



Washington State Department of  
**Early Learning**

**REPORT TO THE LEGISLATURE**

**Outdoor, Nature-Based Early Learning and Child Care Pilot Project**

**Substitute Senate Bill 5357, chapter 162, laws of 2017**

January, 2018

Department of Early Learning

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*\*All photos in this report are courtesy of Nurture in Nature Preschool and are used with the consent of the children’s families.*

**Report to the Legislature:  
Brief Status Report on Outdoor, Nature-Based Early  
Learning and Child Care Pilot Project**

## **Introduction**

Substitute Senate Bill (SSB) 5357, passed in 2017, requires the Washington state Department of Early Learning (DEL) to establish a four year pilot project to license “outdoor, nature-based early learning and child care programs,” otherwise known as outdoor preschools. This report covers DEL’s efforts to date and details the department’s plans for the remainder of the pilot project.

## **Legislative Background**

The legislature found that over forty outdoor preschools are already operating in Washington but are unlicensed and therefore cannot provide full-day care. The legislature also found that these part-day programs are in high demand and many have waitlists. Further, because these programs are unlicensed, they are unable to serve families who would otherwise be eligible for high quality early learning opportunities through the state’s Working Connections Child Care (WCCC) program. The goal in creating a pilot project was to “expand access to affordable, high quality early learning programs, and to further investigate the benefits of outdoor, nature-based classrooms for Washington’s children and families,” (SSB 5357, section 1).

## **Requirements**

The legislature requires DEL to do the following:

- Establish a pilot project to license outdoor preschools, (this began on August 31, 2017 and is scheduled to conclude on June 30, 2021).
- Adopt rules to implement the pilot project and waive or adapt licensing requirements if needed to allow for outdoor classrooms.
- Explore options for developing a quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) for outdoor preschools, including adapting the Early Achievers program to assess quality in outdoor learning environments.
- Select up to 10 pilot locations in the first year of the pilot project, and allow additional outdoor preschools to apply starting August 31, 2018.
- Select a mix of rural, urban, and suburban locations when selecting and approving pilot project locations with the option of giving priority to areas with few or limited early learning programs, areas where early learning programs are near or at full capacity, and areas where an outdoor early learning program would provide more family choice.
- Permit federally recognized tribal program to participate in the pilot project through an interlocal agreement.
- Convene an advisory group of outdoor, nature-based early learning practitioners.
- Provide brief, annual status reports starting January 15, 2018 that describe the implementation of the pilot project (including a description of participating providers and the number of children and families served).

- Provide a full report on findings from the pilot project by November 30, 2020, which must include recommendations for modifying or expanding the availability of outdoor preschools and a discussion of potential options to mitigate the uncertainty for families and participating providers during the final six months of the pilot project when legislation may be pending.

## Creating the Pilot Project

As soon as SSB 5357 was signed into law, DEL began coordinating the pilot project both internally and with stakeholders in the outdoor preschool industry. DEL dedicated 2.5 FTEs to manage the project. One of these FTEs is the pilot program manager, who has a 14 year history in child care licensing. DEL also hired a program specialist and an outreach specialist and designated time for members of the agency's licensing team to assess the health and safety practices and outcomes of existing outdoor preschools.

In August, 2017, DEL and stakeholders in the outdoor preschool industry formed the Outdoor Preschool Advisory Group (OPAG) and began meeting regularly. In 2017, meetings were held on June 29<sup>th</sup>, August 8<sup>th</sup>, September 14<sup>th</sup>, and November 20<sup>th</sup>. This group will convene monthly via webinar, and hold quarterly, full-day, in-person meetings throughout the pilot project. Information about the OPAG can be found on DEL's website at <https://del.wa.gov/Outdoor-Preschool>.

At the first meeting, DEL and OPAG established a work plan, group agreements, and an organizing structure, which includes a small executive committee that will work closely with DEL to handle logistics and planning the overall agenda of the pilot project. DEL and the OPAG set goals of engaging outdoor preschool experts<sup>1</sup> and exploring ways to include the institutional knowledge of noteworthy outdoor preschool programs throughout North America.<sup>2</sup> This group also set the goal of encouraging participation in the pilot project from outdoor preschool participants in as many ways as possible. These goals and the legislative requirements of SSB 5357 led the OPAG to create a two-tiered participation structure.



