

Washington Outdoor Preschool Pilot

Natural Start Alliance | December 10, 2019

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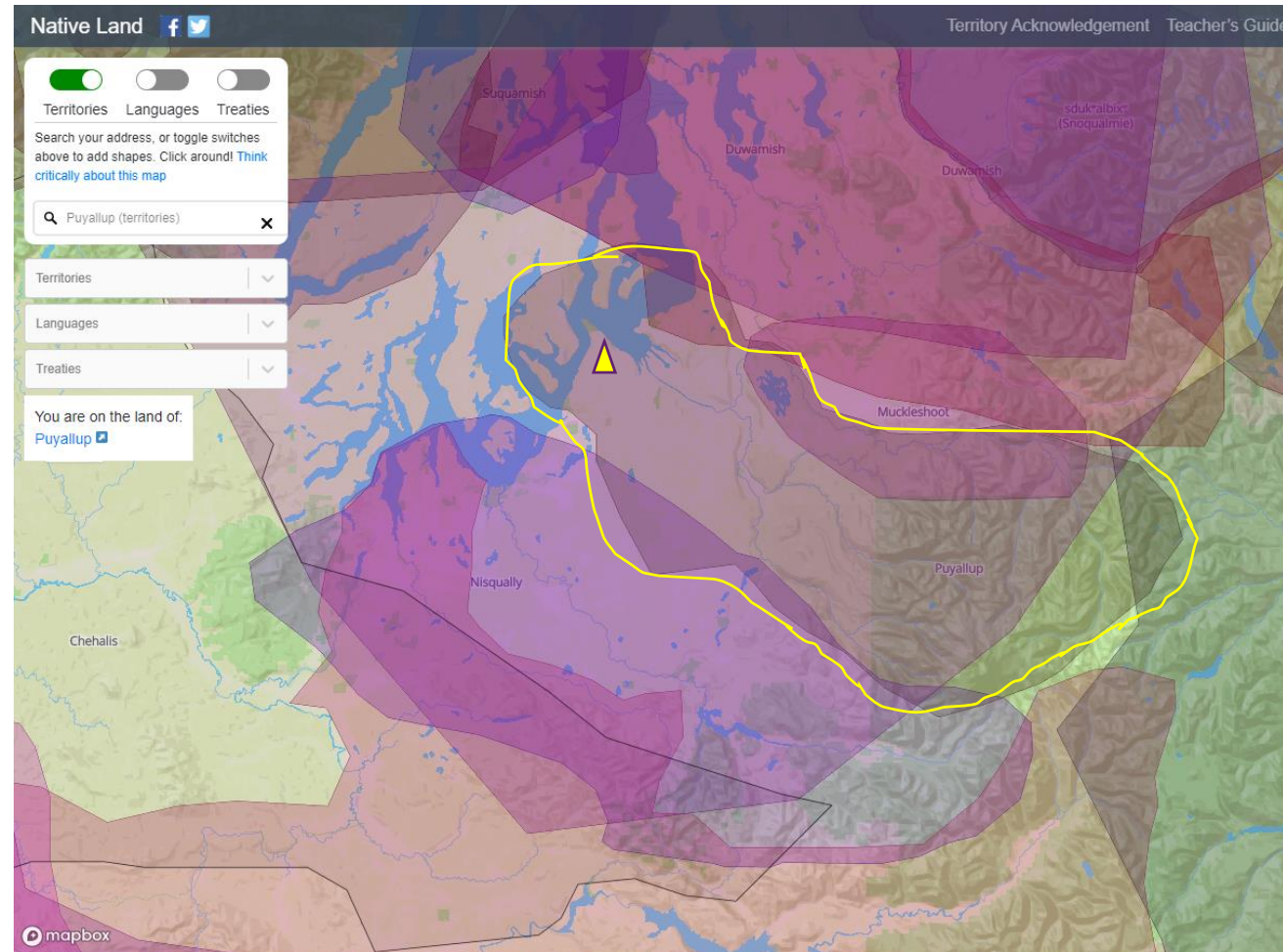
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www.dcyf.wa.gov



Washington State Department of
CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES

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What's Cooking in the Mud-Kitchen?



