

Submitter: Katie Lynch

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Early Childhood and Human Services

Measure: HB2717

I am writing in strong support for creating mechanisms to support thriving outdoor pre-schools.

When my partner and I decided to have children, we knew that nature connection was a core value. Drawing on current research, we know that nature connection is important for promoting physical health, mental health, and also improves academic outcomes (see Kuo et al. for a survey of the data). Thus, our priority as a family has been to connect to the natural world. As David Sobel notes, we need to let children fall in love with the world before we ask them to save it. In Oregon, we have a real need for more outdoor learning for our children. Even in Eugene, a town sympathetic generally to these values, there is simply not enough child care/preschool options based in nature play/immersion.

Outdoor education has led my child (over the past 12 years) to growing into a teen who is embodied and at home in nature, in any weather, trusting the input of her senses. She has learned, through the years, that everything changes and thus to be more adaptable. She is infused with the deep rhythms of the seasons: and turns to nature when the stresses of middle-school or Covid, or climate change becomes overwhelming. And given mental health issues across grade levels, we need to encourage any strategy to include a nature-connection component. This creates a sense of connection and community that creates an ethic of kinship with the world and nurtures empathy and an ethic of stewardship. These are foundations that have long term social, political and economic impacts. Nature-based outdoor preschools should be available to every child, regardless of where they live, how much money their parents make or color of their skin. Oregonians are deeply passionate about our natural heritage, ensuring our little ones have access to nurture this connection seems like a simple first step. Thank you for your consideration.