

## Rationale for Learning Outside

Oregon’s experience with the COVID-19 global pandemic is dynamic and tactics to address this challenge continually adjust as our knowledge and circumstances change. This includes integrating new learning about how the disease spreads and new information regarding the effectiveness of safety protocols. Given the urgency of returning our children to in-person instruction, **Oregon has a substantial opportunity to use outside spaces as a strategic, equitable, and innovative approach** to ensuring more children have access to high-quality in-person instruction. Using outside space offers a unique opportunity to provide:

- access to technology and technology supports;
- social emotional support;
- access to food;
- academic support;
- safe learning environments;
- quiet learning environments; and
- access to accommodations.

Learning in open-air spaces was a successful strategy used in the 1900s to prevent the spread of tuberculosis and to mitigate transmission during the 1918 influenza pandemic. Learning outside has also been a creative approach to bringing students together this school year for face-to-face instruction in a few countries such as England and Sweden as well as in districts in Vermont, Florida, and California (see [Resources](#)). Benefits for students learning outdoors include increased attention, retention, engagement, improved mood, and reduction of behavioral issues. Outside learning spaces are a natural and affordable way to reduce the spread of COVID-19 while providing in-person schooling.

Studies from around the world suggest that COVID-19 transmission rates are much lower in outdoors settings, with most studies finding <10% of cases possibly linked to outdoors transmission, and some studies suggesting that <1% of transmission may actually occur outdoors. The main means of spread of the virus is through droplets and airborne particles, and risk drops rapidly with distance and with fresh air flow. Nonetheless, close contact with others is a risk whether indoors or outdoors, and preventive measures such as maintaining 6 feet of physical distance, wearing face coverings, and washing or sanitizing hands frequently are important both indoors and outdoors<sup>1</sup>. In Oregon, lower transmission rates in outside spaces was evident during this summer’s wildfire events. For over 9,000 firefighters living and working together daily outside in conjunction with strong safety protocols such as small cohorts, physical distancing, consistent hand-washing, boxed meals, face coverings and daily screening procedure, there were no COVID-19 outbreaks in [Oregon’s fire camps](#).

Oregon has a rich history of connections between people, the land, and outdoor recreation. Oregon has one of the longest running statewide outdoor education programs in the nation. Since 1957, Oregonians have recognized through state policy the educational benefits of having youth connect to the natural beauty and deep connections to Oregon’s natural resources.

Outside learning environments, in conjunction with strong safety protocols, provide school districts with an innovative option to create access to high-quality on-site instruction for students in ways that