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<sup>1</sup> Industry professionals include Natasha Kabini, Senior Policy Analyst, Child Care Quality Assurance and Licensing, Ministry of Education, Ontario, Canada; Kayla Streicher, Program Advisor, Child Care Quality Assurance and Licensing, Early Years and Child Care Division, Ministry of Education, Ontario, Canada; and Sheila Williams Ridge, Director of Shirley G. Moore Lab School, University of Minnesota.

<sup>2</sup>Programs include Thomas Irvine Dodge Nature Center, West St. Paul, Minnesota; Emmanuel at Brighton, Licensed Outdoor Program in Ontario, Canada.

## Pilot Project Details

The pilot project currently includes fourteen different outdoor preschool programs with twenty-two sites throughout Washington state. These programs serve approximately 729 children (including 15 children with special needs) and 721 families. The outdoor preschool programs that elected to participate in the pilot project currently have a waitlist of 3,685 children. Pilot participants display a broad mix of business types. Programs include for-profit and non-profit organizations, projects located on the coast and in the mountains, programs located at the University of Washington campus, programs that work in conjunction with Seattle Parks and Recreation, and already licensed child care facilities. For the purpose of the pilot project, these programs are split into two groups: “Implementers” and “Observers.” A map of all participating pilot project is attached as Appendix A. Program descriptions, provided by the programs’ directors, for each outdoor preschool program are attached as Appendix B. Each year of the pilot project, outdoor preschools can elect to become an Implementer or Observer for the upcoming school year.

The Implementer group consists of seven outdoor preschool programs, with ten separate sites throughout Washington state.<sup>3</sup> This group satisfies the requirement for DEL to select up to ten sites during the first year of the pilot project. This group is heavily involved with the leadership, structure, approach, data collection, and work product of the pilot project. The Implementers have agreed to provide DEL with all relevant documents to help the agency achieve the requirement of adopting, waiving, or adapting licensing rules for outdoor preschool programs. Items DEL is reviewing include business documents, programmatic policies, health and safety documents, and any other information relevant to developing the pilot project. The Implementers have also granted DEL analysts and licensors access to their sites to observe and document program settings, practices, curricula, and overall operations.

Importantly, the goal of this group is for each program to be granted a “pilot license” as early as August, 2018, and potentially to work towards becoming eligible for DEL subsidy programs.<sup>4</sup> Pursuant to RCW 43.215.566(2) and (4), DEL will adopt licensing rules tailored to the outdoor preschool industry by August 2018. Using these rules, DEL will issue the first wave of pilot licenses to Implementers for the 2018-2019 school year. These licenses will enable each recipient to participate in DEL programs as if they were a fully licensed child care provider. In exchange for the pilot license, Implementer programs agree to comply with the



<sup>3</sup> Two outdoor preschool programs have multiple sites in the Implementers group. Tiny Trees has three sites and the Washington Outdoor School has two sites. See Appendix A and Appendix B for a visual representation of the pilot project cohorts.

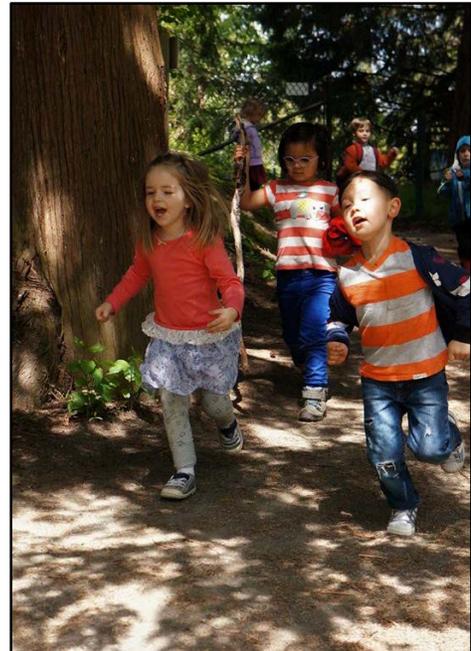
<sup>4</sup> See Working Connections Child Care (WCCC) and Seasonal Child Care (SCC), detailed in chapter [170-290 WAC](#).

licensing rules DEL will adopt for outdoor preschools.

The Observer group consists of eight outdoor preschool programs with twelve sites throughout Washington state.<sup>5</sup> This group, like the Implementers, has provided DEL documents to help adopt, waive, or adapt licensing rules for outdoor preschool programs. The Observers will operate as a group of industry experts who have chosen to remain informed of the details of the pilot project, but will not be as involved as the Implementer group. The Observers group participants have agreed to share program data, documents, and policies with DEL. This group has also agreed to permit DEL to collect data during site visits and interviews. However, unlike the Implementers, the Observers have chosen not to pursue full-day classroom options, and will not be monitored for compliance with new licensing rules designed for outdoor preschool programs.

