



Preschool HANDBOOK 2026-2027

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northbranch@nbsva.org

north-branch-school.org

facebook.com/northbranchschool

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We are very glad you are part of the North Branch School community. Every child's experience at NBS is enhanced by the extra efforts of adults in our school community, and we can never say THANK YOU enough.

We hope this handbook will answer many questions you might have about participating in the daily life of NBS.

We also hope many possibilities present themselves to you, and your own contribution to the life of the school begins to take shape.

If you have any questions that are not answered by this handbook, please contact our Administrator, Autum Fish, at the phone number and email address above. If you have a question about your child's class, please contact that teacher. Questions about the school in general can go to Smith Coleman, Head of School, and questions about giving to the school can go to Bonnie Holliday, Director of Development.

If you are interested in information about our elementary or middle school programs, please ask in the office.

Important Email Addresses:

Head of School	Smith Coleman	smithc@nbsva.org
Head of School	Katrien Vance	katrienv@nbsva.org
Administrator	Autum Fish	northbranch@nbsva.org
Director of Development	Bonnie Holliday	giving@nbsva.org
Director of Preschool	Stephanie Matysek-Snyder	stephaniem@nbsva.org
Preschool teacher	Jeanine Bieber	jeanineb@nbsva.org
Preschool teacher	Brianna Saby	briannas@nbsva.org
Early Primary teacher	Genevieve Hoover	genevieved@nbsva.org
Early Primary teacher	Laura Cote	laurac@nbsva.org

Board of Trustees: The NBS Board is made up of former parents, grandparents, current parents, and community members. Members of the school community are encouraged to communicate directly with Board members if they feel the need. Board Meetings are held at the school and are open to all adult members of the school community. Board members may be contacted with your questions about long-term direction of the school and any items you wish to discuss. Current board members are:

Ellen Bouton	540-456-6746	ebouton@lumos.net
Barbara Heyl	434-466-4767	blhey1@gmail.com
Bill Hess	434-996-6850	bh1411717@gmail.com
Elvira Osuna-Highley	412-215-3328	elvira.highley@gmail.com
Becky Lindsay	540-456-8127	airthfarm@gmail.com
Jaime Marion	540-949-0660	jamarionjr@gmail.com
Freeman Mowrer	434-962-1630	freemowrer@nbsva.org
Philippa Proulx	540-456-6849	proulx@lumos.net

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INFORMATION for PARENTS of PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

What is the mission of North Branch School?

North Branch School fosters respect, nonviolence, and environmental responsibility and encourages the involvement of students, teachers, and families in our community.

We value the uniqueness of each child. Our curriculum promotes the desire to learn and to develop abilities to the fullest.

We are dedicated to providing a diverse environment which stimulates curiosity, creativity, and cooperation.

What is the calendar for the school year?

All students begin on Thursday, August 27.

The last day of school is Friday, May 28.

For more details about the school year, please see a complete calendar on the last page and online at north-branch-school.org/about/calendarhandbook.

What are NBS's hours of operation?

North Branch School's hours of operation are from 8:30 am – 4:00 pm, Monday through Friday, September—June.

The office is open 8:30 am – 4:00 pm daily.

Individuals may call the school at 540-456-8450 at any time during business hours or leave a message for staff after hours.

When should I drop off and pick up my child each day?

Preschool classes begin at 8:30 AM. In order to insure a safe arrival, please bring your child into the classroom and come into the building to pick him/her up. Children may not be anywhere on school property unless accompanied by an adult.

Preschool pick-up time is 12:30 PM. Please check out with the preschool teacher on duty. Preschool teachers have other work obligations elsewhere in the afternoon, so please be prompt. If, due to an emergency, you do not arrive to pick up your child and are unable to call us, we will call the designated numbers listed on your emergency form.

Your child will be released only to those people listed by you on your emergency form or if we have written or verbal permission from you to let someone else pick your child up. If we are unable to reach any of the numbers listed on your emergency form, the state requires that we tell you we will contact the Sheriff/Child Protective Services. This has never been necessary in the past, and we hope it will not be in the future!

No pick-up or drop-off transportation is provided by North Branch.

What is a typical daily schedule for Preschool?

Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday:

8:30 – 9:00 Arrival & outside time (weather permitting)
9:00 – 10:00 Circle time/choosing/theme related activity/art activity or music activity/cleanup
10:00 – 10:25 Wash hands and have snack
10:25 – 11:20 Clean up/movement; games/prep for outside
11:20 – 11:45 Outside for gross/fine motor play
11:45 – 12:00 Story and cool down; handwashing before lunch
12:00 – 12:30 Lunch
12:30 Dismissal

What happens on Wednesdays?

The preschool program is not offered on Wednesdays. North Branch offers a Parent-Toddler Program for children ages 18-months to 3-years-old on this day. This program will not happen during the 2025 – 2026 school year.

Does NBS provide lunch?

Students bring their own lunch and morning snack to school each day. NBS has some food on hand to help a student who has forgotten his or her lunch or snack, but NBS does not provide food to preschool students.

North Branch School will make every effort to observe dietary needs but cannot guarantee supervision of all children at all times. We cannot guarantee an allergen-free environment.

Snack: Please pack enough food in each child's lunch box to cover a morning snack and lunch. Please note that in addition to adequate food, children are asked to have their own refillable water bottles at school each day. We have two water bottle fillers at school, one in the Main Building, and one in the Annex.

Lunch: We do not have a refrigerator, freezer, or cooking space for students' use, so please send only foods that can be eaten directly from your child's lunch box. Ice packs are recommended if sending foods that need to stay cold.

We do not allow children to trade items from their lunches so that parents can be confident their child is eating the food they have provided. Please do not send soda, candy, or glass containers to school.

Special Treats: If you would like to bring a special treat for your child's whole class on his/her birthday, it will be served after lunch. Smaller treats are recommended.

Where can I store my child's lunch and other items?

Preschool students have a cubby labeled with each child's name and symbol for storing lunch and other personal items. Please remember to check your child's cubby for artwork, the Friday Newsletter, and other school communications.

What should my child wear to school?

We understand that saying "dress appropriately for school" means different things to different people. We want everyone to be able to be focused on learning and be fully involved with school activities while at school. For that reason, we require that clothing worn at school:

- always include shoes
- be comfortable
- be practical for school activities, which can often include sitting on the floor
- be appropriate for the weather, since we value being outside even on very hot days and very cold days
- allow for movement, such as running, climbing, and enjoying games
- leave the wearer's mind free to concentrate on learning and being at school and not require frequent adjusting or attention

- be free from upsetting words or pictures — again, so that everyone can concentrate on learning

If a teacher has a concern about a student's clothing, we will gently and privately talk to that student to explain our concern. As with everything at NBS, we see this kind of conversation as an opportunity to teach and learn about cultures and expectations, rather than as a punishment. If we notice clothing that repeatedly concerns us, the Head of School will talk to the parents and the student.

What are NBS's rules and safety procedures for the playground?

NBS values outdoor time for students. Playing in our woods, playground, and field offers valuable opportunities for creative play and problem-solving. Of course, we also value the safety of our children and have created parameters that allow for outdoor play that is both safe and full of choice. There are always two or more staff on duty when Preschool children are on the playground.

Certain equipment is solely for the use of Preschool and Early Primary students, including:

- tractor, wagon, and plastic riding toys
- geodome climber
- yellow swings, the small swing set (other students may use when Preschool children are not out on the playground); swings are always to be used in a seated position

Certain equipment is off-limits to Preschool students:

- Preschool and Early Primary children may not use the FriendShip/big structure.
- Preschool children are not permitted on the tire swing.

Other parameters:

- Preschool & EP children may use yellow slides for going down only.
- When going into the woods, Preschool children must be accompanied by a teacher and must remain within sight and sound of the teacher at all times.
- When going into the garden, Preschool students must be accompanied by a teacher.
- When going into the field, Preschool children must be accompanied by a teacher and must remain within sight and sound of the teacher at all times.

What if my child will be absent?

Please call school ANY TIME your child will be absent. If your family is planning a trip, please notify your child's teacher ahead of time. If you need to pick up your child during the school day for an appointment, please notify your child's teacher ahead of time and remember to check out with the office when you leave.

If your child becomes ill during school, you will be notified. If this occurs, please make arrangements to have the child picked up as soon as possible.

If your child is ill at home, they must be fever-free and symptom-free without medication for 24 hours before returning to school.

