



Wildflower School

School District 8 (Kootenay Lake)

School Handbook

MULTI-AGE EDUCATION FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

-as penned February, 2012

811 Stanley St
Nelson, BC, V1L 1N8
wildflower@sd8.bc.ca

Naomi Ross, Principal
Phone: 250.505.7020

Table of Contents

Contents

Wildflower Mission Statement	3
Wildflower History	4
The Values of Wildflower School	4
Curriculum	5
Homeschooling	5
Reporting.....	6
Expectations of Students.....	7
Expectations of Parents.....	8
Expectations of Teachers	9
Communication.....	9
Responding to Challenging Behaviour.....	10
The Wildflower Annual Calendar.....	10
The Wildflower Weekly Schedule.....	10
The Wildflower Daily Schedule	11
Admission Policy	11
Additional details for Wildflower Middle School.....	11
Frequently Asked Questions	12
Appendix:.....	13
Sample Wildflower Calendar.....	13
Sample Daily Schedule.....	14

Wildflower Mission Statement

- The Wildflower **community** strives to **educate the whole child** - addressing social, emotional, spiritual, physical and intellectual growth.
- The **multi-age** learning environment is one of support, safety, trust, respect and compassion.
- The academic delivery is **personalized** and challenges students to achieve their personal best.

Wildflower History

The Wildflower program was envisioned in 2001 by a group of homeschooling parents and Liz Tanner, a teacher with an extensive multi-aged teaching background who had been teaching in the independent school system.

In 2003, the school district suggested a partnership in which the class could exist alongside district elementary schools. Wildflower became a “public school program” under the Distance Education School of the Kootenays. A long waiting list formed during the first year and a second class was added. The wait list remained and a parent group formed with the intention of expanding the program further. A third class was successfully added in 2005.

In 2008, a Wildflower Middle School classroom was established which addressed the parents’ request for a learning community for twelve to fifteen year olds, holding the same values and curriculum delivery as in Wildflower elementary classrooms.

In June 2011, the Wildflower Program became its own school and was granted its own teaching Principal for 2011-12. In January 2012 the School District Board of Trustees voted in favour of adding an additional class to the Nelson campus and creating a satellite campus in Creston.

That this choice exists with the public school system is remarkable and hopeful—we are one of a kind in our school district and perhaps the province.

It is important to note that we would not be where we are today without the passion and tenacity of each person who has contributed their time and energy to our school. From the school’s inception, parents have been essential partners with the school staff and surrounding community in its growth and development.

The Values of Wildflower School

Wildflower is a school consisting of **multi-age** classrooms. At the elementary level those students are between the ages of six and twelve. In the middle school, students are between the ages of twelve and fifteen.

Wildflower School values **community**. It is a basic principle that school must be a safe place to learn and to grow. The diversity of ages encourages interactive and interdependent learning. We emphasize opportunities for cooperative learning and social activities.

The Values of Wildflower School cont'd...

The Wildflower community strives for **continuous progress** for each student. Whether the student makes enormous strides or small steps, the focus is on next steps. We believe in authentic assessment based on individual needs without comparison to others. Each student works towards their unique goals, based on their strengths, needs, interests and readiness. This is done without the usual arbitrary lines that assume a child to be ready for a curriculum designed for one single grade only.

Family is an integral part of the school community. By facilitating 5.5 hours a week of their child's learning, parents become deeply involved in their child's progress. Parent involvement is also evident in the school, the classroom and in community-building activities.

We believe that **healthy relationships** are of core importance to a teacher's ability to address a child's social, emotional, spiritual, physical and intellectual growth. We manifest this belief with a classroom configuration that keeps a child with one teacher for their elementary years at Wildflower School. This way the child and teacher can build a healthy attachment based on trust, understanding and mutual respect; in doing so, the learning journey is enhanced for both teacher and student.

Curriculum

The Wildflower curriculum follows the Learning Outcomes as required by the BC Ministry of Education. Due to the multi-age environment those Learning Outcomes are delivered over a number of years. Therefore, one cannot assume that any given year will contain all of the outcomes for a specific grade. For example, in one year a child may receive lessons in Science from the Grade Six curriculum and lessons in Social Studies from the Grade Four curriculum. What will always be true is that your child's teacher will strive to prepare material that works for the full spectrum of ages in the room.

