

February 27, 2023

Respectfully submitted to the House Committee on Early Childhood and Human Services: Representative Lisa Reynolds; Representative Hoa Nguyen; Representative Anna Scharf; Representative Tom Anderson; Representative Tracy Cramer; Representative Lucetta Elmer; Representative Annessa Hartman; Representative James Hieb; Representative Travis Nelson; Representative Courtney Neron.

**RE: Support for HB 2717: Establishing oversight of outdoor preschool programs by the Office of Child Care**

Dear Members of the House Committee on Early Childhood and Human Services,

The North American Association for Environmental Education (NAAEE) is pleased to join with partners and colleagues throughout Oregon, and across the country, in expressing enthusiastic support for HB 2717, which would establish a pilot program to license outdoor preschools in Oregon.

Oregon has long been a leader in providing outdoor learning opportunities to students across the state in its K-12 system, and this legislation would extend that commitment, and its benefits, to the state's youngest learners.

Research overwhelmingly confirms that nature and outdoor learning provide a wide range of benefits to children's healthy development, including:

- Promoting physical activity and physical development,
- Boosting children's mental health,
- Promoting the development of self-regulation skills,
- Improving academic performance, and
- Reducing stress.

Because of these benefits, nature-based, outdoor preschools in the United States have experienced dramatic growth across the US, according to NAAEE research. There are now over 800 such schools across the US, and they are available in nearly every state.

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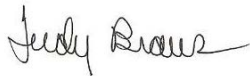
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Unfortunately, the same research reveals that these benefits are not equally available to all children. Children of color, multiple language learners, and children with disabilities are all under-represented in nature-based programs today. Licensing outdoor preschools could provide greater, and more equitable, access to this innovative and effective approach to early childhood education.

NAAEE closely monitored and supported similar legislation in Washington State, which established a pilot program to license outdoor preschools. The outcomes of that pilot were incredibly positive, with the state expanding access to outdoor learning for young children while demonstrating that the pilot outdoor programs effectively ensured child safety and kindergarten readiness. As a result, in 2021 Washington adopted legislation to permanently authorize the state's Department of Children, Youth, and Families to license outdoor, nature-based child care programs. Today there are hundreds of children across Washington who are reaping the developmental, academic, and mental health benefits of outdoor nature-based child care. We believe Oregon can leverage the research and licensing standards developed in the Washington pilot to bolster and streamline an outdoor preschool pilot in Oregon.

The dramatic growth in popularity in outdoor learning for young children reflects the effectiveness and need for these programs in a rapidly changing world. All families in Oregon should have the opportunity to choose outdoor learning for their children. We encourage you to support HB 2717 to provide safe, effective, and inclusive outdoor education options to Oregon families with young children.

Sincerely,



Judy Braus  
Executive Director

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