

Volo Natural Learning Community

2024/2025

Mission

To prepare young people to go forward with justified confidence to meet the challenges and opportunities that arise.

Lifeworthy Learning

At Volo, we facilitate learning likely to matter to the learners; we strive to facilitate “Lifeworthy Learning.” (Borrowing that term from David Perkins, Harvard Graduate School of Education).

For the Future

We are educating for the unknown future. Educating for the future means energetically fostering curiosity, creativity, empowerment, responsibility, ethics, empathy, and self-direction.

Big Ideas

Big Ideas guide the curriculum; they are integrated in blocks and daily plans. Big ideas provide rich learning themes with abundant impacts on a person’s life; these include foundational skills and understandings. For example, big ideas include everyday mathematics, storytelling, and energy.

Program

Monday through Thursday is the weekly program. Daily attendance Monday through Thursday (4 days/week) provides a full educational service. Attendance Tuesday and Thursday (2 days/week) is a part time option to complement and augment other education. Fridays comprise a correlated but separate program focused on adventure, exploration, and projects.

Calendar

The school year includes three terms – Fall, Winter, and Spring. For details of the calendar, please see the website.

Daily Schedule

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
8:30	Gather				
9:00	Morning Circle & Music				Adventure, Exploration, Projects
9:30	Math	Language Arts	Math	Language Arts	
10:00					
10:30	Block				
11:00					
11:30					
12:00	Lunch				
12:30	Play				
13:00	Class A	Class B	Class A	Class B	
13:30	Stations / Projects				
14:00					
14:30	After School Program TBD				
15:00					
15:30					
16:00					

Daily Schedule Explanation

Gather – This is a time to catch up, play, and visit

Morning Circle & Music – We gather for announcements and to make music together.

Morning Math (M,W) – An hour focused on math. This will include activities, instruction, and practice. A focal purpose is to engage young people with math in ways that are happy and build a joy of learning.

Morning Language Arts (T,H) – An hour focused on language arts. This will include creative activities, reading, writing, and speaking. A focal purpose is to open doors of understanding, confidence, and joy with the English language.

Blocks – Themed periods that integrate disciplines and include movement, play, and self-direction.

Lunch – Initially, at least, participants will bring their own lunches. We will eat together.

Play – Time for free play

Classes – Two classes will be taught each week. One class (A) will be held M, W; the other class (B) will be held T, H. Students will sign up for classes if they want to.

Stations – This portion of the day will be for free play, attending “stations”, for conferences with facilitators or mentors, and to plan projects.

Projects – we will do one relatively large community project each semester. Individuals and smaller groups will also do projects.

(After School Program – an after-school program may be created if there is interest.)

Additional Details

Morning Math

Twice per week we dedicate about an hour to math. As noted above, a primary goal is grow a sense of enjoyment and confidence in math. Topics we plan to cover this year include:

- Joy of numerical relationships, patterns, and tools
- Numeracy – concept, history, patterns
- Measurement – volume, length, weight; units; application (play, cooking, building)
- Basic operations – concept, application, memorize
- Ratios – fractions, rates, applications (cooking, building)

We will draw from a variety of resources. One key resource may be Making Math Meaningful: A Source Book for Teaching Math in Grades One through Five. 2nd Edition. N. Fabrie, W. Gottenbos, and J. York. Jamie York Press. ISBN: 9781938210013

FAQ

Here are some frequently asked questions and short answers. They apply to more than math, but we are putting them here because at this point you might be thinking of some of these questions.

- ***How will Volo use Utah State Core Standards?*** Volo teachers prioritize the well-being of the students ahead of the core standards. What this means is that while core standards are treated as a reference, their influence is customized with careful attention and sensitivity to the development of the child. Volo teachers will refer to core standards in their planning. We value them for providing insights on basic knowledge and skills correlated generally with students of different ages and recognize that many intelligent people have contributed to the established core standards and the revisions that are now underway. We also recognize that individuals develop and learn at different rates and in different areas. We also refer to curricular guides and standards from other tested perspectives, including Waldorf and Montessori, which are explicitly child-centered and responsive to the development and interests of the child.
- ***How will Volo be sure that my child has learned what they need to for their grade level?*** Volo teachers will create personalized learning plans with young people and their families. As part of the personalized learning plans, we will discuss goals, benchmarks, and assessments. These personalized learning plans will be informed by the experience of Volo staff, and they will purposefully be flexible regarding age and grade level.
- ***How is Volo tracking progress for each child?*** Learning assessments will take the form of observation and conferences. Summative assessments will be portfolio-based.
- ***What textbooks will Volo be using?*** We will use a variety of resources, as is common for flexible, adaptive learning programs. Some key resources are listed in this document and on the website. The students will help to guide these choices. We are not averse to using a textbook or curriculum guide, if that predictability turns out to work best for the group of

young people; however, even in that case, we will augment it by drawing from a variety of other sources, including our own experience.

