

# Flourishing in Nature

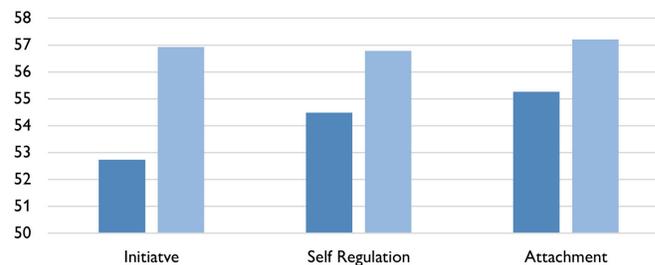
## Investigating the Impact of Nature Preschools on Young Children's Protective Factors Associated With Resilience

**Overview.** Resiliency, the capacity to cope with stress and adversity, is dynamic, contextual, and malleable. There are a set of protective mechanisms that seem to give rise to successful adaptation in the face of adversity, including dispositions and skills within a person, as well as contextual and external factors. Early childhood is a critical window of opportunity for fostering development of protective factors that give rise to successful adaptation, allowing a child to thrive and even be transformed by adversity. The purpose of this study was to explore the potential for nature preschools to support the development of key protective factors associated with resilience. The Devereaux Early Childhood Assessment for Preschoolers (DECA-P2) was used in a sample of 78 nature preschool participants and a baseline reference group of 14 children attending a non-nature preschool during the 2016-2017 school year. The DECA-P2 assesses preschoolers' initiative, self-regulation, and attachment in both the preschool and home settings.

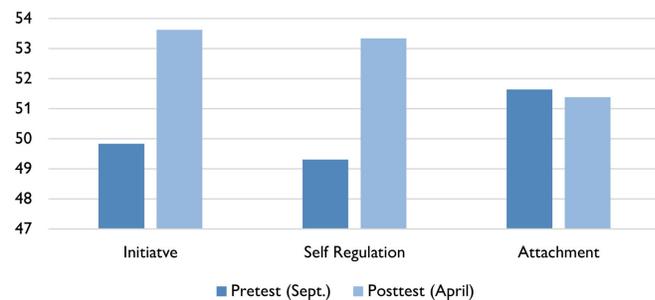


Image Credit: Secret Forest Playschool, MN

### Nature Preschoolers' Growth in Protective Factors at **School**



### Nature Preschoolers' Growth in Protective Factors at **Home**



**Results.** There was significant growth in nature preschoolers' initiative scores ( $p < .001$ ) and self-regulation scores ( $p = .002$ ) in both the preschool and home setting. In comparison, the only significant growth seen in the non-nature preschoolers was in the initiative scores in the preschool setting ( $p < .001$ ), but not in the home setting.

**Conclusion.** Results of this exploratory study suggest the potential of nature play in fostering protective mechanisms related to resilience. The strongest evidence in the data was for nature preschools' impact on self-regulation, beyond what would be expected from cognitive maturation and high quality, non-nature preschool participation, and a seemingly positive influence that extends beyond their preschool setting to their home lives. While more research is needed, these results are encouraging. Through strengthening children's internal protective factors, and through supportive contexts and relationships (all of which can happen through nature preschools), children are strengthening their capacity to function well in spite of stress and adversity.

