

Case Study: Outdoor Preschool Washington



Overview

Washington state has more than 40 active outdoor preschool programs, but licensing requirements have historically prevented these entities from providing provide full-day care despite high demand. Child care licensing regulations are typically geared toward indoor classrooms and don't allow for outdoor programs to qualify. This pilot program is developing a first-in-the-nation licensing program for outdoor preschools to offer full-day learning in a way that “expands access to affordable, high-quality early learning programs.”

Bill: [SB 5357 \(2017\)](#)

Target Audience

This program aims to provide licensure for outdoor, nature-based early learning and child care programs in the state by developing comparable health and safety standards for preschools without a childcare facility. The program also strives to support regularly licensed child care programs to use outdoor preschool programs to expand capacity and enrollment.

Coalition

The pilot program has been supported by a coalition of existing outdoor preschool programs throughout the state, along with key advisors in the office of Governor Inslee and the Washington Department of Youth, Children, and Families.

Funding

The pilot program authorization included roughly \$650K over four years for administrative staffing and oversight. Once certified, outdoor preschools will have access to new funding sources from state and federal programs that are contingent on licensure.

Impact

The final set of recommendations is due to the state legislature at the end of 2020. However, by early 2020 at least six outdoor preschool programs have already received licenses as part of the program and are serving children throughout the state. These represent the first licensed outdoor preschools in the country.