

## Environmental Education is central to the mission of Pioneer Springs, by Chris Simeral, Dean of Nature Education



### IMPORTANT DATES & ITEMS TO NOTE

- [K-12 supply lists](#)
- [Board Meeting Minutes](#)
- [Who to Contact and When](#)
- [Academic & Events Calendar](#)

Pioneer Springs Community School believes a school can capture students' inherent curiosity about their environment to foster deeper connections to nature. Developing students' Environmental Literacy is at the core of Pioneer Springs' education mission. In North Carolina, Environmental Literacy is defined as the ability to make informed decisions about issues affecting shared natural resources while balancing cultural perspectives, the economy, public health and the environment.

According to the North Carolina Environmental Literacy Plan, an environmentally literate student:

- Understands how natural systems and human social systems work and relate to one another;
- Combines this understanding with personal attitudes and experiences to analyze various facets of environmental issues;
- Develops the skills necessary to make responsible decisions based on scientific, economic, aesthetic, political, cultural and ethical considerations; and
- Practices personal and civic responsibility for decisions affecting our shared natural resources.

### Why are Environmental Literacy and Environmental Education (EE) important?

Studies reviewed by Stanford University indicate that EE has been shown to improve:

- Knowledge in science, mathematics, reading, and writing.
- Emotional and social skills, such as self-esteem, character development, team work, and leadership skills.
- Environmentally friendly behavior, such as reducing water use, increasing recycling, and participating in community cleanups.
- Academic skills (21st Century skills), such as critical thinking, oral communication, analytical skills, problem solving, and higher-order thinking.
- Motivation to learn, including enthusiasm for and interest in school.
- Civic interest and engagement, including feelings of civic responsibility, feelings of empowerment, and ability to take action.

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### What Does Environmental Literacy and Education Look Like at Pioneer Springs?

The Pioneer Springs campus is the perfect setting for environmental education. Teachers utilize multiple outdoor learning areas including the pond/wetlands, our wooded nature trail, multiple garden spaces, outdoor classrooms, and greenhouses. Many grade levels participate in hands-on citizen science projects helping scientists broaden the scope of their research. Annually, students experience age appropriate nature focused field trips and overnight adventures offered each Fall and Spring.

EE evolves as Pioneer Springs students grow up. In the elementary grades, environmental literacy is taught by providing educational and play opportunities that develop environmental awareness, knowledge, and curiosity. Teachers integrate nature throughout all subject areas, have a dedicated Environmental Literacy class each week that is used to expand on ideas and topics introduced in core subject areas, and provide opportunities for nature based play,

As students mature and move into middle school, environmental education strives to go beyond knowledge acquisition. Students begin developing environmental empathy, problem solving, and critical thinking skills. Teachers continue to integrate environmental education throughout the curriculum and during Environmental Literacy class, and also provide project based opportunities, allowing students to make meaningful connections to nature and the wider community. Through service learning projects students identify problems, work together to find creative solutions, and begin to implement strategies to take action.

High school students continue to expand their environmental literacy and knowledge base through selecting one of five Communities in Action pathways where they explore careers, learn skills, and are challenged to take authentic environmental action. Through completion of rigorous coursework, internships, research projects and service our environmentally literate graduates are ready to take collaborative action and be active civic participants.

## Marvelous Math: Games that keep math skills strong



Here are some fun puzzles and games to build math fluency and number sense this summer. Once your family has completed these activities, challenge your student to create games or puzzles of his/her own!

- Elementary–play “Multiplication Ball”, throw a ball to a partner, and for each successful catch, count up by an agreed upon multiple. When the ball is dropped, start over with a new multiple.
- Middle School–look for symmetry in nature, and use your discoveries to create art
- High School–do some Olympic Math

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## Backyard science: Explore nature through the arts



Art and illustration provides unique insight into the natural world. Share illustrations of nature by artists including Beatirx Potter, Charley Harper, Katsushika Hokusai, and Jackie Morris. Discuss how the artist uses details to capture the natural world, and then take your family outside with art materials to try capturing the natural details of your surroundings. Find more ideas for using art to explore nature and science here.

Want more ideas? Check out STEAM Bingo!

