
Outdoor and Nature-Based Early Care and Education Resource Library

The following resources provide valuable information for public agencies, early care and education providers, funders, advocates, and others interested in moving ONB ECE efforts forward. Please contact Very Feeny at the National League of Cities (feeny@nlc.org) or David Beard at the Children & Nature Network (david@childrenandnature.org) for questions or more information.

Policy-Focused Resources

1. Children & Nature Network and National League of Cities [Early Childhood Nature Connections - State Policy Brief](#): *This brief highlights the complex, interconnected framework of federal, state, and local policies that affect everything from how programs are funded to their standards of operation and who is eligible to be served.*
2. National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) [State Policies and Guidance Relating to Outdoor and Nature-Based Experiences in Preschool](#): *This brief considers the potential benefits of outdoor and nature-based experiences in preschool and reviews the current state policies to assess the extent to which these might facilitate or present barriers to implementing outdoor and nature-based experiences in state-funded preschool. The brief also offers recommendations for improvements in state policies to facilitate outdoor and nature-based experiences in state-funded preschools.*
3. National Wildlife Federation's Early Childhood Health Outdoors (NWF - ECHO) and New America's Early & Elementary Education Policy [A New Day for Outdoor Play in Child Care: State Policy Recommendations](#): *This policy brief provides recommendations for a winning strategy for state leaders to promote healthy child development, support the early childhood workforce, and enhance health equity in communities.*
4. National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) [Potential Inclusion of Outdoor Preschool in State-Funded Programs](#): *This brief examines including outdoor preschool as an option in state-funded preschool programs and subsidized child care. The brief provides an overview of outdoor Pre-K in Washington State and includes considerations about including outdoor preschool in publicly funded programs for other states.*
5. Natural Learning Initiative: [Policy Brief: Achieving Quality in Outdoor Play & Learning Environments for Children Birth to Five](#): *This policy brief is directed to those trying to improve the quality of outdoor spaces in childcare/child development centers, to create vital*

health-promoting places for rich early childhood education (ECE). Relevant early childhood environmental education frameworks and environmental assessment tools that recognize the importance of outdoor play and learning environmental quality are described. Exemplary strategies for sustainability and guidelines for achieving minimum levels of quality are discussed. Key actions required to achieve progress in outdoor play and learning environments are proposed.

Public Systems and Licensing Resources

6. Capita-Aspen Institute [US Early Years Climate Action Plan](#): *The Early Years Climate Action Task Force, an effort of This Is Planet Ed with the Aspen Institute and Capita, released the U.S. Early Years Climate Action Plan, Flourishing Children, Healthy Communities and a Stronger Nation.*
7. Food Research Action Center [Federal Funding Opportunities for Farm-to-Table ECE](#): *Farm ECE includes a range of activities and approaches that connect young children and their families to local food, hands-on gardening opportunities, and food and agriculture education. This guide provides functional descriptions of timely funding streams and highlights case examples of how entities across the country are creatively leveraging funding streams for farm to ECE.*
8. National League of Cities [Considerations for Leaders: The Intersection of Early Childhood and Environmental Impacts](#): *Climate and environmental health risks to children are increasingly recognized as an international problem by leaders across the early childhood field. Due to their size, physiology, and behavior, children are more vulnerable than adults to environmental hazards such as climate change. This brief provides an agenda for early childhood development to limit the impacts that climate change will have on children throughout their lives.*
9. Natural Start Alliance: [State Progress toward ONB Licensing Policy](#): *The ability to license nature-based and outdoor preschools has significant implications for regulation, implementation, and access to outdoor and nature-based (ONB) early learning experiences across the spectrum of early care and education. To support awareness, advocacy, and engagement with ONB Preschool and Childcare Licensing Policy Efforts, the Natural Start Alliance tracks the progress of ONB licensing policy and advocacy around the country. The ONB Licensing Policy Map provides an overview of ONB licensing efforts and links to various licensing-related resources.*
10. National Wildlife Federation's Early Childhood Health Outdoors (ECHO) and New America's Early & Elementary Education Policy: [Improving Outdoor Learning in Child Care: A Health Equity Strategy](#): *This brief provides state and federal policy recommendations to build outdoor learning opportunities that help young children thrive. These policy recommendations can help state and federal leaders promote healthy child development, support the early childhood workforce, and enhance health equity in communities.*

