

Manzanita School 2024-25

Forest Kindergarten & Outdoors Immersion in 1st and 2nd Grades 'Frequently Asked Questions' (FAQs)

What is Forest Kindergarten & a Nature-Immersive an Early Elementary Program?

Forest Kindergarten and Nature-Immersive Programs are a type of early childhood education originating in Europe, and usually serving children between the ages of three and seven. Classes are held almost exclusively outdoors. Whatever the weather, children are encouraged to play, explore, and learn outside. Adult supervision is meant to assist rather than lead.

What is the age requirement for Manzanita's Forest Kindergarten Program?

We require that students turn 5 years old by September 1st of the entering school year.

What are the benefits of the Forest Kindergarten model?

In a Forest Kindergarten and Nature-Immersed Early Elementary Program, children are given freedom to play, and the opportunity to explore and learn about the natural environment. They are provided with the support they need in learning how to handle risks and cooperate with their peers. This type of outdoor learning encourages problem solving and critical thinking. Children develop 'grit' when they must try something repeatedly before they discover how to solve the challenge they face. Given that much of the day is focused on student interests and needs, children become self-aware, are better able to self-regulate, and curiosity is consistently evoked. Children become intrinsically motivated, develop empathy, learn how to interact with adults and peers, and how to assert their independence. They are given opportunities to grow in confidence every day.

What is meant by Nature as the "Third Teacher?"

An outdoor learning environment will inherently present invitations for learning, just as a teacher might present a lesson to their students. By recognizing nature as a teacher, adults and children alike build skills of observation, reflection, exploration, and an intuitive 'listening' for environmental cues and clues. Learning through the lens of nature also contributes to one's sense of awe and wonder for the natural world.

How does this Forest Kindergarten and Outdoor-Immersion 1st and 2nd Grades fit with the rest of the educational program at MNZ?

The Forest Kindergarten model fits seamlessly into Manzanita's existing curriculum and our Six Guiding Principles. At Manzanita, we challenge the prevailing paradigms of both schooling and culture, and present new models for student learning, parent involvement, and community engagement. Our curriculum and programs are built on the understanding that every young person has something unique and meaningful to offer the world, and that this gift must be awakened with the support of caring mentors. The Forest Kindergarten model focuses on student-led learning and supported risk taking. These principles are the first steps in bringing forth one's intrinsic gift.



Will my child fall behind in their academics?

Not at all. In fact, extensive research on early nature immersion has shown that student-led learning, play in nature, and supported risk-taking, lead to academic success later on. In addition, examples of non-formal academic learning and preparation in nature-immersive programs include the following:

Ecology: the relationship between soil, air, and water

Physics: balance, energy, motion

Biology: flora and fauna, bird identification, insects, and mammals

Literacy: animal tracking, dramatic play, storytelling and listening

Math: measuring distance, grouping, counting, spatial relationships

History: place-based learning and ancestor studies

Environmental Science: Earth structures (geology), plant identification & uses (ethnobotany)

Art: artistic expression using natural materials, and extensive crafting

Is there Art and Music in Forest Kindergarten?

Art and music are important components in a Forest Kindergarten. Singing is regularly integrated into the rhythm of the day and teachers are taught to play instruments. Creating beauty, crafting with natural materials, and exploring a variety of art mediums, all enrich the Forest Kindergarten, and 1st -2nd grade programs.

What about safety?

Students are taught to take risks with the support of the teachers. Students may explore climbing trees, using tools, lighting and tending a fire, etc.. Instructors help students assess risks and benefits so that decisions are always carefully informed. Manzanita's Kinder and 1st grades have a higher instructor-to-learner ratio than other types of learning environments (1 to 6 staffing ratio).

What kind of training will the teachers have?

Our Kindergarten teachers have received extensive training from the Academy of Forest Kindergartens, located in Santa Barbara. Teacher training is ongoing throughout the year.

What about food and snacks?

Manzanita provides all students with delicious and nutritious daily lunch and snacks.

To learn more about the Forest Kindergarten, or to complete an application, please contact our Director of Admissions, Ms. Eva Sanchez-Calixtro, at eva@manzanitaschool.org

