The Field Guide

Tamarack Discovery School Family & Caregiver Handbook 2024-2025



Introduction

Tamarack Discovery School is a multi-age K-5 school whose purpose is to create a learning environment that fosters the development of the whole child, acknowledging each child's uniqueness, passions, and potential. Our curriculum comes from fostering connections with students and their community, nature, each other, and finding their sense of purpose.

This supportive environment creates conditions that build a learner's confidence to take cognitive, physical, and emotional risks as they mature across developmental and educational domains. The focused learning through direct instruction, nature and place-based experiences, and authentic learning opportunities provide a well-rounded learning environment that builds foundations for environmental, community, and academic competencies that prepares our learners for varied future paths.

Our Mission & Philosophy

At Tamarack Discovery School, our deepest mission is to cultivate a community of learners that develop **agency** and **resilience**. Through wonder, experience, and explored interests, our children will discover their own identity, purpose, and connection to the greater environment.

 Agency empowers learners to take an active role in their education, more than passive recipients of information; they become creators of knowledge. This autonomy not only enhances motivation and engagement but also fosters a sense of responsibility and ownership over one's learning journey. contributes to the development of crucial life skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and self-efficacy and the ability to adapt to new challenges. This approach not only enhances academic performance but also prepares students for lifelong learning and success beyond the classroom.

Our Core Values

Serving as a guiding framework for our educational community, these values articulate the characteristics that will foster our sense of identity and unity among learners, educators, and parents. Our core values provide a compass that influences decision-making and interactions within the school and our community and empower learners to contribute positively to their own learning and growth.

Awareness encourages mindfulness and a deep understanding of oneself, others, and the surrounding environment. To be aware we must observe the world around us and find our own place in it, understand our impact, and see our potential to positively influence our environment.

Awareness promotes empathy, advocacy, integrity, compassion, gratitude, safety and stewardship.

Resilience emphasizes a growth-mindset and the ability to bounce back from challenges. It is our ability to persist when we face adversity and failure is embraced as part of the learning process rather than a set-back.

Resilience promotes determination, adaptability, persistence, and serves to prepare individuals to navigate life's uncertainties.

Curiosity cultivates an inquisitive mindset and a lifelong love for learning. Enthusiasm for learning comes from asking our own questions and pursuing answers and solutions. proactive approach to seeking knowledge, fostering intellectual growth and adaptability. Curiosity promotes a sense of wonder, creativity, joy, discovery and imagination needed to puzzle the challenges learners will encounter in an ever-changing world.

Brilliance encourages recognition and development of individual talents and strengths. Learners are encouraged to express their unique perspectives and Uniqueness and diversity are valued and create an environment where individuals can harness their distinctive capabilities to contribute positively to their community.

Genius promotes innovation, adaptability, creativity, confidence, critical thinking, self-expression, and purpose.

Connection highlights the significance of building meaningful relationships with each other, and recognizing our interconnectedness with our local and global community and with our natural world. Expressing ourselves and our ideas with others through effective communication is a cornerstone that fosters a sense of unity and shared purpose. Students learn to work together, communicate effectively, and appreciate diverse perspectives, contributing to their social and emotional growth. Connection promotes empathy, collaboration, communication skills, conflict resolution, and mutual respect.

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Our Approach

THE ROLE OF THE CLASSROOM

Learning can happen incidentally and in the moment, inside and outside of the classroom. However, fundamental skills and competencies are necessary for learners to be prepared to meet academic demands. Authentic learning needs a strong foundation of these skills that learners can call upon to support new learning and build deeper understandings. These skills require intentional and direct instruction, with guidance and repeated practice. Although the classroom can be in many outdoor and indoor environments., most often instruction that aligns to age-appropriate expectations and scaffolded to individual learners' needs happens in a routine and predictable structure in our classroom settings.

THE ROLE OF NATURE

Outdoor learning is a central feature of our program, with frequent opportunities for outdoor exploration and learning in natural spaces. The benefits of time spent in nature is well documented and includes but is not limited to: promoting emotional resilience and self-regulation, promoting physical activity and development, reducing symptoms of stress, promoting executive function and providing mental health benefits. There is also a strong link between time in nature and academic performance including producing richer writing and providing foundations for science learning. Improved concentration and focus have also been shown to increase in the classroom when learners have been exposed to nature.

