



**NEW RIVER GORGE
LEARNING COOPERATIVE**
A Montessori-Based Education Alternative

**Parent Handbook
2019 - 2020**

New River Gorge Learning Co-op
Parent Handbook
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New River Gorge Learning Co-op Parent Handbook

Section 1 - Introduction

Welcome!

On behalf of the entire school staff, administration, and current families we want to extend a warm welcome to all new and potential families. We are grateful and honored to have the opportunity to be in this most critical partnership with you. We feel as strongly about the importance of your child’s academic and social-emotional learning as we are sure you do.

The New River Gorge Learning Cooperative (NRGLC) is a non-profit 501(c)3 holistic community school registered with West Virginia’s State Board of Education which aims to give each child the opportunity to rise to his or her own level of excellence. We offer a nature-based, student-driven, academically rich program with an equal emphasis on critical thinking and emotional intelligence. Our carefully prepared environment, with specially-trained teachers using Montessori principles along with other innovative and complementary educational practices, empowers independent thinkers, creators, entrepreneurs and learners for life.

All parents are members of the organization, and are required to participate in ways that offset our operating needs - including fundraising, volunteering at the school, etc. **Up until 2017, the school had been created, built, furnished, maintained, etc. 100% by parent members and community support.**

1.1 You make it work!

The success and value of any parent cooperative depends on the conscientious effort of each family and parent. The NRGLC is a serious educational project for both parent and child, requiring dedication and commitment of time, talent and energy of each individual member. The benefits for you and your child will more than compensate for the work involved in helping to make NRGLC successful.

In this handbook, you will find answers to many of your questions about NRGLC's policies and procedures. Please keep it for future reference during the school year. If you have any questions, please contact the Center Director (this and all other contact information is listed at the end of this handbook, in Section 12).

1.2 NRGLC Vision and Values

Our mission is to operate a Montessori-based alternative learning option for children in the Fayette County area that aims to give each child the opportunity to rise to his or her own level of excellence. Together we will create an encouraging and positive environment where children can learn the skills they need to eventually become responsible, independent, productive and caring citizens of the world. More specifically **OUR VISION** for education includes a focus on:

- Strong academics
- An equal emphasis on emotional intelligence
- Mastery-based, hands-on and experiential learning
- Outdoor and environmental education
- Physical fitness
- Community engagement
- Arts, music and languages
- Child-centric support for a natural desire to learn
- Room to pursue individual interests
- Small student to teacher ratio

We strive to encourage each child's natural desire to learn. We will help them develop self-motivation, self-knowledge, and respect for the world and others through our **CORE VALUES**:

- Creating a child-centered environment that reflects beauty, simplicity, and order while providing materials and activities required for learning;
- Nurturing a community of mutual respect that utilizes peaceful conflict resolution;

- Letting each child work and progress at his/her own pace;
- Giving students the space to concentrate on tasks that interest them;
- Closely observing each child to determine when they are ready and willing to learn a specific skill and then demonstrating the steps involved in developing the skill;
- Encouraging the appreciation of diversity, compassion, and social justice;
- Providing significant opportunity for outdoor and environmental education;
- Providing children with the opportunity to correct their own mistakes, receiving neither rewards or punishment;
- Using practical life activities to develop motor skill and as well as independence, self confidence and a sense of community;
- Integrating mixed age levels;
- Supporting a spirit of service mindedness and respect for the environment;
- The gradual incorporation of additional educational methods (project-based learning and STEAM) that include materials and methodologies to prepare children for the scientific and technological aspects of our ever-changing world;
- Continuing to evolve as an organization as demanded by our members and our surrounding community. Evolution will continue to be a thoughtful and directed process, shaped by input of our members, the overall community, and guidance from accredited higher education institutions.

1.3 How we are organized

The school operates as private school registered with the WV State Board of Education managed by a Center Director who is hired by an appointed committee made up of board members and advisors and reports to the executive committee of the school board. Additionally, we employ seven paid teachers in our three classrooms and one after school care attendant.

We cover ~82% of our (minimal) operating budget through tuition, which we offer on a sliding scale based on household income, with Tuition Assistance sometimes available. The remaining funds are raised through fundraising efforts, which parent members are required to assist with.

We have a general board of directors that consists of parents and outside professionals who help lead the school with policies and procedures. These are appointed positions by the executive committee. The general board meets once a quarter and the meetings are open to everyone, we encourage you to attend. We have by-laws that are available for you to review.

The executive committee consists of the board president, vice president, treasurer and

secretary. These positions are voted on at the annual meeting by the general membership (that's you, the parents). The executive committee is a 'working' board and meets every month or more frequently, depending on what is going on.

Our by-laws can be reviewed online [here](#). FAQs and basics on our operations are online [here](#). All contact information for the board and our staff can be found in Section 12 of this handbook.

Section 2 - Enrollment, Admission, and Financial Responsibilities

2.1 Enrollment Procedure For New Families

NRGLC has an open enrollment throughout the year. In order to enroll your child or to be put on the waiting list, if the classroom in question has one, an application must be submitted to our Center Director at info@nrglc.org with a \$50 non-refundable application fee. Enrollment will be accepted on a first come, first served basis with priority given to returning students and their siblings; however, special consideration may be given to balancing the age ranges and gender of the applicants.

