



Dear Prospective Families,

Thank you for your interest in Spire School, our all-weather forest preschool that focuses on developing life skills through play, exploration, and emergent curriculum. We, Ilana and Megan, began Parks Plus Creation in 2013 to offer nature connection programs to children and families in San Francisco, and in 2015 Spire School launched to serve as a place for children to learn and grow 100% outdoors, immersed in nature.

We are thrilled that our forest school has captured your attention. Spire School means so much to us, and we are happy to share it with others. Over the past eight years we have been honored to learn alongside hundreds of children and families as we have all grown our appreciation for the land and for this community. We are grateful everyday for the opportunity to laugh, play, and wonder with young children in the Presidio.

As you explore options for your children's preschool years, we hope you approach this journey with curiosity and excitement; please don't hesitate to reach out.

Thank you again for seeking to learn more about Spire School!

Sincerely,

Ilana Phillips
Co-director

Megan Dusablon
Co-director

Philosophy & Approach

We believe that all children, in a safe, nurturing environment, have the capacity to learn and develop through play, sensory experiences, and exploration. We empower each child to be a creative, competent and curious explorer through our focus on collaborative learning, whole child development, social and emotional development, care for nature, and an overall understanding of the importance of building not only kindergarten readiness skills, but life skills.

We draw from Reggio Emilia philosophy, developing our curriculum based on the interests of the child by providing open-ended, child-directed experiences and materials. Children are encouraged to ask questions, use their imaginations, and analyze the environment with all of their senses. With a strong emphasis on social and emotional growth, Spire School educators help guide the children to develop conflict resolution skills, cooperation, and help to foster kindness and respect towards one another and nature.

Largely influenced by the Forest Kindergarten approach, we support children in building a connection to nature. By spending hours of uninterrupted time outside, and creating a space for positive growth and inquiry-based learning, children develop in all areas, from physical coordination, language and cognition, to their overall creativity.

You can learn about our philosophy and approach [HERE](#) and [HERE](#). Additionally, if you would like to read more about the benefits of Forest School please check out [this article](#) and [this article](#).



Frequently Asked Questions

Below you will find links to answers to some of our most frequently asked questions. Please don't hesitate to reach out to us if you have additional questions. You can email us at parkspluscreation@gmail.com.

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Classes & Tuition

What are the age ranges and class times of each group?

Spire School is made up of three different classes, or groups, divided by age. The hours of the classes vary depending on the group.

Class Name	Class Days & Times	Class Ages
Younger Group (YG)	Tuesday-Friday, 9am-12pm	2-3 years old*
Older Group (OG)	Monday-Friday, 9am-1pm	3-4 years old
TK Group (TK)	Monday-Friday, 8:45am-1:45pm	4-5 years old

****Children must be 2 years 2 months old by 9/1/2022 to join Spire School Younger Group. If your child was born after July 1, 2020 they are not eligible to apply for Spire School 2022-23.***

What is your student-to-teacher ratio?

Maximum ratios will not exceed 4:1 in YG, 5:1 in OG, 6:1 in TK. Each Spire School group has no more than twelve children with a minimum of two teachers.

Are there extended care options?

Yes. Options vary year to year to meet the needs of the groups.

What are the dates of the Spire School year?

Spire School 2022-23 will run from Wednesday, September 7, 2022 to Friday, June 2, 2023.

Where does Spire School meet?

Our outdoor classrooms are located in the Presidio near the Arguello gate entrance. TK Group locations may vary quarterly to allow in-depth exploration of San Francisco land and habitats; former locations have included Golden Gate Park, Mountain Lake Park, and East Beach/Crissy Field.

How much is tuition?

