment are routinely cleaned and maintained.

A telephone is available in each classroom in case of emergency and family contact information is kept with the phone as well as the number to the poison control center. Stocked first-aid kits are kept in the classrooms and on the playground. A portable first-aid kit is taken along on field trips.

Exterior doors to the LAB remain locked at all times. Access is limited to the LAB Staff, clinical-experience students, currently enrolled families, and a select few director-approved UM and College of Education staff/faculty. Parents are issued a key fob at open house that allows access during school hours. All others, including non-ECE practicum students, must ring the door bell and be admitted by a LAB staff member.

Meeting Children's Nutritional Needs:

The curriculum includes learning experiences for the children regarding healthy foods. Parents are encouraged to share diet restrictions with the teachers. It is essential that information about food allergies is expressed and recorded on the program intake and emergency contact forms. Daily snacks, provided by the LAB School, represent a range of food groups across the week and provide a natural opportunity for discussion of healthy food choices. Snack is offered as a center time choice so that children are able to self-monitor their hunger needs. A rotating three-week menu is provided to all families and is posted on the family bulletin board.

When Children Are Ill the Illness Exclusion policy copied below is followed:

Policy Title: Risk Management: Illness Exclusion

NAEYC Criteria: 6A.8 and 10B.19

Resources: State of Montana Licensing Requirements of Child Day Care Centers, "Model Child Care Health Policies."

Procedure/practice:

At the LAB Preschool, we believe that mild illnesses can be managed in the program, but children with moderate to severe illnesses may need to be excluded because they need special care and/or to protect the other children in care. We believe planning ahead for possible exclusion will make it easier and less stressful for the child and family.

This Illness Exclusion Policy was developed to increase awareness of the increased potential for group transmission of illness in the childcare setting and to decrease the spread of communicable disease between all. Unless otherwise noted, this policy applies equally to teachers, support staff, and field-experience students as it does to children attending the LAB. All notations of “child” below apply also to any adult participating in the program.

The decision to exclude or dismiss a child from preschool will be based on the child’s signs and symptoms and/or the diagnosis of a health care provider as outlined below:

- *The illness prevents the child from participating comfortably in the routine activities of the program.*
- *The illness results in a greater care need than the staff can provide without compromising the health and safety of the other children.*
- *Signs or symptoms of possible severe illness such as unusual lethargy, uncontrolled coughing, persistent crying, difficulty breathing, wheezing, or complaints of severe pain.*
- *The child has any of the following signs or symptoms of contagious illness:*
 - *Fever accompanied by behavior changes or a temperature of 100.3 degrees or greater in the past 48 hours, or until a medical evaluation determines the child may be in child care.*
 - *Vomiting: Two or more episodes in the previous 48 hours.*
 - *Diarrhea: Increased number of stools, watery stools, stools with mucus or blood, and/or stools that cannot be contained by a diaper or clothing and are different and more frequent than the child’s regular pattern.*
 - *Bacterial infections listed until treated for 24 hours with antibiotics and the child feels well enough to participate.*
 - *Conjunctivitis*
 - *Strep throat*
 - *Impetigo*
 - *Skin infections or draining burns*
 - *Lice or Scabies until after treatment and no nits present.*
 - *Generalized rash with fever or behavior changes or jaundiced skin color until medical evaluation determines symptoms do not indicate excludable communicable disease.*
 - *Chicken Pox until 6 days after onset of rash or until all sores have dried and crusted.*
 - ***COVID positivity or COVID exposure/close contact*** – *The LAB Preschool will follow the current guidance of the Missoula City-County Health Department (MCCHD) in regard to COVID exclusion. If a child, parent,*

staff member, field-experience student, or other adult receives a positive COVID test or is a close contact to a positive case, they must refer to the MCCHD website <https://www.missoulainfo.com/> for direction.

Parents will be notified if their child becomes ill at the preschool and meets the criteria for exclusion. If unable to reach parents with the contact information provided on the Emergency Contact Form, the emergency contact persons listed on the form will be notified. The child must be picked up as soon as possible. If parents are unable to pick up within 30 minutes of notification, they are responsible for coordinating someone else who can meet this timeframe.

Readmission to the program: After an absence, the family needs to share pertinent information with the staff regarding the illness. In most cases, the child needs to be **symptom free without fever reducers for a full 48 hours**. A release from the health care provider is required after a serious illness and/or the diagnosis of a communicable illness. COVID positive and close contact cases must follow direction for readmission from the MCCHD website <https://www.missoulainfo.com/>.

This policy applies to all enrolled children, teaching staff, and participating adults, from the first date of attendance. Parents are provided a copy of this policy at the time of enrollment and a copy is given to all parents every year in October. This policy is consistent with state regulation and may be more restrictive.

Medication Administration During School Hours:

In most cases we prefer that medication be given directly by the parent. However, for children who require medication to be administered during school hours, the appropriate medication administration forms must be completed and signed by the parent. Medication will be stored in the locked box located in the director's office unless deemed necessary to have in closer proximity to child (i.e., EpiPens/inhalers). Medications must be in original bottle and clearly labeled with the child's name. Only staff who have completed Montana's DPHHS Medication Administration courses are permitted to administer medication. A medication log will be completed at each administration. For the full Medication Administration policy see appendix.