The New River Gorge Learning Cooperative does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, sex, national or ethnic origin, sexual orientation, income level, or religion in its educational, admissions, and hiring policies and practices, scholarship and loan programs and athletic and all other administered programs.

Families new to the NRGLC will need to complete an orientation interview. The interview process is primarily for prospective students and family to be introduced to the very different model of education we offer at our school as well to the teachers and classroom. Most families coming to us have no experience with the Montessori approach or any form of alternative education and our cooperative model of operation is unique - it is important that you understand how our system works before you choose to become members of our school. The interview is the first step in an orientation process, especially critical for students with years in a traditional school setting.

We are a small school with limited resources. From time to time, we encounter children who have needs greater than we can provide for. If your child has had a documented behavior problem or they seem unable to function fully in their current setting, you must disclose this to us so we can discuss how best to support your child's success at NRGLC. All children deserve to be fully supported no matter what their individual needs are. We will always do our best to

support each child within the bounds of our capacities, however we are currently unable to provide consistent one-on-one attention to any given child.

Every child beginning in the program will have a trial period of 30 days. This allows us to determine if we can provide the best environment for your child and if we are a good match for each other. During the trial period, we will have an open dialogue with you regarding your child's progress here and how they are fitting into our school environment. Our effort is to be fair and honest about the ability of our program to serve your family's needs.

To enroll, children should be a minimum of 3 years old and be fully potty trained, however children ages 2.5 up to 3 may be accepted for enrollment in the Children's House on a case by case basis, as approved by the Center Director and Children's House teachers (child should be able to follow directions, communicate his/her needs, be fully potty-trained, etc).

2.2 Re-enrollment for Returning Families

Re-enrollment forms are sent to current families of NRGLC in early spring, which includes a \$100 deposit to secure the student's spot for the next year. This deposit is applied to the first month's tuition in the new school year.

2.3 Admissions Procedure

Once your student's enrollment has been confirmed (whether new or returning), you will be contacted by our Center Director who will provide you the required enrollment documents. The following will be required for admission:

- Completed Enrollment Form
- Signed Cooperative Membership Agreement
- Completed Household Income Worksheet
- Proof of Income (if using sliding-scale)
- Copy of Immunization Record*
- First tuition payment will be due the month of enrollment or in August for a new school year**

*Our school does not require vaccinations for attendance and this information is strictly confidential.

**The current year's Tuition Chart can be found online [here](#).

2.3.1 Potty Trained Requirement for 3-Year Olds

It is the policy of NRGLC that all students are fully potty trained. Teachers can offer assistance with clothing but we request that you send them in garments they can manage themselves as it will promote independence and confidence. Occasional accidents are to be expected in young children but if it is becoming clear a student is not quite ready to be in the school environment, teachers will schedule a meeting to discuss suspending admission until they are ready.

2.4 Attendance Policy and Extended Travel

Attendance is of utmost importance with the understanding that we have a diversity of family situations and interests. Our success and our funding are linked to enrollment, so we require advance notice for withdrawal from the program. If you commit to a trimester we ask that you plan to pay through the whole trimester and give at least 30 days notice that you will not be enrolling in the following trimester.

We are open to part-time enrollment only for special circumstances, such as families who live afar or travel for extended periods of time. In order to maintain a spot in any classroom, tuition must be paid in full (either annually or monthly) even when your child is only present part-time, be it weekly or for any extended period of time.

2.5 Financial Responsibilities

2.5.1 Tuition

The annual tuition rates can be paid in one lump sum at the beginning of the school year for a 2.5% discount. Otherwise, members can choose to pay the annual tuition amount in 12 monthly installments, beginning August 1st for each school year, ending in July. (This means, **if paying monthly, you will have full monthly payments due in the summer months of June, July and August**).

You can also choose to pay annual tuition amount over the ten (10) months school is in session.

An indexed sliding scale tuition option is available upon submitting a Family Financial Worksheet. Families not participating in sliding scale tuition need not submit a Worksheet and will sign a waiver stating such as a part of the annual enrollment process.

Please see the current year's Tuition Chart online [here](#).

2.5.2 Discounts

- Pay in Full Option: Tuition paid annually by September 1st will receive a 2.5% discount.
- Sibling discounts are reflected in the tuition chart.

2.5.3 Late Payments

Tuition will be considered late as of the 2nd of the month. A \$10 late fee will be due if paid on the 2nd with an additional \$1 per day fee until payment is made. Please pay your tuition on or by the 1st of each month.

2.4.4 Additional Fees

There are fees associated with our After School Care Program, please see Center Director for details or to sign up for that program. Other possible fees throughout the year include field trips, school pictures, yearbooks, testing, etc.

2.5.5 Tuition Refund Policy

For students removed from school, for any reason: tuition that was paid annually will be refunded for any trimesters not already in session but not for the current trimester when they are removed. Monthly tuition is non-refundable.

2.5.6 Tuition Assistance Program

We value and strive for diversity of all types in our school. In an effort to ensure more families have access to our unique model, we use a sliding scale tuition rate and **sometimes have funding** for a Tuition Assistance Program for low-income students, which covers up to 75% of the annual tuition for families who demonstrate significant and real financial need (as measured by standards similar to the National School Lunch Program and the WV Medicaid Program, up to 185% of the most current poverty level guidelines determined by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services). The Tuition Assistance Program available for students who have been accepted to enroll at NRGLC and for families with a real financial need (as opposed to a 'perceived' need based on an opinion that tuition is too high).