## Encourage reading by setting aside time to read as a family, by Tanya Blumenfeld, Third Grade Lead Teacher



Children are influenced by what they see happening around them and if the goal is to encourage independent summer reading, then let your child see you reading as well! You may want to set up a consistent reading time where everyone reads at the same time during the day or evening. This will help encourage a daily routine and they will be less likely to forget to read. Literature-rich homes have a variety of reading materials available ranging from different genres of books to newspapers, magazines, and even books on electronic readers. Don't forget to share your excitement over what you are reading as well! Believe it or not, teens are also more likely to read when they see the significant adults in their life reading.

Recommended books:

**Kindergarten** *One Tiny Turtle* by Nicola Davies, *Last Stop on Market Street* by Matt de La Pena

**First grade** *Tuesday* by David Wiesner, *Diary of a Worm* by Doreen Cronin

**Second grade** *Dear Max* by Sally Grindley, *The Worst Witch* by Jill Murphy

**Third grade** *Each Kindness* by Jacqueline Woodson, *Wayside School* by Louis Sachar

**Fourth grade** *Fortunately, the Milk* by Neil Gaiman, *The Magnificent Lizzie Brown and the Ghost Ship* by Vicki Lockwood

**Fifth Grade** *Walk Two Moons* by Susan Creech, *Africa is my Home* by Monica Edinger

**Middle School** *The Marvellers* by Dhonielle Clayton and Khadijah Khatib, *The Girl Who Stole an Elephant*

by Nizrana Farook

**High School** *The Berry Pickers* by Amanda Peters, *The Collectors: Stories* by M.T. Anderson, et. al.

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### What's your favorite place and what makes it awesome?



Writing over the summer is important because it gives young people the opportunity to write about their interests in a low stakes setting. This allows students to take ownership of their writing, and to write simply for the pleasure of telling a good story or describing something they find exciting. In each edition of the summer Coop Scoop, we will share writing prompts to inspire young authors. This week invite your young author to identify their favorite place. Then, invite them to write a persuasive review of that place, convincing others that their favorite place is awesome. Be sure to include lots of sensory details in the review! Alternatively, write a review of a least favorite place.

## Get Outside!: Find a new perspective on nature through photography



You can encourage your youngster or teen to spend time outdoors by challenging them to find new perspectives on nature through photography. Hand your child an old smartphone and send them into the backyard, or share your digital camera with your teen on vacation, and ask them how many unusual nature photos they can snap. [National Geographic has a great guide for young photographers](#) that you could share with your elementary age shutterbug. For teens, the [New England Botanical Garden offers some intriguing prompts for seeing nature in a new way](#), and this blog has some [fun ideas for trick photography](#). Share your family's nature photography online and be sure to tag #pioneersprings.

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## Getting ready for kindergarten: help me do it myself



For many children, kindergarten is their first experience spending long stretches of time away from their families. While adults at home can tie zippers, and open food containers for children, kids need to be able to do these things independently at school. Take some time this summer to teach your youngster to [tie their shoes](#), to [zip zippers](#), and to open their lunch containers. At Pioneer Springs we go outside a lot, which means that kids take their shoes off and on many times throughout the day. If your kindergartner is not ready to tie shoes yet, consider buying shoes with Velcro or elastics. Additionally, most kindergartners cannot open Go-Gert containers independently. Please choose food containers that your child can open on their own.

# Camp Smiles



## This is an important announcement regarding students who will be attending 7th or 12th grade for the 2024-2025 school year:

Students coming into 7th or 12th grade are required to provide updated vaccination records, as there are additional vaccination requirements that occur at these grades. Please submit vaccination records to [registrar@pioneersprings.org](mailto:registrar@pioneersprings.org). Alternatively, a hard copy can be delivered, in person, to the front office.

Please note that these vaccinations, or a religious/medical exemption, are due no later than 30 days from the first day of school. Students who are out of compliance upon reaching this deadline will be unable to attend school at Pioneer Springs until the appropriate documentation is received.

You can visit your child's doctor or the health department for vaccination information and to ensure your child's vaccines are up to date. If you have any questions, you may email me at [ArmanC@pioneersprings.org](mailto:ArmanC@pioneersprings.org).

Thank you,  
Arman Casini, RN