Emergency Procedures:

The LAB School teachers maintain current CPR and first-aid training certifications. In the event of any emergency, 911 will be called immediately. Emergency services will be used to transport the child, if necessary. Whenever indicated, the teacher will also call the poison control number (1-800-222-1222).

Relocation sites are identified annually in the unlikely event that the LAB must be evacuated. Emergency relocation information and permission forms are included in the enrollment paperwork.

DO CHILDREN NEED TO BE TOILET TRAINED? ARE THERE PROCEDURES FOR USING THE BATHROOM DURING THE SCHOOL DAY?

Preschool Children: Toileting independence is not a requirement in the LAB's Preschool sessions. If your child is still gaining independence, please visit with the teachers to ensure a supportive plan is in place that meets the developmental needs of your child and feels comfortable for your family.

Transitional Kindergarten Children: We do expect children attending the Transitional Kindergarten to be toilet independent. That said, we anticipate that "accidents" happen. Our staff is happy to support your child in changing to clean clothing in a non-judgmental and individualized developmentally appropriate way.

All children are free to use the bathroom at any time throughout the school day. Bathrooms are located inside each classroom and have been designed so that children have some privacy within stalls while at the same time teachers are able to visually supervise for safety and good hygiene practices.

WHAT ARE THE QUALIFICATIONS OF THE LAB SCHOOL STAFF?

Each class is taught by an **Early Childhood Clinical Specialist (ECCS)** and an **Early Childhood Education Graduate Fellow**. **Early Childhood Education (ECE) field-experience students** may also teach under the mentor ECCS. This co-teaching team insures mastery level and current evidence-based early childhood teaching practices. While a Master's degree in ECE is preferred, at a minimum, the ECCS position requires a four-year degree in Early Childhood Education, Child Development, Elementary Education, or related field such as Early Childhood Special Education. In addition, these teachers must be registered on the Montana Early Childhood Practitioner's Registry at a Level 6 Certification.

The ECCS position is unique in the early care and education field in that these teachers must have the skills and expertise to effectively mentor UM teacher candidates (ECE and Elementary Education students). They are responsible for UM student supervision, reflection and course work implementation. All ECE field-experience students are listed as staff though our Montana Child Care License.

A small staff of **student employees** supports the LAB co-teaching teams. Student employees are primarily responsible for prep-work, cleaning and clerical support. They are able to participate fully in student orientation and training seminars and are often long-term employees throughout all four years of college.

The LAB's **director** is responsible for program administration in operations as well as family, community and campus/faculty outreach. This position requires a Master's Degree in Early Childhood Education, or related field.

University Student Supervision:

School operations and teacher schedules have been carefully orchestrated to support the development of a strong teaching team with the student interns. A thorough orientation is completed prior to involvement in the LAB and students can attend a weekly instructional seminar to enhance their developing knowledge and teaching skills. In addition, teachers meet with the UM students on a daily basis before and after each session to provide ongoing instruction and support. UM students are supervised in their work with the children.

Building Campus Partnerships:

Strong campus partnerships have emerged over time bringing a range of experiences to the children. Collaboration examples in the past have included art lessons in collaboration with the Art Department faculty and students, weekly music classes provided by Music Education students, creative dance with students in the School of Fine Arts, and PE classes with students from the Department of Health and Human Performance. While these experiences will vary from one year to the next, the teachers work hard to maintain a range of collaborative partnerships with UM programs that can enhance the school experience.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I HAVE A CONFLICT WITH A STAFF MEMBER, OR A CONCERN ABOUT THE PROGRAM?

The LAB school staff value family perspective and work hard to build respectful-reciprocal relationships with parents. In the event that you should have a question, concern, or conflict of opinion, we ask that you first communicate with your child's teacher in person, by phone, or by email. If communicating with the classroom teacher doesn't resolve the issue, you may bring it to the director. If you prefer, you may also leave a suggestion, or comment, in the locked orange tuition box.

WHERE CAN I FIND MORE INFORMATION ABOUT LAB SCHOOL POLICIES?

This handbook provides an overview of pertinent policies and procedures. Parents have full access to the full LAB School Policy Handbook located in the Family Room. Digital copies are available upon request by emailing the director.

HOW DO I CONTACT THE LAB SCHOOL STAFF?

Typically, the director's office doors are open. Parents are welcome to stop by anytime with questions, comments, or suggestions. Or, simply to say hello! If the door is closed, or a sign is posted, it might be best to try again later or reach out by email or phone instead.

While teachers are meeting with teacher candidates and practicum students immediately before and after each class session, they do make every effort to briefly greet each child and family at drop-off and pickup times. If you are hoping to have a longer, or private, conversation please reach out to your teacher by email or phone.

LAB telephone number: (406) 243-4262

Director email: kristin.horejsi@mso.umt.edu

Early Childhood Clinical Specialist emails:

danielle.bailey@mso.umt.edu

olivia.kersey-bronec@mso.umt.edu

judith.stack@mso.umt.edu