A full description of this program, including program eligibility criteria, can be found online [here](#). Please contact the Center Director to see if any funds are currently available, for the required program application, or any additional information.

Section 3 - Cooperative Membership Requirements and Procedures

3.1 Cooperative Membership Policy

NRGLC operates as a parent-member cooperative organization. When you enroll in NRGLC, your family becomes members of our school. The overall management and success of our school requires an intelligent and active team consisting of four critical elements — family members (owners), board of directors (Executive Committee elected and volunteer, General Board volunteer), the Center Director (hired by Executive Committee), and our staff teachers (paid) — each group shouldering its own responsibilities to the best of its ability.

3.1.1 Member Rights

Members have the right to elect the Cooperative's Executive Committee on the Board of Directors; to attend meetings of the Board; to receive notice of and attend membership meetings. Each member shall have one vote and no more on all matters submitted to members. The rights of members shall be understood to apply only to active members in good standing.

3.1.2 Member Responsibilities and Obligations

The school does not yet employ any staff to accomplish necessary facilities, classroom support, fundraising, or other operations not fulfilled by the Center Director or teaching staff. As members of the Cooperative, each member-family is expected to actively participate in the operations, fundraising, upkeep and maintenance of the school (see Member Participation for requirements below).

Additionally, members are obligated to pay their tuition payments on time and should feel responsible for actively promoting the school in our community; finding marketing, fundraising, and other promotional activities that increase the success and longevity of our school.

3.1.3 Member Participation Requirements

The following is a list of the minimum required annual participation as a member family:**:

- Serve as an active member of one (1) or more of our 'Action Teams' each month - each family must fulfill no less than one and a half (1.5) hours of work, each month, as part of their Action Team(s)*.
- Contribute efforts (minimum of two (2) hours per family) to school-wide cleaning, once per trimester (three cleanings per year).

- Contribute minimum three (3) hours, per family, towards summer deep cleaning/facilities maintenance.
- At least one (1) family representative must participate in a minimum of two (2) annual fundraisers (*in addition to capital campaign participation, which all members are expected to participate in*)♦.
- Every family must contribute a minimum of four (4) hours towards work day activities per year‡.
- Each family must send one (1) representative as a field trip/school outing chaperone once per trimester.
- At minimum, one (1) family member must attend Annual Member Meeting.
- Each family must sign up for the Kroger Community Rewards program and is strongly encouraged to recruit friends and family to do the same.

* If there is not 1.5 hours of work for your given Action Team(s) in any given month, please communicate with the Center Director to fulfill this requirement. Hours may roll over into subsequent months within a given quarter, but do not roll into the subsequent quarter.

♦ Hours towards fundraisers will vary depending on the type of fundraiser, how many other people are signed up to help, and the nature of each person's participation.

‡ Work days come up when larger facility projects are identified and a large team of people is required to complete the given project.

3.2 Participation Buyout Option

** Members who do not have time or are unable to participate in work parties, fundraising, deep cleaning, parent aid days, and other member contributions to NRGLC may pay a fee as follows to be released from these responsibilities:

- \$1200: exempt from work parties, annual fundraisers*, deep cleaning, parent aid days, and field trip driving/supervision (**all members are expected to participate in capital campaigns*)
- \$600 - exempt from work days and annual fundraisers only (**all members are expected to participate in capital campaigns*)

3.3 Member Participation Descriptions and Sign Up

The administration and staff of the NRGLC commit to making support needs and opportunities for participation clear, as well as making necessary supplies and information available for any given task. The Center Director and teachers will do their best to keep the participation sign ups updated and clear. Upon enrollment, your family will be given the necessary sign up information and will be communicated with on a regular basis, as things get updated or needs arise. Every

member family should feel empowered to communicate immediately and directly with the Center Director should any information or supplies required for any given task not be available or are inadequate.

3.3.1 Action Teams Information and Logging Your Time

To complete your family's monthly participation requirements, parent-members sign up for an [action team](#) each trimester: Classroom Support, Grounds/Maintenance, Fundraising, or NRGLC Support. Parents choose where they are most likely to be successful in contributing their time and energy and may sign up for more than one team. We use an [online sign up](#) to keep track of needed tasks and communicate via email when tasks have been added to any given group. Each team has a team leader - this person is the one person the Center Director and/or teachers communicate directly with when things need to get done and they are responsible for organizing the group.

Members are asked to log all of their participation time via a google form [here](#).

3.4 Annual Meeting-Parent/Member Orientation

Our Annual Membership Meeting is held each year prior to the fall trimester, in August. Important information for the coming school year will be shared and discussed and it is also a wonderful time for our community to gather together and commune over a pot luck meal. We encourage both parents to attend this meeting, but need at least one parent representative to attend. Children's participation in the meeting will be relayed by our Center Director prior to the meeting.

Section 4 - School Calendar, Hours of Operation, Daily Arrival and Dismissal

4.1 School Calendar

NRGLC operates on a 9-month school calendar, always beginning the day after Labor Day and ending the week of Memorial Day. We are off for three days at Thanksgiving, three (3) weeks for Winter Break and two (2) weeks of Spring Break, typically the week prior and of Easter. We are closed for all major holidays, however we do not close for all of the holidays the Fayette County or other public school systems are closed.