- Pilot Project Overview
- Child Care and Early Learning Laws and Rules
- Outdoor Preschool Licensing Standards
- Licensing Outdoor Preschools
- Setting Teacher Qualifications Requirements
- Q&A



Pilot Project Overview



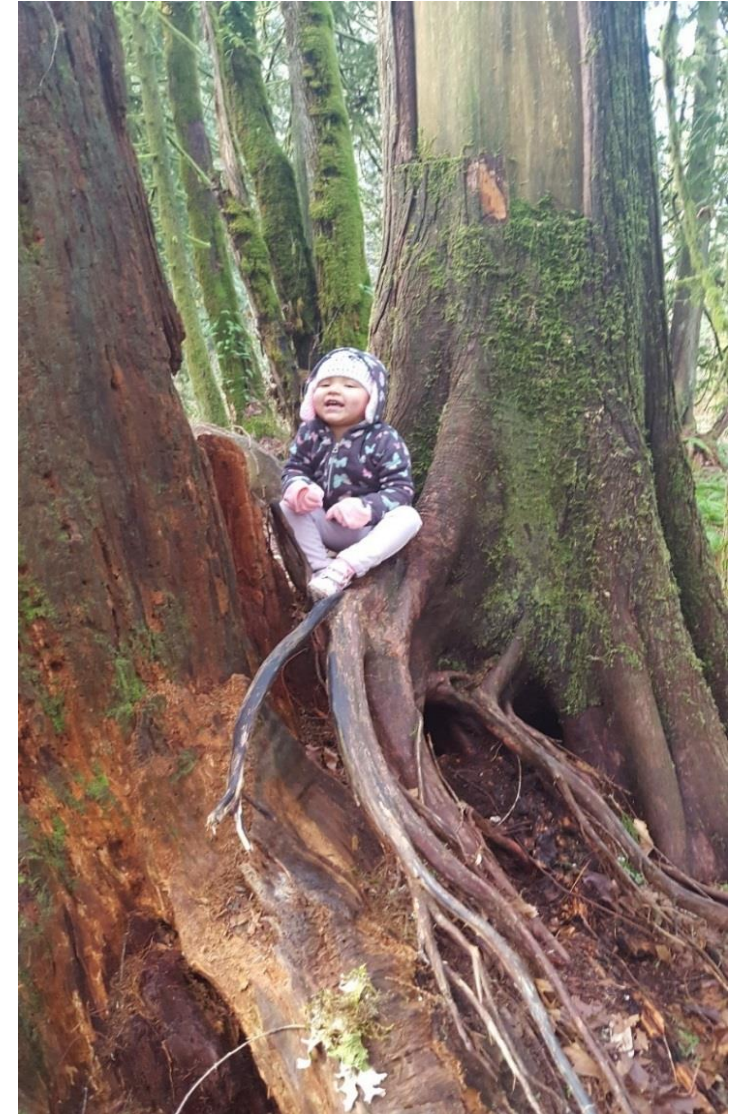
WA Senate Bill 5357 - Goals

Set Standards for Outdoor Preschools

1. Analyze current models of outdoor preschools.
2. Adapt, waive, or create licensing regulations, when necessary.
3. Establish health, safety, and best practices for early childhood environmental education in WA/ USA.

Include Outdoor Preschools in Existing Systems

1. Enable outdoor programs to increase hours and receive subsidies.
2. Explore outdoor preschool participation in our quality-rating and improvement system.
3. Increase access to the outdoors and benefits to children.



Timeline: August 2017 – August 2021



Reporting to Legislature

Pilot Project Research Questions

Can the outdoor preschool model help expand access to early learning programs?

- Enrollment and waitlists
- Family surveys
- Cost analysis

Can the outdoor preschool model help expand access to quality early learning programs?

- Injury/illness reports
- Attendance
- Quality measures: ECERS-3, CLASS, ERS-3i

How can the outdoor preschool model participate in a state QRIS?

- Potential alternative quality measures and coaching needs

Participant Overview

- Advisory Group
 - Directors of current programs
 - Includes up to 10 pilot sites (implementing group) and others (observation group)
- Program Types
 - Nature preschools (with indoor facility)
 - May be already licensed
 - Nature center-based programs
 - All-outdoor programs
 - With or without a permanently located outdoor classroom
 - Gardens/farming included



Permanently-located outdoor classroom of an all-outdoor program at the Tacoma Nature Center.



Child Care and Early Learning Laws and Rules



Washington State Licensing Context

- The Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) currently regulates:
 - Center-based child care
 - Family home-based child care
 - School-aged child care (before and after school)
- WAC Chapter 110-300 – aligned center and family home standards

An “Agency” gets licensed by DCYF... What is NOT an Agency?

