



WILLAMETTE PARTNERSHIP

House Committee on Early Childhood and Human Services
355 Capitol Street NE
Salem, OR 9731-3871

Re: Support for HB 2717 on Outdoor Preschool Licensure

Dear Chair Reynolds and esteemed Committee members,

It's my distinct pleasure to put Willamette Partnership's support behind HB 2717 and the opportunity to provide a pathway to licensure for outdoor preschools. This is an effort our organization has been pursuing for nearly five years, and it has the potential to dramatically increase equitable access to these programs.

Peer-reviewed literature is clear: time spent outside for children is healing time. Studies show that kids who spend more time outdoors are [less likely to develop ADHD symptoms](#) or [illnesses related to sedentary lifestyles](#), such as cardiovascular disease, obesity, and diabetes. They develop [strong socio-emotional skills](#) and are [better prepared to respond to stresses and trauma](#). Their [immune systems become stronger](#) from exposure to the microorganisms in the air and soil. Being outside even helps children [maintain better eyesight and hearing](#). Perhaps most importantly during cold, flu and COVID seasons, children are significantly less likely to catch communicable diseases in outdoor environments. Outdoor and nature-based preschools are more than just learning spaces—they're healthy spaces.

By our count, there are well over 30 outdoor and nature-based preschools currently operating across Oregon, but not all Oregonians have equitable access to these programs. The main hurdle for families is the fact that there's no pathway to licensure for outdoor preschool programs, meaning these schools can only operate half-day programs and are unable to accept many vouchers and subsidies. This means that working families need to find someone to provide childcare for the other half of each preschool day and must pay full price. Often, this simply translates to most families being shut out of these programs.

A pathway to licensure would make it possible for ALL Oregon children to benefit from these programs, but it would also relieve pressure on families simply looking for a safe, healthy space for childcare. There's a severe shortage of preschools across the state of Oregon, with [60% of children living in childcare deserts](#) that lack readily available preschool options. Outdoor and nature-based preschools can dramatically increase the number of available childcare options by activating existing outdoor spaces, reducing the burden on new school providers to lease and maintain indoor facilities, and providing children with care that carries the myriad co-benefits of outdoor spaces.

HB 2717 is a simple bill that opens a pathway to licensure for these programs, ensuring a more equitable future for Oregon's kids. It continues the long history of environmental literacy that Oregon has so proudly invested in since 2009's "No Child Left Inside" Act. And with its passage, Oregon would become only the second state in the country with a legislated pathway to fully-licensed, nature-based preschools. I humbly ask the Committee to support HB 2717 to create a healthier, more equitable future for Oregon's children.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'B. Robison', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Barton Robison, Interim Executive Director
Willamette Partnership
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