

PARENT  
HANDBOOK

# Mulberry Bush Independent School

Intentionally Nurturing the Growth of the Whole Child.



Brattleboro Retreat

# Mulberry Bush Independent School

*Intentionally Nurturing the Growth of the Whole Child*

## PARENT HANDBOOK

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## General Purpose

### Who we are

The Mulberry Bush Independent School is a private, not-for-profit early learning school operated by the Brattleboro Retreat. We serve approximately fifty-nine children ages eight weeks to six years of age. We also offer afterschool and summer programs for young people up to the age of twelve. Our educational philosophy is based on the use of responsive classroom techniques, outdoor curriculum, and positive behavior supports. We believe in providing children with developmentally appropriate social, emotional, and academic learning opportunities in an intentional

learning environment. We offer an individualized curriculum to enhance each child's chance to develop the skills necessary for school readiness and to have a love of lifelong learning.

We strive to meet all of your child's needs: physical, emotional, social, and intellectual. We want parents and guardians to feel great about leaving their children in our programs. With this in mind, we have created the best policies possible to foster a safe, positive environment for children, and enhance their growth and learning. Please read this handbook carefully. We are always available for questions or to discuss concerns.



# Educational philosophy and goals

Our philosophy of education is based on the work of Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, and Eric Erickson, pioneers who described the stages of child development and who stressed the concept that learning takes place through exploration. We also refer to ongoing brain development research to provide children with all the required materials and teaching methods to support building the young child's learning brain for social competency and school readiness. We provide this

exploration by creating an environment that is designed to give children:

- Materials that encourage growth and discussion
- Individual and group interactions with well-trained teachers that support children's learning experiences through structured activities and opportunities (e.g., morning meeting and projects)
- Personal, quality, one-on-one time with children during diapering, dressing, and other daily routines.



"I love how well the teachers communicate with me. They are all so loving and caring."

—Sandy

These and other age-appropriate activities promote cognitive, physical, social, and emotional growth and development. Our goals are guided by the following objectives:

- Maintain a safe and secure child-oriented environment at all times.
- Provide a consistent and nurturing environment that encourages a wide variety of positive personal interactions between peers and with teachers.
- Promote cooperative relations among parents/guardians, teachers, and the manager to ensure consistency between home and the School.
- Support parents and guardians in any way that seems appropriate.
- Assist your child in developing all the skills needed to be successful in kindergarten.
- Create a balance between group and individual needs, and energetic and quiet activities.
- Utilize play and exploration as primary mediums for promoting each child's learning experiences.
- Offer a curriculum that incorporates an individualized, child-centered approach, rich in opportunities to explore and create, through the use of materials that enhance the child's overall learning.
- Develop lesson plans that cover language development, gross and fine motor skills development, social interaction, music, and art while maintaining a physical environment



where children have learning readiness experiences in science, math, and social studies.

- Help to ensure children feel they are competent learners.
- Promote positive self-esteem and confidence in each child enabling trust in himself/herself and others.
- Support children in developing social skills by learning to be helpful and cooperative with peers, learning to express their needs verbally and appropriately, and to share their ideas and beliefs.
- Use our knowledge of children's brain development, individuality, and overall development to create a supportive learning environment.



## Our Aftercare programs— philosophy and goals

The Mulberry Independent School Preschool/Pre-Kindergarten and School Age Aftercare Programs are committed to supplementing each child's day with positive and enriching experiences. We believe that children need to have fresh air and exercise. Whether it's on one of our playgrounds, in the woods or meadows, or in positive cooperative games, we provide opportunities for children to decompress from their busy day at school and be children. Many of our public schools have cut back on recess and gym time and obesity is on the rise. Children have less time to relax and play outdoors. Therefore, we have designed our two aftercare programs to help nurture the whole child and to have fun-oriented activities that promote overall wellness. It is our

purpose to help each child develop to the best of his/her individual ability and to provide an atmosphere of support and acceptance.

## The Mulberry Bush Independent School's program options

The Mulberry Bush Independent School has 6 programming options for your child. These options are designed to meet the learning needs of your child and to give parents choices to meet their family's needs.

Our six options are:

**Infant Toddler Classrooms:**  
We have an infant/young toddler

and older (two year old) toddler classroom.

**Preschool Classroom:** The preschool classroom consists of children age 2 to young fours.

**Pre-Kindergarten Classroom:** The pre-k classroom consists of children 4 to 6 years of age.

**Preschool and Pre-Kindergarten Aftercare Program:** This program runs from 3:30 pm to 5:30 pm, halfdays and full day closings. Please following the Mulberry Bush Calendar.

**School Age Aftercare Program:** This program is designed for Mulberry Bush graduates and Retreat families to provide high quality after school care for children 6 to 12 years of age.

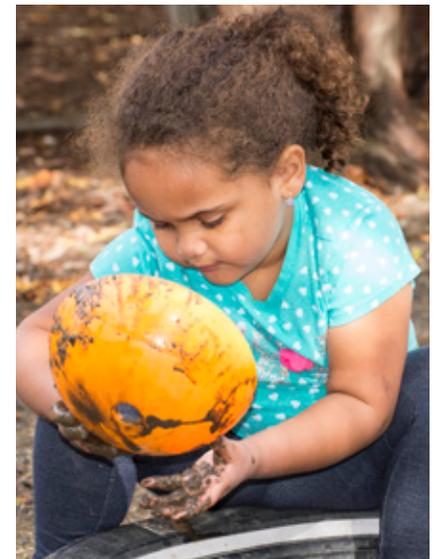
**Preschool and Pre-K Summer Program:** We have five two week sessions that parents can sign their children up for during the summer months. Ages 3—6.