Homeschooling

The school week runs Monday – Thursday, leaving one day a week for home-learning activities. Although families are not expected to fulfill this responsibility solely on Fridays, it is expected that each student will receive approximately 5 ½ hours of home learning per week. In effect, parents are responsible for delivering approximately one year of homeschooling within the 6 years of their child's elementary education.

Homeschooling cont'd...

The individualized home-learning program allows for a high degree of individualization to meet the learning needs of each child and takes advantage of the special resources a family can bring into the learning experience. The collaborative work between the child's teacher and parent(s) in developing the plan also enhances the sense of community Wildflower values.

The initial home-learning plan is created by the child's teacher and parent(s) in the fall of each school year. It is revised throughout the year to ensure that the goals and plan are meeting the child's individual learning needs. Teachers will support families with instructional ideas and, on occasion, supplementary resources. Parents are expected to actively support their child to ensure the plan is implemented and that the goals are being met. The teacher is responsible for assessing the child's progress for reporting purposes.

Reporting

Student progress is reported with anecdotal comments and suggestions from his or her teacher. The emphasis is always on striving for personal bests and not in comparison to others.

To meet provincial requirements, letter grades for intermediate children are kept in the student file. These files are open to parents upon request. The report cards given to parents consist of an anecdotal report that addresses the whole child. Student progress in each area of school life is explained in detail. The anecdotal report will address the following:

- This is what your child can do now....
- A next step for your child's learning is....
- Here are some strategies your child is/may begin using to get there....

When extra effort is required to strengthen a child's growth, school plans and home support suggestions will be described.

Individual formalized conferences to talk about your child's progress occur in November and March. It is expected that all parents attend. You can also expect ongoing informal communication such as emails, telephone calls, and face to face discussions as well. Parents are welcome to set up appointments with their teachers and the school Principal at any time.

Expectations of Students

Students are expected to contribute and thrive in a Wildflower classroom. The culture that surrounds them at school is one of courtesy, curiosity, respect for learning and respect for each other.

The Wildflower community recognizes the impact that each person has on this whole; therefore, students are expected to behave in ways that enhance the classroom community and refrain from activities that detract from community.

Children are expected to speak respectfully and to honour individual differences. They are asked to come to school ready to learn and to be involved with each other in supportive ways. They are expected to heed the adults charged with their care, as well as be mindful to include all children.

They are expected to show good stewardship. That is, they will be mindful of their physical environment and take care to use resources without waste. This includes keeping their classroom tidy.

We believe in the power of play for building interpersonal relations and helping children grow in a myriad of ways. Children are encouraged to engage in peaceful, creative, and inclusive play. We emphasize inclusion and emotional safety; therefore violent themes are not allowed. This extends to Halloween costumes and books brought to school. Wrestling and “play” fighting are not allowed as the spirit of such play may foster real anger or injuries.

The Wildflower community strives to provide a learning environment unique from the media-driven culture that surrounds our lives. Time at school is for healthy interactions. The presence of electronic devices or commercial collectibles detracts from the kind of play that we encourage as the focus often centers on the objects rather than on the humanity and imagination. Therefore we ask that Gameboys, music players, Pokémon cards and all their relatives stay at home.

Primarily, we ask that the children invest in their school community and make the most positive contributions that they can. We provide the environment; the children animate it with their curiosity, inventive minds, and active bodies.

Expectations of Parents

It is essential that parents joining the Wildflower community embrace the opportunities and values within our unique educational learning environment. Staff and parents need to work collaboratively to achieve an optimum learning environment for the children.

Our program is most effective when parents clearly communicate to children their respect for the teachers and what their teachers focusing on to accomplish. It is expected that parents will support their children in all aspects of the school community and learning environment.

Parents' vital roles are at least three-fold. One, parents provide for the basic needs that help a child to learn at school. A second and immensely important role is that of home educator. And finally, there is the crucial responsibility of being an active and positive member of the school community.

To ensure that your children arrive at school ready to learn we ask that you send them to school well fed, well rested and with a hearty, healthy lunch.

If they are unwell or your family will be away, please let your classroom teacher and the school secretary know.

We also ask that children arrive on time each day and knowing how and with whom they will be going home. Teachers find that when children do not know how they are to get home at the end of the day, they are often distracted and uneasy with tension building as the day progresses.

