



**naaee**

North American Association  
for Environmental Education  
1725 DeSales St. NW, Ste. 401  
Washington, DC 20036

February 7, 2022

Maryland House Ways and Means Committee  
House Office Building  
6 Bladen St.  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

**RE: Support for HB 376: Outdoor Preschool Licensing Pilot**

Dear Members of the Maryland House Ways and Means Committee:

The North American Association for Environmental Education (NAAEE) is pleased to join with partners and colleagues throughout Maryland, and across the country, in expressing enthusiastic support for HB 376, which would establish a pilot program to license outdoor preschools in Maryland.

Maryland has long been a leader in providing outdoor learning opportunities to students across the state in its K-12 system, and this legislation would extend that commitment, and its benefits, to the state's youngest learners.

Research overwhelmingly confirms that nature and outdoor learning provide a wide range of benefits to children's healthy development, including:

- Promoting physical activity and physical development,
- Boosting children's mental health,
- Promoting the development of self-regulation skills,
- Improving academic performance, and
- Reducing stress.

Because of these benefits, nature-based, outdoor preschools in the United States have experienced dramatic growth across the US, growing 25-fold over the past decade according to NAAEE research. There are now nearly 700 such schools across the US, and they are available in nearly every state.

Unfortunately, the same research reveals that these benefits are not equally available to all children. Children of color, multiple language learners, and children with disabilities are all under-represented in nature-based programs today. Licensing outdoor preschools could provide greater, and more equitable, access to this innovative and effective approach to early childhood education.



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NAAEE closely monitored and supported similar legislation in Washington State, which established a pilot program to license outdoor preschools in the state. The outcomes of that pilot were very positive, with the state expanding access to outdoor learning for young children while demonstrating that the pilot outdoor programs effectively ensured child safety and kindergarten readiness. As a result, in 2021 Washington adopted legislation to permanently authorize the state's Department of Children, Youth, and Families to license outdoor preschool programs. We believe Maryland can leverage the research and licensing standards developed in the Washington pilot to bolster and streamline an outdoor preschool pilot in Maryland.

The dramatic growth in popularity in outdoor learning for young children reflects the effectiveness of these programs. All families in Maryland should have the opportunity to choose outdoor learning for their children. We encourage you to support HB 376 to provide safe, effective, and inclusive outdoor education options to Maryland families with young children.

Sincerely,

Judy Braus  
Executive Director