

The Early Years In About & For the Environment

# The University of Delaware Lab School

## Connecting Children and Teachers to the Land through Nature-Based Practices



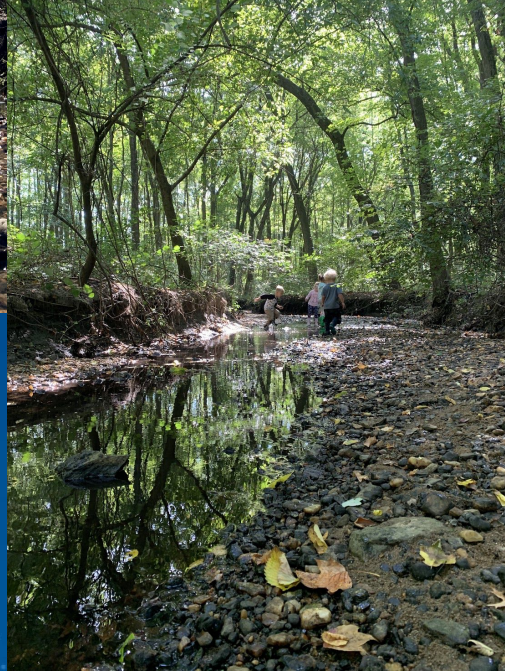
**Katie Pollock**

**Jen Gallo-Fox**

**Dorit Radnai-Griffin**



# Our Living Land Acknowledgment



# The University of Delaware Lab School

Mid-Atlantic, United States

University-affiliated, Early childhood Education Laboratory

NAEYC Accredited, DE Stars-5 Star Rating, DE OCC License

- 5 school year programs (ages 2-6 yrs.)
- Play & Grow Program (12 wk. 2x a year)
- Summer Camp Programs (ages 3-6 yrs, 1-4 weeks)
- 6 Teachers - Graduate Education & Administrative Certificates
- Director (& 2 hourly administrative assistants)
- Faculty partner
- Student teachers & interns
- Early field placement students
- A Financially Self-Sustaining Center



## Goals and Mission

- Commitment to high quality early childhood education for children, families and educator development, research, service
- Curricular emphasis include: nature-based, socio-emotional/mindfulness, and DAP
- Outdoor classroom and nature-based preschool class
- Work grounded in relationships and commitment to community

# Demographics of Our 87 Children & Families:

## Racial Identities:

White/Caucasian 60%

Asian 22%

Bi-Racial 15%

Black/African-American 2%

## Children with Special Needs:

13% Children with identified special needs

6% Children receiving support for unidentified special needs

14 Home Languages: Bengali, Chinese, English, German, Gujarati, Hebrew, Hindi, Mandarin, Nepali, Serbian, Slovak, Spanish, Thai, Urdu



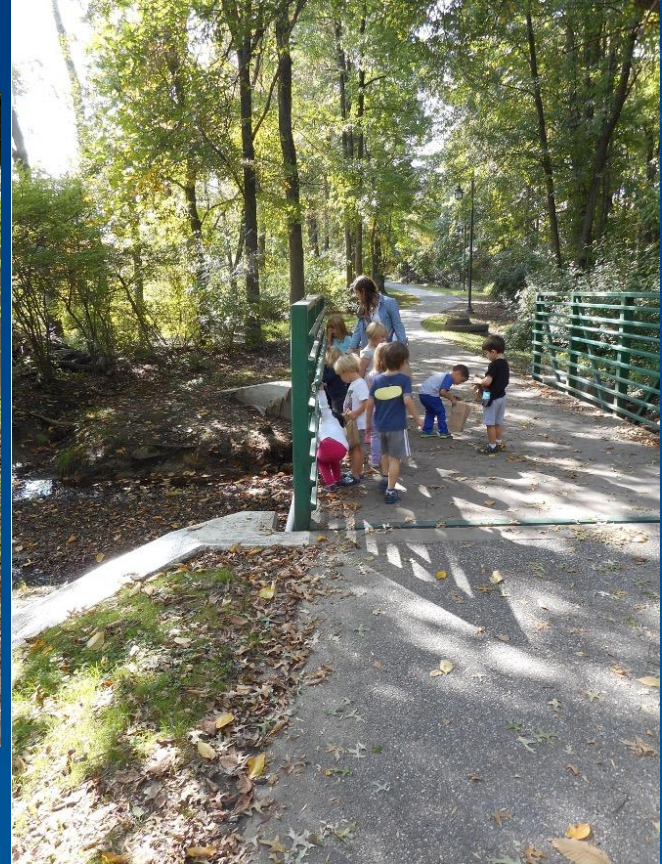
# Our Old Lab School Site: Place-Based Learning



