



STATE LEVEL EFFORTS TO ADVANCE CHILDREN'S EQUITABLE ACCESS TO NATURE

Cities Connecting Children to Nature

NLC NATIONAL LEAGUE OF CITIES
CITIES STRONG TOGETHER

Children's Nature Network

STRATEGY

Engage cities within a region or state to work collaboratively at the state level to expand access to high-quality green spaces and increase policies and programs that support nature-based experiences for children.

KEY BENEFITS

- Opportunities for cities to leverage regional and state partners and resources in support of local strategies to connect children to nature more equitably
- Opportunities for cities across a regional or state to collectively advocate for state policies and resources to bring nature connection to their local communities

EQUITABLE CONNECTION TO NATURE AT THE STATE LEVEL

Several states have implemented successful policies, programs, and infrastructure improvements that gained attention and are ripe for replication. These state actions can support local city efforts to expand nature access for children.

EXAMPLE OF STATE PATHWAYS FOR SUCCESS:	DESCRIPTION:	STATES WHERE IMPLEMENTED (AS OF 2022):	
Infrastructure improvements that increase high-quality natural spaces with an eye towards equity.	Provide licensing of outdoor schools for children and the establishment of outdoor state outdoor recreation offices.	Alaska Indiana New Mexico	Texas Utah Washington
Investment in new or expanded programs that draw children and families to natural spaces.	Support initiatives to ensure "no child is left inside."	Minnesota Nevada Washington	
	Create new funding mechanisms to ensure future resources are available for programs.	Colorado New Mexico California	
Policies and formal practices to get kids outdoors and promote environmental awareness.	Pass legislation to develop comprehensive strategic plans to get kids outdoors, promote environmental literacy and establish graduation requirements that include environmental education.	Maryland Maine New Hampshire	Oklahoma Oregon

EMERGING EXAMPLES OF REGIONAL, STATE NATURE PRIORITIZATION AND ACTIVATION

Statewide Outdoor Policies, Programs, and Infrastructure

A change in statewide policy and funding for outdoor, nature access can lead to additional resources and opportunities for cities and local efforts. Examples include:

- California, Colorado, Minnesota, New Mexico, Washington, and Utah have all enacted bills to establish outdoor equity funds ranging from nearly one million to 57 million dollars for state-administered micro-grants to local governments and nonprofits led by black, indigenous, and people of color to run outdoor recreation and education programs that prioritize youth of color. New Mexico State Representative Angelica Rubio, who championed the [Outdoor Equity Fund](#), went on to secure one percent of the state's total American Recovery Plan Act package to place an outdoor learning coordinator in every school.
- At least two states, Colorado and Minnesota, have used dedicated funding to make grants available for the addition of public parks and green spaces. Both draw upon their state lottery as sources of funding. Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's current yearly budget includes a study to determine the potential for historic, scenic, and/or recreational trails to be created in Texas and to identify potential partners for creation of the trails. Georgia introduced a similar study bill, which is pending approval.



State Nature Connection Strategy - OLE! Texas

In Texas, over 30 percent of children between the ages of two and four are already overweight or obese. The statistic led the Texas State Department of Health Services (DSHS) to adopt [Outdoor Learning Environments](#) (OLE) as a key strategy to improve the health of children. The state program strives to increase physical activity through outdoor design and play in early childcare centers. DSHS serves as the backbone organization distributing resources and subgrants to five locales in Texas that implement the program. OLE! Texas is supported with national funding from the Centers For Disease Control and Prevention. The project also engages the Natural Learning Initiative in the College of Design at North Carolina State University, who developed the Obesity by Design model as a key partner. The Harris County Health Department, along with eighteen key organizations, added OLE into their Healthy Living Matters Coalition and improved local early childhood education in three of their communities. A coalition at Texas Tech University in Lubbock trained 26 design professionals on best practices for creating natural learning environments and then went on to design and install natural learning environments at early childcare centers across the city.

HOW TO ENGAGE

FIND RESOURCES

Explore the CCCN Resource Hub, www.childrenandnature.org/cccn offering a Municipal Action Guide, planning materials, and strategy tools.

GET CONNECTED

Sign up for the CCCN newsletter at www.childrenandnature.org/cccn and follow [#citykids2nature](#).

Cities Connecting Children to Nature (CCCN) is an initiative of the National League of Cities and the Children & Nature Network, made possible with support from The JPB Foundation. CCCN helps city leaders and their partners ensure equitable opportunities for children to play, learn and grow in nature, from urban parks and community gardens to the great outdoors. Find more planning resources at the [CCCN Resource Hub](#).