THE ROLE OF THE COMMUNITY

Incorporating the community into our educational approach enables learners to see the practical applications of academic concepts in their everyday lives and provides opportunities to apply academic knowledge in real-world situations. This hands-on approach helps bridge the gap between theory and practice, making learning more relevant and engaging. Learners are more likely to be actively involved in the learning process, fostering a genuine curiosity and interest in the subjects they study, improving long-term retention These experiences contribute to a positive attitude toward learning and a lifelong love for exploration and discovery.

Place-Based Learning

By connecting academic content to the local context, place-based learning promotes hands-on experiences, critical thinking, and a sense of place, encouraging students to develop a strong connection to their community and a broader appreciation for the world around them. Students engage in hands-on activities, field trips, and projects that directly connect to the geographical, historical, and ecological aspects of our region. Whether exploring nearby parks, visiting local

³

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historical sites/museums, or interviewing community members, students gain a deeper understanding of their surroundings and how their learning relates to the world outside the classroom.

A place-based education fosters a sense of connection and responsibility among students, as they develop an appreciation for their local community and environment. It encourages critical thinking, problem-solving, and collaboration, as students tackle real-world challenges relevant to their region and authentic learning experiences and promotes a lifelong love for exploration and discovery.

Multi-Age Learning

Academic Benefits

Classrooms provide a more fluid and continuous progression of learning. Students are not bound by grade-level expectations, allowing them to progress based on mastery of skills rather than age-related benchmarks. Multi-age classrooms allow for more individualized instruction as educators are more able to tailor their approach to each student's pace and learning style, accommodating diverse needs within the same environment. Educators often have the flexibility to address different readiness levels and abilities. This adaptability can lead to a more dynamic and responsive learning environment that accommodates diverse learning needs.

Social Benefits

In multi-age settings, students have the opportunity to build long-term relationships with both educators and peers. This continuity contributes to a more stable and supportive learning environment. Multi-age classrooms and groupings can often foster a strong sense of community and shared responsibility. Students develop a sense of belonging and learn to collaborate across age groups, creating a positive and inclusive classroom culture. Mirroring and preparing for the diversity of interactions in the real world, where individuals of different ages collaborate and work together in environments, are not strictly segregated by age. Older students often become natural mentors to younger peers, fostering a sense of responsibility and leadership. Younger students benefit from the guidance and support of older role models. Interacting with peers of different ages enhances social skills. Students learn to collaborate, communicate, and negotiate with individuals at various developmental stages, promoting a sense of community and mutual respect.

Admissions

Tamarack is committed to providing a comprehensive and enriching educational experience for all our students. This Admissions Policy outlines the policies and procedures for enrollment, as well as the general criteria upon which admissions decisions are based. Our goal is to ensure an equitable and transparent admissions process that aligns with our school's mission and values. We seek to admit students who demonstrate the potential to thrive academically, socially, and personally within our school community. The following general criteria are considered during the admissions process:

Admissions Criteria

Educational Fit:

- In our student-centered approach, we prioritize the readiness and academic needs of the learner above the pace and predetermined sequence of any published curriculum. Both learners and families should appreciate instruction tailored to meet the core instructional, remedial, and extension needs of the student.
- Tamarack has a unique educational philosophy that emphasizes outdoor & community learning, environmental stewardship, and hands-on experiences.
 Students and their families should understand and value this approach, leading to a more cohesive and supportive school community.
- Our core learning is supported and strengthened through our exploration curriculum and learning experiences. Off campus explorations are an essential part of our instruction and should be given the same importance and priority as all subject matter. It is considered compulsory to our educational philosophy and instruction.

Academic Performance

- We consider students of all abilities and we value unique talents, interests, and experiences that learners may bring to the school community.
- Families with learners who require substantial support will need to be fully aware of the services we can and can not provide due to our resource availability.

Physical Readiness:

 Learners are often engaged in physical activities and spend extended periods outdoors or in community settings. Learners should be capable and prepared for these activities, which is essential for their safety and well-being.

Behavior and Conduct:

 Managing behavior in an outdoor setting requires learners to acquire and exhibit self-discipline and respect for others and the environment. Learners who are unable to maintain physical safety boundaries pose a danger to themselves and the group. Learners must contribute to a safe and positive learning environment, minimizing disruptions and potential hazards.