### Next Steps

Both DEL and the pilot project participants will review and analyze both the current child care licensing rules for center and family home child care (chapter 170-295 and 170-296A WAC, respectively) and the forthcoming draft licensing rules (chapter 170-300 WAC) to develop a common set of licensing rules tailored for outdoor preschool programs. To ensure relevance and inclusiveness of this review process, DEL will reach out to a diverse group of community members to ask for input on the pilot project including tribes, communities and stakeholders of color, families and parents, and stakeholders with a special interest in outdoor preschools. Through this review, DEL, the programs participants, and stakeholders will determine which licensing rules would need to be adopted, waived, or adapted to ensure outdoor preschool programs will meet the same high quality standards of current licensed child care programs in Washington state. DEL aims to file and publish new licensing rules specific to outdoor preschools by August 2018. The rules will go into effect as soon as possible after filing and will remain in effect until the termination of the pilot project, at which time DEL may seek permanent authority from the legislature to license outdoor preschools.



DEL recently hired two new full-time employees to administer the pilot project.<sup>6</sup> These employees will coordinate data and policy analysis and provide technical assistance and professional learning activity supports with an emphasis on licensing and Early Achievers. As part of this project, the agency intends to develop and enhance high quality, comprehensive, and interconnected licensing and Early Achiever's

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<sup>5</sup> Tiny Trees has elected to participate in both the Implementer and Observer cohorts, with five sites in the Observers cohort. See Appendix A and Appendix B for a visual representation of the pilot project cohorts.

<sup>6</sup> A Program Specialist 5 and a Program Specialist 3.

systems within the outdoor, nature-based framework. The pilot's administrative staff will develop, research, and maintain data-driven programmatic systems to support this work. Finally, the team will also engage community partners, stakeholders, and outside special interest groups in the development and review of baseline standards and of quality improvement guidelines.

Beginning in January, 2018, the project's team will visit each of the pilot project sites to observe and critically assess each program's unique approach to child development, educational philosophy, health and safety policies, emergency preparedness plans and other relevant program operations. Scheduled visits will allow DEL staff to explore program practices, conduct semi-structured interviews of staff, and observe outdoor classrooms in order to better understand the similarities and differences among the programs in meeting health, safety, and developmental needs of children.

DEL intends to include the following topics when providing orientation to outdoor preschool pilot project participants:

- Overview of the Revised Code of Washington (RCW) and draft outdoor preschool WACs
- MERIT, Washington state's professional workforce development registry
- Portable background checks, pursuant to chapter [170-06](#) WAC
- Requirements for licensed providers to receive child care subsidies
- Requirements for licensed providers to accurately track attendance within the state's new electronic attendance system
- Requirements of the federal Child Care and Development Fund
- Enrollment requirements of the Early Achievers program

DEL outdoor preschool pilot staff, in coordination with OPAG, will work closely with the Early Achiever's program to implement the quality rating system in a manner that adequately measures outdoor preschool environments. A review of the Environment Rating Scale will be completed and decisions will be made to exclude this instrument or replace with a tool that adequately measures quality in outdoor settings. A review and analysis of the national best practices for outdoor programs will also be taken under consideration.

## **Goals for the First Year**

By the culmination of the pilot's first year, DEL plans to successfully license ten Implementer outdoor preschool sites, monitor pilot participant compliance with newly developed licensing rules, offer technical assistance to help program participants meet these standards, and prepare pilot projects for enhanced quality improvement. DEL also aims to allow programs to offer full day slots, providing equitable access to all families who choose outdoor programs for their children.

## Next Report

DEL is next required to submit a brief status report to the legislature on January 15, 2019. This report will be submitted by the new Department of Children, Youth, and Families, where the child care licensing division will reside after July 1, 2018.



