

2/28/2023

Early Childhood and Human Services Committee

Dear Honorable Early Childhood and Human Services Committee:

As you consider the possibility of licensing outdoor preschools in Oregon, I would like to share my experience directing a licensed outdoor preschool in Washington. I am the Head of Fiddleheads Forest School in Seattle, which has been operating at the University of Washington Botanic Gardens since 2014. Fiddleheads has been licensed for almost two years and was also part of the pilot program when Washington became the first state to license outdoor programs. Our license through the Department of Children, Youth, and Families benefits staff and families in the following ways:

- It enables us to accept state subsidies as tuition payment. This is crucial to our goal of equity, as it overcomes this particular financial barrier for children who would otherwise not have access to our program. We see first-hand how much these families appreciate this unique opportunity.
- We can have children on-site for longer than 4 hours. Since receiving our initial license, we opened a 6-hour class and an Early Care program, which both help working families by extending their childcare day. Next year, we are also piloting an After Care program to expand on these opportunities.
- It is invaluable to have the licensing department as a resource. We receive a well-prepared set of guidelines and updates regarding safety and best practices. The licensing team always goes above and beyond to answer our questions and champion our work in any way they can.
- Fiddleheads staff receives all of the basic state trainings to serve our students and completes the required in-service trainings. This enables us to meet state standards and advance their own expertise.

From the ways that licensing serves our equity goals and improves resources for staff and families, it has become integral to everything that we do at Fiddleheads. We are eternally grateful for the state's support in our goal of providing high-quality outdoor programming to the preschoolers in our care.

Best,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Madeline Cole". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Madeline Cole (She/Her)  
Head of Fiddleheads  
Seattle, WA