Teacher-Student Ratio:

 Maintaining a manageable teacher-student ratio is crucial for providing quality education and ensuring student safety during outdoor activities, and allowing for personalized attention and effective supervision.

Admissions Procedures

1. Application Submission:

- Complete Application Form, available on our website or from the Admissions Office.
- Submit the application along with the non-refundable application fee which are accepted on a rolling basis.

2. Tour:

- All eligible applicants will receive an invitation to attend an initial conference and tour. This offers an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of our programs and assess the compatibility of our program with the needs of the learner.
- The initial meeting may include potential students, but it is not mandatory.
 Parents and caregivers may choose to meet with the school before introducing their child.

3. Review Process:

 All applications are considered. We insist on keeping eligibility requirements attainable to as many students as possible but must consider if we are best suited to meet learner academic, social, and emotional needs strongly considering the enrollment criteria listed above.

4. Notification:

- Applicants will be notified of the admission decision by phone or email when an open position is available.
- Accepted students will receive an enrollment package, including instructions for completing the enrollment process.

5. Enrollment Confirmation:

 Parents must confirm acceptance of the admission offer by submitting the enrollment contract and paying the required deposit by the deadline indicated in the enrollment package.

6. Waitlist Policy:

 If a grade level reaches capacity, applicants may be placed on a waitlist. Should a spot become available, families will be notified according to their position on the waitlist. Curriculum, Instruction & Assessment

Core Instruction

Phonics & Reading:

Sounds-Write is a structured, systematic synthetic phonics program designed to teach children the essential skills for reading, spelling, and writing. Emphasizing a multi-sensory and code-oriented approach, it introduces students to the 175 most common spellings of the 44 sounds in English through a carefully crafted sequence that progresses from simple to more complex concepts. This method ensures that learners build a solid foundation in literacy, enhancing their ability to decode and comprehend text effectively.

Literature:

Wit & Wisdom is a comprehensive English Language Arts (ELA) curriculum designed for students in kindergarten through eighth grade. It emphasizes the integration of reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills through the study of rich and diverse texts. Each module focuses on a specific topic, allowing students to build deep knowledge and engage in meaningful discussions. By exploring a variety of literary and informational texts, students develop critical thinking and effective communication skills, preparing them for future academic success.

Handwriting:

Teaching handwriting is not just about the mechanical skill of writing; it forms a foundational element that contributes to the overall cognitive, motor, and academic development of students. The benefits extend beyond the act of writing itself, positively influencing various aspects of learning and academic achievement.

Math:

Dimensions Math emphasizes problem-solving, mental math, and a deep understanding of mathematical concepts. The program employs a concrete-pictorial-abstract approach, guiding students from hands-on experiences to visual representations, and finally to abstract reasoning. This method ensures that learners build a solid foundation in mathematics, fostering both competence and confidence in their skills.

⁸

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Homework Policy:

It's important for educators and families to consider the developmental needs of elementary students and carefully balance the educational benefits of homework with the potential drawbacks, aiming to create a supportive and enriching learning environment. We encourage students to explore and learn in their own time, whether through reading, outdoor activities, or pursuing personal interests. We believe that these activities contribute to a child's holistic development. Elementary-aged children benefit greatly from play and sufficient sleep for their overall development. Therefore, we have adopted a no-homework policy for elementary students.

Technology Policy:

Technology use will be used sparingly as a tool to enhance curriculum delivery and support learning, replicate practice at a pace and precision that can be more efficiently achieved with technology, and for research and collaborative projects.

- Technology use will be limited to developmentally appropriate durations.
- Students will have restricted access to the internet, with access limited to age-appropriate educational websites vetted by the school. Social media platforms and non-educational websites will be blocked on school devices.
- Written parental consent will be obtained before students are given access to online platforms, engage in online collaborative projects, or utilize their school-specific online profile.
- Educators will monitor students' online activities to ensure compliance with school guidelines and to address any potential issues promptly.
- Students are discouraged from bringing personal electronic devices to school, unless approved as an educational accommodation.

Routines & Procedures

Arrival & Dismissal

- Drop-off Time: 7:50-8:00
- Pick-up Time: 3:00-3:10
- To report a late arrival or early dismissal please call/text: **319-899-8835** or send an email to theoffice@tamarackschool.org.