The current full school calendar can be found online [here](#).

4.2 Hours of Operation

Drop off of students begins at 8:30 am. Prior to that, if teachers are present, they are getting ready for the day and are not available to tend to students. Please do not drop off before 8:30.

The following is the **general daily schedule**, please refer to your welcome letter or see your classroom teacher for your classroom-specific daily schedule.

8:30 am - Drop off begins

8:45 am - Morning Movement/Soft Start

9:00 am - 12:00 pm - Three-hour work period

12:00 - 1:00 pm - Recess/Lunch

12:45 - 12:55 pm - Half-day students dismissed

1:00 pm - Half-Day Students After School Care begins (additional fees apply)

1:00 - 3:00 pm - Afternoon session (includes enrichment classes, depending on the classroom: music, art, spanish, gym, agro-ecology)

3:15 pm - School dismissed

3:30 - 5:30 pm - After School Care (additional fees apply)

4.3 Arrival

To help develop the child's sense of being capable we encourage you to drop your child off without having to come in the classroom. It is understandable that this may be something that is worked toward in the beginning of the trimester for younger students; staff and other parents will be available to provide any support that is necessary to gently ease this transition.

Children arriving into the classroom late, any time after 8:45 am, cause a disruption to the class and are set up for a poor start to their own day. Please respect your child as well as their classmates and teachers by getting them to class on-time.

4.4 Dismissal, Pick Up and After School Play

Sessions end at 12:55 (Half-Day students) or 3:15 pm (Full-Day students).

All students need to be signed out on the classroom sign out sheet clipboard by the adult picking them up for the day.

If someone other than a parent is picking up your child, the person must be listed on the child's Authorized Pick Up list. If that person is not known by NRGLC staff/volunteers identification will be required. Please notify the Center Director immediately if there are any changes to your child's Authorized Pick Up list. Please contact the After School Care attendant and/or the Center Director if someone not on the list needs to pick up your child on any given day.

After School Care (ASC) fees will begin at 1:00 pm for half-day students and 3:30 pm for all other students who are not signed out by a parent or guardian. (Please see Section 5 for ASC fees and additional program information).

Please do not enter the classrooms until the children have been dismissed.

Pick up is a good time to check your child's box or cubby for any work to take home or communications from the teachers. This is also good time to communicate any brief special needs to the teacher or assistant. Conversations involving sensitive or more involved communications should be scheduled according to your classroom's parent meeting schedule. Please see your welcome letter or ask your child's teacher for additional information.

Families are welcomed and encouraged to stay at the school for free-play for as long as you'd like. Beginning at 3:30 pm, the After School Care attendant is responsible for all students present, ensuring safety and all school rules are being followed. We ask parents and caregivers present for free-play to please support the ASC attendant in observing and managing the kids during that time and respect that all students are still required to follow all school rules, regardless of their parents being present.

Playground Rules can be found online [here](#) and are posted in both classrooms and may also be on the sign out clipboards.

The time period between 3:30 and 4:00 pm is particularly chaotic for the After School Care attendant, the only staff person responsible for the kids after 3:30. Please be respectful of the fact that they need to have their attention fully on the kids and cannot be distracted by conversations with parents at that time, most especially.

4.5 Late Arrival, Early Pick up, Absences

Please communicate with the teacher or assistant if you are planning a late drop off or early pick up.

Absences can have their own negative ripple effects in the classroom. Our classrooms operate as communities, with each student playing a role in the overall management of the day. Your child's absence may disrupt planned lessons, the daily jobs routine, etc. Clearly they cannot be avoided in some instances, however we ask that every family plan their 'away from school' activities with the school calendar in mind.

You are responsible for communicating unavoidable or well-planned absences with your child's teachers so they have ample time to both adjust the planned curriculum as well as provide you with any materials you will need to ensure your child comes back to school with minimal readjustment needed.

Unplanned, last minute absences (i.e. due to illness or emergencies) should be reported to the staff via text, phone call, or email. **We greatly appreciate you taking the time to let us know your child will be home for the day**, for any reason. Otherwise, we spend significant energy wondering if everything is ok or if there is an illness we should keep our eyes out for.

4.6 Carpools

Many NRGLC families coordinate carpools. The names of all parents in your carpool must be listed on the Authorized Pick Ups list section of your child's enrollment form. If your child participates in a carpool on a regular basis, please ensure our staff is also aware so communication with the parents can be arranged, if needed. (The carpool parent is responsible for all late fees each time they are late for pick up).

4.7 Inclement Weather

Please be sure your kids are prepared to be at school during all types of weather. **Unless the temperatures and conditions are dangerous, the kids will be outside for a minimum of 15 minutes everyday and kids are not prevented from playing in the rain, mud, snow, etc.** Students should always have extra clothes on hand and come prepared with layers and snow clothes, when appropriate. When there is good snow, we sled the hill next to the Beehive.

All students should have a pair of slippers or house shoes to be worn inside.

4.7.1 Snow Days

We follow the school closures of St. Peter & Paul but not their delays: if they close for the day we will also close but we do not do late arrivals. If we are open on an inclement weather day, we will open at our regular time and we trust our parents will choose if and when to bring their kids to school.

You will receive a group text message from the Center Director should our school be closed for the day.