# Initial Disappointment Turned to Hope - James F Hall Trail



# Development of Nature Program



# Our Outdoor Learning Environments



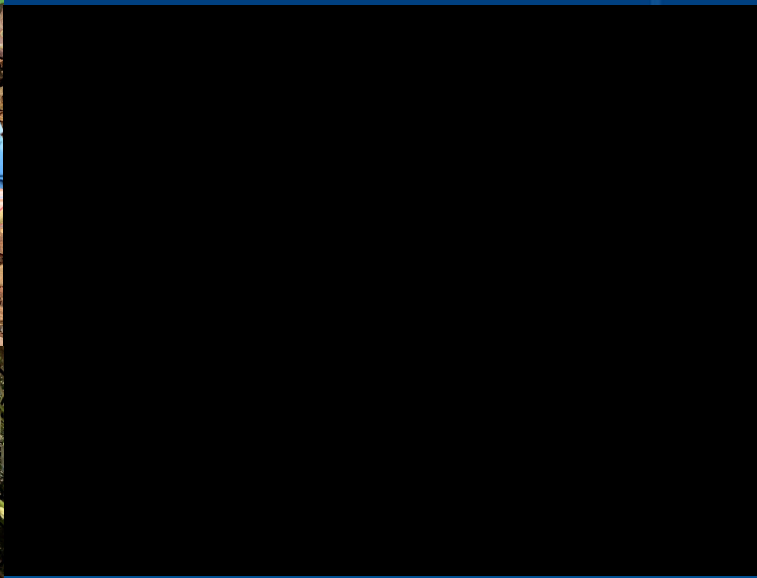




# Our Indoor Learning Environments



# Nature-based Programming in the Lab School: Supporting children's connectivity with nature



# Caring for our Earth



# Commitment to Nature-based Education: Early Childhood Educator Education

Preservice Teacher Education

High School

Inservice Teacher

Outreach

Professional Development

Visiting

Demonstration site



# Nature-based Programming in the Lab School: Supporting Undergraduate Connections with Nature



Supporting ~ 400 undergraduate students annually

- Child Development Observations
- Initial Field Placements
- Early Field Placements (Methods Blocks)
- Mathematics Methods Course
- Science Methods Course
- Student teaching
- University Interns



# Undergraduate Early Childhood Educator Development: Field Placements

Pre-session  
On the floor  
Post-session  
Lesson Planning  
Coaching/Mentoring  
Ongoing Feedback



# Science Methods

## Goals....

- Develop an openness to engaging in science and learning with children
  - Become comfortable with not knowing the answers
  - Being open to curiosity and learning
- Strengthen personal connection to nature and place
- Develop an awareness of science advances and the role of science and engineering in their lives and human impact on the world
- Develop an understanding of early childhood science curriculum, instruction and assessment practices
- Strengthen science and engineering knowledge
- Provide opportunities to teach and engaging science and engineering instruction





# Science Methods: Science Buddies



# 12 Week Student Teaching Placement for Seniors

- Focus on individual children, building relationships and collecting observations that will inform their lesson planning. Taking over the lead role
- Emergent curriculum planning as a teaching team



“The nature preschool has opened my eyes to education  
beyond the four walls.”  
Isabel Josephson, Senior ECE





“A takeaway from my experience at the Lab School was a true appreciation for nature. Before this experience, I did not hate nature or being outside, but I did not fully appreciate it or willingly spend much time out there. During my time at the Lab School, I began to enjoy being outside, even in the rain. I learned that with the proper clothing and gear nature can be so much fun and it is so beneficial to young children and their development across all developmental domains. In my future teaching career, I may not be able to spend as much time outside with my class as I did at the Lab School, but I will definitely find ways to incorporate nature into our lessons.”

**Mya Stone, Senior ECE**

# Our Commitment Continued During the Pandemic



The iPads have allowed us to follow the children through the woods as if we were there in-person, which is nice to get some human interaction! The journey of online school and virtual placements has taught me how to adapt to a new reality and with the help of the iPads, I have been able to feel connected with the students and teachers, even if it is from afar! Watching a nature preschool is not the same as being in the nature preschool which makes me realize how much I actually miss being outside. As I have come to this realization, it has made me consider pursuing a career in nature-based early childhood education! Again thank you for providing the iPads and making the virtual placements a little bit easier!"

**Christina Aguilera, 3rd year ECE major**



# Supporting Nature-Based Education Early Childhood Education Pathways and Teacher Academies (High school)



# Commitment to Nature-Based Education - Working with In-Service Teachers





# Professional Development at the Lab School: Workshops

The Lab School offers professional development workshops for teachers, administrators, and other early childhood education professionals. These workshops are development and taught by our Master and Lead Teachers and are designed to share the latest evidence-based early education practices

Some of the workshops offered

- Nature Play - Beyond the Playground Fence
- Forest Literacy - Listening, Looking & Learning in Nature
- The Three C's of Outdoor Education - Building Confidence, Collaboration, and Character



# Outreach - Wilmington Head Start



# In Bloom In Delaware 2022



# Thank you!

We would like to thank

- UD Lab School: Teachers, Children and Families
- UD HDFS Department & CEHD
- UD students

Contact Us:

Dorit Radnai-Griffin: [doritrg@udel.edu](mailto:doritrg@udel.edu)

Katie Pollock: [kpollcock@udel.edu](mailto:kpollcock@udel.edu)

Jennifer Gallo-Fox: [gallofox@udel.edu](mailto:gallofox@udel.edu)

UD Lab School Website: <https://www.labschool.udel.edu/>

UD Lab School Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/udlabschool/>

