



NORTH CASCADES INSTITUTE

MOUNTAIN SCHOOL

Teacher/Chaperone/Parent FAQs

CONTACT INFORMATION

Staff at the North Cascades Institute administrative office in Sedro-Woolley may be contacted for general program information.

North Cascades Institute
810 State Route 20
Sedro-Woolley, WA 98284

Phone: 360-856-5700
Fax: 360-856-1934

Staff at the Environmental Learning Center office on Diablo Lake may be contacted for site specific Mountain School programming information.

North Cascades Environmental Learning Center
Physical: 1940 Diablo Dam Rd
Ross Lake National Recreation Area

Phone: 206-526-2599

Emergency Contacts: In the event of an emergency, schools and families can reach teachers and program staff at the following numbers:

North Cascades Environmental Learning Center

206-526-2599

Maria Santiago, Learning Center Director
(primary emergency coordinator)

206-526-2590 (Night)
802-989-3353 (Day/Night)

Michael Blackwell, Program Director

206-526-2598 (Day)
540-922-2175 (Day/Night)

ACCESSIBILITY

→ *How physically intensive are the activities at Mountain School?*

Instructors are very accommodating to students' physical abilities and emotional needs. Group activities may involve a moderate level of physical activity in walking trails while carrying personal backpacks. Though dependent upon participants' needs, our most strenuous hike is 3.5 miles roundtrip with 500 feet of elevation gain.

→ *How accessible is your campus?*

All public buildings at the Learning Center are ADA-accessible and feature both stairs and ADA-accessible trails between buildings. In addition, there are ADA-accessible bathrooms and showers in all locations as well as ADA-accessible bed and common rooms in the lodges.

The Environmental Learning Center allows trained service animals in all programs to provide services for those with disabilities. Please be prepared to describe the nature of the training that your animal has received and what your animal has been trained to do for you. Do be aware that the Learning Center campus is home to deer, bear, cougar, and smaller animals of all types. All service animals must be trained to not bark at, chase, or harass wildlife.

If you have any specific questions about how we can adapt our program to better meet you or your child's needs, please get in touch. We'd love to work with you!

ACCOMODATIONS

→ *Where will Mountain School participants be sleeping?*

While at Mountain School, your child will be sleeping in one of our LEED Silver certified lodges. Our lodges feature a common room, bathrooms, showers, and bedrooms. Each lodge has two separate, shared gender bathrooms with two sinks, two toilets and two showers. Toilets and showers are partitioned in private stalls. Each bedroom has two sets of bunk beds; participants sleep three or four to a room. Chaperones and teachers monitor students during their time in the lodges during free time and at night. A fitted sheet and pillow with pillowcase will be provided for each bed. All participants must

bring their own sleeping bag or blanket. Prior to checkout, participants are expected to remove bed linens and sweep out their rooms.

ALLERGIES

→ *Are you able to accommodate a Mountain School participant's allergies?*

At the Learning Center, we are sensitive to the individual needs of students, especially when it comes to allergies. The information you provide in your child's Personal Information Release forms will help us be attuned to any allergies your child might have. As a baseline our campus is pet-free and our dining hall is meticulously nut-free. Animals trained to provide services for disabilities are permitted. As a substitute for peanut butter for sack lunches we provide sunbutter, made from sunflower seeds. If you have specific questions or concerns about how to best support your or your child's needs throughout your Mountain School experience, we encourage you to contact us!

EMERGENCIES

→ *What happens if a Mountain School participant has a medical emergency?*

We are able to contact emergency services through several platforms and have detailed emergency response plans in place for potential scenarios. Throughout the duration of Learning Center programs, an incident commander is on site to respond to and oversee emergency scenarios. In addition, much of our staff has Wilderness First Responder, Wilderness First Aid, or Emergency Medical Technician training and can facilitate supporting a participant until emergency medical services arrive.

EQUIPMENT TO PACK

→ *What equipment do participants need in order to feel prepared during Mountain School?*

Your BRNJWPLS of course! Don't know what BRNJWPLS are yet? It's an acronym we use to stand for what you'll need to be prepared each day on the trail. Specifically, it refers to: (B) Backpack, (R) Raingear, (N) Nametag, (J) Journal, (W) Water Bottle, (P) Pen or Pencil, (L) Layers, and (S) Sitpad. Some of these materials, like a nametag, journal, and sit pad, will be provided when you arrive. It's also important that you're well prepared for your overnight stay with us. You can reference the Mountain School Packing List to see what your and your child should bring to be adequately prepared for Mountain School.

Do note that Spring and Fall weather in the North Cascades can be very unpredictable. While we always hope for sunny and warm days, it's crucial to be prepared for cold, wet, and windy weather. We are also happy to loan equipment from our gear library when necessary!