You may choose to pay tuition up front or monthly. If siblings are enrolled simultaneously the second child's tuition receives a 10% discount. Annual Tuition for Spire School 2022-23 by Group is:

Younger Group	\$12,910	Tuesday-Friday from 9am-12pm
Older Group	\$15,600	Monday-Friday from 9am-1pm
TK Group	\$18,380	Monday-Friday from 8:45am-1:45pm

Spire School's tuition model is designed to support the program and generate financial aid for a small percentage of our families, allowing lower-income households to pay a discounted tuition. This element of our program is greatly important to us in achieving our goal of reaching a diverse community and making our program available to those who would otherwise be unable to afford it. To provide greater scholarship funds, the Spire School community will have a few fundraising events and giving opportunities throughout the school year.

Admissions Process

What is the application process?

1. Thoroughly review this Prospective Family Admissions Packet and our [website](#).
2. **Complete the application [HERE](#)** and submit the \$80 fee and family photo. **Applications are due by February 20, 2022.** If the application fee poses a financial hardship, please email us to request a fee waiver.
3. **Attend a Playdate.** This is an opportunity to see our forest classroom and hear from and ask questions of our Co-Directors and current Spire School parents/guardians. There will be open-ended play opportunities for your child(ren), and children must be accompanied by at least one parent/guardian. Please sign-up below for a Playdate.
 - o Sign up [HERE](#) for Monday, December 13, 2021 from 9:30-11am
 - o Sign up [HERE](#) for Monday, January 24, 2022 from 9:30-11am
 - o Sign up [HERE](#) for Monday, January 31, 2022 from 9:30-11am
4. First round of acceptance emails will be sent at noon (12pm) on Tuesday, March 8, 2022. Accepted families will have until 10am on Tuesday, March 15, 2022 to accept enrollment and submit a deposit to hold their child's space.

NOTE: you may attend a Playdate before OR after you submit your application, the order does not matter.

What is your decision process for putting class groups together?

All application decisions are made by Co-Directors, Ilana and Megan. We try to balance the classes as much as possible, considering overall diversity and temperament. Our goal is to reach families who believe in the importance of building positive relationships with others and nature, and believe that children can learn valuable life skills through inquiry-based learning. Returning students and siblings are given priority enrollment.

How does the waitpool work?

We are a small school, with small group sizes, and are truly humbled by the number of applicants we receive each year. Families who are not offered a spot in Spire School during our first round of acceptance letters in March are put in a waitpool for that school year. Our waitpool does not roll over from one year to the next. Typically we see movement from the waitpool as family decisions are made and are usually able to offer spots to some families in the waitpool before September. We will notify you by email if your child has been accepted from the waitpool. The children in the waitpool are not ranked, if a space becomes available we consider many factors to fill the opening.



At Spire School

About our Teachers

We are thrilled to have a diverse group of educators at Parks Plus Creation. Our teachers bring unique skills and varied educational backgrounds and interests; we have teachers who have studied art, child development, art history and museum studies, environmental studies, child and family development, special education, psychology, and more! All teachers have had experience working with young children prior to working at Spire School. All our educators believe in treating children with kindness and respect, and holding the child at the center of the learning. Our teachers share their nature connections, love for creatures and our earth daily with the children.

Educators are required to have up to date CPR and First Aid certification, a negative TB test, LiveScan fingerprint clearance, COVID-19 vaccine, and participate in a variety of professional development opportunities throughout the school year.

How is Spire School addressing social and environmental justice with students, parents, and staff?

We celebrate our differences and similarities with phrases like “rainbow connection” for something that makes us different, and a “heart connection” when we share something in common with someone. This helps us support children in building and understanding who they are, and what makes them each special. We use children’s literature, keeping in mind windows and mirrors, with books that reflect the children and their experiences in our classes, and books that provide a different perspective, characters and experiences, this helps us spark conversations, ask questions, and broaden our world view. We often talk about what’s fair and unfair, why, and how we can take action against bias and unfairness. A lot of this is supported by our focus on social and emotional learning, building confidence to stand up for yourself and for others, and developing skills to problem solve. Each class creates community agreements to address age appropriate challenges, like exclusion. At Spire School everyone can play, and there’s always a way to listen and include other’s ideas, and make the game big enough for everyone who wants to join.