In addition, please let the teacher know if there are big changes happening at home. The effects often show up at school and we are better prepared to support your child if we have some insight into the situation.

Wildflower parents have a special level of commitment because of the Friday home-learning component of our program. We expect that the individualized home-learning program will be faithfully delivered.

Finally, please be aware that as a parent you have a direct role as a member of the school community. There are many ways for a parent to be a positive contributor within Wildflower School. One avenue is to be involved with the Parent Advisory Council.

Life in the classroom is enriched by parent participation. It is expected that most parents will find a way to help. We ask that parents talk to their child's teachers to learn about the variety of ways to contribute. Experience teaches us that parent support is no frill, it is essential. A truly holistic education cannot exist without families supporting the school with their honourable intentions, their presence, and their heartfelt commitment.

Expectations of Teachers

The Wildflower School staff completely embrace the Mission Statement.

Wildflower School endeavours to hold students with compassion and to create an atmosphere of trust and safety which enables all members to learn and grow. The school and individual classroom community require that all its members work together to ensure each child finds his or her place in the mosaic.

Working to establish a trusting connection allows students to feel safe and cared for at school. Wildflower teachers value each child's uniqueness. Each child is honoured for his or her contributions to the school and classroom community and is encouraged and given the tools to achieve his or her personal best.

Please also refer to the following sections for further Expectations of Teachers: "Values Statement", "Curriculum and Assessment", "Communication" and "Conflict Resolution".

Communication

If a parent has a school concern, they must first have the necessary conversation directly with their child's teacher. It can be damaging to the parent - teacher relationship and therefore to the child's school experience, if complaints are aired outside of what should be a bond of trust. If the teacher or the parent believe that there continue to be barriers to good communication or problem solving after honest attempts, they are asked to involve the Principal. Every attempt will be made to resolve the conflict respectfully.

The formalized conference times to talk about your child's progress are in November and March. It is expected that all parents attend. Additional meetings are set for home-learning conversations. Keeping communication open and frequent is an expectation from the school staff. Informal and ongoing conversation about progress can be expected. Please respect the process by responding promptly to any queries that come up in notes home.

Responding to Challenging Behaviour

When responding to behaviour that does not fit the values of the school, the Wildflower staff is committed to consequences that uphold connections and a sense of belonging. Most situations are handled within the classroom community using strategies consistent with the principles of Restorative Justice, Restitution, Compassionate Communication and Attachment Theory as presented by Gordon Neufeld.

For situations that are not resolved at the classroom level, teachers invite parents to help resolve the situation in the interest of their child. The Principal is informed and invited into the process as needed. In those rare situations that cannot be resolved with the support of the parents, discussions and decisions about the school's ability to meet the needs of the child will ensue.

Among many other options, parents may be asked to consider other learning environments for their child.

The Wildflower Annual Calendar

The Wildflower daily and weekly schedule as described below is substantially different than the schedule found in other schools. Each year, the Wildflower staff develops a proposal for the daily and weekly schedule in the form of an annual calendar and submits it for consideration by the Board of Education. If this calendar proposal receives tentative approval by the Board, each family in Wildflower School receives a ballot on which they indicate their opinion about the calendar proposed by the staff. The school also hosts an information meeting to answer the questions of the families before the ballots are collected and counted by two executive members of the Parent Advisory Council. Due to the Board of Education's schedule, tentative approval is often received in June and the timelines dictated in Bylaw #2 for the Board's policy sometimes dictate a September vote. Please speak with the Principal if you have questions about this process. The annual Wildflower calendar for this school year is found in the appendix.

The Wildflower Weekly Schedule

The Wildflower weekly schedule is one of the many unique features contributing to the program's success. Children class four days each week, and Fridays are homeschooling days. Fully 20% of a child's educational program is supported directly by the home.

The Wildflower Daily Schedule

The length of time students are in class each day is also longer than you would find in a mainstream school setting. Typically, a Wildflower student will receive approximately 30 minutes more of instruction each day. This “extra time” accumulates throughout the year and results in extensions to the winter and summer vacations as well as days used by the teachers for family conferences and reporting. The daily schedule for Wildflower School is found in the appendix.