**School Age Summer Program:** We have five two-week sessions that parents can sign their children up for during the summer months. Ages 6—12.

## Our collaboration with WSESU school district and the Department of Education

Mulberry Bush is an early learning school working in collaboration with

the Department of Education to provide the best education possible for children between the ages of 8 weeks and 12 years of age. Our curriculum is aligned with the Vermont Framework of Standards and Learning Opportunities, which provides the basis of education for students of all ages in Vermont. Our teachers use the companion guide to these frameworks called the Vermont Early Learning Standards when planning our programs. In our newsletter, the teachers clearly break down their activities and curriculum in each of the learning domains.



The Mulberry Bush collaborates with the Windham Southeast Supervisory Union (WSESU) as a partnership school to provide universal high quality preschool education to the children in our area. We are a "High Quality Partner" with WSESU under Act 166.

# Registration and Enrollment

## Registration

Employees of the Brattleboro Retreat are the first to be offered eligible slots in our program. Any openings not filled by Retreat employees will be available to the community. We maintain a waiting list that consists of both community and Retreat employees' children. We will refer to the wait list to fill any available slots. We ask that all parents fill out and submit an application form available both on our website ([brattlebororetreat.org/mulberry-bush-application-form](http://brattlebororetreat.org/mulberry-bush-application-form)) and in paper form. We welcome families who are using the state subsidy program or ACT 166 funding to assist with tuition payments.

## Enrollment process

The purpose of our enrollment process is to provide you and your child with the best possible start at our School. These enrollment procedures are required. We require children to attend our School a minimum of 4 days per week.



## Important program policies

At the time of enrollment, parents/guardians will receive copies of our:

- Anti-discrimination & Inclusion policy
- Emergency handbook
- Medication Procedure handbook
- Supports & Expulsion policy

## Sibling policy

Due to the fact that siblings\* have complicated relationships and can distract each other from the tasks needed to learn and grow in a school environment, we strictly avoid assigning siblings to the same classroom. Therefore, siblings who attend our school will not assign them to the same classroom. The rare exception to this rule may involve twin siblings.

In cases where siblings are extremely close in age, the manager, the parents, and any other team representatives will meet and discuss placement to ensure both children's needs can be met. This process can include one child attending a different school or staying in a different age group, depending on what best meets the needs of the children at the time.

\*Siblings describe children who live together part or full time in the same house. The children can be bio-siblings, step or half-siblings, regardless of the marital status of the partners or parents in the home.

## Getting to know each other

Parent(s) visit and tour the School. If, at this point, the family wishes to register their child at our School, the manager will give the family all necessary information in the Registration Packet.

The manager and family will discuss the needs of the family, work schedules, the child's needs, financial needs, available space at the School, and then start a transition plan for the child.

The family must complete all registration materials, send in immunization records, and pay the registration and deposit fees before the child enters our program. We will respect legal decisions regarding issues of child custody and restraining orders. We ask that you submit copies of these legal documents to the School. If the legal documents are not submitted, we cannot refuse the release of the child to a parent.

## Child transition plan

The following is a recommended plan to transition children (from infancy to pre-k age groups) into the School. Your family and the School can determine what is best for your child.

- **1st Day:** One hour with parent present, 9:00 am—10:00 am
- **2nd Day:** Child visits alone between 9:00 am and Noon.
- **3rd Day:** The child visits alone from 9:00 am to 3:30 pm.

Your child's temperament and the parent's schedule will help decide if this transition schedule is effective. If a child is having a difficult time adjusting, we will call and ask the parent to pick the child up and adjust the transition accordingly. We are happy to work with the parent and child to make sure the transition goes as smoothly as possible.

## Children's transitional objects from home

Mulberry Bush provides a variety of play materials for your child. We understand that some children need transitional objects from home to school. We ask that you assist your child in choosing a soft, cuddly toy as opposed to hard, inappropriate toys, which will not be allowed in the classroom.

## Open door policy

Parents, guardians, and other family members are welcome and encouraged to visit the School at all times. Visits from parents, guardians, and family members may include, but are not limited to observing, eating lunch, nursing their child, volunteering to participate in an ongoing activity or sharing a story, music or crafts from various cultures. Each classroom has its own schedule. Please ask staff about the timing of visits so that your child's lunch or nap are not disrupted.

We encourage you to communicate your ideas with us on how to better serve you and your child.

# Hours of Operation

**The Infant/Toddler classrooms** (on the lower level) are open from 8:00 am to 4:30 pm, Monday through Friday. Parents can sign up for a school year or full year program. We do offer limited before care (7:00 am to 8:00 am) and extended day care (4:30 pm to 5:30 pm) for an additional fee. Early or late care is available if the number of parents requesting such care warrants extending the day.

All early and late care needs to be signed up for in advance. Included in this schedule are some holidays (see holiday schedule on following page) and our annual school calendar. We close for one early release day a month (12:00 noon) and for longer in-services two times a school year and for one week in the summer to provide our staff with in-service trainings and classroom worktime. In your financial packet, you will find additional information concerning late (beyond contract time) pickups. Any late fees will be charged to your monthly tuition.

**The Preschool and Pre-kindergarten Classrooms** (upstairs) follow the WSESU calendar very closely with some exceptions. Please refer to our school calendar. The school day is 8:00 am to 3:30 pm with a 3:30 pm pick up and dismissal in front of the building by the porches. Children will have quick access to their parents' cars by the front stairs and the ramp.