- ***Is Volo planning to post what has been completed on a daily or weekly basis?*** We are not planning to post regular updates. We hope parents will communicate with their children. We think it is an important skill for young people to communicate what they are learning with explanations and questions. We will meet with each young person at least weekly to discuss how things are going, and this will include reference to their goals in their personalized plans. We will also keep parents updated as needed. Parent updates will include special communications, parent meetings scheduled throughout the year, at semester-end presentations, with a semester-end letter, and with a final presentation and report at the end of the year.
- ***How much homework should we expect for our child who is in the Volo learning community?*** You can expect very little assigned homework. You can, however, expect that your child will be interested in continuing to learn at home some of the things we worked on during the Volo days.

Morning Language Arts

Twice per week we dedicate about an hour to language arts. Again, a primary goal is to help young people learn to love and appreciate language and communication. Topics we plan to cover this year include:

- Joy of communicating with written and spoken language
- Alphabet – concept, history, uses; pictorial
- Reading – begin with familiar texts then move to reading for instructions and a variety of books and materials. Integrated combinations of whole word, phonic, and contextual methods. Hearing and reading whole class, person to person, self.
- Writing -- practice composing and reproducing. For creative expression – poetry, stories, moods; for practical application -- directions for a game, recipes, letters, description of an observation; for thought and inquiry – concept maps, pro and con lists
- Speaking – qualities of spoken sounds and sentence melody. Drama (plays).

We will use a variety of resources. One key resource may be Wit & Wisdom, by the Great Minds group.

Blocks

Blocks focus on themes or big ideas. Typically, each block incorporates in some way(s) movement, math, reading, writing, speaking, art, history, science, and music. Blocks are simply focal periods of times; elements and topics from blocks will also appear in other areas of the schedule. For example, math throughout the year will include numeracy and a focal numeracy block.

4-Day & 2-Day Blocks: Students attending 4 days/week will have two extra days for block learning activities and practice compared to students attending 2 days/week. Children who attend for two days will participate in blocks with 4-day attendees; daily block plans will be designed accordingly.

Reviews (that typically begin each day of a block) will be a chance for 2-day-attendees to pick up what happened the day before. In some cases, 2-day attendees may be asked to complete block activities at home.

Here is the planned block schedule for 2024/2025. Block dates and elements may change according to the needs, interests, and opportunities of the group.

Dates	Block	General Description	Possible Daily Plan Elements
Aug 26 – Aug 29	Orientation	Familiarize young people with learning spaces, plans, and expectations. Introduce to ideas and possibilities. Engage in collaborative planning and choices.	Visit learning centers and outposts Get to know participants and facilitators Introduction to block topics and try initial activities Communicate and practice group desires and expectations Play & games
Sep 3 – Sep 11	Form Drawing	Bring dynamics of movement and shape onto paper	Body movements – whole body, gestures Express the sense of things through movement Large drawings to represent movements in various media Draw shapes Move body and group to represent shapes
Sep 23 – Oct 10	Numeracy	Develop abilities to understand and work with numbers	Represent numbers with shapes, movements, and manipulatives Skip counting Rhythmic counting Movements and games involving numbers and counting such as jumping rope, hand claps, dribbling.
Oct 14 – Oct 24	Folktales and Fables	Tales that express a variety of human personalities Classic tales of animals representing human interactions	English, German, and American folktales such as tales about Robin Hood, King Arthur and Merlin, Rip Van Winkle, Johnny Appleseed. Aesop’s Fables
Oct 28 – Nov 7	Reader’s Workshop	Reading books according to ability	Whole class reading Child to child Child to adult Adult to child Quietly to self
Nov 11 – Nov 14	Number Operations	Foundational number relationships: multiplication, division, addition, subtraction	Represent with actions, manipulatives, symbols Play and create games Observe and identify patterns Memorize multiplication facts