This work is ongoing for us, ensuring that we always look at our curriculum and practices through an anti-bias lens, especially to address the impact of stereotypes. Additionally, we have teamed up with an equity consultant who is supporting our school community to examine our practices, curriculum, and policies with an anti-racist, anti-bias prespective.

Parent/Guardian Communication

Open and transparent communication within the Spire School community is deeply important. Families are encouraged to connect with their child’s teachers briefly before and after school, and share pertinent information. Each afternoon, teachers have curriculum planning, communication, and documentation time. They respond to emails, and send families “Notes from the Forest”, which serves as a recap of the children’s days. They share photos and highlights of our adventures and give families a snapshot of what took place at school.

Parent/Guardian-Teacher conferences are scheduled twice per school year as a way for families to work together with the teachers to best support their child’s development as well as to discuss short and long-term goals. Observations of your child’s strengths and challenges will be shared. Families are always welcome to request time to speak with teachers or directors for extended conversations or more consistent check-ins throughout the school year.

What opportunities exist for parent involvement?

Each class group has several volunteers who facilitate communication between parents/guardians and teachers, support the teachers with needs that may arise, and organize social activities for the class. Volunteers also play a key role in helping with fundraising opportunities throughout the year.

Field Days are for parents/guardians to spend the day at Spire School to experience firsthand how we learn and play in the forest. Additionally, afterschool and weekend events are planned to strengthen our community, such as seasonal celebrations, BBQs, beach clean-ups, and an annual camping trip.

Does my child need to be potty trained?

Your child is not required to be bathroom independent/potty trained to attend Spire School. Teachers will meet your family where you are in the process, continuing to use whatever toilet training methods you're using at home to the best of our abilities during the school day outside.

How do potty breaks work in the forest?

While in the forest we encourage children to do a nature pee where appropriate. We help them find a private spot, and an adult remains nearby. For bowel movements, teachers carry a small travel-potty, lined with disposable bags, and set up in a private place. Teachers wear gloves when assisting students and the travel-potty is sanitized between uses.

Is Spire School a nut-friendly school? How do you support children with food allergies?

Yes. We are a nut-friendly school, and do not restrict what foods children bring. Groups that have children with food allergies or sensitivities take extra precautions around mealtimes, for example, emphasizing hand and mouth/face washing after eating. Food allergies are also listed on each group's family contact lists for awareness, and mindfulness around group snacks. The teachers support the children in learning about each other, and how we can keep everyone healthy and safe.

What does my child need to carry in their backpack?

- A change of clothes
- Snacks and/or lunch for the day
- A full water bottle
- A placemat
- Handwashing towel
- Sunscreen
- Sun hat and/or winter hat
- Mittens/gloves (when cold)

What happens when it rains?

We're an all-weather preschool, and are outside, rain or shine. On rainy days, teachers put up a tarp shelter to give some protection for gatherings and meal times.

Proper clothing is key to making rainy and blustery days fun and comfortable. A wet day might quickly become your child's favorite kind of day in the forest! We have a list of recommended gear and clothing, and have partnered with several outdoor gear companies to offer discounts.



Skills & Development

When children graduate from Spire School, they will be prepared with a wealth of skills that can support them in their future endeavours. We provide opportunities and individual support so each child develops the unique skills he or she needs to be a confident lifelong learner. We see children develop the same skills they would in an indoor classroom, just in different ways outdoors.

Positive Discipline

Preschool years are often accompanied by limit testing behavior both at home and at school. Our educators set and follow through with consistent limits so that children learn to understand the expectations of keeping everyone safe. Through this process children gain tools for self-regulation and control. Teachers support children to use their words, listen, and check in with their peers and teachers. We introduce language and tools around different types of feelings, understanding that young children may be having a particular big feeling for the first time, and need support developing coping mechanisms. Spire School teachers treat children with respect; we model the type of behavior and language skills we ask of the whole group. Everyone has something they are working on. Together, we support each other as a school community.

