

Pre-Registration Packet 2024-2025



Venture Out!

Dear Families:

We hope you will join us in the fall as we embark on our 20th year of this exciting and unique preschool program. Our program is accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children, the highest level of accreditation available in our profession. We have devoted staff members who are chosen for their exceptional instructional ability and experience in the field. They place nature at the core of their curriculum, blending high-quality early childhood education practices with environmental education, preparing children to be innovative, compassionate, resilient, and environmentally literate stewards of our earth.

We strive to elevate, continuously innovate, and challenge the standard of high-quality, nature based early childhood education. In doing so, our culture values its youngest citizens, engages community members, and partners with families.

Will Smith Zoo School will make sure your child's first adventures are considerate, mindful, and safe. Nature connection, and ultimately all learning, happens best once a comfortable space has been established. We start with trust at our core, then radiate outward.

Welcome to Will Smith Zoo School, where learning comes naturally.



Sincerely,



Christopher Throm, Ph.D.
Will Smith Zoo School Director

Nature Preschool Leadership

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WSZS Hours of Operation

8:00 am-5:30 pm
Hours of Operation

8:00 am-8:45 am
Extended Care Early Arrival

8:45 am-9:00 am
Arrival

9:00 am-2:00 pm
Preschool Programming

2:15 pm-5:30 pm
Extended Care Preschool
Programming and Gradual Pick Up



WSZS Guiding Principle

Will Smith Zoo School is dedicated to cultivating innovative, resilient, and compassionate children who value living things and natural resources and who develop a relationship with nature through high quality, child-driven experiences involving enriched play, problem-solving and risk-taking. Our students will impact the world by helping to secure a future for wildlife.

Program Philosophy

At WSZS, we believe that children are capable individuals intrinsically motivated to learn. The teaching staff promotes learning by:

- Providing an environment which encourages discovery, experimentation, and the opportunity to see the results of one's actions.
- Developing activities that encourage growth based on children's abilities and interests.
- Encouraging problem-solving and reflection by asking open-ended questions and providing information in response to children's ideas, insights, and concerns.
- Assisting children in their interactions with each other and offering opportunities for conflict resolution and cooperative learning.
- Appreciating the individuality of children and families and celebrating diversity.
- Engaging the whole family in the nature-based educational process.

Nature Preschool

WSZS brings together the tenets of high-quality early childhood education and environmental education, with a focus on connecting young children to animals and nature for the benefit of both the child and the natural world. Inspired also by the Reggio Emilia approach, the preschool follows an emergent curriculum philosophy guided by the principles of the North American Association for Environmental Education (NAAEE) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). Daily field trips to the zoo offer the child rich experiences in animal and plant interaction, global awareness, nature play, and the many ways the zoo community works together.

Outdoor, nature- based play has been shown to provide physical, cognitive, social and emotional benefits for children:

Physical Benefits:

Outdoor play provides more vigorous, varied, and sustained play; improves gross and fine motor development, including bone health, balance, coordination, endurance, spatial awareness, core strength and posture; strengthens immune systems and promotes lifelong engagement in physical activity.

Cognitive Benefits:

Outdoor, nature-based play supports improved executive functioning and self-regulation abilities; increases observation and problem-solving skills; increases attention and focus; and challenging play supports children's resilience, independence, and self-confidence.

Social and Emotional Benefits:

Nature-based play supports development of empathy for the natural world and an emotional connection to special places, laying the foundation for environmentally responsible attitudes and behaviors and reduced stress, anxiety, and depression.

Global Awareness and the Zoo Connection

The San Antonio Zoo environment provides the context for children to develop an awareness of and an appreciation for the animals, ecosystems, people, and cultures of our world. Children broaden their understanding of our global community through guided investigations of zoo habitats with a focus on universal concepts such as use of water, homes, food, safety, families, and communities. Zoo walks will take place daily and may include the following:

- Observation of zoo animals, habitats, and horticulture
- Interaction with zoo staff
- Interaction with animals, including feeding and contact
- Educator modeled mini-lessons or data collection to develop skills in the cognitive, social/emotional, and/or physical domains

Sustainable Gardening

Our organic gardening projects integrate social and emotional learning and connections to wildlife as we observe the plant life cycle from seed to seed and strive to understand how plants, animals, and humans are intrinsically intertwined. As native insects and bird sightings emerge through the year, so do the plants with which they are co-adapted. Sensory garden plants provide opportunities to ground children through mindful interactions; edible garden plants connect children to animals through shared nutrition experiences; and pollinator gardens provide a life cycle habitat for butterflies, bees, and beetles, among other animals.

Curriculum and Activities

WSZS has developed a robust nature-based preschool curriculum that draws inspiration from the natural world, explores related concepts through play, and incorporates authentic experiences that build global citizenship through conservation and wildlife gardening. Our emergent curriculum inspires students to connect with nature, chase adventure, and pursue their passions. It's a time for fun, laughter, exploration, and inquiry, while building relationships, expressing creativity, and getting dirty! Our day is interspersed with a gentle integration of proficiencies such as numbers and letters in a highly supportive learning environment.