Nov 18 – Nov 21	Energy	Exploring the feeling, meaning, and uses of energy	Discussion Demonstrations of battery-powered machines Lemon battery Fire Remote-controlled, battery-powered vehicles
Dec 2 – Dec 18	Wish, Wonder, and Surprise	Developing delight in poetry with illustrations	Hear evocative poetry such as short poems by Emily Dickenson, Shel Silverstein, Robert Frost Copy short poems and create illustrations for them Shape poems such as “The Six-Cornered Snowflake” by John Frederick Nims Memorize a short poem Create a poem from an illustration
Jan 6 – Jan 16	Water	Learning about water in nature and human life	Observe and experience water in nature Measure Experiments with state changes Observe and change water quality
Jan 21 – Jan 23	Native American Stories	Stories providing insight to people and place. Promote cultural understanding for people of other times, places, or cultures	Tales from Native Americans with focus on tribes of western North America (Ute, Shoshone, Navajo, etc.), such as Chief Washakie, stories of the Navajo and animal people, and stories about Coyote and creation from the Ute tribe.
Feb 10 – Feb 20	Skiing	Whole-body movement	Skiing lessons drawn from the work of Diane Bode Practice gross and fine motor skills
Feb 24 – Mar 6	Drama (Class Play)	Acting to tell a story verbally, through movement, costume, and setting	One- or two-act play or plays where every person has a part. Participants will co-choose the play(s). Presented to parents and friends.
Mar 10 – Mar 20	Writer’s Workshop	Practicing and developing writing skills and joy in writing	Writing stories or plays Character development Problems and resolution Story arc
Apr 7 – Apr 10	Fibers and Clothing	Learn about natural fibers and clothing	Tie to crocheting in handwork station Sheep and alpaca wool Cattails, milkweed, reeds Natural dyes and dying fabric
Apr 14 – Apr 24	Math Understanding	Tbd: depends on group	May be a topic or understanding that is interesting to the group and could use more focus. For example, may be ratios, business math, measurement, etc.

Apr 28 – May 8	Comparative Study of Animals	Fun focus on animal types and groups	Comparing and contrasting animal groups Holding and observing animals Exploring systematic categories Create simple dichotomous key from observations
May 26 – May 29	Wrap Up	Final portfolio and presentations	Compile and bind works on paper Presentations to parents and friends

The following are examples of classes, stations, and projects. Final plans will be co-created with the participating children and volunteers.

Classes

If a student signs up for a class, it will be a commitment to attend and participate. If someone chooses not to sign up for a class, the class time will be used for something independent such as reading. There is some flexibility on how many classes will be taught; the following is the starting plan:

TERM	A TIME	B TIME
FALL	Baking and decorating cakes and cookies from scratch	Why food matters: from your body to the natural environment
WINTER	Life in dramatic performance – plays, costumes, and sets	Weather, from partly cloudy to hurricanes
SPRING	Business math, for real.	Growing plants for food, spice, medicine, and beauty

Stations

When facilitators or other volunteers are available, we will have stations where children can watch and participate in interesting activities. Stations may include the following and/or others

- Painting
- Chemistry laboratory
- Botany
- Fishing skills
- Maker space
- Crocheting
- Woodworking
- Physics Laboratory
- Choir
- Drama
- Cooking
- Sewing
- Animal care
- Making holiday cards

Projects

We will choose one large yearly project together. We will also do other projects in smaller groups. Projects may include the following and/or others

- Restoration tree and shrub planting
- Building furniture
- Building fences to protect priority natural areas
- Leading another school group in an outdoor activity
- Participating in community science such as bird counts or searches for sensitive plant species
- Creating and donating materials for needy people
- Creating and donating materials for wildlife rehabilitation
- Growing and selling vegetables
- Creating artwork for gifts

We look forward in 2024/2025 to working with a wonderful group of creative young people who are curious, creative, unique, and eager to learn and make friends. We intend in all that we do to preserve the vigor and unique wonder of each child.

The educational choices described in this document will, we know, resonate with some of you. For some, you might be wondering about departures from a more traditional set of grade-based, materials-focused practices like the practices that many of us experienced growing up. We understand and value questions and questioning educational practices, from any source. Our strong, measured opinion, based on years of practice with thousands of students and teachers, is that the educational choices described here for Volo really work – they increase as much as possible the chances for good outcomes from the many hours that young people put into learning. In other words, the principles and practices of Volo have a very high potential for helping children to achieve the purpose of education.

“Education involves learning foundational knowledge and skills, but it can go so much further; supporting the development of engaged, thoughtful, responsible, collaborative citizens; fostering personal agency, creativity, deep understanding, empathy...with so many possibilities, no single list will suffice to guide educational designs. No single set of educational goals can meet the needs and interest of every child or the emerging needs and opportunities of every community, and no set of educational goals should be restricted solely to academic outcomes.”
– Thomas Hatch, Teacher’s College, Columbia University