

# WHY DOES OREGON NEED LICENSED OUTDOOR PRESCHOOL?

2022



WILLAMETTE PARTNERSHIP

Photo by Ben Wicks, Unsplash

## Outdoor Preschool is...

Outdoor preschool is a preschool that meets either entirely or primarily outside. Also called “forest kindergartens,” this model has been around for decades and offers children the unique health benefits of time in nature along with the skills your kid needs to succeed in school. Many of the [physical, cognitive, and social development benefits](#) are unique from those in a traditional indoor environment.

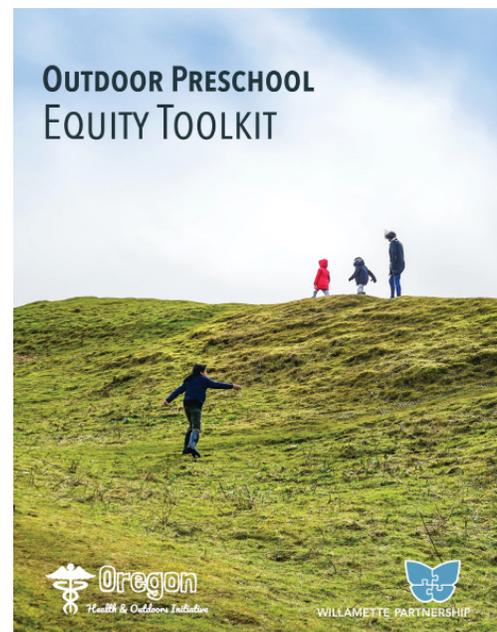
## Licensed Outdoor Preschool is

### Accessible

It’s official: [there’s a severe shortage of preschool options](#) in Oregon. There’s currently only capacity to serve [1 in every 5 young children](#) who need child care throughout the state, and with physical space for child care centers limited, outdoor preschool provides an alternative that could help close that gap.

Providing a path to licensure for outdoor preschools would allow existing outdoor preschools to operate for full days and serve more children. It would help increase the state’s capacity for child care by offering an alternative, accessible option for parents who need full-day care but are currently unable to access it.

Licensure also means low-income families and children enrolled in services such as Early Intervention will have access to outdoor preschool through subsidized systems that provide financial support, personalized coaching, and resources to the child’s learning experience. Currently, many funding avenues and resources are unavailable to nonlicensed programs. Licensure offers equal access to outdoor educational spaces that will better support and empower children, families, and their caregivers.



Outdoor Preschool Equity Toolkit,  
Willamette Partnership

## Licensed Outdoor Preschool is

### Affordable

In Oregon, the average annual cost of child care [is over \\$14,000](#), twice as expensive as public university tuition. Though both the state and federal governments offer childcare subsidies and waivers to help offset the costs of childcare, [less than 1 in 5 Oregon children who qualify are actually enrolled in programs that accept these subsidies](#). When combined with the shortage of available preschool options throughout the state, many Oregon families aren’t able to find an affordable solution to childcare, and our kids are the ones being left behind.



Photo by Bambi Corro, Unsplash

Outdoor preschools operate without the high costs associated with building rent and maintenance, utilities, etc. Lower building expenses mean that outdoor preschools can invest more money where it really matters: on hiring and retaining quality teachers and instructors to help facilitate your child's early learning.

## Licensed Outdoor Preschool is **Equitable**

Offering parents the power to choose where to send their children for preschool is a matter of equity. While several outdoor preschools already operate around the state, they aren't able to meet licensure requirements that were specifically designed with indoor spaces in mind. (For example, it's hard to ensure there aren't insects in the child's play area when the play area is a forest!)

No licensure option means these preschools can only operate for half days, and they are unable to accept state or federal child care resources or apply for programs like [Preschool Promise](#) or [Preschool for All](#). This translates to outdoor preschools in Oregon being unavailable for families who rely on these programs, or who need to work full days and are unable to afford only half-day care.

Outdoor experiences are good for children's physical, cognitive, and social development in ways that are unique from a traditional indoor environment. Yet many families lack access to outdoor and nature-based experiences, and these inequities often fall across socioeconomic and racial lines. By licensing outdoor preschools, we're creating equitable and accessible opportunities for all families.

## What's the Solution?

In 2017, Washington [passed SB 5357](#). The bill successfully established a four-year pilot project during which outdoor preschools operated for full days while working with state agencies and lawmakers to establish a path to licensure for outdoor preschools. In 2021, Washington became the first in the nation to permanently license outdoor, nature-based child care for preschool and school-age children under [SB 5151](#). These bills addressed the same regulatory challenges that Oregon outdoor preschools face, and so we propose that Oregon pass an analogous bill or explore other policy pathways to licensure in 2023.



*Children learn, play, and spend nearly 100% of their time outside at Tygh Valley Head Start, Mid-Columbia Children's Council.*

Outdoor Preschool Licensure is supported by the Outdoor Early Learning Alliance of Oregon (OELAO). OELAO's mission is to promote policy changes in Oregon that result in a path to licensure for outdoor preschools, creating equitable and accessible opportunities for all families.

For more information or to join our Alliance, please email  
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