## APPENDIX A

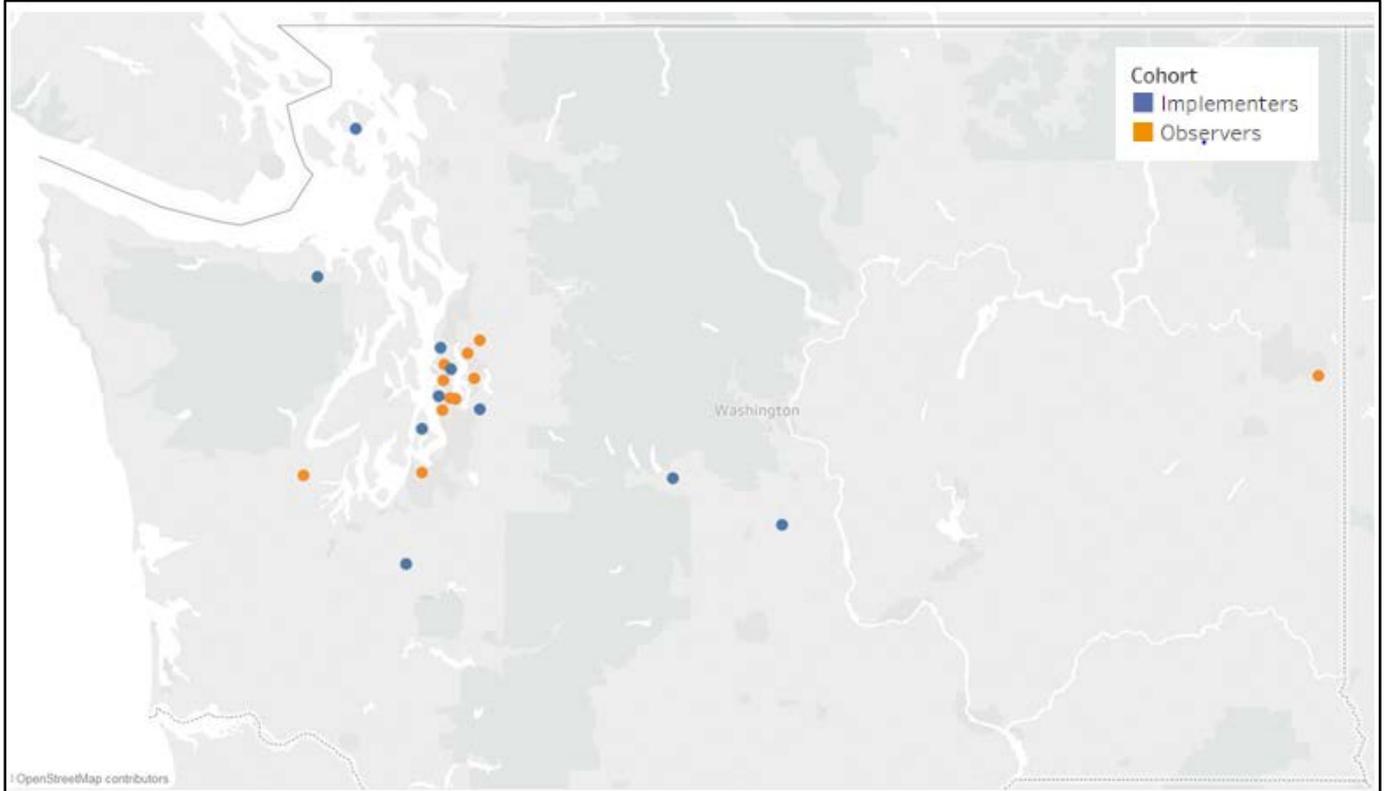
### Participant Chart

<b>Implementers cohort</b>	<b>Sites</b>	<b>Location</b>
ACORNS NW	1	Olympia
Tiny Trees	3	King County
Orcas Island Forest School	1	Orcas Island
Washington Outdoor School	2	Roslyn & Ellensburg
Fiddleheads Forest School	1	Seattle
Cedarsong Nature School	1	Vashon Island
Owl's Hollow Nature School	1	Carlsborg
<b>Total sites</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>Across the state</b>

<b>Observers cohort</b>	<b>Sites</b>	<b>Location</b>
Polliwog Preschool	1	Bellevue
Nurture in Nature Preschool	1	Tacoma
Fremont Community School	1	Seattle
Roots and Sky Nature School	1	Seattle
Into the Forest Preschool	1	Spokane
KinderGarden in the Garden	1	Woodinville
Tiny Trees	5	King County
Squaxin Island Child Development Center	1	Shelton
<b>Total sites</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>Across the state</b>

