



## Designing for Health

Supporting Outdoor Play & Learning  
Environments at Early Care &  
Education Sites

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## Objectives

Introduce the concept of Outdoor Play and Learning Environments (OLE)

Share how design principles applied in ECE sites encourage more physical activity and healthy eating

Learn about the partners collaborating to support this work in Wisconsin and Dane County

\*The source of all photos/screenshots appearing in this presentation are from the NC State University Natural Learning Initiative website and resource materials.

## What is an Outdoor Play and Learning Environment?

A natural outdoor space that includes **diverse features** designed to promote **structured** and **unstructured** physical activity, play, and learning.

A setting whose elements advance and enrich all of the domains relevant to the development, health, and wellbeing of young children.



TIT Project Implementation [MODULE 6]

## Incremental development

BEFORE POD Renovation → AFTER Gathering space Vegetable, fruit, and flower planter



Best practice indicator:  
Vegetables, fruit trees, fruiting vines within play areas

Kyle's Munchkin Academy, Buxton, NC

## Goal: Build Healthy Childcare Environments (0-5 years)

Early care and education (ECE) programs:

- group and family child care centers,
- after-school programs,
- preschool programs,
- 3K and 4K programs,
- Head Start centers

There are 485 childcare sites in Dane County according to YoungStar

- 7-11 hours/day in childcare
- 266 facilities of 485 had at least one child participating in WI Shares in June 2022
- In July 2023, over 1,000 families (~1,600 children) benefited from Wisconsin Shares Child Care Subsidy Program



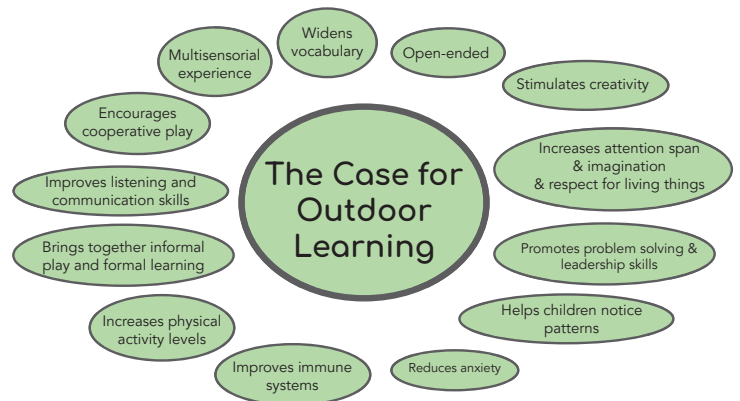
## Training Opportunities

NC State's Natural Learning Initiative:

1. Early Childhood Outdoor Learning Environments
2. Train the Trainer: Early Childhood Outdoor Play and Learning Spaces (ECOPALS)

Goals: Help participants understand how landscape design can:

1. support active lifestyles,
2. promote mental health and wellbeing,
3. encourage healthy eating, and
4. motivate learning in, about, and through nature



## Design Principles: Best Practice Indicators

Indicator #1: 10+ Play & Learning Settings

Indicator #2: Looping Primary Pathway

Indicator #3: Grassy Lawn for Activities

Indicator #4: Shady Settings (in addition to trees)

Indicator #5: Variety of Accessible, Loose Materials

Indicator #6: Portable Play Equipment

Indicator #7: Sufficient Gross Motor Activities Supported by the OLE

Indicator #8: Sufficient Trees

Indicators #9-10: Some trees are edible fruiting species; Sufficient shrubs and vines, grasses, and flowering plants

### Indicator #2: Looping Primary Pathway



### Indicator #3: Grassy Lawn for Activities



### Indicator #5: Variety of Accessible, Loose Materials

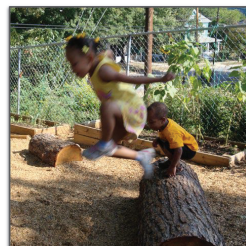




Indicator #6: Portable Play Equipment



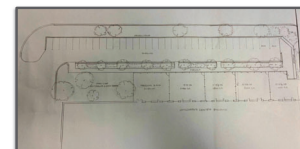
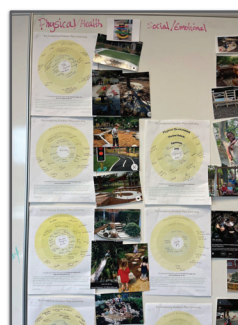
Indicator #7: Sufficient Gross Motor Activities Supported by the OLE



Indicators #9-10: Some trees are edible fruiting species; Sufficient shrubs and vines, grasses, and flowering plants



The Playing Field East



Thank you!

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