Attendance & Absences

- Early Pick-up and Late Drop Offs
 - Because of the unique nature of our instruction, drop-offs and pick-ups outside of the typical time frame can pose a challenge. We will do our best to communicate our expected locations and arrival/departure times to accommodate parents and caregivers who need to meet a child's class at a location other than school.

• In accordance with new Senate File 2435, effective July 1, 2024:

 If a child is absent from school for 15% or more of the days or hours in the grading period, a school official must investigate the cause and initiate a school engagement meeting. This meeting aims to identify attendance barriers and interventions to improve attendance. A school official can also hold this meeting before reaching the 15% absence threshold. The meeting must include the child, their parent/guardian, and a school official.

Lunch & Snacks

- Families are responsible for providing a nutritious lunch and snack each day. Food should be able to be eaten without the need of refrigeration or heating.
- Lunch will be eaten outside when temperatures are 50 degrees or above and conditions are favorable.
- Water bottles are required.

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Explorations & Outdoor Learning

- Students should dress for the weather daily.
- Proper footwear is required for outdoor activities.
- Respect for nature and community spaces is expected at all times.

Communication

- Parents should reach out with any questions or concerns—we value open communication!
- Weekly newsletters will be sent to families to update on current happenings and future events.
- Parents are encouraged to reach out to the staff member most directly involved with any concern. If the issue remains unresolved, the next step is to contact the Head of School and if the matter still requires attention, parents can contact the Board of Directors, contacts are available on the school website.

Health & Safety

Safety

Risky Play

Learning to navigate risk is an important part of learner development but risk is only healthy insofar as it is managed, to an appropriate degree, by knowledgeable and attentive adults. Educators manage potential harm in the environment, create environments and experiences that allow learners to take risks that are individually and developmentally appropriate.

- **Supervised Exploration**: Children are encouraged to engage in activities such as climbing, balancing, and jumping from heights under the supervision of capable and confident adults.
- **Risk Assessment**: Staff members are trained to assess the environment and activities to ensure that risks are appropriate and beneficial, avoiding unnecessary hazards.

First Aid and Injuries

Learners will have access to staff who are first-aid/CPR trained at all times, at school and on explorations. Bandages and a first-aid kit are available at school and on all explorations for minor cuts and scratches. Aspirin or Tylenol will be dispensed if permission has been given on the Health Information Card (Emergency Card) kept on file in the School Office.

Students who require situational treatments, such as Epi-pens or Insulin, will have access to trained staff at all times. A medical treatment plan will be easily accessible at all times.

Emergency Action Plan

As in any school setting, injuries and emergencies may occur. Minor injuries may be treated with a first aid kit. An Incident Report is created and parents are notified as soon as reasonably possible.

In the event of a more severe injury such as possible concussion, fracture, burn, laceration (1/4'') deep or more), etc. one teacher will attend to the student and apply first aid while the other will contact the caregiver or the emergency contact.

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In the event of an emergency, ambulatory services may be contacted first prior to alerting the caregiver to initiate emergency medical care that is outside of our educators' realm of experience.

Emergencies

In the event of an emergency, such as severe head trauma, anaphylaxis, major fractures, excessive bleeding, or external threat, the following procedures will be followed.

- All activities will halt and group safety will be prioritized.
- The lead teacher will contact emergency services.
- Patients will be triaged and emergency first aid will be initiated as instructed by emergency dispatch instructions.
- One teacher will meet emergency services at the entrance of the property, if possible.
- One teacher will contact Parents/Caregivers and Emergency Contacts as soon as practicable via phone call.

ILLNESSES AND EXCLUSIONARY CRITERIA

A child should be temporarily excluded from school when the child's illness causes one or more of the following:

- Prevents the child from participating comfortably in activities.
- A need for care that is greater than the staff can provide without compromising the health and safety of other children.
- An acute change in behavior: lethargy, lack of responsiveness, irritability, persistent crying, difficulty breathing, or a quickly spreading rash.
- Fever with behavior change or other signs and symptoms, e.g., sore throat, rash, vomiting, diarrhea.
- A fever reading at or above 100.4 F.
- Children do not need to miss school or child care due to head lice.