Children will be waiting starting at 3:15 pm for their parents in the pre-kindergarten room with staff members watching for cars. If it's an early release day, your children will be waiting at 11:45 am in the same location. Please do not use the main entrance when picking up your children on these days. It will disrupt the program in the infant and toddler classrooms and create too much foot traffic through the building. This pickup plan is designed to be safe and quick for all.

Some preschool and pre-kindergarten children will be signed up for our aftercare program. These children will be in the preschool room until the 3:30 pm pick up is complete and then will start the aftercare program in the pre-kindergarten classroom. On the 12:00 noon in-service dismissal days there is no aftercare program for any age children. All staff will be involved in the in-service plans for that day.

**The Preschool and Pre-Kindergarten Aftercare Program's and the School Age Aftercare Program's hours** will be outlined in the Mulberry Bush calendar and will align as closely as possible with the WSESU calendar. School age children can be bussed to the commons near the Brattleboro Retreat to attend our program from many local Brattleboro Schools. A Mulberry Bush employee will meet the children at the bus stop and escort them to our program.

**Both the Preschool/Pre-k and School Age Summer Programs** will be 8:00 am to 3:30 pm with early or late care available if the number of parents requesting such care warrants extending the day.

Pre-registration is required for all programs and contracts will be signed for each program separately.

All children should arrive at the School **no later than 9:00 am**. Children arriving after 9:00 am will be sent home unless there is a planned late arrival. The program in each classroom will have started by that hour.

## Holiday Schedule:

January	New Year's Day
February	President's Day
May	Memorial Day (and the Friday before the holiday for in-service).
July	Independence Day
August	One week in-service closing at the end of the summer program and before the new school year starts.
September	Labor Day
November	Thanksgiving Day and the Friday after Thanksgiving
December	The week of Christmas will consist of three in-service days and two holiday closures.





"We love the smaller class size and the individual attention our daughters receive."

—Allison & Derek Nadeau

## Snow Days and the Retreat Harsh Weather Policy

All parents will receive a copy of the Harsh Weather Policy on an annual basis. The Mulberry Bush Independent School will follow the WSESU weather related closing schedule. These weather related closings and delays will be announced on local radio.

However, a sheet will be sent home in the fall to allow Retreat employees and guardians only to sign up their children for special care on the days that the School is closed due to harsh weather. Retreat parents and guardians must sign up in advance for these days. There will only be enough staffing to care for the children who have been signed up. For complete details, please refer to the Harsh Weather Policy.

Any enactment of the Harsh Weather Policy will be announced on WKVT (92.7 FM) and WTSA (96.7 FM). Please familiarize yourself with the following two key definitions:

- **A Harsh Weather Day** is when it's announced on the radio that we are running on the Harsh Weather Day Policy. Only **children of Retreat employees** who have been pre-signed for "harsh weather days" will be admitted to the School. A skeleton crew of local staff will work on these days. Children who have not pre-signed for this service will not be permitted when the Harsh Weather Policy is in effect.
- **No Radio Announcement** means the School is open as usual. Any decision to open, close, or delay opening will be made no later than 6:30 am.

## Absences and vacation

Please call your child's classroom as soon as possible if your child will be absent for the day. Also, please notify your child's teacher(s) of any planned vacations. If your child is ill please inform the teachers of the illness so we can track illnesses at our School. You can find the phone number for your child's classroom in your registration packet. **Please do not leave information about absences on the manager's office phone.**

## Arrival and departure

NOTE: A full copy of our Arrival and Departure Policy will be distributed to parents and guardians as part of your registration packet. Highlights include:

- You must accompany your child into the School and sign in each day at the daily register.
- We ask that only parents and teachers open and close the doors and gates at the program (including the playground gate). We don't think it's safe for children to be in the habit of opening and closing doors and gates on their own while at the program.
- Parking area supervision: We ask that all parents hold their child's hand or have their child walk very close to them when walking through our parking areas. It is very difficult to see little people through rear view mirrors, and such. Let's help children learn that parking lots can be dangerous and

they need to use safety rules.

- Please wash your hands and your child's hands upon entering the School. This important precaution is required by state regulations and reduces the number of illnesses in our School. Children **MUST** arrive at the School by 9:00 am.
- Always make contact with a teacher before leaving your child at the School or taking your child from the School. If you are going to be late picking up your child, or need to bring your child earlier than your approved schedule, you will need to make prior arrangements with the manager. Notify the teacher if someone other than yourself will drop off or pick up your children. We will refuse to release him/her to any person who does not have proper identification, even if they are on the child's approved list of pick up people.
- **Please conclude all cell phone calls while outside our building. We prefer cell phones not be used in our program.**
- If a staff member has reason to believe that the person who is picking up a child has engaged in any activity related to drugs, alcohol, or substance abuse that would endanger the well-being (safety) of that child, the School will take appropriate action. We may ask the parent if someone else can come and pick up the child or we may call the police and notify them of our concern.



## Discipline or Setting Limits

Our policy on discipline is based on respect for the individual and an understanding of the developmental appropriateness of a child's actions. We don't expect children to come to us with appropriate social behavior. A good part of what we do here is to teach children skills to help them be with other people, accept limits, work in a group, etc. Therefore, to help teach the many skills a child needs to be successful in life, we use many techniques.