Irregular Arrivals and Departures

→ *What happens if a Mountain School participant needs to arrive or depart separately from their school?*

Late Arrivals

Chaperones, Administrators and Students:

Schools should notify a Mountain School Coordinator if they are aware of a chaperone, administrator, or student arriving late. As necessary, late arrivals will be placed on the dam gate list by the Learning Center Manager. Upon arrival at the ELC, the chaperone, administrator, or student and guardian should check in during office hours at the front desk (in the office).

If the office is closed, the chaperone, administrator, or student and guardian should locate instructions of where to meet an ELC staff member via laminated instructions located on the front door, and pick up their late arrival packet.

If not already filed, each individual's Participant Information and Release form will be collected by a designated ELC staff member at this time.

Early Departures

Chaperones and Administrators:

If a chaperone or administrator is planning to leave early, they should notify a Mountain School Coordinator ahead of time. If a chaperone or administrator is unexpectedly leaving early, they must notify a Mountain School Program Coordinator as soon as possible. As necessary, the departing individual should move out of their rooms (linens, garbage, prop open door etc.) and leave visitor name tags with a staff member at the front desk in the main office.

Students:

If a student is planning to leave early, the school's teacher should notify a Mountain School Coordinator ahead of time. If a student is unexpectedly leaving early, the school's teacher should notify a Mountain School Coordinator or on-site Incident Commander as soon as possible. Their departure time and pick up person will need to be provided in that communication and have received verification to sign out that student.

Day Visitors**Parents:**

Unfortunately, we no longer allow for day visitors to attend Mountain School, unless it's a unique arrangement made to support a students' participation in the Mountain School program. The reason for this is to not impact the flow of the Mountain School experience for students while participating.

Chaperones/Administrators:

In the event of a unique arrangement made to support a students' participation in the Mountain School program, if a day visit is planned, see late arrival and early departure protocol as necessary. Any chaperones or administrators who arrive for a day trip without pre-trip communication from a teacher may be sent home.

Students:

Student day visits are sometimes coordinated by teachers looking to make the trip accessible for more students in their classroom. In such cases, the teacher should communicate with a Mountain School Coordinator ahead of time. Upon arriving, the student should check in with a Mountain School Coordinator at the front desk in the office.

MEALS

→ *What sort of food will Mountain School participants be eating?*

Six delicious and nutritious kid-friendly meals are prepared by our talented kitchen staff and served buffet-style in the Salmonberry Dining Hall. Our staff prepare meals that showcase the fresh and flavorful foods of the Skagit River Valley. As part of our ongoing Foodshed Initiative, our kitchen integrates local and organic ingredients into each meal, almost entirely sourced from within 150 miles of the Environmental Learning Center.

At Mountain School we serve vegetarian meals, and these are meals familiar to most like pizza, mac and cheese, eggs, and pancakes. Additionally, we always provide plenty of fresh vegetables and/or fruits.

Our chefs take care to make sure that every student that comes to Mountain School can have tasty food to eat. If your child has specific dietary requirements you'd like to talk with us about, please contact our Mountain School team to discuss the possibilities of accommodating your needs.

PROGRAMMING

→ *What activities will Mountain School participants be engaging in?*

While activities vary, you can expect to spend much of your time outside learning with and exploring in nature. Hiking, educational games, and environmental observation are common daily practices. Classroom based programming can include microscope lab, art activities, or a reprieve from harsh weather. We focus on experiential education, and strive to make activities hands-on and engaging while also being accommodating to the abilities and needs of every student.

→ *Is attending Mountain School similar to going to camp?*

Although there are many characteristics of Mountain School that may feel like camp, your experience here is still very much going to school. Although you will not have four classroom walls, every day you will be learning lessons amongst a group of peers led by a Mountain School Instructor. We will be asking you to make observations, share ideas, and engage as a supportive team member similar to the ways you would in class. We just get to do these things outside!

WEATHER

→ *What will the weather be like during Mountain School?*

Spring and Fall weather in the North Cascades can be very unpredictable. While we always hope for sunny and warm days, it's crucial to be prepared for cold, wet, and windy weather. You can reference the Mountain School Packing List to see what your child should bring with them to be adequately prepared for Mountain School. We are also happy to loan equipment to your child when necessary!

→ *How is the drive up to the Environmental Learning Center?*

The drive up to the Environmental Learning Center is always beautiful, following the Skagit River as it meanders into the North Cascades National Park all the way to Diablo Lake. In addition to beautiful mountain vistas, there are plenty of opportunities to view wildlife on the way up! In rare instances, State Route 20 can close between the Learning Center and Newhalem due to rock, snow, or mudslides. Historically, the vast majority of these closures have occurred between January and mid-March. In these cases a road closure may delay your child's arrival or return home. We are well-equipped for this possibility including providing extra food, housing arrangements, and a well prepared staff to care for the needs of Mountain School participants.

*Do you have an additional question that isn't answered here, or care for more detail to a question that is? Please feel free to reach out to one of our staff via email at mountainschool@ncascades.org or via phone at **(206) 526-2599** so we can best support you in your Mountain School experience. We look forward to learning with you!*