## APPENDIX B

### Participant Map



## APPENDIX C

### Pilot Project Participant Testimonials<sup>i</sup>

**ACORNS NW (various locations in Olympia, WA area).** A Cooperative Outdoor Revolutionary Nature School Northwest (ACORNS NW) is a non-profit program currently in the process of becoming a 501(c)(3). We serve a total of 33 children (including eight children with special needs), ages 2 to 5 years old, and 30 families. We are a nature- and earth-based experiential learning program. We seek to help nurture and restore connection to the natural world through exploration, play, observation, and community. It is our hope that prioritizing a connection to nature and building a relationship in the ways we learn, grow, teach, share, and live, that we will create more inclusive and sustainable futures for all beings. ACORNS NW Forest School was co-founded in November 2015 as a homeschool enrichment program by two queer women, Heather McKenna and Kendra Obom. Our hope and vision is to create accessible nature connection programming for the Olympia and Thurston County community. For the past two years, Ms. McKenna and Obom have acted as the directors on a mostly volunteer basis with the hope of providing affordable programming and meaningful employment within their community. In 2016, Melissa Fassbender and Allan Davis helped found the preschool program, which has grown into ACORNS NW most active program. The ACORNS NW community seeks cooperative and justice-based approaches to both social and environmental issues, and continues to grow its capacity to deliver alternative education and nature-based community for all ages.

**Cedarsong Nature School (Vashon Island, WA).** This program is a 501(c)(3), non-profit entity and currently serves 25 families with enrolled children from two to six years old. An additional ten families are currently on the waitlist, mostly for two year old children. In addition, each class accommodates up to two children diagnosed with high functioning autism, ADHD, or SPD. Cedarsong Forest Kindergarten is 100% outdoors for four hours no matter what the weather, there is no indoor space on the Cedarsong campus. The most distinguishing feature is that we are committed to unstructured flow learning for the entire time the children are with us. There is no schedule, no agenda, no pre-set activities, and no direct teacher instruction. We use inquiry-based teaching to draw out children's problem-solving. We emphasize compassion, respect, and mindfulness towards each other and towards the natural world. We are also a physical therapy and sensory integration program because these kids thrive with the lack of transitions at our school. With licensing, we could serve families that need all-day coverage and families who need financial assistance. We already provide a number of scholarships through our fundraising, but the need keeps increasing and we are having a hard time keeping up with requests.

**Fiddleheads Forest School (University of Washington, Seattle, WA).** Fiddleheads Forest School was established at the Washington Park Arboretum, a public park in the city of Seattle, in 2013. Fiddleheads was the first entirely outdoor preschool in Seattle and one of the first urban outdoor preschools in the country. In 2017, Fiddleheads served over 80 families of children ages 3-5 in our morning, afternoon, and summer school programs, and has 176 families on our annual waitlist with children ages 3-5. Flexibility is a cornerstone of the Fiddleheads philosophy. Our program is as responsive as the

environment in which we operate. Teachers take into account a variety of factors including the weather, the wildlife, and the children themselves when determining the direction of the day. On any given day at Fiddleheads, students spend the morning exploring and engaging with their environment in a multitude of ways that is unique to our specific space. At Fiddleheads we believe strongly in empowering students to guide their own learning process, and work to help each of them develop the tools to do just that through use of a curriculum that expressly teaches self-regulation. We have found that the forest grove classroom is uniquely suited to helping children develop these skills through exposure to gradual, contextual change. Fiddleheads pioneered the outdoor preschool approach in Seattle and continue to lead the field both regionally and nationally. We established the Washington Nature Preschool Association to help support the field regionally, and work with the Natural Start Alliance to develop national standards of best practice. Our seasonal approach arises out of the unique relationship between, children, families, and the environment, and emphasizes the development of self-regulation and natural science skills. Becoming licensed would help set a standard of practice in the field and allow us to reach a greater diversity of families in and around the Seattle area.

**Fremont Community School (Seattle, WA).** The Fremont Community School (FCS) serves 60 children, ages 2.5 to 5 years old, and 90 families. FCS is a multi-age preschool that allows children to choose to be inside or outside during the four hours they are at school. Tara Katz, the Director and Lead Teacher, is trained in Waldorf Education and has merged this creative educational impulse with other educational philosophies. As an outdoor school in the heart of Seattle's Wallingford neighborhood, we strive to create an atmosphere of open-ended play. Children play outside rain or shine. When it's raining children are suited up in raingear and boots and allowed to wallow in mud and create streams, dams, and bridges. Open ended tree stumps, wood planks and branches, bricks, stones and sand allow imaginations to run free. Old fig trees with their suitable branches allow children to climb and test muscle strength and ability. Our outdoor classroom, the "Beehive," allows us to sew, draw, create crafts, and even eat outside in all types of weather. Our farmhouse gives the younger children, our "Ladybugs," a warm retreat when needed. Teachers are trained to work along-side the children collaboratively, sparking enthusiasm through ideas brought to bear. Gardening, caring for our chickens, and earth stewardship teach the children that the earth and its creatures are ours to protect and honor. We prepare our food daily from scratch and it is organic and vegetarian. FCS would like to be able to offer a longer day to our families so that we could have the time to go further on our hikes, and, more than anything, be able to reach a wider, more economically diverse population by being able to accept DSHS assistance. Currently our financial aid is self-funded and does not allow for many lower income families to take advantage of our extraordinary school.