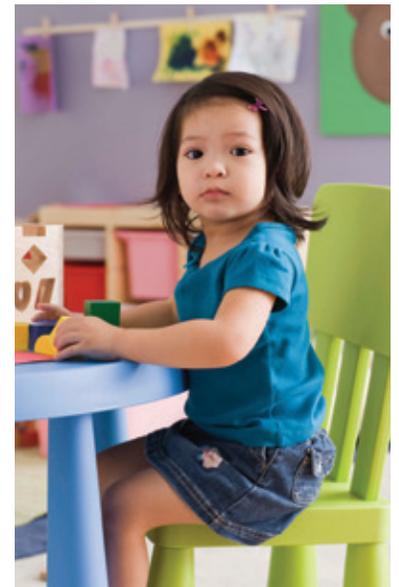
What follows are a few of the techniques we use to help children learn the complexities of "appropriate social behavior." If you are interested in more detail about our "discipline plans" you can ask the teacher assigned to your child's room about what they do for certain behaviors. Also, we have a Staff Manual that all staff receive at orientation when hired at the Mulberry Bush. It provides a wealth of information about how to handle children in general.

### In managing children's behavior:

- First we examine the child's behavior to see what is being communicated to us. We believe children communicate through their behavior. While examining the child's behaviors we will also review the daily routines, the classroom arrangement, and other program details to see if the child may have needs we can meet by adjusting our programming.
- We will verbally recognize a child's feelings. We will help children to label these feelings and find ways to handle them.
- We will model appropriate language, good manners, non-violence, patience, etc., to help children learn these behaviors.
- If a teacher must remove a child from a situation, she/he will speak calmly about why the child was removed, and then we will give the child choices to help him/her avoid the situation in the future.
- We teach children mediation skills so that they can learn to handle social problems on their own.
- We have a written procedure for many aggressive behaviors, including biting. If you would like a copy, please see the manager.
- When a child's behavior is consistently deemed inappropriate or unsafe for other children or staff, the manager will discuss with the family possible help for the child. Many organizations in the area are designed to help child care centers, children, and their families with prolonged or intense behavior issues.
- If, after many attempts to secure help for the child and to work with the family to improve the child's understanding of social situations, there is little growth or the family is not interested in the help we feel is important for the development of the child, we may ask the family to withdraw the child from the School.

### If a child is having continuous problems and is having difficulties learning ways of dealing with his/her feelings and with other children, we will do the following:

- All significant behavioral issues will be discussed with the child's parents or guardians at the earliest possible convenience.





## Daily Schedules

The following schedules are approximate and have degrees of flexibility. They offer parents and guardians an idea of the daily structure for children of various age groups. Note that while our Infant and Young Toddler room is merged, each age group has its own schedule:

On Fridays between 10:00-10:30 am, children will attend All School Sing in the older toddler classroom.

### Infant Schedule

Infant schedules will be set up to coincide with established schedules at home. Please label all formula bottles, baby food, and diapers.

### Young Toddler Schedule (one year olds and older)

7:00 am - 8:00 am	Early care provided in the Older Toddler room
8:00 am - 9:00 am	Start school day—explore learning areas
9:00 am - 9:30 am	Morning snack
9:30 am - 10:15 am	Diapers, Circle Time/songs, music, games
10:15 am - 11:00 am	Outdoor Activities
11:00 am - 11:30 am	Wash hands, lunch preparations
11:30 am - 12:15 pm	Lunch
12:15 pm - 12:45 pm	Diapers, stories, ready for nap
1:00 pm - 3:00 pm	Naptime and quiet play
3:00 pm - 3:15 pm	Wake up, clean up mats and ready for snack
3:15 pm - 3:45 pm	Snack
3:45 pm - 4:30 pm	Diapers and clean up
4:30 pm	End of school day and start of extended day care
4:30 pm - 5:30 pm	Indoor or outside play. Aftercare and activities.

### Older Toddler Schedule

7:00 am - 7:30 am	Arrival, breakfast, activities with all Early Care children in the Two's room
7:30 am	Preschoolers, toddlers & infants go to their rooms
7:45 am - 9:00 am	Free play and outside time
9:00 am - 9:15 am	Morning Meeting
9:15 am - 10:00 am	Morning snack and diapering / toileting
10:00am - 10:30 am	Project time (one day a week the older toddlers will have organized motor movement in our gym)
10:30 am - 11:00 am	Free play, diapering/ toileting
11:00 am - 11:45 pm	Outdoor or gym activity
11:45 pm - 12:15 pm	Lunch
12:15 pm - 12:30 pm	Free play, diapers, potty
12:30 pm - 2:45 pm	Story and naps
2:45 pm - 3:00 pm	Wake up, clean up, table activities
3:00 pm - 3:30 pm	Snack
4:30 pm	End of school day, beginning of the aftercare day
4:30 pm - 5:30 pm	Outdoor or indoor play activities, closing, say goodbye!



## Preschool and Pre-kindergarten Schedule

7:00 am - 8:00 am	Early arrival, free play and breakfast in Older Toddler room
8:00 am - 8:15 am	Clean up and move to preschool room
8:15 am - 9:00 am	School activities in preschool room
9:00 am - 9:20 am	Clean up, toileting
9:20 am - 9:45 am	Morning meeting (greeting song, calendar, weather & story etc.)
9:45 am - 10:00 am	Morning snack
10:00am - 10:20 am	Morning meeting (songs and/or games, etc.)
<b>10:00 am - 10:30 am</b>	<b>One day a week the preschool and pre-k rooms will have motor movement time, and on Fridays they will attend the all school sing.</b>
10:20 am - 10:40 am	Theme Projects
10:40am - 11:00 am	Clean up, toileting, get ready to go outside
11:00 am - 12:00 pm	Outside free play (or gym in weather 20 degrees °F or colder)
12:00 pm - 12:40 pm	Lunch
12:40 pm - 1:15 pm	Start cleaning up lunch, toileting, brush teeth
1:15 pm - 2:30 pm	Nap
2:30 pm - 3:15 pm	Wake up, and snack
3:15 pm - 3:30 pm	Dismissal and beginning of aftercare programing
3:30 pm - 5:30 pm	Outdoor or indoor activities
5:30 pm	School is closed



**The School Age Program** will provide programming at the end of the normal school day, on many WSESU teacher in-service days, half days, and many school holidays. The School Age Program is not available on Mulberry Bush early release days or on some calendar holidays. Please use our program calendar as a reference.