Please Note: Sometimes Ss. Peter & Paul goes on delay very early and then makes the call to close closer to 8:00 am. **On snowy days, please be prepared for a closure to occur at anytime.**

We have 3 snow days built into our school calendar. Any additional snow days beyond 3 will be made up in the week following the last week of school- please refer to this year's calendar online [here](#).

Section 5 - After School Care Program (ASC)

The NRGLC After School Care Program runs from 1:00 - 5:30 PM, for any day the school is in session.

5.1 Fees

There is a monthly rate (unlimited use), a 10-day punch card rate, and a drop-in rate. Please refer to the [NRGLC After School Care Program](#) document for current rates and a full description of the program.

Families wishing to use the monthly rate will be required to commit for the full trimester.

Should anyone using the monthly rate need to discontinue use of the program, the monthly fee will apply until the beginning of the next trimester.

5.2 Participation

Any NRGLC student not picked up (or signed out by parents present) by 1:00 for half-day students and 3:30 pm for all others, will be considered a part of ASC for that day and the current fees will apply.

Parents are encouraged to use the ASC program at any time. If you have not purchased a 10-day pass in advance, please notify the Center Director if you plan to use the program on any given day so the staff and your student will be aware.

Students in the After School Care program will need to be provided with extra snacks for the extended time they are school.

Section 6 - Food, Clothing, and Personal Belongings

6.1 Food Policy

The NRGLC does not currently have a kitchen facility, so please provide a wholesome lunch and snacks your child can enjoy while at school.

Highly-processed sugary foods are *not allowed* in the Co-op including juice, soda, chocolate milk, candy, high sugar content snacks, bars, etc.

This policy applies to all school activities including potlucks, birthday treats, holiday gifts, etc. We do have a number of families who strictly restrict (for a variety of reasons) their children's diet. **Out of respect, please follow our food policy for all school-related events.**

The [NRGLC Food Policy](#) document provides additional information and has a list of resources (and you are also welcome to ask your teachers or the Center Director) if you are unsure of what to provide.

We place a high priority on our school food policy because we recognize its power to:

Fuel learning: Healthy meals support our schools' core mission of education, especially when it comes to boosting students' concentration, focus and cognitive function. A vast body of research shows that improved nutrition in schools leads to increased focus and attention, improved test scores and better classroom behavior. In addition to staying alert during class, eating a healthy diet helps children fight off illnesses, and grow into strong, healthy adults.

Support healthy habits and consistent messages: Nutritious school food helps students develop lifelong healthy eating habits. It also contributes to a culture of wellness at school, reinforcing nutrition education messages from teachers. We hope that eating healthy food at school will also increase our school's connectedness and reinforce to our students, their families and our community that students' health and well-being are valued.

A healthy lunch should be provided each day in easy-to-access containers for your child. We promote independence in children caring for themselves; setting up and cleaning up their lunch will be a part of each day and they should need minimal support in doing so.

Please ensure there is also a snack inside their lunchbox that your child can enjoy at snack time.

The Children's House does group snack; please refer to your classroom welcome letter or your teachers for more information. **Students in the After School Care program will need to be provided with extra snacks for the extended time they are school.**

If your child has food allergies or is unable to eat any foods, please include this information in your child's enrollment form. We will do everything possible to avoid an allergic reaction.

6.2 Clothing

Painting, cooking, gluing, sitting on the floor, and outdoor play in all weather are some of our regular school activities; we ask that you dress your child accordingly. A pair of tennis shoes is the best footwear for your child's safety and freedom of play outside. If your daughter is wearing a skirt, please remind her to wear bloomers/shorts under it.

Children should have appropriate shoes and clothing for outdoor weather - we do not restrict outdoor play in inclement or shoulder season weather (think mud puddles, snow angels). Parents should always ensure there is at least one extra set of clothing available for their child, especially in mud and rain season.

Cold weather clothing in the winter months is imperative. **Unless the temperatures are deemed unsafe, NRGLC students will be outside for a minimum of 15 minutes every day.** Please help them remember hats, gloves and boots. When there is snow, we sled the big hill next to the Beehive - snow pants are recommended on snowy days.

We approach directing the kids with the idea of 'natural consequences' in mind - we will not force any student to wear their appropriate clothing but will ask them to think about what may occur if they do not.

Children should wear clothes that allow easy access when using the restroom. For our younger students, belts, suspenders, back zippers, tights, hard snaps, and small buttons should be avoided, if possible. We promote independence in our students and will only provide support if absolutely necessary.

Please label all clothing, lunch boxes, and backpacks with your child's first and last name.

In case of emergency, we will use the lost and found or another student's extra set of clean clothes for accidents that may occur at school. Please wash and return any items borrowed. We are always happy to accept clothing donations including underwear, pants, shorts, shirts, and jackets for both boys and girls.

6.3 Personal Belongings

6.3.1 Toys and 'Focusing Tools'

We have found that it can be very disruptive for the children to have their toys at school.

Personal items including toys, swords, and magic wands should not be brought to school, including the before and after school time periods. Any items found will be put away for parents to collect at the end of the day.

Appropriate books are always welcome. There may be, at the teacher's discretion, a special time for these items in class.

'Focusing Tools' such as fidget spinners, focus cubes, etc. are not allowed in the Children's House and may be allowed in the Beehive (elementary class) upon approval, on a case by case basis. A student wishing to use a focus tool at school will have to speak with his/her teachers to determine if the tool type has been previously approved by the class. If it has not, they must complete the [New Tool Proposal form](#) and present the tool to the entire class for approval. The form includes an agreement to use the tool appropriately or to use the privilege.