**Into the Forest Preschool (Spokane, WA).** We are a licensed childcare facility that offers outdoor learning. We serve 15 children and 15 families. We opened our facility in hopes to create a program that blends the Reggio Approach and Waldorf Theory; focusing on a nature-infused learning environment with real life experiences. We also bring nature inside for learning. We believe children learn best through experiences of touching, moving, listening, and observing—when they have control over the direction of their learning. A child's self-confidence and self-esteem are built when they can explore and make their own decisions while being supported by peers and teachers. Our classrooms resemble

homelike environments and use simple and natural materials, which allow children to immerse themselves in imaginative and creative play and learning. We also offer a safe place for children to explore and problem-solve in outdoor adventures. This strengthens the connection between children and the natural world. Everyday this outdoor program offers many opportunities for unplanned learning, such as watching birds build a nest or a hummingbird drink nectar from a flower. We want to build a solid foundation of healthy living habits that children can take with them as they grow and learn. Right now, we are unable to have or do a lot of the things we want to do, things that we know benefit a child's learning tremendously. We are participating in the pilot project to see if we can help change the standards in this area to allow such natural learning.

**KinderGarden in the Garden (Woodinville, WA).** KinderGarden in the Garden (KGiG) is dedicated to early learners and pre-K. Classrooms are Seedlings, Sprouts, Blossoms enroll children from 2 to 6 years old. "Getting Our Babies Right" is our core value, which includes sharing nature and farming immersion. In this way, children can learn to shift from being passive citizens to active stewards. KGiG is a progressive learning space that is responsive to each unique, brilliant child and their needs. We offer 'edible education' in an outdoor learning classroom by connecting our Garden Stars to the soil and teaching stewardship and sustainability, and health and wellness. We believe that healthy childhoods start with healthy communities, and healthy communities start with healthy childhoods. Our special focus is on children of color and drawing connections between the group histories, community values, true freedom to be brilliant and expressive cultures of our kiddos and the environment we all share to foster ecological awareness and critical environmental thinking. KGiG links cultural wisdom with planetary realities made evident by nature and encourages social change for the betterment of our natural world and future of all people within it. To help shape that change and provide an alternative to popular consumption oriented American culture. KGiG strives to create and encourage cultural production by and about children of color that illustrates the interconnectedness of people, nature and reveals the worth strength and promise of everyone.

**Nurture in Nature Preschool (Tacoma, WA).** Nurture in Nature Preschool is based at the Tacoma Nature Center, which is a facility of Metro Parks Tacoma. Our mission is to provide a high-quality early childhood environment that meets preschoolers' needs, while inspiring them to love nature. We serve 60 children ages 3-6 years old during the school year in five different sections (from 60 families) and 12 pre-K students in summer school (from 12 families). With over 70 acres of natural area, several dedicated indoor and outdoor school spaces, and outstanding teachers and staff, this hands-on learning program allows children to learn and grow at their own pace. We encourage their endless curiosity and plant the seeds to help them become lifelong learners. Our emergent child-inspired curriculum often follows the changing seasons. Although traditional academic skills and opportunities are part of our school, they are definitely not the focus. Our philosophy is that preschoolers grow and learn how to be part of a community through play, discovery, and learning. When their brain is ready, they will naturally gravitate towards more academic pursuits.

**Olympic Nature Experience (Sequim, WA).** Olympic Nature Experience is a non-profit located in Sequim, Washington surrounded by the beautiful Olympic Peninsula. Our preschool programs run four days a

week and serve 44 children, ages 3-6 years old, from 25 families. Several children are on the Autism and Sensory Processing Spectrum, and many of whom were not successful in indoor classroom settings due to their high energy or need for autonomy. Our organization also runs programs a family play group, summer camps, after school programs, and homeschool enrichment classes for children from birth to age 12 years old. The backbone of our school's philosophy has developed from Wilderness Awareness School's nature connection model, which uses children's passions, emergent curriculum, and flexible activities to educate, inspire, and empower children. To ensure our children are meeting Early Learning standards and are Kindergarten Ready, we have created an in house Waldorf-inspired curriculum and an educational framework that incorporates the five standard Head Start domains. We added our own sixth domain, called Earth Wisdom which incorporates ideas of connection to place, systems thinking, community building and personal empowerment. By connecting children with their local environment, they are learning the age appropriate math, literacy, and cognition skills but with an everyday context that gives the world around them greater relevance.