School Age Aftercare Program schedule is as follows:

3:15 pm	off the bus
3:15 pm - 3:25 pm	gathering, discussion, share day, talk about plans for the rest of the day
3:25 pm - 3:40 pm	wash hands and eat snack
3:40 pm - 4:30 pm	playground, outside games, woods time.
4:30 pm - 5:00 pm	homework (if needed) and gym or playground
5:30 pm	closing of school

The after school offerings will be expanded on half and full day programming to allow more time for the above activities.

# Visitors to Our School

Many types of visitors come to our School. They are with us for varied lengths of time. Please note that they do not change diapers, nor are they left in charge of children. Visitors may include:

**Learning Express Library Van** The Community Express comes to our school to extend literary activities for pre-school and pre-K children.

**College students** We occasionally permit students to conduct classroom observations. A student who wishes to focus on one child for a particular reason (for example, a language sampling) is required to get a parental release first.

**Children of our teaching staff** Our teaching staff members are allowed to have their own children spend time at the School. These are children who are older than the children for whom we provide care. These children do not care for children. They are only here to visit for a specific period of time.

**Parents/guardians** As you have read, we have an open door policy. You are welcome to visit your children and have lunch if desired. We welcome

parents and guardians who are interested in enrolling their children in our School or who would like to be on the waiting list to come and visit the School.

## **Early Essential Education (EEE), Children's Integrated Services (CIS), and the Family Infant Toddler Project (FITP)**

Staff from these organizations visit the School and observe children. They provide services to children who may need developmental assistance. Children observed by these organizations have prior parental permission.

**Windham Child Care Association (WCCA)** This organization also sends visitors to our School. These professionals assist our teachers in getting their Child Development Associate Credential (CDA), mentor classroom teachers who request it, and support all of us in the field of early education.

**Child Care Division** Occasionally the state of Vermont sends licensors to visit us. This is part of our licensing process.

**Environmental Rating Scale (ERS)** Assessors come to implement the ERS assessment tool for our Step Ahead Recognition System (STARS) renewal process.



**If you have questions about these visitors, please contact the manager.**

**"Our son has blossomed and we have become stronger, more confident parents."  
—The Wessel Family**

# Health Policies

Good health for children and staff is an important issue for childcare. Finding care for sick children is one of a parent's most difficult responsibilities. We have drawn up the following guidelines for when a child is too sick for childcare. At registration we will also disseminate the Mulberry Bush Medication Policy to all parents for you to reference when medication might be required for your child. Also, if your child has an allergy or ongoing medication need, the medication policies will outline the state requirements for allowing us to administer medications.

## When should you keep your child home?

Keep your child at home if he/she has any of the following:

- Hepatitis A
- Campylobacter (food borne)
- Chicken Pox
- Bacterial Meningitis
- Influenza
- Scabies
- Conjunctivitis (pink eye)
- Head Lice
- Diarrhea
- Pertussis (Whooping Cough)
- Scarlet Fever
- Rubella (German Measles)
- Giardia (lake, river borne)
- Tuberculosis (Active)
- Mumps
- Measles
- Impetigo

- Polio
- Shigella (food borne)
- Diphtheria
- Salmonella (food borne)
- Streptococcal infection, including scarlet fever, strep throat.

## Head lice and scabies

Please notify the School immediately if diagnosed. Lice: A child may return to the School after appropriate treatment is completed and nits are removed. Children must be nit free for 24 hours in order to return to The Mulberry Bush. We have a written lice procedure for parents to follow to successfully get rid of lice. Scabies, pinworm infection, and ringworm infection: A child may return 48 hours after treatment is initiated.

## Chicken pox

Children and staff with Chicken Pox may return seven days after the rash appears or when all vesicles have crusted over. Clearance from a healthcare provider is required in order to return sooner than seven days after onset of rash.

Additionally, a child or staff member who has the following symptoms shall not be allowed to attend the School until the symptoms disappear or until otherwise indicated by a medical professional:

- **Diarrhea** Three loose stools beyond what is normal in 24 hours or loose stools persisting for more

than 48 hours; if there are two episodes of diarrhea in a four-hour period, then children and staff must leave the School.

- **Vomiting** Two or more episodes in the previous 24 hours; children at the School will be sent home after one episode.
- **Fever** Greater than 101°F rectally or 101°F orally or axillary; they should stay home until fever free for 24 hours without medication.
- **Severe Coughing** Child or staff gets red/blue in the face or produces whooping or croup noise after cough. If a child is coughing and throwing up they will be sent home.
- **Purulent Conjunctivitis** Often called "pink eye"—the child can return to the School when a

physician sends a note stating they can return.

- **Jaundice** Yellowing of skin or white part of eye
- **Rash** With fever or behavior change.

Other symptoms of possible severe illness include unusual lethargy, irritability, persistent crying, difficulty with breathing, persistent abdominal pain, body pain, disinterest in being in a classroom environment.

Employees of the Brattleboro Retreat should also refer to the Retreat Employee Health Policy. The Health Department and Infection Control Coordinator must be notified promptly when a child or staff member is known or suspected to have certain diseases.



"The infant program at the Mulberry Bush has exceeded our expectations in every way. It's a joy to see my daughter so happy in a program!"