Health Records:

lowa state law requires that every student must have an up-to-date immunization record on file at school, including record of DPT and oral polio boosters after the fourth birthday and a second MMR if born in 1985 or later.

- Students lacking proper immunization or a completed waiver* will be asked to stay home from school until proof of immunization or a waiver is submitted.
- All new students must have a completed physical signed by a licensed health care provider on file.

*A **medical** waiver is acceptable if signed by the child's physician. An expiration date must be included. A **religious** waiver must be signed and notarized.

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Medication Administration at School

Medications will be administered to a student by trained school only when the following consents and documentation is provided to the school office, along with the medication:

- Parents/caregivers must provide the medication to the school in a labeled bottle.
- Written consent from the parent/guardian (forms available from the school office).
- Over the counter/non- prescription medications are to be provided by the parent/guardian and sent to school in the original medication container with the student's name attached. The medication will be given according to package instructions unless otherwise directed in writing by the student's health care provider/prescriber.
- The parent/guardian is responsible for submitting a new prescriber's order form to the school each time there is a change of dosage or time of administration.
- To ensure the safety of all children, we request that a parent or another responsible adult deliver all medications to school staff. The medication will be kept in a locked storage box.
- The first dosage of any new prescription should be given at home so the child can be more closely observed for possible side effects and/or adverse reactions.
- The parent/guardian is responsible for notifying the school when a medication has been discontinued or changed.
- Medication should not be administered by any student to self and others, including pain relievers, cough drops, or other over the counter or prescription medications.

Mandatory Reporting

All full time employees are required to understand and report suspected child abuse and required to take Mandatory Child Abuse Training offered by the Iowa Department of Human Services ("DHS") and to renew their certification periodically as required by law for Mandatory Reporters. Employees are required to make an oral and a written report. According to the Iowa Code, any Mandatory Reporter who makes a report of child abuse or participates in an investigation of child abuse in good faith has immunity from any criminal or civil liability. The safety of all of our students is of primary importance.

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Social Emotional Learning & Discipline

We are committed to fostering a supportive and effective learning environment for all students. To achieve this, educators rely on the Collaborative and Proactive Solutions (CPS) model, an evidence-based approach designed to address and prevent challenging behaviors through collaboration and proactive problem-solving.

Proactive Preparation

- Identify Unsolved Problems: Regularly assess and identify potential challenges that may impede students' ability to meet expectations.
- **Assess Skills:** Evaluate students' skills to determine if deficits are contributing to difficulties in meeting expectations.
- **Collaborative Planning:** Engage with students to collaboratively develop strategies and solutions that address identified problems and skill deficits.

Reactive Response

15

- **Empathy Step:** When a challenging behavior occurs, begin by gathering information from the student to understand their perspective on the problem.
- **Define Adult Concerns:** Clearly articulate the concerns from the educator's perspective, focusing on the impact of the behavior on the learning environment.
- Invitation to Solve: Invite the student to collaborate in generating and evaluating potential solutions that address both the student's concerns and the educator's concerns.

By consistently applying the CPS model, educators can create a more harmonious and effective learning environment that addresses the root causes of challenging behaviors through collaboration and proactive problem-solving.

Dismissal Considerations

Excessive violations of safety protocols and disruptions to the learning environment are taken seriously. The following measures are implemented to ensure the safety and well-being of all students and to maintain a positive learning environment. The school reserves the right to consider dismissal to maintain a safe and conducive learning environment for all students.

Disruption of Learning Environment:

Persistent disruption of the learning environment, hindering the educational experience of others, may be grounds for dismissal. This may include, but is not limited to, behaviors such as chronic bullying, harassment, physical aggression, or intentional destruction of school property. All reasonable attempts will be made to address and rectify such behaviors through interventions, support, and communication with parents or guardians.

Explorations:

Explorations are an important component of our educational experience and require students to adhere to specific behavioral expectations and boundaries that respect and protect all students, staff, volunteers, and the environment we occupy. Every student has an opportunity to participate in explorations, but no student has the right to interfere with another's safety or ability to participate and enjoy this part of our school day. Safety is our number one priority and behaviors and attitudes need to contribute to an overall safe environment.

Exploration Student Rights and Responsibilities

Students are expected to fully participate to their ability while on explorations and maintain safe behaviors and boundaries at all times.