6.3.2 Use of Electronic Devices

NRGLC does not allow the use of electronic devices on schools grounds before or after school or during outside playtime. We have a beautiful outdoor environment that encourages imaginative play and having electronics distracts the kids from other kinds of creative play. Electronic devices include smartphones, video games, iPads, Kindles, handheld computers, etc.

Technology will not be used in the Children's House, other than the very occasional slide show or short film.

The elementary class in the Beehive uses iPads and computers for research, and the occasional slide show or short film. **There is currently a [Bring Your Own Technology Agreement](#) available to upper elementary students (ages 9-12) only.** Students should discuss this with their teachers if they believe having their own tech at school would support their learning in a positive way.

6.3.3 Lost and Found

Each classroom and the ASC room have a lost and found where any unaccounted for items found in the classroom or on the school grounds will be kept. At the end of each trimester, we will set all items out for retrieval and anything left unclaimed will either be kept for emergency use or donated.

Section 7 - Discipline

We believe that schools have a critical choice to make in how we perceive and respond to student misbehavior. When we follow familiar and traditional practice, we often act in ways that contradict our fundamental mission - to engage each student in high levels of learning.

The New River Gorge Learning Co-op is a Positive Discipline school, meaning we are non-punitive and we have zero tolerance for shame, blame, pain, or humiliation. Positive discipline emphasizes mutual respect between teacher and students (and amongst the students themselves). It follows recent research that has shown that good discipline is dependent on students feeling a strong connection to their community, family and school.

The model teaches adults to employ both kindness and firmness at the same time. **We believe students learn best from those with whom they are in caring, mutually respectful relationships that promote independence.** Such supportive relationships enable students from diverse backgrounds to feel comfortable bringing their personal experiences into the classroom, discover their common humanity and feel as though they are viewed as assets to the school community.

In our school, every adult...

- Understands that the quality of relationships and school climate are absolutely critical to successful student learning.
- Seeks to establish strong meaning and connection for students, families and staff in social and academic contexts.
- Implements principles of mutual respect and encouragement, belonging and significance.
- Focuses on long term, solutions to misbehavior at individual, class and school wide levels.
- Views mistakes as opportunities to learn and misbehavior as opportunities to practice critical life skills.
- Questions the tradition of adult control, rewards and punishments.
- Know that a misbehaving child is a discouraged child.
- Know that children do better when they feel better.
- Believe all people are equal and every child deserves dignity and respect.

By focusing on prevention, early intervention and thoughtful intervention we are thorough, systematic and effective at preventing students from rising to higher levels of misbehavior. We work to prevent misbehavior by:

- building positive emotional connections to school for every student and
- engaging all students in learning and practicing problem solving and empathy

Please refer to the following documents for more complete information about our policies and approaches:

1. [NRGLC is a Positive Discipline School](#) - this document includes links and resources for parents unfamiliar with or interest in learning more about positive parenting practices.
2. The [NRGLC Behavior and Dismissal Policy](#) includes detailed information about the steps we will take if there is a serious misbehavior that requires more severe action as well as the school's procedure for consideration of dismissal.

Section 8 - Health and Wellbeing Policies

8.1 Illness & Accident Information

Information should be kept current with correct phone numbers and contact information for emergencies. Please let the Center Director know immediately if there are any changes to your family's information.

NRGLC must exempt children and staff from attendance if the following symptoms occur:

- Nasal discharge that is copious and interferes with work
- Persistent cough or heavy congestion
- Diarrhea (three or more watery stools or one bloody stool within 24 hours)
- Vomiting (two or more times within 24 hours)
- Open or oozing sores, unless properly covered with bandages
- Suspected communicable skin infections such as pink eye, impetigo, and scabies.
- Children may return 24 hours after the start of antibiotic treatment and abatement of fever without antipyretics
- Lice - Until first treatment is completed and no live lice are seen
- A fever of 100.5° Fahrenheit or higher and also one or more of the following:
 - Earache
 - Headache
 - Sore Throat
 - Rash

- Fatigue that prevents regular activities

Please keep your child home from school if they show any of the symptoms above. Children may return to school 24 hours after all symptoms are gone.

The full NRGLC Medical Policy can be viewed online [here](#).

Parents will be informed of any accidents or injuries that happen at school. If first aid was required, parents will be given a copy of the Accident/Medical Incident Report Form, with a summary of the incident, for your signature. The signed copy will be kept in your student's online file at school.

8.2 Child Abuse Reporting

NRGLC is required by law to immediately report any suspicious occurrences of physical, sexual, or emotional child abuse, child neglect, or child exploitation to Child Protective Services or local law enforcement.

Section 9 - Progress Reports and Teacher Conferences

9.1 Transparent Classroom Reports

NRGLC uses an online data and curriculum management system called Transparent Classroom for tracking and sharing your student's academic progress. You will get regular updates on your child's progress but are welcome (and encouraged) to log in anytime to see what he/she's been up to.

9.2 Teacher Meetings and Conferences

Parents are welcomed to meet with teachers at any point in the year they would like to discuss their student. Each classroom has set meeting hours available for you to sign up for, please see your teachers or the Center Director for more information.