—Jill Terrell-Ouazzani



### Policy on care for a sick child

The Mulberry Bush staff will contact parents or guardians when a child is not well enough to be in childcare. While stressful for parents and guardians, it must be understood that we only send children home that we feel are contagious with an illness, or are unable to manage being in a childcare environment. When it has been determined that a child is too ill to remain in childcare, the following procedure will be followed by the Mulberry Bush staff:

- Contact the parent or guardian responsible for the sick child. If the parent or guardian cannot be reached, we will contact other adults on the child's pickup list. It's very important that parents/guardians consider their child's needs for a local person to be

available for pick up in case of emergency or illness when filling out this portion of the registration forms.

- Determine with the parent or guardian approximately how long it will take to make arrangements to pick up the child.

While waiting for the parent or guardian, the staff will make the child as comfortable as possible by restricting play, providing a quiet rest area with the child's comfort object, and providing extra fluids. Parents/guardians should alert the Mulberry Bush in writing to any changes on their emergency pickup lists.

### Medication

The staff will give medication only after the parent or guardian has completed the Medication Consent

forms and policies. It is best practice for parents to provide all needed mediations at home if at all possible. Please note that sunscreen lotion, bug repellent, and first aid creams can only be applied if an authorization form has been signed.

### Immunizations

The State of Vermont requires all childhood immunizations to be up-to-date upon entering the program. Children whose examinations and immunizations are not kept current are subject to termination. The doctor's office can fax the child's immunization records and health wellness forms directly to the manager's office. Please see the Mulberry Bush classroom phone sheet for the proper fax number to use.

### Notification of neglect or abuse

As childcare professionals, we are mandated to report child abuse and neglect in accordance with 33 V.S.A. Chapter 14. Child abuse can be physical, verbal, emotional, sexual, or neglect. If staff suspects any type of abuse, a report will be filed with the Vermont Department of Children and Families (DCF). It will be left to the discretion of the manager and the classroom teacher whether the parent is informed that we have reported suspected abuse to the state. In order to have parents and/or guardians maintain a close relationship with the staff, the identity of a teacher who reports suspected abuse will be kept confidential.

" We couldn't be more pleased with the teacher's calm, thoughtful environment in the infant room. The way the staff takes care of our baby is like having trusted family care for her."

—Simha Ravven

### Accidents and Injuries

A staff member trained in First Aid will treat minor cuts and injuries. We strive to have all staff trained in both First Aid and cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR). A report informing you of the incident will be shared with you when you pick up your child. For more serious injuries, such as a cut that might need stitches or injuries that go beyond our general first aid care, your child will either be taken to Brattleboro Memorial Hospital or we will call 911. You will be notified as soon as possible if your child has been seriously injured. Your child's safety is our primary concern.

### Fire drills

Fire drills will occur once a month at the discretion of the Brattleboro Retreat. Children will practice the emergency exit procedures that are posted at the entrances. Our goals are to get them out safely and for them to learn that it is important to get out quickly. Children will be expected to go out without their jackets. If we are asked to leave the grounds and stay out of the building, you will be notified and asked to pick up your child.



"Our daughter's face lights up every morning when we drop her off."

## Supplies Your Child Will Need

### Snack and lunch

The School does not provide any food for the children. It is up to the family to provide each child with two snacks and one lunch.

A snack is one protein and fruit or veggie. Crackers can be included. A lunch should also include a protein, veggie or fruit, and some type of bread or carb if so desired. Therefore, daily we need 3 sources of protein, 3 veggies or fruit, and additional carbohydrate for one or all of the snack and lunch times. Children need healthy food for physical energy and brain power. Please help your child be a better learner and enjoy their day by providing enough food. Please send milk (or milk substitute) or 100%

juice as well. We will not serve children other sources of juices or drinks other than milk or 100% juice.

We ask that preschool children do not bring in sippy cups. We prefer to teach the children to pour their drinks into cups. This is a wonderful skill for children to acquire. Therefore, if you bring a child's thermos with your child's food, your child will have this great opportunity. We ask that you label both the thermos and the cup with your child's name.

We provide a lot of water throughout the day. We have metal cups for the children in most classrooms. New state regulations strongly discourage serving anything other than milk (or

milk substitute) or 100% juices in early childhood programs.

Parents or guardians are responsible for providing their children with nutritious lunches. Please note that we will not allow candy, gum, or other sugary food to be served in our classrooms. We do have microwaves to warm foods if needed. We ask parents/guardians to provide microwavable containers and not the plastic type that may leach unhealthy chemicals into the food. Many stores sell these types of containers and they are great for packing food in lunch boxes.

### Infants/toddlers and two year olds will need:

- Disposable diapers
- Diaper wipes and any rash medication
- All baby food, cereal, and bottles with formula, milk or juice (absolutely no glass bottles)
- Two or three complete changes of clothing

- Pacifier or other object needed to self-soothe
- Seasonal needs: swimsuit, small water bottle, sunscreen lotion, towels, insect repellent, snowsuit and boots. Please bring in clothing for the outdoors. It's a terrible thing for children to have to stay inside due to lack of proper clothing.
- All babies one year or younger will need to bring in sleep sacks for napping in. No loose blankets will be used for infants sleeping.

**NOTE:** Sunscreen lotion or insect repellent will not be applied without prior written authorization from a parent or guardian. If your child is still using infant formula, please bring enough for every feeding—we cannot re-use formula. Please label formula and baby food jars. Please also note we have limited storage for large boxes of diapers and food. Therefore, you may provide up to a week's worth of labeled baby food.