Each student has the right to feel safe from physical and emotional harm. Each student has the responsibility to:

- adhere to all physical boundaries established by staff
- maintain personal boundaries by not aggressively entering into another student's space
- refrain from using derogatory or obscene language (including swearing, name calling, mocking, or intentionally hurtful language)

Each student has the right to learn on explorations.

Each student has the responsibility to:

- safely participate in activities
- follow adult directions in an urgent and sage manner
- allow others the opportunity to learn and participate

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Each student has the right to enjoy explorations.

Each student has the responsibility to

• respect other's ideas, creations, personal property, and space

Each student has the right to feel comfortable and valued Each student has the responsibility to

- take care of their environment (both natural and within the community)
- leave each environment better than they found it

Specific Exploration Rules

All Students MUST:

17

- Stay within physical boundaries at all times
- Stay within sight and voice contact of an adult at all times
- Cooperate with adults and follow all given directions
- Respond immediately to adult directions
- Respect environment by doing no harm and leaving it better than you found it
- Avoid using put-downs, name-calling, or intentionally hurting other people's feelings
- Maintain other's personal space by keeping hands and feet to self
- Avoid using inappropriate language and/or gestures

Parents/Guardians and Visitor Code of Conduct

Our policy aims to foster a culture of respect and civility within the school community. Persistent or severe instances of behaviors in contrast with this may be addressed in accordance with school policies and applicable laws. We are committed to fostering a peaceful and safe environment for our students, staff, and community. We kindly ask all parents, guardians, and visitors to embrace the following expectations to support this goal:

Contribute to a Positive Environment: Ensure that your behavior enhances and supports the effective operation of classrooms and other learning environments.

Respectful Communication: Engage in courteous and respectful dialogue with all members of the school community, including in-person conversations, emails, texts, voicemails, and other forms of communication. Using derogatory labels or insults directed at individuals, using offensive language or profanity in any form of communication will not be tolerated.

Supportive Presence: When visiting or volunteering, parents should observe all rules of the school, participate in a manner that aligns with the educational purpose, ensuring interactions are supportive and conducive to learning. You are responsible solely for your own child and should not assume responsibility for other students.

Maintain Student Confidentiality: Refrain from discussing any student's personal information with others, except with authorized school personnel.

Promote a Secure Atmosphere: Uphold the safety and well-being of everyone by refraining from actions or language that could cause harm or discomfort to others.

Address Concerns Through Proper Channels: Share any concerns directly with the appropriate school personnel to ensure they are handled fairly and effectively.

By adhering to this Code of Conduct, families contribute to a harmonious and effective educational community where all students can thrive. In such cases of non-compliance with these policies or fundamental disagreements between the school and a student's parents or guardians that cannot be resolved, may hinder any student's educational experience, or that may interfere with educators' ability to perform their duties, the school reserves the right to take appropriate actions, which may include restricting access to school premises or, in severe instances, considering the student's dismissal from the school. These measures are intended to maintain a positive and productive learning environment for all members of the school community.

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Equity and Inclusion

We advocate that **all** children should have access to high-quality, learner-centered education that promotes an environment which values diversity and preserves and celebrates cultural identities. Every learner is regarded as a valuable, unique, and capable contributor to the learning environment.

- Educators are committed to inclusive practices and meeting the needs of all learners.
- Educators employ a community based approach that connects the school community to the wider natural and cultural community.
- Educators are committed to on-going professional learning to enhance the knowledge and skills associated with serving a diverse community of learners.
- Educators make modifications to support learner's individual development, physical, emotional, behavioral, cultural, or other needs.
- Educators provide an environment that values diversity and sustains children's cultural identities.

TDS is committed to fostering a safe and positive learning environment for all students Our policies prioritize a culture of diversity and inclusivity in an environment where every student, regardless of background, identity, or abilities, feels valued and respected. Our commitment to inclusivity extends beyond the classroom to all aspects of school life, ensuring that every member of our community has the opportunity to thrive and succeed.

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Root

Reach

Rise

We create an environment where children can be deeply rooted in their community, their environment, and their sense of purpose. We offer opportunities for children to reach out and connect to each other, new ideas, relationships, and their community. We support our students in their growth and progress as they rise up into their futures as the fullest versions of themselves.

20

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