RCW 43.216.010

(2) An "Agency" does not include the following:

- (a) Relatives
- (b) Legal guardians
- (c) Friends and neighbors (FFN)
- (d) Parents on cooperative basis (ex. trading care)
- (e) Programs under four hours (“nursery schools”) ← Outdoor Preschools
- (f) Schools
- (g) Seasonal camps
- (h) Drop-in child care when parent remains on-site
- (i) Boys and Girls clubs
- (j) Government operated (local, state, federal care)
- (k) Tribal care on tribal lands
- (l) Military care on military base
- (m) Early learning and support services programs



Washington Outdoor Preschool Pilot Bill

2017: “waive or adapt” licensing requirements and explore quality improvement for outdoor, nature-based preschools (aka “outdoor preschools”).

- At the time, more than 40 outdoor preschools operating as license-exempt “nursery schools” (under four hours).
- License-exempt also means no DCYF support: not eligible to receive subsidies for low-income families; participate in the state’s QRIS; or public pre-k programs.



Who Gets Licensed?

Outdoor Preschools: As Defined by RCW



RCW 43.216.740

(7) For purposes of this section, "*outdoor, nature-based early learning and child care program*" means an agency-offered program operated primarily outdoors in which children are enrolled on a regular basis for three or more hours per day.



Legal Structure of Pilot Program

Revised Code of Washington (RCW)

RCW 43.216.740 authorizes and funds the pilot project, requires DCYF to promulgate rules.



Washington Administrative Code (WAC)

Chapter 110-300D WAC is a set of rules used to administer the pilot project. Require each pilot participant to sign contract.



Outdoor Classroom Agreement

Contract between the program and DCYF. Requires each pilot participant to follow draft rules, our outdoor preschool pilot standards.



Outdoor Preschool Pilot Standards

“Touchstone Standards.” Draft licensing rules that allow DCYF to test rules during pilot but allows change-on-the-fly flexibility.



Outdoor Preschool Licensing Standards



Outdoor Preschool Pilot Standards Development



Best Practices and Research



- Natural Start Alliance Professional Practices
- National Outdoor Leadership School
- Outward Bound
- USFS
- Leave-No-Trace
- Washington State Department of Health
- Washington State Department of Agriculture
- Research into “risky” play, benefits and potential injury, nature education
 - Mariana Brussoni (British Columbia)
 - Ellen Sandseter (Norway)
 - David Sobel (Antioch, NH)



Outdoor Preschool – Specialized Standards

- Professional requirements for environmental education **and** early childhood education
- Smaller group size and ratios (maximum 16, 1:6)
- Teaching focus on boundaries and self-regulation
- Benefit-risk assessment for new or changing environment/activity
- Policies and Procedures
 - Activities: tree-climbing, tool use and campfires.
 - Hygiene: toileting, hand-washing and eating.
 - Family Engagement: proper clothing, commitment to outdoors and environmental education.



Approach to Risk, Risky Play and Protecting Children

- **Hazard** = a source of harm that is not obvious to the child, such that the potential for injury is hidden; or a source of harm that is greater than a child can manage to avoid.
- **Risk** = a situation in which a child can recognize and evaluate a challenge and decide on a course of action, although there is the potential for injury. In this context, risk can be necessary to support healthy child development.
- **Risky Play** = play that is thrilling, exciting and where there is a risk of physical injury. This includes play involving heights, speed, dangerous tools or near dangerous elements (e.g., fall into something).
- **Benefit-Risk Assessment** = a process of identifying hazards and risky play elements in early childhood outdoor play and making plans to mitigate children's risk of injury while maintaining the developmental benefits for children.



0471 Outdoor Preschool Benefit-Risk Assessments, Risk Management Policies and Waivers (1)

(1) Outdoor preschool providers must have and implement benefit-risk assessments and risk management plans, reviewed by the department, and under the following circumstances:

- (a) Selection of a site
- (b) For different seasons as conditions change
- (c) For risky play activities
- (d) To provide guidance for staffing and staff policies.