Classroom Communities

WSZS classroom families consist of no more than 16 children ages 3-5, facilitated by a dedicated and knowledgeable teaching team. Multi-age classrooms provide benefits in whole child development.

Inclusive Program

Will Smith Zoo School does not discriminate on the basis of religion, race, ethnicity, culture, gender, or ability. The preschool program is committed to providing a developmentally appropriate education for all learners and implements the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) by providing multiple means of representation, multiple means of engagement, and multiple means of action and expression. If a child needs significant 1-on-1 attention to be successful in the program, the family may arrange for a professional aide to support the child.

Facilities

Will Smith Zoo School was awarded LEED Platinum certification from the U.S. Green Building Council, the first for a preschool in the country and second in the world. LEED stands for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design and LEED Platinum certification is the highest certification available. Will Smith Zoo School is the largest nature-based preschool in the country. The 2-acre campus sits on the perimeter of the zoo and consists of 11 classrooms, a 20-foot-tall outdoor butterfly house, a garden to raise food to feed both kids and zoo animals, a special discovery pond (complete with tadpoles, aquatic plants, fish, and crawfish), and an interactive child-sized birdhouse. The campus also has several outdoor learning environments that challenge and develop students' physical, mental, and cooperative skills. Open-ended equipment and supplies encourage creative and cooperative learning. In addition, the 56 acres of San Antonio Zoo offer great opportunities for learning during the daily group explorations.

Tuition

5-day Program: \$1,100/month

5- Day Extended Care: \$200/month

3-Day Program: \$660/month

3-Day Extended Care: \$120/month

2-Day Program: \$440/month

2-Day Extended Care: \$80/month

Please note change in tuition fees

To Enroll

All families will complete the online registration using the MyProcure.com Portal.

New families will create their MyProcure.com account following the link that is emailed to them.

Registration for alumni and current families
Wednesday, January 3, 2024

Registration for waitlist families
Thursday, February 1, 2024
then on an ongoing basis until filled.

Enrollment Eligibility and Priority

Children must be at least 3 years old by the date of planned admission, and no older than 5 years old by August 1st of the school year session (not yet eligible for public kindergarten). They must be using the toilet independently by the child's first day of class.

Priority for admission will be given as follows:

- Children currently enrolled
- Siblings of children currently enrolled
- Children of San Antonio Zoo Staff
- Children on the pre-paid wait list

Admission is subject to availability and program needs. When an opening exists, early enrollment may be granted for children who are awaiting age or developmental readiness. Early enrollment is dependent upon full tuition being paid while awaiting the child's admission.

Enrollment Process and Fees

To enroll your child in WSZS, you will need to complete a registration form and submit it with a **\$45.00** non-refundable deposit. There is a non-refundable supplies fee of **\$495.00** that is charged once each year, the month before your child's start date. The Registration and Supply Fees are payable once a year, non-refundable, and invoiced on acceptance of an enrollment. This payment confirms your intention to enroll. The registration and supply fees will not be refunded if you withdraw your child.

A complete list of needed paperwork and documentation will be sent to you upon enrollment opening. Registration for the following school year will be secured upon receipt of the enrollment packet in its entirety, including the documents listed, and the non-refundable deposit.

Completed admissions packets include:

- Registration Form, including:
 - Consent information for photographs, field trips, insect repellent, etc.
 - Authorization for emergency medical attention
 - Acknowledgement of operational policies and procedures
- Medical Documents, including:
 - Vision and hearing screen information (for children age 4 or older)
 - Immunization records
 - Health appraisal (physical) signed by a licensed physician
 - Authorization for Dispensing Medication form if needed
 - Food Allergy & Anaphylaxis Emergency Care Plan if needed

Tuition Assistance

We know that providing the best quality preschool education for your child represents a financial commitment. WSZS has full and partial scholarships available to assist with tuition. Due to limited funds, the exact percentage is determined by household size and annual income. Families who apply for tuition assistance are not guaranteed that the assistance will be awarded and are responsible for full tuition payments until notified otherwise.

If you are interested in being considered for tuition assistance, please complete the application, on our website www.willsmithzooschool.org, after submitting your registration form.

Applications are open from January 3, 2024 to May 1, 2024. Award notifications will be sent in August.

Payment Schedule

Families can choose to pay full year, by semester, or by month. Monthly tuition payments commence on August 5, with subsequent payments due on the fifth of each month. The enrollment contract will include instructions for those interested in setting up automatic payment.

Refund Policy

Tuition and registration fees are not refundable. The program's budget is based on enrollment numbers at the start of the academic year and financial commitments are made to faculty, staff, and facility investments accordingly. Therefore, requests for pro-rated tuition charges or refunds as a result of illness, unexpected departures, or extended holidays cannot be granted.

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