

NORFOLK COLLEGIATE'S OUTDOOR LEARNING LAB FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Who is responsible for taking care of the Outdoor Lab?

The lower school students will take ownership of Norfolk Collegiate's Outdoor Learning Lab, including plant and animal maintenance, feeding and more, under the supervision and guidance of the lower school science department and their teachers. All teachers and staff are welcome to volunteer to care for any aspect of the lab, when possible.

Who will maintain the garden and animals throughout the summer?

The lower school science department will be primarily responsible for the lab during the summer months. There will also be several summer camps devoted to learning and caring for the learning lab and The Oak Roost. Any faculty or staff member willing to volunteer also would be appreciated.

What about possible predators?

The administration is aware that bringing a food source and live animals into the courtyard comes with the possibility of predators. Several precautions are being taken to lower the risk of this occurring, such as securing the hens inside their coop after school and until the morning. The hens will be fenced within one area at all times. The gardens are on raised beds that have the ability to be completely protected with screen covers. The greenhouse has the ability to be completely closed and locked each evening. Should predators become a nuisance, inexpensive and non-harmful deterrents may be installed on the roof, as well as netting across the courtyard roof.

How will the school handle any incident of predators that does occur?

The administration has protocol in place for handling such an incident, and it includes first making sure all students are secured and removed from the area. Administration will then contact appropriate agencies such as Animal Control, maintenance and guidance departments to insure an appropriate plan of action.

Will this be a huge distraction to classrooms?

The outdoor lab is not intended to provide a distraction to classroom instruction. The goal is to further instruction by providing hands-on, real-life opportunity for learning. The noise should be minimal as there will not be a rooster and the hens are usually fairly quiet during daytime hours. There is only one classroom adjacent to the outdoor lab. Should this classroom be adversely affected, alternate solutions can be arranged.

Is there a health risk to students through manure contact, pesticide contamination or bird flu?

Every effort will be made to minimize the risk to student health. All birds have been vaccinated and are examined and cleared of any risk of disease, such as bird flu, before arriving at the school. They will then be examined by a vet twice a year from thereafter. No hand-to-bird contact without the direct one-on-one supervision of a staff member is expected with our students. The majority of manure will be collected in the hutch in a removable tray, which will be emptied weekly or as often as needed to maintain healthy conditions for the animals and to minimize odor. The chicken yard will also be raked often.

How do we prevent kids from being unsupervised in the outdoor lab?

Both entrances to the outdoor lab will be locked at all times, and only staff members will have access to the keys.

Does this affect our daycare licensure?

We have contacted the Virginia State Licensure and local licensure agencies and received their approval. They have asked and Norfolk Collegiate will ensure that no child in child care will have entrance to the area without an adult daycare provider. Any child given entrance during day care times must follow all safety precautions already in place, including thorough hand washing after contact.

What role can or will students have in this lab?

It is the intention for all Norfolk Collegiate students to feel a sense of ownership in this outdoor learning area. All teachers, classrooms and students are welcome to use and learn from the lab at all times of the year. Students will be directly planting, caring for and harvesting all plants year-round. Fourth- and fifth-grade students who have signed, parental permission will be allowed to care for The Oak Roost at set times with adult supervision.

Will I be able to purchase fresh eggs or produce from the lab?

No. Norfolk Collegiate will not be selling the eggs or vegetables for profit.

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