If your child misses a day due to illness or travel, this time is not made up on another day of the week.

What if my child is sick at home?

Please call Autumn in the office to let her know your child will be absent. Please do not email teachers the day of an absence; teachers might miss your message. We request that the parent be the one to communicate the absence. We encourage older students to be in charge of communicating with the teacher about what was missed.

Sick policy for children & staff

- **Keep your child at home if he or she is sick with any illness.** Contact your healthcare provider to discuss your child's symptoms.
- Children or staff must be fever-free WITHOUT MEDICATION for 24 hours before being allowed to return to NBS facilities.
- Children or staff who show symptoms of illness such as those listed below will be required to avoid NBS facilities and must remain isolated from others.
 - Fever of 100.0° or higher
 - Cough
 - Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
 - Runny nose and/or sore throat
 - Vomiting
 - Other illness symptoms.

What if my child gets sick while at school?

If your child becomes ill during school, you will be notified. If this occurs, please make arrangements to have the child picked up as soon as possible.

What if there is inclement weather?

If both Nelson and Albemarle County Schools close, NBS will **often** close for the first day of a weather event - this is not true for every weather event. On subsequent days, we will assess independently, since often we are able to come back to school before county schools because we do not use buses. If we are open but your road is a problem, please use your own judgment about safety.

In the event that NBS decides to open two hours late to allow conditions to improve, Preschool will be canceled that day.

School closing for snow or other hazardous weather conditions will be announced on Channel 29 TV and the NBS website: north-branch-school.org. There will be an announcement on the school voicemail, which you can reach by calling the school's number after 7:00 am of the day in question, and we will also post the information on the school Facebook page.

Will NBS make up days missed for hazardous weather?

NBS makes up days 6-10 that are missed. If there are make - up days they will be communicated to families as needed. All make- up days will be done at home-some teachers will send home packets and some will hold online classes. Preschool - Juniors will be packet driven; only Seniors & Middle School will have online classes for make up days. Preschool make-up days will be added only if school-age make-up days are added.

Can I visit school?

Parents are welcome to visit school any time. Sometimes preschoolers find it difficult to remain with their class when parents are present in other areas of the school. Please tell your child's teacher if you plan to stay at school during Preschool hours. Teachers may request that parents avoid being seen by their child.

All visitors must report to the office. Alumni visitors should contact Autum and the teacher of the class they wish to visit to get permission and be sure the day they want to visit works well for all involved.

Can I bring my pet to school?

In the interests of safety and health, family pets of any kind are not allowed in North Branch School buildings. When school is in session, no pets will be allowed on North Branch School grounds from 8:00 am – 5:30 pm. If pets are brought

to school for pick-up and/or drop-off, they must remain in the car at all times. Pets are not allowed at school-sponsored events.

Does NBS administer medications?

If your child needs to receive medication during the school day, please give the medication directly to Autum, with the medication form completed by the physician. Autum is the only NBS staff certified to administer any medication. The medicine will be locked away during the day and returned to you upon pick-up. Except for emergency care, no medication will be administered without your consent.

Will teachers apply sunscreen or insect repellent to students?

NBS staff do not routinely apply sunscreen or insect repellent. If your child has a particular need in these areas, please speak with staff.

How can I expect teachers to communicate with me?

NBS teachers are committed to communicating to and hearing from parents frequently so that we work as a team to give your child a rewarding experience. Communication ranges from informal to formal and verbal to written.

If a question arises about the appropriateness of the North Branch Preschool program for a specific child, the teacher, Preschool Director/Head of School, and parents will determine the proper action to take and work within a reasonable time limit for both the family and the school.

Verbal reports: We value frequent face-to-face exchanges of information at drop-off and pick-up times; however, if you are going to need an extended, uninterrupted discussion with a teacher, please schedule a conference. Parents or teachers may request a conference at any time.

Written information — Newsletter: A weekly newsletter about classroom activities and school news will be sent home to each family, usually on Fridays. Remember to ask your child for this. A copy will be posted outside the office. We will also post it weekly on the school website www.north-branch-school.org

During an Emergency: In case of an emergency situation at school which requires evacuation, information will be available at the local sheriff's office at 434-263-8099.

What is NBS's discipline policy in Preschool?