Each trimester, your teacher will offer scheduled Parent-Teacher Conferences where you will be given the opportunity for more in-depth information regarding your student's progress here at NRGLC. Students are sometimes invited to participate in a student-led conference. Your classroom teachers will send out a notification via email when conferences are being made available and the sign up will be managed online.

Parents are encouraged to reach out to the Center Director via email ANYTIME, phone or text during office hours (unless urgent) if there is anything you would like to discuss - questions, comments, concerns are welcome. We appreciate you helping us ensure our school is operating at our best and encourage your feedback!

9.3 School Feedback - questions, comments, concerns

Parents are encouraged to reach out to the Center Director via email ANYTIME, or by phone or text during office hours (unless urgent) if there is anything you would like to discuss - questions, comments, concerns are welcome. We appreciate you helping us ensure our school is operating at our best and encourage your feedback!

Additionally, we have an [anonymous online form](#) available if you prefer to privately share your feedback.

Section 10 - Testing

10.1 Annual Standardized Testing

We organize the purchasing of and proctor a nationally-recognized/normed test once a year (in the spring) for an additional cost. Test results provide you and us with the essential information of your student's strengths and weaknesses, allowing us to better tailor their learning. Additionally, this data is critical in our overall school evaluation as well as for marketing purposes to help us grow.

We do not teach to the test. We do cover some basic 'how to take a test' information at the school and parents who wish to do so are encouraged to help their children prepare as well.

The portfolio option is a collection of the student's work for the year and a review is done to assess their progress. We have teachers who can provide that review, if you choose the portfolio option, but again, we prefer all students aged six (6) and above be tested annually.

Section 11 - School Events and Service Days

11.1 Birthdays, Class Parties & School Events

Individual birthdays will not be celebrated with a party or any special food. Your child's birthday will however be acknowledged in a special way; each classroom has a unique way to celebrate.

Invitations to birthday parties may not be handed out at the Co-op unless everyone is included.

We will offer different school events throughout the year such as: school pictures; outdoor adventures; fundraisers; open houses; field trips and service projects; community potlucks; etc. We appreciate and encourage your participation and assistance with these activities.

Please follow our [food policy](#) for all school-related events.

11.2 Community Service Program

In addition to our academic goals at NRGLC, we model and teach our students to be stewards and caretakers of the Earth and all its inhabitants. By doing so, we create caring, empathetic students who are capable of thinking beyond themselves. It was Dr. Montessori's vision that a peaceful world, created by children, would make the world a better place. We know that by performing community service, students learn the joy of giving of themselves, and develop compassion because of these real, practical life volunteer experiences. We also know that healthy communities have engaged citizens, young and old.

NRGLC students will participate in regular (ideally monthly) service learning projects within our community. For a full description of this program, see the [NRGLC Community Service Program](#) document.

Section 12 - Contacts and Other Helpful Information

12.1 Staff Contact Info

Center Director

Jenny Becksted-Smith: jenny@nrglc.org; 304-640-6022

Children's House

Therese Ehrnschwender: therese.ehrnschwender@nrglc.org

Mariana Primavera: mariana@nrglc.org

Beehive

Caitlin Brash: caitlin.brash@nrglc.org

Kyla Hilton (Lower El.): kyla.hilton@nrglc.org

Stephanie Bragg (Upper El.): stephanie.bragg@nrglc.org

After School Care

Faith Jones: 843-730-0735; faith.jones@nrglc.org

12.2 Board of Directors

The 2019-2020 Executive Committee is:

Jonathan Danz - President; jonathan@nrglc.org

Vacant - Vice President;

Vacant - Treasurer;

Alison Ibarra - Secretary; pinheads.alison@gmail.com

Other current Board Members at-large:

Kim Shingledecker

Ron Crosier

Mary Ann Roberts

Aaron Kemlock

Eric Pories and Barbara Wykoff both serve as advisors to the board.

12.2.1 Organizational Bylaws

Our bylaws can be viewed online [here](#).

12.2.2 Board of Directors Meeting Schedule

Executive Committee meetings will be held on the 2nd Tuesday of every month, with the exception of 2nd Tuesdays when there is a General Board meeting scheduled. These meetings are not open to the general membership.

General Board Meetings are held quarterly and are open to the membership. Dates for General Board Meetings in 2018: January 9th, March 13th, June 12th, and October 9th.

12.3 Catalog of Parent Resources

Once you have been enrolled in NRGLC, you will receive a link to an online document called the Catalog of Parent Resources, which is a one-stop-shop for most of the information you will need access to. It contains parent contact information so is not linked here in this public document.

12.4 Weekly Updates, Social Media, and Other Ways We Communicate

During the school year, the Center Director sends a weekly announcements update via email and also posts them to our private school Facebook group, which you should join via our [school's page](#). We also have an [Instagram](#) account you can follow.

We primarily use Google Drive for school documents. The best place to start, when you need something, is our Catalog of Parent Resources. Please contact the Center Director if you do not have access to this document.