Admission Policy

Having a well-balanced class in age and gender is crucial for a multi-age classroom. Placements are offered in the order of when the applications are received. Teachers look for individuals on the waiting list with desired age and gender and contact the next appropriate child, i.e. the earliest application date. If that seat is declined, the spot is offered to the next individual.

Because of our value on family and community, siblings of present students may be given priority. In addition, a child’s unique needs are also taken into consideration in the classroom placement process.

If a placement is offered, but the parents decline the seat, the parent may reapply for a future admission date and take a new position on the waiting list or in the case of extraordinary circumstances, parents may make a written request to retain the child’s position on the list. The Principal and Wildflower School staff will determine whether to grant the request.

Additional details for Wildflower Middle School

Children currently enrolled in the Wildflower elementary program will be the first to be considered and may have priority over children from other schools and programs. All students interested in attending Wildflower Middle School must apply directly to Wildflower Middle School. This includes children currently attending Wildflower Elementary School: they must reapply during their grade 6 year.

Frequently Asked Questions

Does Wildflower School cost money to attend?

Wildflower school is part of the public school system, School District #8 and therefore does not have costs associated. We do have an annual school fee for each student which covers the cost of all learning supplies, such as pencils, rulers, art supplies, PE equipment, workbooks etc... This method of purchasing insures students have materials of equal quality. In extraordinary cases where the financial circumstances of a family warrant, the family is asked to contact the Principal directly to make alternate arrangements.

What are the benefits of multi-age?

A multi-aged classroom environment aims to encourage the healthy interactions that naturally flow from children who are placed in a family-type structure. It frees children from the constraints of uniformity. In a classroom of age-mates, children often refer to each other for social, physical, and academic cues. They can feel pressure to be like “everyone else in the class”, regarding behaviours. A common result of this is children feigning sophistication, acting outside of themselves to “fit in” and in many cases, expressing behaviour beyond what is appropriate. In the Wildflower multi-age classroom this kind of age-mate peer pressure rarely manifests. It is our experience that children quickly settle into being themselves.

Is there homework assigned at Wildflower School?

At Wildflower School we do not believe in assigning homework for homework’s sake. There may be times, however, when your child will be expected to complete school work at home. For example,

- If a child needs more time to complete work that is important to ensure participation in future activities, the work may become homework. Adaptation of work is made as needed.
- Students may be asked to spend some time before the next class collecting information for a class discussion or assignment.

Please note that the circumstances, above, may occur in the elementary classes as well as the middle school class.

Appendix:

Sample Wildflower Calendar

Tuesday, Sept. 2	First Day of School
Thursday, Sept 11	No school, teachers meet with parents re homeschooling
Monday, Sept 22	Pro D Day District based
Friday, Oct. 10	Pro D Day School based
Monday, Oct. 13	No school Thanksgiving
Friday, Oct. 24	Pro D Day Self directed
Monday, Nov. 10	Pro D Day School based
Tuesday, Nov. 25	Early Dismissal (one hour) District wide
Wednesday, Nov. 26	Early dismissal (one hour) District wide
Thursday, Nov. 27	Early dismissal (one hour) District wide
Tuesday, Dec. 16	Last day before Winter break
Monday, Jan. 5	First day back
Friday, Feb. 27	Pro D day district based
Thursday, Mar. 5	Last day before school closure days and spring break
Monday, Mar. 23	First day back
Wednesday, Apr. 1	Early dismissal ½ day Three Way conversations
Thursday, Apr. 2	Early dismissal ½ day Three Way conversations
Friday, Apr. 10	No home schooling, Good Friday
Monday, Apr. 13	No school, Easter Monday
Thursday, Apr. 23	No school, Wildflower retreat
Monday, May 18	No school, Victoria Day
Monday, May 25	No school, School based planning day
Thursday, June 11	Penultimate Day
Thursday, June 25	Last day of school and report card pick up
Friday, June 26	Administration Day

Dear Families;

It is additionally expected that you will provide the equivalent of 35 days of home schooling. ☺

Sample Daily Schedule

	Elementary	Middle School
Start Time	8:40	8:30
Break	10:30	10:30
Back in Session	10:45	10:45
Lunch	12:45	12:15
Back in Session	1:15	12:45
End of Day	2:50	3:05

Each day will contain whole group instruction, cooperative learning activities and individual learning activities. We strive to offer a variety of situations addressing the learning styles of all students. There is time for physical play and social growth alongside curriculum.