Becoming licensed would benefit our programs by ensuring our staff has the support and training to meet the national and statewide standards that will set our students up for success no matter what their continued learning path takes. Additionally, allowing our programs to offer before- or after-care, or additional hours when appropriate and safe, could open our programs up to more families who are interested in our model. If we could access state funding for low income families, we could also decrease the heavy burden our organization has undertaken to ensure we have enough tuition assistance to meet the needs of our community.

**Orcas Island Forest School (Orcas Island, WA).** Orcas Island Forest School is a registered 501(c)(3) non-profit located at Camp Orkila on Orcas Island with 16 currently enrolled children, 3-5 years old (with two students currently on a waitlist), from 15 families. Through a unique partnership with Camp Orkila, our program is able to provide a stunning forest, meadow, and seascape learning niche for our students. Here, children become intimately connected to their local ecology and history throughout seasonal changes. We believe the natural environment is an ideal classroom for cultivating the mind, body, emotions, and spirit of every child. The Forest School model gives young children an opportunity to develop a sense of wonder towards the natural world, and fosters compassion and empathy for the earth and its creatures. When given the time and space to play, children learn how to draw upon their innate curiosity to observe and make sense of their world. Using an emergent learning approach, we listen and observe children as they play, determine their deep interests, and then offer a plan to help them expand and grow. Research shows that children who are immersed in nature are healthier, able to think more clearly, have an easier time paying attention, and cope more effectively with stress. Our students will have the opportunity to work through physical challenges and risks of the natural environment to develop independence, self-confidence, and resilience.

**Polliwog Preschool (Bellevue, WA).** Polliwog Preschool is a play- and nature-based preschool at the Mercer Slough Environmental Education Center in Bellevue. Now entering its seventh year, the program is a collaboration between the Pacific Science Center in Seattle and the City of Bellevue. At Polliwog, we believe that the natural world is an ideal catalyst for discovery and an amazing medium to lay a

foundation for the love of learning. While we have indoor classroom space, we spend 50-90% of our day exploring the outdoors in the 320-acre wetland park. Polliwog Preschool has three part-time classes, with 12 kids, age 3-5 years old, in each class. We currently serve 36 total families. Last year, we were only able to offer enrollment space to about 40% of families who applied. Polliwog Preschool uses the natural world as the guiding theme to frame our core curriculum areas of science, art, music, math, language and literacy. The program is play-based and student-driven with a combination of activity choices, discovery explorations, and specific activities that relate to each week's theme. With a 320 acre wetland as our classroom, "Polliwogs" have the opportunity to hike through the forest, dip for creatures in a pond, investigate the flow of a stream, wander through meadows, and bounce on a bog. Currently, we're not sure whether licensure is the right decision for Polliwog, but as one of King County's oldest nature preschools, we look forward to sharing knowledge gained from our years of experience with the rest of the pilot project.

**Squaxin Island Child Development Center (near Shelton, WA).** Squaxin Island Child Development Center is a for-profit entity owned by the non-profit Squaxin Island Tribe. The center is licensed for 112 children, infants through 8 years old. There are currently 55 children enrolled in the preschool rooms, age 30 months through 5 years old, from 50 families. Three children have special needs and are currently being served in special needs programs. The center has a waiting list with 5 children, ages 4 months to 4 years old from 5 families. The center has unique features both indoor and outdoor that standard child care centers lack. First, the Squaxin Tribe has a swimming pool and provides weekly swimming for all pre-school aged children. Since the center is located near many lakes and streams as well as Puget Sound, it is important for children to learn how to swim. The center is located in a naturally forested setting that includes a "culturally modified cedar tree" as a focal point that the building is constructed around. There is an established trail that goes out into a forested setting with tall maple, fir, and cedar trees. There are also two fresh water streams passing through within which children can observe salmon go up each fall to spawn.

