

WAC 110-300D-0005 Findings and intent. (1) Under section 1, chapter 162, Laws of 2017, the legislature made the following findings:

(a) Over the past decade, more than forty outdoor, nature-based early-learning and child care programs have opened in Washington, several of which are in high demand based on existing waitlists;

(b) These programs are currently unlicensed and unable to offer full-day programs, which many working families are seeking;

(c) Unlicensed outdoor programs are also unable to serve families who are eligible to receive assistance through the department's working connections child care program;

(d) The outdoor preschool model could help expand the number of high quality early learning opportunities available to families throughout Washington, particularly in areas where preschool-appropriate indoor space is unavailable or unaffordable;

(e) When early learning programs spend less on physical facilities, they are able to spend more on recruiting and retaining teachers and other early learning professionals; and

(f) Research on outdoor preschools operating in Scandinavian countries for decades has demonstrated a positive impact on children's development, including improved cognitive and social skills when children transition to grade school.

(2) Based on the findings described in this section the legislature declared its intent to establish a pilot project to license outdoor preschools in order 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.

(3) The data collected from the pilot project will be evaluated by the department to determine whether an outdoor preschool program in Washington can be implemented, consistent with the intent and purposes of chapter 43.216 RCW, to provide access to affordable, high quality early learning programs.

[Statutory Authority: RCW 43.216.055, 43.216.065, 43.216.740 and chapter 43.216 RCW. WSR 19-07-021, § 110-300D-0005, filed 3/12/19, effective 4/12/19.]