NBS values cooperation and teaching children to resolve conflicts with staff support. Children are encouraged to work through disagreements together and ask for help from teachers when they need it. Occasionally a child will be separated from the group but remain within the classroom to assist in regaining self control. At no time whatsoever will corporal punishment be used.

We value imaginative play but steer students away from pretending to hurt or kill their friends. We do not bring play weapons to school, and redirect students from improvising weapons.

What paperwork does NBS need from me to begin the year?

For Preschool students, North Branch needs to have on file:

- application
- immunization record/exemption
- completed physical records
- birth certificate information
- emergency form
- a current signed contract.

How do I pay tuition?

Tuition rates are posted in the office. Checks may be left for Business Manager Philippa Proulx in the payment folder in the office. If you are paying with cash, please ask for a receipt in the office.

Tuition paid in 9 installments is due by the 1st of the preceding month. (For example, October's tuition is due September 1.) Tuition paid in 12 installments is due according to the agreement with the Business Manager. Please help us meet our payroll obligations to staff by paying tuition on time. **A \$25 late fee will be charged each time tuition payments become 30 days past due unless prior arrangements have been made with the Business Manager.** This fee will be cumulative; you will be assessed \$25 for every 30 days a tuition payment is past due. Any questions regarding tuition payment or tuition assistance should be addressed to the Business Manager, Philippa Proulx, 540-456-6849.

What is the enrollment fee?

Returning families will have the opportunity to submit a non-refundable enrollment fee in February to hold a place for the following year. After contracting, this fee covers student accident insurance, a yearbook, some field trips, and a portion of classroom and general supplies.

Where does the money go?

Tuition income goes towards staff salaries and benefits.

The **enrollment fee** covers student accident insurance, a yearbook, some field trips, and a portion of classroom and general supplies.

What kind of financial assistance is available?

Each year, between 30% – 40% of NBS families receive need-based financial assistance in exchange for performing work needed by the school. In this way, NBS receives cleaning, landscaping, maintenance, special classes, and more, without paying high outside service fees. In addition, a limited number of scholarships are available. The Financial Assistance Form is available on the school's website under the "Admissions" tab or by asking Autum for a copy.

What if I want to end my contract?

For all students other than first-year Preschool students, once a contract has been signed, parents are committed to pay for the service, whether or not that service is used. While the Board reviews and considers thoughtfully any request for release from the contract, release is not typically granted unless the class fills and NBS can no longer offer the service for which parents have contracted.

How can parents get involved at NBS?

North Branch School maintains an open-door policy to all families at all times.

Yellow Pages: This one-page form helps us know your interests, talents, and preferences for ways to help out around the school. Please take a moment to complete this and return it to the office.

Perhaps you have an expertise you want to share with your child's class or another class — let us know!

Available to drive on field trips? Let us know!

Parents are always welcome at North Branch. Sometimes preschoolers find it difficult to remain with their class when parents are present in other areas of the school. Please tell your child's teacher if you plan to stay at school during Preschool hours. Teachers may request that parents avoid being seen by their child.

Fundraising and Workdays: Parent involvement is essential to North Branch School. Your time spent on fundraising events, workdays, maintenance, and upkeep is the difference between our low tuition and the expense of other area

schools. The contract states that parents are expected to help with at least one fundraising event and at least one workday; however, we encourage you to participate in as many as possible. WE NEED ALL THE HELP WE CAN GET FOR EACH EVENT AND PROJECT! You will benefit from the camaraderie, and the school will benefit from your efforts.

Please make sure to sign in at workdays and fundraising events so you will be credited for the work you do. On the Yellow Pages, you may opt to “buy out” of workdays at \$100/day and fundraising events at \$100 per event. You will be billed at the end of the year if you have not participated in the appropriate number of workdays and/or fundraisers. If you are doing tuition credit work, you are still expected to participate in the appropriate number of workdays and fundraisers. If anyone knows of a civic group looking for service projects, please let Autum know.

What are other ways to contribute to NBS?

Tuition pays for teacher salaries and health care benefits. That leaves all other necessary items and programs in need of funding! Here are some ways you can help the school receive this much-needed support for our programs and facilities. Please contact our Development Director Bonnie Holliday at giving@nbsva.org if you have any questions or suggestions.