Our program is unique in that we honor and celebrate what "Mother Earth" gives us. We have our own garden beds where the children actively engage in the planting and harvesting of crops that are used in the food services program. We link with the Squaxin Community Garden staff and staff from Community Development to teach the children the value and importance of recycling and composting. Fruit trees were donated to establish our own orchard. The pumpkins we grow are used each fall for a National Pumpkin Day Celebration and apples are harvested for pressing into cider. The highlight of our program is the annual First Salmon Celebration. The children are involved in drumming, dancing and celebrating the arrival of the first salmon. Tribal elders and leaders come and share stories about the life of the salmon and the children honor the salmon by respectfully returning part of the salmon back to the water to let other salmon they are welcome here. If outdoor classrooms receive licensing as a part of this process, it would enhance our outdoor and beyond-the-fence experiences and opportunities, as well as allow us to serve more children.

**Tiny Trees Preschool (several locations throughout King County, WA).** Tiny Trees is a 501(c)(3) non-profit based in Seattle with seven classroom sites throughout King County (and seven more sites

opening in the fall of 2018). 265 children, ages 3-5 years old, from 265 families attend daily classes. An additional 3,450 children are on our waitlist. Tiny Trees uses the High Scope curriculum, which incorporates evidence-based practices to provide the highest quality learning environment for our children. High Scope is a preferred curriculum of Head Start and Seattle Preschool Program facilities. Tiny Trees also makes preschool affordable by eliminating the cost of building, renovating, and maintaining a child care facility. We break down the schoolhouse walls and take the classroom outdoors. This means that instead of spending a huge amount on bricks and mortar, we spend money on what matters: hiring and supporting great teachers. Tiny Trees is a scale up of an innovative, proven concept. Started in Europe, outdoor preschools have shown to be healthier, more affordable and able to reach great academic outcomes. Tiny Trees is modeled after outdoor preschools in Norway, Germany and Denmark, three countries where the weather can get really cold. Tiny Trees also helps kids enter kindergarten ready to thrive. We help children learn to read, succeed at math and explore the wild where they receive both a world class science education and a gleefully muddy childhood: one full of play, exploration, and wonder in the great outdoors. Full day classes are a must for working families. Becoming a licensed child care provider would allow Tiny Trees the ability to offer students and families a higher quality environment, improved health and safety, and greater ability for low income families to work.

**Washington Outdoor School (Roslyn and Ellensburg, WA).** The Washington Outdoor School is a 501(c)(3) non-profit, based in Roslyn, Washington, that serves children from 2.5 to 6 years old in morning programs. Our programs currently serve approximately 45 children from 30 families in Kittitas County during fall, winter, and spring seasons, and we maintain a low student-to-teacher ratio. Our all-outdoor settings include forested trails—some more maintained than others (we come across fallen trees at times)—sandstone outcroppings, and seasonal creeks and streams in Roslyn. In Ellensburg, Helen McCabe State Park has a large pond and is skirted by a rushing creek, which makes its way to the Yakima River through a canyon. The landscape changes quite dramatically through the seasons. Access is easy along parts of the pond trail in late fall through winter, but the difficulty increases in the spring when grasses grow taller than the children. Two Crack Oak trees in the park are favorite places for the children to climb, and we spend a lot of time in and around them throughout the year. It is not unusual for us to walk more than a mile a day in both locations and sometimes much more than that in Roslyn.

Our mission is to cultivate a child's sense of wonder through immersion in the natural world. We believe that interacting with nature encourages a sense and knowledge of place, awakens curiosity and creates healthy minds and bodies. Our work is based on the core values of strong communities, equal access to outdoor adventures, and stewardship of our natural world. Our approach to education is child-interest led with an emphasis on experiencing each day in the moment—noticing changes and building on previous experiences. The natural world provides our curriculum for the day. We are about exploration, play, building positive relationships with each other and the world around us, and experiencing what the natural world has to offer, which cultivates an attitude of joy and wonder within each child. We infuse experiences with relevant books, stories, songs, and activities. These experiences can include journal writing, crafts, and, in Roslyn, planting and tending to garden spaces. Being licensed by the Department of Early Learning would validate our type of program and communicate to families that programs like

the Washington Outdoor School provide viable preschool options for kindergarten readiness. We seek to provide equal access to outdoor adventures, but many families in Kittitas County struggle to afford early learning programs for their children. As a DEL licensed program, families could use state subsidies toward tuition, which would allow our program to better serve our economically diverse community.

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<sup>1</sup> Statements were provided by the pilot program participants and reflect the opinion of those independent entities, and not necessarily the opinion of the Department of Early Learning.