## Preschoolers—ages 3 to 5 for both the school year and summer programs will need:

- One or two complete changes of clothing—all the clothing children bring to the program should be labeled with their name. Children also need to come with extra clothing, properly labeled in case of spills or accidents.
- We prefer children three years and older to be toilet trained. If this isn't possible please see the manager.
- Slippers for inside—all the clothing children bring to the program should be labeled with their name.
- To preserve space in the children's cubbies, the School will provide each child with a sheet and blanket for naptime. We will launder these items here. Appropriate outdoor clothing will be needed for children of all ages; i.e., mittens, hats, winter snowsuit and boots, and mud pants and puddle boots.
- We have a mud season policy and procedure that will be distributed annually.
- Appropriate footwear—have your child arrive with appropriate footwear for the weather. Keep in mind that flip-flops and other loose sandals or shoes don't provide the support needed for walking, climbing, playing ball, etc. For your child's safety have them wear sneakers, sandals with straps, hiking and rain or winter boots. Being outdoors is a huge part of our program. Please make this comfortable and safe for your child.
- In the summer children will need swim suits and towels for sprinkler and wading pool fun.



**Please label all items with your child's first and last name.**



**"At each pick up, we see how happy, loved and nurtured she is."**

## School Age Children—ages 6 to 12 will need:

- Our mud season policy is also in place for our school age children. The mud season policy and procedure will be distributed annually.
- Appropriate footwear—have your child arrive with appropriate footwear for the weather. Keep in mind that flip-flops and other loose sandals or shoes don't provide the support needed for walking, climbing, playing ball, etc. For your child's safety have them wear sneakers, sandals with straps, hiking and rain or winter boots. Being outdoors is a huge part of our program. Please make this comfortable and safe for your child.
- Summer program school age children 6 to 12 years will need a swim suit and towel for use in the in-ground pool here at the Retreat. The pool is maintained by the Retreat and life guards are provided. We won't be providing swimming lessons.
- On swimming days we will have a male and female staff person to attend to the children in the separate changing rooms.
- Parents will be given permission slips to sign to allow their child to use the pool.
- School age children should bring a snack for the afternoon on normal school days, a snack and a lunch on half days, and 2 snacks and a lunch on full days of programing.

# Field Trip Policy

## Walking field trips

Field trips and nature walks are considered a part of our educational program. We will be taking regular trips to the park, the library, and other short walks. We will provide the same adequate and responsible supervision as is provided in the classroom. Your written permission is requested at the time of enrollment (Activities Consent).

## Non-walking field trips

These field trips are planned in advance. You will be notified about the details in writing. No child will go on a field trip without a permission slip and a telephone number where we may contact you. Parents, guardians,

and volunteers are invited to help chaperone these trips. A fee may be charged for some field trips. The two's room, the preschool room, and the pre-kindergarten classrooms should each take three field trips annually.

## Emergency procedures on field trips

The ratio of children to adults is the same as in the classrooms (page 32). We do strive to have chaperones or per diems to help. If a child is injured:

- One to two adults stay with the group.
- One adult attends to the injured child.
- One adult makes the necessary telephone calls.



## Additional Information

### Birthdays

If you would like to celebrate your child's birthday at the Mulberry Bush, please notify your child's primary teacher one week in advance to plan the party. If you opt to have a birthday party outside the School, and need to distribute invitations, please either invite all the children in the classroom, or send the invitations from home. Please don't ask staff to hand out invitations. You can place the invites in the parents' mailboxes. Our reason for these restrictions is that children can have hurt feelings about not being invited to their friends' birthday parties. If you have a party at the School, we ask that parents/guardians provide a healthy favorite snack as part of their child's birthday celebration. We ask that cakes and cookies be saved for family celebrations.

### Holidays and celebrations

*(Please see our separate holiday policy and parent questionnaire.)*

### Parent Communication and Involvement Plan

We want to work closely with parents and guardians to develop open communication regarding your child. For this reason we schedule parent conferences, provide mail boxes, send home various information, and work to develop as many types of communication as possible so that we can support your child's development. Please read the following section carefully.

- **Daily posting** Each classroom has an area that posts information for parents and guardians. Please make sure the classroom teacher has shown you where this area is. Also, **each parent has a mail pocket outside the classroom. There will be a variety of informational pieces put there designed to keep you in touch with the life of the School.**
- Curriculum forms and daily activity boards are posted outside your child's classroom.



"Being new to the area and far away from friends and family, Mulberry Bush has been a tremendous source of support and comfort for us."

—The Grutta Family

**Donations to the School** Since the Mulberry Bush Independent School operates on a limited budget without a petty cash system, donations of reusable materials no longer needed in your home are appreciated. This includes recycled materials such as: styrofoam trays, paper towel rolls, toilet paper rolls, plastic shopping bags, plastic jars with lids, newspaper, old calendar pictures, yarn and string, fabric scraps, empty food containers, and extra clothes.

**Note: Toys made for home and toys made for school are often constructed very differently. As such, all donated toy items must be checked by the manager.**

- On occasion, we send home a notice asking for parents/guardians to purchase and donate items. These purchased items consist of play dough and goop ingredients, and some materials used in sensory tables (sand and water tables), plus food coloring, flour, salt, liquid starch, vegetable oil, cream of tartar, cornstarch, macaroni, beans, cornmeal, etc.
- **Volunteering** You and your family are welcome at any time (see Open Door Policy on page 7). We love to have parents/guardians come and help on field trips, read stories, share cultural interests, or just have lunch with the group!
- **Parent newsletter** We send home a newsletter 4 or 5 times a year. In the newsletter, you will find information about what your child is doing in class, interesting early

childhood articles, events at the School, or ways to be involved with your child's educational experience. The newsletter will also be posted on our website ([www.brattlebororetreat.org/mulberrybush](http://www.brattlebororetreat.org/mulberrybush)).