12.5 Fundraising Links

There are several ways you can contribute financially to the NRGLC by doing nothing more than your regular shopping:

- [Kroger Community Rewards](#)
- [Amazon Smile](#) - search for 'New River Gorge Learning CO-Op Inc'
- [MightyNest](#) - search for 25840 zip code and find us in the dropdown menu

Section 13 - NRGLC History and Plans for Growth

The NRGLC is currently in the midst of some very exciting plans for growth - it's a very dynamic time for our school. With a clear and demonstrated need for our school to evolve even further, we have

13.1 A Brief History

NRGLC was founded by four (4) families in 2008 as an alternative to individually homeschooling. Before the 2017 school year, when we received our first grant funding and other outside support, the school had been created, built, furnished, maintained, etc. 100% by dedicated parent members and community support. NRGLC has grown significantly since its founding and has assembled a diverse board of directors that are engaged and planning towards a successful future.

Listed below is a brief history of NRGLC:

2008 - A homeschool cooperative was founded by four 4 families that were not unsatisfied with public and private schooling options; the parents were the teachers.

2010 - The growing group hired their first teachers, which provided schooling for (20 families, comprised of 24 students).

2015 - Hired first Center Director (was previously parent volunteer) and developed a successful capital campaign to purchase a new modular building for second classroom. Highest enrollment to date at 26 students.

2016 - 37 students enrolled. General membership meetings resulted in plan to move forward with significant plans for growth, including selecting a permanent location and planning to build new facilities to accommodate additional programs and student capacity.

2017 - Initiated partnership with West Virginia University's Curriculum Development and Landscape Architecture Departments. Recruited first AmeriCorps*VISTA volunteer. An additional assistant was hired for the elementary class for a total of 5 teachers, 1 After School Care attendant and 1 administrator on staff.

Today - 40 students enrolled. Increased capacity in both classrooms (Children's House to 21; Elementary Class to 20). Currently only one open spot in the elementary class and we will expand capacity in Children's House to 25 next year.

13.2 Business Plan

At capacity with staff and facilities, we have an enrollment waiting list and can grow no further until we significantly expand both our budget and our facilities. Our Center Director has been drafting our business plan, with One Foundation funding that provided the paid consultancy of Fritz Boettner of [Downstream Strategies](#). The final draft of this document will be made available as soon as it's ready.

We will use the business plan to attract investors and partners to help fund future growth and impact. In the next three years, we aim to expand our physical and curricular operations. This growth will be accomplished by implementing a strategy that will result in a permanent campus prepared to accommodate 100-150 learners, ages 3-18 and includes the following goals:

- New facilities with increased enrollment capacity
- Shifting operation from a cooperative to a revenue-driven, non-profit model
- Expanded curriculum inspired by cutting-edge methods of 'remaking education' through experiential and project-based learning
- Elementary program split into two classes: lower and upper el.
- A middle school program (ages 12-15) set to open in fall of 2018

- A high school program (ages 15-18), projected to open in 2021
- An Outdoor Adventure Summer Camp program set to pilot in 2018
- Expanded after school care opportunities (both of which will target students from the greater community as well)
- Potential for a tutoring center and child care center for infants.

13.2.1 Desired Outcome

By 2022, the school will be a licensed Montessori-based independent school operating from a permanent campus for children ages 3 through high school. The school will not only provide education but also be an education hub, offering programming and events to enrich the greater community. Additionally, the school will be environmentally and financially sustainable:

Environmentally sustainable: This includes building materials and energy sources.

Financially sustainable: This includes the creation and implementation of various revenue streams designed to enrich the lives of our students and create consistent income that is vital to the survival of the school.

Legal Designation: The school will be a licensed independent school, operating as a 501(c)3 that is revenue-focused.

13.3 WVU Partnership

In the summer of 2017, we entered into an exciting partnership with WVU: Dr. Denise Lindstrom from the Curriculum and Instruction/Literacy Studies Department College of Education and Human Services and Peter Butler, Director of Design and Community Development and Associate Professor of Landscape Architecture have teamed up with us in an effort to address the challenges and opportunities for change they see in our nation's current public school system. Many across the nation believe that the current system of education is broken and not adequately meeting the needs of today's youth - our future leaders. There is a movement sweeping the nation to 'remake' education and the WVU team sees our school as a local incubator for creating alternative models and methods of learning that can be applied to public and private schools here in West Virginia and beyond.

13.3.1 WVU Program/Curriculum Support

Dr. Denise Lindstrom is providing support as a consultant for the development of our new middle school program curriculum, acting as a research and funding partner for all of our

programs, and providing support and connections to WVU student staff for our summer camp program.

13.3.2 WVU Site Design Support

Peter Butler is acting as a consultant for our site expansion plans and had one of his students, Alex Corapi, draft a design booklet based on our current location (which is our desired permanent location). You can view this booklet online [here](#) - it's very inspiring!

13.4 AmeriCorps*VISTA

This year the NRGLC was awarded an AmeriCorps*VISTA volunteer position through the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), a federal agency. The AmeriCorps*VISTA program is a volunteerism program designed to fight poverty - often called the "domestic Peace Corps." Member volunteers make a year-long, full-time (40 hrs/wk) commitment to serve at a nonprofit organization or public agency. They focus their efforts building organizational, administrative, and financial capacity of organizations that fight illiteracy, improve health services, foster economic development, and otherwise assist low-income communities. Sponsoring organizations pay a small cost-share match (ours was \$2,500) to CNCS and volunteers are compensated with stipends, education awards, health insurance directly through the federal program.

Our VISTA began her service in November and is responsible primarily for helping us with program development (middle school, summer camp, community service and after school care programs) in addition to fundraising efforts through grant writing, capital campaigning, sustained giving program development, endowment research, and more.