Annual Fund: This fund covers day-to-day operating expenses, such as heat, electricity, paper, and more. Our goal is 100% family participation. A suggested amount is included with your Yellow Pages; however, please give at a level that is comfortable for your family. Whether you give \$1 or \$1,000, your contribution joins with gifts from friends, former families, alumni, and board members to make your child’s school experience possible.

Monthly donations: Consider a recurring monthly gift through Paypal (no account needed) at bit.ly/NorthBranchdonation. This is an easy way to structure your contribution to the Annual Fund or another fund of your choice. Other funds: North Branch gratefully accepts contributions for our Grandparents’ Fund, Endowment Fund, the Naomi Scherr Memorial Scholarship Fund, the Fine Arts Fund, the Founder’s Fund, which underpins the school’s needs-based financial assistance program, and for special programs such as Model UN.

Gifts in honor of or memory of someone special: A donation is the perfect way to honor or remember someone in your life or the lives of your children. The honoree or family of the person remembered will receive notification from the school. Gifts also will be acknowledged in the annual newsletter.

Information to family and friends: We like to keep our friends informed about goings-on at school through letters, newsletters, blog entries on our website, photos, and cards and drawings from students. Please plan to give us the names of at least two individuals or couples interested in your children and their school experiences.

Suggest a fundraising event: North Branch holds several successful fundraising events throughout the school year. The ideas for those events came from parents! See Bonnie if you have an idea for a fundraiser.

Gifts: If you know of a company or an individual who may be interested in making a donation of equipment, materials, or money, please let Bonnie know. NBS also gratefully accepts gifts of stock and corporate matching gifts.

Tax advantage: North Branch School is a 501(c)(3) organization. Donations and gifts-in-kind are tax deductible as allowed by law.

Planned giving: When reviewing your estate plans, please consider including North Branch School. Some people designate a set amount for charitable organizations, while others include a percentage of the estate, from 1% – 100%. An attorney or CPA can advise you.

Things We Are Required to Tell You

Suspected Child Abuse

The Commonwealth of Virginia requires us to inform you that if child abuse is suspected, North Branch teachers are required by law to report the possibility to the Social Services Department.



2026-2027

Working Calendar

Aug. 15 (SAT)	Parent Workday
Aug. 18 (Tues)	Preschool & Early Primary Play date session 10-11:30 am
Aug. 25 (Tues)	Back to School Night: Early Primary, Primary Blue, Primary Yellow, Juniors, Seniors & Middle School 4-5 pm OR 6-7 pm
Aug. 27 (THURS)	First Day of School
Sept. 7	Closed- Labor Day
Oct. TBD	School Pictures
Oct. 10 (SAT)	Parent Workday
Oct. 12	Teacher Workday – no school for students
Oct. 16	Grandparents Day
Nov. 2 (Mon)	Parent-Teacher conferences - no school for students
Nov. 3 (Tues)	Parent-Teacher conferences – no school for students
Nov. 20	NBS Stone Soup
Nov. 21 - Nov. 29	Fall Break
Dec. 1	#GivingTuesday
Dec. 4	Holiday Craft Fair
Dec. 18	St. George & the Dragon – afternoon & evening performances
Dec. 19	Winter Break Begins
Jan. 4	Teacher workday – no school for students
Jan. 5 (TUES)	School opens at 8:30 am
Jan. 18	Closed - Martin Luther King Day
Feb. 6 (SAT)	Parent Workday
Feb. 15	Closed – Presidents Day
Feb. 16	February Break – Closed for students
Feb. 17	February Break – Closed for students
March 13 (SAT)	Parent Workday
March 29-April 2	Spring Break
April TBD	NBS Golf Classic
May TBD	BandFair 2026
May 15 (SAT)	Parent Workday
May 28	Last Day of School & Graduation
TBD	Other School Events

* Working Full Calendar

** February Break are our inclement weather make up days as needed

Working Full Calendar: some events may be added as the school year progresses.

View the calendar online: north-branch-school.org/about/calendarhandbook

The Friday Newsletter from Autumn is the best source for information about school.

YOUR HELP IN KEEPING NBS A TOBACCO FREE ENVIRONMENT IS MUCH APPRECIATED.

We are glad Your Family is part of our School Community.