

2019 U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon School
Missouri Honoree
Raintree PreK and Early Elementary



Students plan a project

Raintree School is a private Reggio-inspired Forest School serving two to eight year olds in St. Louis. The Reggio approach holds that children are driven by their interest to understand and know more, and able to learn their place in the world through their interactions with others and with an environment filled with natural light, order and beauty. As a Forest School, Raintree's goal is that students develop civic character, sense of place, and depth of knowledge through inquiry-based thinking and student driven projects within the context of nature. It is a school founded on the premise that civically-minded outdoor, experiential education is a vehicle for change.

- **Sustainability** - For Raintree School, sustainability begins with the landscape. On the nearly 11 acre, wooded campus, creating and protecting the threatened habitats for insects, birds, mammals and other wildlife has been of utmost importance to the campus and neighboring residents. Having eliminated the threat of the woodland being leveled for a housing development, Raintree now



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works to remove invasives from the woodland while adding pollinator gardens and tall grasses in all landscaped zones and student-use spaces, so that school grounds are a haven for wildlife.

- **Health** - Raintree's most notable accomplishment was replacing traditional PE classes with open play outdoor time. Recent research found increased student gross motor activity in open-play outdoor time above and beyond that found in organized P.E. classes. Similarly, data on Forest Schools finds additional benefits in balance, coordination, and strength in children spending time in wild outdoor spaces. Wanting to maximize the physical activity of students during gross motor opportunities, Raintree has made play in wild outdoor spaces a regular, consistent part of the school week, year-round, rain or shine with one whole day a week devoted to being outdoors.
- **Learning** - Every academic benchmark at Raintree is embedded in the locally-based work of each class cohort. Within the "Free Shooney! project", students initiated advocacy considered the habitat and wildlife of Shaw Nature Reserve, integrated every learning domain (from creating watercolor paintings of the prairie to graphing bird sightings), enhanced soft skills, and prompted presentations to students campus-wide and the partner organizations within the project.

Raintree School Nomination Form