Cognitive Development

We limit transitions and maintain a flexible daily rhythm, when children find something that interests them, they take the time to carefully inspect their discovery. Children's cognitive development is nurtured in our natural setting, bird sits and animal tracking are good examples of focused outdoor activities. When the children become familiar with the forest and trails, they notice changes every day in the appearance, smells, and sounds; these experiences develop important skills for each child's future: asking questions, observation, finding patterns, sequencing, researching, exploring, and drawing conclusions.

Social Emotional Learning

Social and emotional development and growth is something we value immensely. Our intention is to create a space where children will practice caring for themselves, others, as well as their natural environment. We welcome self expression and ask children to feel confident in seeking help if needed. We will often ask children to try a task on their own before getting assistance from a peer or teacher. Developing positive and creative problem solving skills will greatly benefit children as they grow.

Language & Literacy Skills

Each day, children and teachers sing songs, share stories, and reflect about the day and past events. We introduce tools, such as: story cards, nature journals, sign-in sheets, schedules and calendars to provide opportunities for mark making, letter and number recognition, and to help provide visuals for our time together. Children build language skills while creating deep connections with classmates and teachers.

Gross Motor Skills

We spend a large portion of our time climbing, running, balancing, lifting, pushing and building, all which help children with their motor planning and gross motor development. Mastery of new physical skills builds self confidence and autonomy. Learning about your body's limitations is an important part of overall development, and one of the biggest skills learned is a child's ability to take and manage risks. Even the smallest obstacles, when mastered, are great accomplishments.

Fine Motor Skills

We provide many opportunities for children to strengthen their fine motor skills throughout our days. Children are not only provided with writing utensils to practice their pencil grasp, but are given time and support each day to manage their belongings. Zipping and unzipping their backpacks and jackets, and opening and closing their lunch containers are a few examples of how children are building their fine motor development. Collecting, sorting and manipulating small nature treasures like leaves, rocks and sticks are other natural ways that children are strengthening the muscles in their hands each day.



Licensing & Insurance

Is Spire School a licensed preschool?

We're unable to obtain a license without a physical classroom building. Our Co-Directors Ilana and Megan are on the founding board of California Association of Forest Schools (CAFS) and are working to help create state-wide Forest School standards and best practices. Community Care Licensing Division (CCLD) provides regulations for indoor childcare facilities and programs. Spire School follows CCLD regulations that can be applied to forest school for the safety and wellbeing of the children and staff, though they are license-exempt by the state. During the global pandemic, the San Francisco Department of Public Health is providing guidance for childcare programs, and we are diligently following the Health Directives and guidance from public health officials, and adjust our policies and/or procedures when changes are made to state or county guidelines that pertain to childcare programs.

What insurance are you covered by?

We have general liability insurance (same coverage and provider as Tree Frog Treks) that includes specialized coverage for our outdoor activities in public parks, and workers compensation for our staff.

Health & Safety**What happens if there is extreme weather?**

There may be situations of extreme weather where Spire School will create an alternative plan, or cancel school if a safe option cannot be provided. These circumstances include, but are not limited to: wildfire or effects of wildfire such as dangerous air quality (see below), earthquake, extreme storms or effects of extreme storms, and other natural disasters.

What happens when there is poor air quality?

If the AQI is above 100 (orange) Spire School does not hold in-person classes, rather virtual gatherings are offered for each class. This policy will remain in effect during the COVID-19 pandemic. Once indoor spaces become available again for group use, on days when the AQI is between 101-200 (Orange-Red) rather than meet virtually, we may utilize a safe, indoor location with engaging, age appropriate activities, i.e. Academy of Sciences, DeYoung, Officers Club, etc.

What do you do when you see coyotes in The Presidio?