Practitioner, Implementation, and Research Resources

11. American Academy of Pediatrics: [Nature and Children's Health: A Systematic Review](#) (2021) *The American Academy of Pediatrics has long recognized the importance of play and has encouraged outdoor play to promote children's health and social-emotional development. Recent studies have demonstrated that a broad range of outcomes are related to access to and contact with nature, including increased physical activity, reduced obesity, decreased stress, and improved mental health. For these reasons, promoting nature contact and ensuring equitable access to green spaces could play a role in improving health outcomes and behaviors, as well as reducing health disparities.*
12. Children & Nature Network [Research Library](#): *This search tool includes curated and summarized peer-reviewed scientific literature that makes the case for connecting children with nature. The curation of research is guided by a Scientific Advisory Council, a multi-disciplinary team of experts who bring diverse perspectives to our work. The search function allows inquiries based on several potential data points, including age, setting, geographic location, and more.*
13. National League of Cities and Children & Nature Network [CCCN Early Childhood Nature Connections Toolkit](#): *Many cities are eager to find ways to bring nature's benefits to young children where they live, play, and learn. They understand the research: providing young children, ages 0 – 5, with regular access to nature improves physical and mental health, develops social-emotional skills, and better prepares children for school. The tools and resources compiled below help cities and partners achieve these goals with a particular focus on equity so all children, regardless of race or income, can access nature's benefits.*
14. Natural Learning Initiative [Preschool Outdoor Play and Learning Environments Best Practice Toolkit, \(2nd Ed.\)](#): *The toolkit is a guide for implementing POD (Preventing Obesity by Design), launched in 2006 by the Natural Learning Initiative. The original focus, to modify the built environment to support physical activity and healthy eating, was gradually expanded, driven by scientific evidence and community concern, to include outdoor learning, social-emotional development, and mental health. POD is based on the North Carolina Division of Child Development and Early Learning policy to transform each childcare center "playground" into a health-promoting, naturalized Outdoor Learning Environment or childhood habitat—children, plants, and animals living together naturally.*
15. Natural Learning Initiative [Research Brief: Impact of Naturalized Early Childhood Outdoor Learning Environments](#): *This Research Brief was created to highlight the importance of bringing nature play and learning to every community. It identifies several ways naturalized outdoor learning environments, or natural play and learning places, benefit children's physical health, social-emotional growth, cognitive growth, and more.*
16. Natural Start Alliance [Nature-Based Preschool Professional Practices Guidebook](#). *The Guidebook is an essential resource for teachers, administrators, parents, policymakers, licensing agents, or anyone who needs to know how nature-based education professionals operate programs that are safe, effective, and inclusive. Although the practices are focused on programs serving preschool-age children (ages 3-5), the practices are relevant to programs serving early*

elementary students or infants and toddlers. The practices are organized into four areas of practice: teaching, environments, safety, and administration.

17. Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) [Nature-Based Learning Competencies Supplement for Early Care and Education Professionals](#): *This Supplement to the Core Competencies for Early Care and Education Professionals highlights the unique aspects of the nature-based learning experience, and establishes expectations for educators and administrators who offer this type of learning environment. This guide was developed by a working group of DCYF staff, stakeholders, tribal partners, and experts in nature-based and nature-centered early childhood education.*
18. Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) [Outdoor Preschool Pilot Final Report](#): *The Washington State Outdoor Preschool Pilot (2017-2021) is the first program in the nation to successfully develop state licensing requirements and processes for outdoor, nature-based early learning and child care programs, expanding access to safe and high-quality child care and education. Learn more about the pilot and recommendations for permanently implementing outdoor licensed preschool and child care.*

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