0471 Outdoor Preschool Benefit-Risk Assessments, Risk Management Policies and Waivers (2)

(2) Outdoor preschools must have risk management policies and procedures to address potential hazards and risks of their nature-based program, including:

- (a) Encountering pets and wildlife
- (b) Interacting with strangers
- (c) Campfire activities
- (d) Water activities or supervision near bodies of water
- (e) Using an emergency shelter
- (f) Required clothing
- (g) Using any public facilities or buildings
- (h) Climbing natural features
- (i) Foraging or Egg Collection and Consumption
- (j) Encountering poisonous species
- (k) Use of sharp tools
- (l) Missing child protocols
- (m) Toileting
- (n) Hand-washing



Tree Climbing in the Squaxin Forest

Risk

Up high,
could fall

Smooth
roots, could
be slippery

Only room
for one,
could be
conflict

One teacher
stands
nearby to
assist



Discuss risk
of slipping
and need for
turn-taking
with children

Benefit

Surrounded
by cultural
practice of
cedar bark
harvesting

Confidence
and
competence
from “risky”
activity of
tree climbing

Familiarity
with root
systems and
bark texture

Management Plan



Licensing Outdoor Preschools



Addressing DCYF Liability

Programmatically

- Teacher qualifications, training and experience (e.g., two years in nature-based education)
- Site-specific policies based on benefit-risk assessment
- Extreme weather emergency plans
- Requirements for campfires, water supervision, missing children protocols, etc.

Legally

- Pilot is voluntary
- Licensing mechanism: program must follow rules, contract and standards
- Risk waiver for parents to sign is required
- Land use agreement required
- Program insurance required (\$100,000 per occurrence)



Licensing and Monitoring in Practice

- Mirror child care licensing – just tweak to fit outside
 - Specialized standards (e.g. extreme weather plans, increased supervision)
 - Applications (e.g. maps and back-up staff)
 - Data collection systems (e.g. paper, Excel, attendance, filing benefit-risk assessments and policies)
 - Licensing and monitoring cycles



Licensing and Monitoring in Practice – Staffing

- Need specialized licensing staff
 - Value outdoor, nature-based play
 - Familiarity and comfort in the outdoors
 - Gives staff the ability to check that risk management plans are reasonable for the area
 - Specific gear – rain gear, boots, snow shoes, waterproof data gathering systems
 - Specific trainings – value of field time – our special “boot camp”



Pilot Licensing Progress



Five licensed outdoor preschool programs

- Met all initial licensing requirements
- Licensed in September, October 2019
- Two are blended center-outdoor preschool model.

Five programs receiving support for the application



Setting Teacher Qualification Requirements

Washington State Working Group - Goals

1. Establish professional competencies for outdoor, nature-based educators and staff, that connects to the Early Care and Education Core Competencies;
2. Determine pre-service training(s) requirements and establish equivalencies for meeting professional qualifications standards, and
3. Ultimately build Washington's capacity to provide teacher training opportunities for nature-based, early childhood education and environmental education.



Washington State Working Group - Members

- Faculty from universities and colleges,
- Members of the WA Early Childhood Teacher Preparation Council,
- Leaders and staff of independent environmental education teacher-training institutions,
- Directors and staff of outdoor preschools,
- Experts in child development,
- Outdoor and environmental education experts from K-12,
- Various DCYF staff, and
- Tribal representatives.



Potential Workforce Training Structure

- Two types of environmental competencies:
 1. Outdoor safety and risk management
 2. Nature-based education (early childhood environmental education + using nature to support other developmental goals)
- Delivery methods:
 - Safety and risk management as a pre-service requirement, such as an Outdoor Preschool Child Care Basics
 - Nature-based pedagogy and environmental education as Professional Development/ Qualifications

Determining Required Qualifications – Process Overview

June 24

- Learn about the pilot’s licensing requirements and impact on teaching practices.
- Create a shared understanding of the goals for children’s learning
- Share knowledge and resources
- Brainstorm teaching competencies

October 28

- Create shared understanding of Nature-based teaching competencies.
- Establish levels and create supplemental document.
- Check against goals for children.

2020

- Apply Competencies to current qualifications and trainings
- Establish equivalencies
- Discuss workforce development implementation



For More Information

The Outdoor Preschool Pilot Website:

2019 Legislative Report

Outdoor Preschool WAC

Outdoor Classroom Agreement

Outdoor Preschool Pilot Standards

<https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/about/government-community/advisory/opp>

OUTDOOR PRESCHOOL PILOT PROJECT

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Thank you!

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Visit:

<https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/about/government-community/advisory/opp>

