

## Letter of Support for Outdoor Preschool Licensure in Oregon - HB 2717

February 2023

Office of Child Care  
Early Learning Division  
Oregon State Legislators  
Early Childhood Decision-Makers

Dear Office of Child Care, Early Learning Division, Legislators, and Early Childhood Decision-Makers:

### **Re: Outdoor Preschool Licensure in Oregon - Letter of Support**

We are writing to show our support for outdoor preschool licensure in the State of Oregon through legislation. Currently, outdoor preschools cannot be licensed and are therefore not an option for many families. Outdoor preschool licensure increases childcare capacity and equitable access to more childcare options. We envision a future where every family has the choice to send their kids to an accessible outdoor or nature-based preschool and reap the benefits of being outside. Together, we can address equity in early childhood outdoor education by passing legislation that pilots outdoor preschool licensure across Oregon.

### **Investments in Early Childhood Can Include Equitable Access to the Outdoors**

In 2020, Oregon saw significant investments in early childhood education. Funding for [Preschool Promise](#) was greatly expanded across the State, and in November 2020, [Multnomah County voted to offer voluntary, tuition-free high-quality preschool for all children who are 3 or 4 years old](#). These funding streams allow eligible families to choose from a variety of preschool options, as long as they are licensed and meet funding requirements. We believe that one of these options can and should be [Outdoor Preschools](#): preschools that are entirely, or almost entirely outside.

In the age of increasingly sedentary lifestyles, mental health concerns, and chronic diseases among young children, outdoor preschools offer a multitude of benefits at a critical stage of a child's development. [Especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, the outdoors offer safer open-air environments than indoor classrooms](#). Outdoor preschools offer high-quality education, safe learning environments, and are good for a preschooler's [physical health, mental health, learning, and development](#). All children should have access to these benefits.

### **Inequitable Access to Outdoor and Nature-Based Learning**

Unfortunately, outdoor preschools that are completely outside are not a viable option for many families because they cannot be licensed in Oregon. Licensing standards were originally written with indoor classrooms in mind, making it nearly impossible for outdoor preschools to meet the rules and become licensed (for example there is an indoor square footage requirement per child). The consequence is that outdoor preschools remain exclusive and expensive and are often ineligible for state resources and funding, despite growing research that outdoor preschools offer safe, high-quality education and care for children.

*All children should have access to the wonderful benefits of learning and playing outdoors.*

## Letter of Support for Outdoor Preschool Licensure in Oregon - HB 2717

### **Solution: Outdoor Preschool Licensure**

Through adopting new rules, passing legislation, or piloting outdoor preschool licensure, we can expand child care capacity in the state and advance equitable access to more childcare options.

In 2017, the State of Washington passed a [bill to pilot outdoor preschool licensure](#), and voted to adopt [new standards in 2021](#). Their program generated robust [outdoor preschool licensing standards](#) that can be replicated in Oregon. Washington has seen an increase in culturally-specific outdoor preschools affiliated with [tribes](#), [Spanish](#) and [Chinese](#) language programs, and schools in [public parks](#).

We want to see the same equitable access to outdoor preschools in Oregon. Please support HB 2717 for Outdoor Preschool Licensure.

The below signed are organizations and advocates who wish to make outdoor preschools affordable, accessible, and equitable. Together, we can increase equity and access to outdoor preschools for all.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

### [Outdoor Early Learning Alliance of Oregon](#)

*Our 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. Alliance is made up of 60 members.*

Lynny Brown

Oregon Health and Outdoors Initiative, Willamette Partnership  
lynny@willamettepartnership.org

Ryder Talcott

Owner, Programs Director- Maverick Outdoors LLC., Mini Mavericks Preschool  
[info@minimaverickspreschool.com](mailto:info@minimaverickspreschool.com)

Kendal Sweeney

Owner, Preschool Director- Maverick Outdoors LLC., Mini Mavericks Preschool  
[info@minimaverickspreschool.com](mailto:info@minimaverickspreschool.com)

Rachel Turner

Director, Hazelwood Outdoor Kindergarten  
[hazelwoodrachel@gmail.com](mailto:hazelwoodrachel@gmail.com)

Jamie Pang

*All children should have access to the wonderful benefits of learning and playing outdoors.*

## Letter of Support for Outdoor Preschool Licensure in Oregon - HB 2717

Environmental Health Program Director, Oregon Environmental Council  
[JamieP@OECOnline.org](mailto:JamieP@OECOnline.org)

Heather Mayer  
Director, Lucky Ducklings Preschool  
[heather.michelle.mayer@gmail.com](mailto:heather.michelle.mayer@gmail.com)

Amy Nelson  
Teacher, Maple Grove Nature School  
[amy@outdooredadventures.com](mailto:amy@outdooredadventures.com)

Heidi Hoskins  
Director, Maple Grove Nature School  
[heidi@outdooredadventures.com](mailto:heidi@outdooredadventures.com)

Nicole Fravel  
Owner, Wildwood Nature School  
[nfravel@wildwoodnatureschool.com](mailto:nfravel@wildwoodnatureschool.com)

Dezire Clarke Meindersee  
Owner, Cedar Tree Learning  
[dez@cedartreelearning.com](mailto:dez@cedartreelearning.com)

Elia Gilbert  
Forest Kindergarten Teacher, Acorn Waldorf School  
Nature-based Teaching Mentor, The Neighboring Tree Project  
[Elia@acornws.org](mailto:Elia@acornws.org)

Joe Madden  
Forest Kindergarten Assistant Teacher, Green Meadow Waldorf School  
[jmadden@gmws.org](mailto:jmadden@gmws.org)

Shannon Coker  
Lead Teacher  
Mind-Full Meadows Nature Preschool  
[Shannon@mind-fulleducation.com](mailto:Shannon@mind-fulleducation.com)

Andrea Davey  
Owner, Little Root Children  
[littlerootchildren@gmail.com](mailto:littlerootchildren@gmail.com)

Heidi Mckay  
Executive Director  
<https://downtoearthforestschool.com>

*All children should have access to the wonderful benefits of learning and playing outdoors.*

## Letter of Support for Outdoor Preschool Licensure in Oregon - HB 2717

Jenny Calhoun  
Early Childhood Teacher  
[jenny.calhoun@eugenewaldorf.org](mailto:jenny.calhoun@eugenewaldorf.org)

Amber Ankrum  
Owner/Teacher at Elements Nature School  
[Elementsnatureschool@gmail.com](mailto:Elementsnatureschool@gmail.com)

Laurel Loughran (she/her)  
Office and Admissions | Waldorf Teacher Education Eugene  
[laurelwtee@gmail.com](mailto:laurelwtee@gmail.com) | [wtee.org](http://wtee.org)

Samantha Dorsch (she/her)  
Owner/Teacher at Under the Trees Forest Preschool  
[sammi@underthetreesforestpreschool.com](mailto:sammi@underthetreesforestpreschool.com)

Melissa Moore  
Owner/Teacher - Freckled Fawn Nature School  
[melissa\\_moore@freckledfawnnatureschool.org](mailto:melissa_moore@freckledfawnnatureschool.org)  
[www.freckledfawnnatureschool.org](http://www.freckledfawnnatureschool.org)

*All children should have access to the wonderful benefits of learning and playing outdoors.*