

Submitter: Dezire Clarke Meindersee  
On Behalf Of: HB2718  
Committee: House Committee On Early Childhood and Human Services  
Measure: HB2717

Chair Reynolds, Vice Chairs Nguye and Scharf, and honorable Members of the committee. My name is Deziré Clarke Meindersee, owner of Cedar Tree Learning, a forest school program for children ages 4-10 years old. I was a teacher in Portland Public Schools, and a director of a preschool for African Immigrants and Refugees. I have a masters in Educational Leadership and Policy.

I'm here today to urge your support for Outdoor Preschools for every child.

The pandemic brought about unprecedented changes in the way we live our lives. One of the most significant changes has been the shift to online learning. Families began to rethink education and what would serve their children's best interests. This is where nature-based learning comes in. Nature has always been a source of wonder and inspiration for children, and during these difficult times, it has proven to be a powerful antidote to stress and lack of connection.

When it comes to early literacy, nature-based programs offer a wealth of opportunities and motivation for children to develop their oral communication skills, phonological awareness, and print knowledge. Rich, reciprocal dialogue is a core practice for language and literacy development, and in the outdoor classroom, children have countless opportunities to observe and inquire about the natural world around them.

Activities that foster phonological awareness can be seamlessly woven into the outdoor classroom experience with songs, rhymes, and games that involve oral language, movement, and interaction with the environment itself. New vocabulary is introduced contextually, as teachers and students seek language that reflects the phenomena they encounter.

Emergent reading and writing are also natural byproducts of outdoor learning, as children capture their ideas in journals and field guides encourage them to notice patterns and distinguish visual details while building an interest in printed material.

Socio-dramatic play is an important part of language and literacy development: children create their own play-worlds of stories, conflict, and experimentation. Children can use natural materials around them to create their own imaginative play.

Nature-based learning offers a wealth of opportunities for children to develop their language and literacy skills in meaningful, engaging ways. Let us embrace this

opportunity to provide our children with a learning experience that is not only educational but also nourishing. Thank You for your support in passing HB2717.