We are lucky to share this natural space with coyotes! They are wild animals that we treat with respect, and while generally non-threatening, they are very curious. In the case that a coyote gets too close to our group, we get all of the children together in one place with one teacher, while the other teacher follows Presidio protocol to scare the coyote away. Each teacher has a whistle, and uses a loud voice and clapping, or will throw sticks towards the coyote if it is not leaving the area. We report any sighting through the iNaturalist app to help the Presidio coyote specialists keep track of coyote activity. If there's ever a situation with a wild animal where it is not safe for us to be in the same area, we will leave the space and call the Park Police.

What policies have you put in place for COVID-19?

We follow San Francisco Department of Health's guidance for childcare programs, this includes required face covering for all adults, and encouraging masks/face coverings for all children over 2 years old, daily health screening and temperature checks (at-home), hand hygiene, staggered or distanced seated mealtimes on individual tarps, strict wellness and community travel policies, and open communication with families and staff. As advised, we have appointed a COVID-19 liaison who ensures our policies are up to date, and will communicate directly with the DPH if necessary.



Transition to Kindergarten

Will my child be ready for Kindergarten after Spire School?

Yes. We support each family on their journey to find an elementary school that best matches their child's needs and their family's values. Teachers and directors provide a variety of support for families in this process, including meetings, conversations and community events connecting alumni families with current families to share their experiences at public, parochial, independent/private and charter elementary schools. After graduating from Spire School, children have moved on to public, private/independent, and charter schools in San Francisco & Marin. Life skills our graduates take with them to Kindergarten include:

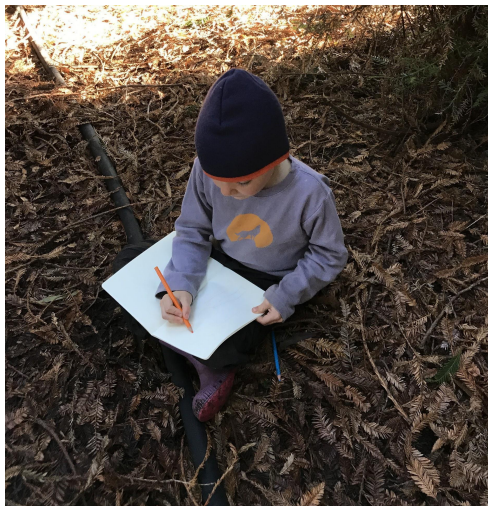
- Resilience
- Adaptability
- Confidence
- Ability to cooperate
- Self-regulation
- Creativity
- Observation skills
- Critical thinking
- Conflict resolution
- Respect & care for nature
- Respect for others
- Math, sequencing, categorizing, defining patterns
- Language and vocabulary
- Physical stamina & confidence
- Balance, strength & control
- Fine & gross motor development & control
- Reflection & curiosity
- Risk management
- Thoughtful problem solving
- Curiosity & sense of wonder

Will my child be able to sit at a desk?

Sitting at a desk takes self-regulation and physical strength. Children learn so much about their bodies being on uneven ground outside, this awareness helps build physical strength and self-regulation. The mindful practice of careful noticing allows children to use observation and self-regulation skills. Other ways children practice self-regulation at Spire School include: bird sits, watching a gopher hole, mealtimes, morning circle, story time, etc.

Independent Schools where Spire School students have been accepted:

- BrightWorks
- Cathedral School for Boys
- Katherine Delmar Burke School
- Mount Tamalpais School
- Notre Dame des Victoires
- Presidio Hill School
- San Francisco Day School
- San Francisco Friends School
- San Francisco Schoolhouse
- Stuart Hall for Boys
- Town School for Boys



Children leave Spire School with a wealth of skills, including a deep connection to the natural world. As children build a relationship with nature, they develop positive memories and experiences that will help add to the development of a lifelong connection to the environment and stewardship of the earth. We hope to nurture the protection, and better the understanding of nature for present and future generations.

Please don't hesitate to reach out to us if you need additional information. You can email us at parkspluscreation@gmail.com



Spire School Teachers & Staff