- **Schedule changes** All schedule changes need to be approved by the manager.
- **Parent/teacher conferences** Twice a year, teachers prepare a child development assessment form to share with you (please see the permission form in your registration packet). Each classroom will post a sign-up sheet for parent conferences. These parent conferences are an important way for parents, guardians, and teachers to have an in-depth opportunity to evaluate the children and their development. We feel that parent conferences are very important in order to have a relaxed conversation about your child's development and interests, and to answer any questions you might have about our program.
- **Parent concerns** You are encouraged to share any concerns. Most concerns can be resolved at the classroom level. If you and a staff member have difficulty reaching an agreement, you can discuss your concerns with the manager. Open communication between staff and parents/guardians is important to the success of your child's experience and the positive relationships we

"The teachers are creative and knowledgeable in early childhood education."



strive to build between you, your child, and the School.

- **Parent Work Groups** When the need arises we will hold Parent Work Group planning meetings and work time. In the past we have convened Parent Work Groups regarding playground upgrades, building playground equipment, painting playground sheds, and helping with the vegetable garden. Announcements for these work groups will be disseminated through our newsletter, posters, and sign-up sheets.
- **Annual program questionnaire** A questionnaire will be sent home annually for feedback about our program. This questionnaire will help us identify our strengths and areas needing improvement. Your input and comments will be used to help us determine our goals for the year. You are welcome and encouraged to give us any information about our School. If you would like to set up an individual meeting with the manager let her know.
- We have a "Back to School Night" each March when parents and children join together to participate in some common activities that occur in your child's classrooms.
- Each June we have a graduation ceremony for the children leaving the Mulberry Bush Independent School to start Kindergarten.
- During the school year each classroom will have one parent meal for all the parents in the classroom to join with their children and enjoy pot luck offerings.

## Child-to-staff-ratios

We want parents and guardians to know the goals that the Mulberry Bush has for child-to-staff ratios. We strive to meet the state of Vermont's requirements. We prefer to meet the child-to-teacher ratio required by both the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the Step Ahead Recognition System (STARS).

### Ratios (child:staff):

- 3:1 (children 8 weeks to 24 months)
- 5:1 (children 2 year olds)
- 10:1 (children 3 years to 12 years)

## Tuition and payments

### Late payment guidelines

(Please see the Mulberry Bush Independent School Financial Packet for information.) Payments should be made out to the Brattleboro Retreat and mailed to:

Brattleboro Retreat  
Attn: Cashier, P.O. Box 101,  
Brattleboro, VT, 05301

Families that use state Child Care Financial Assistance should be aware of the following:

1. If your child is absent and you do not call the classroom to let them know that your child is sick, the state subsidy program may refuse to pay. If this is the case, you will be billed for the tuition for the day or week.
2. If you are late in picking up your child and you are charged a late pick-up fee, state funding cannot be used to cover those charges.

3. When your Child Care Financial Assistance application is up for review, please complete the paperwork early. If your certification expires you will be responsible for payment.
4. Our Strengthening Family Grant does not cover co-pays for the School Age Program.

### Leaving the School

If you wish to withdraw your child from the School, a three-week written notice is required. The finance office will credit your account for the amount of your deposit if the 3 week notice is given. During this period, we will prepare your child and the other children for the pending departure. We ask parents and guardians to respect the fact that children have developed close relationships with staff and peers. Children strongly benefit by having an opportunity to say goodbye.

### Car seats

If you need to leave your child's car seat at the School for someone else to pick up your child at the end of the day, please leave the seat outside the child's classroom. Also, all children's names should be written on the back of the car seat. This helps to reduce confusion if any other children have the same style seat. We will also need your labelled child's car seat if a field trip is planned.

### Contacting the Mulberry Bush manager

All parents and guardians should know that there are mail baskets for the manager located on the table



"All of the teachers we have had at the Mulberry Bush have been fantastic!"

across from the entrance as you come in to our School and inside the preschool and pre-kindergarten classrooms. Please feel free to leave notes, paperwork, or any other communications for the manager there. You may reach the manager by phone at 802-258-4350.

### Contacting the classroom teachers

Please use the staff phone sheet to find the correct phone number and extension of your child's classroom. **Please call the classroom directly when reporting a child's absence.** The classroom staff list their email addresses in the newsletters. Please feel free to contact the classroom staff via email.

### A word about our facility

Please note that because the Mulberry Bush is located on the grounds of a health care facility, it is essential that all parents and guardians using

Mulberry Bush's services recognize the Brattleboro Retreat's need to ensure patient privacy.

Information of any kind about patients, past or present, is strictly confidential and should never be confirmed or denied to anyone outside the Retreat. It's very important to also remember that parents/guardians should never leave their cars running outside the School or leave their keys in their cars. Please do not let your car idle, and NEVER leave children in a vehicle without an adult.

We welcome you and your family to our School and look forward to both getting to know each other and to help support and serve your child's emotional, intellectual, physical, and social needs for years to come. Welcome!

**Mulberry Bush Independent School**  
Anna Marsh Lane, Brattleboro, VT 05301  
(802) 258-4350  
[brattlebororetreat.org/mulberrybush](http://brattlebororetreat.org/mulberrybush)

# Mulberry Bush Independent School

## Our Mission Statement

The Mulberry Bush Independent School's mission is to create an intentional learning community that uses innovative responsive classroom techniques; an effective individualized academic foundation; and positive social and emotional strategies to support the overall development of the whole child.



## Brattleboro Retreat

Anna Marsh Lane  
Brattleboro, VT 05301  
(802) 258-4350  
[brattlebororetreat.org](http://brattlebororetreat.org)

