

Playing by the Rules | Colorado Executive Summary

A Practitioner's Guide to Rules, Regulations, and Rating Systems for Outdoor Learning Environments in Colorado Child Care Facilities



Playing by the Rules|Colorado helps practitioners navigate rules, regulations, and rating systems that affect naturalized outdoor learning environments in Colorado child care facilities. Use of this guide may reduce the cost and effort of creating nature play and learning settings by making it easier to understand the regulatory systems that influence their design.

A growing body of research shows that exposure to nature benefits a child's physical and mental health, overall development, and motivation to learn. Nonetheless, the naturalization of outdoor learning environments can be limited because providers are uncertain how it may affect their license and their quality rating. Most nature play and learning settings are only affected by a handful of rules, but these rules can be hard to find. *Playing by the Rules|Colorado* provides practitioners with up-to-date information without having to sift through hundreds of pages of material.

Nine documents—totaling more than 1,000 pages—were reviewed to produce the guide (See graphic above). These documents were identified through research and interviews with child care center directors, landscape designers, college instructors, non-profit leaders, assessors, and regulators. Drafts of the guide were reviewed by regulators from the Colorado Office of Early Childhood, Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, and Clayton Early Learning professionals responsible for rating and assessing child care environments.

Playing by the Rules| Colorado is a flexible document aimed at supporting those who plan, design, and manage outdoor areas at child care centers, family child care homes, neighborhood youth organizations, and school-age child care centers. The guide summarizes site-level requirements and has charts on regulatory considerations for over 50 different settings, components, and management issues (See reverse).

Dry Creek Beds and Rain Gardens <i>Dry creek beds are shallow, linear, manmade depressions in the ground, typically lined with smooth, rounded river rock, that are usually dry at the surface. Dry creek beds are intentionally designed to convey small amounts of runoff from rainfall, snow melt, or water play to a drain...</i>	Department of Human Services, Social Services Rules Child Care Facility Licensing 12 CCR 2509-8 (March 15, 2019)				Colorado Shines Quality Rating Improvement System: Program Guide (2015) & Environment Rating Scales	Rules and Regulations Governing the Health & Sanitation of Child Care Facilities in the State of CO, 6 CCR 1010-7 (2016)	2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design
	Child Care Centers (7.701, 7.702, 7.719)	Family Child Care Homes (7.701, 7.707, 7.719)	Neighborhood Youth Organizations (7.701, 7.720)	School-Age Child Care Centers (7.701, 7.712, 7.719)			
	May be designed to meet requirements <i>Design Considerations: "[M]ust be appropriate for children's ages, size," & "develop...</i>	May be designed to meet requirements <i>Design Considerations: "[M]ust be kept safe and free of hazardous materials" including...</i>	May be designed to meet requirements <i>Design Considerations: "[O]utdoor ... materials ... shall be sturdy, safe and free of hazards." ...</i>	May be designed to meet requirements <i>Design Considerations: "[M]ust be sturdy, safe and free of hazards." Mandates...</i>	May contribute to higher rating All environment rating scales used as part of CO Shines ratings include scale items related to nature/science and reward staff for using...	May be designed to meet requirements. <i>Design Considerations for family child care homes and neighborhood youth organizations: None...</i>	<i>Design Considerations for family child care homes: None</i> <i>For other facilities: Qualifies as a play component subject to...</i>

Partial example of outdoor setting double-page chart (pp 52-53)

Section One introduces research that shows how the design of outdoor learning environments may support children's physical and mental health, overall development, and learning.

Section Two identifies rules, regulations, and rating systems that relate to the planning and design of outdoor learning environments in Colorado. It discusses documents that the guide may help readers navigate.

Section Three introduces site-level requirements that may affect the overall layout of outdoor learning environments and settings. Requirements covered include square footage, enclosure, visual supervision, and regulations that may require separating children by age group.

Section Four provides a general review of accessibility regulations applied to outdoor learning environments and an introduction to relevant sections of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Standards.

Section Five discusses definitions of playground equipment and when playground equipment standards may apply to components such as boulders, logs, and decks.

Section Six charts over 50 play and learning settings and components that may be included in an outdoor learning environment. Each setting/component is briefly described in terms of design and planning considerations, licensing, sanitation, and accessibility requirements. Charts also include Colorado Shines rating system items (example above).

Section Seven summarizes items related to management of outdoor areas that are common across a range of play and learning settings but are unlikely to have a major effect on the layout or design of an outdoor learning environment (e.g. handwashing rules).

Section Eight discusses rules and regulations for nature visits that occur beyond licensed child care facility spaces (hiking, biking, and visiting natural spaces).

Use *Playing by the Rules|Colorado* to learn how regulations affect over 50 settings and components, including:

- Composting Settings
- Dry Creek Beds and Rain Gardens
- Earth and Sand Play Settings
- Embankment Scrambles
- Fruit and Vegetable Gardens
- Logs, Boulders, and Stumps
- Natural Construction Settings
- Ornamental Grass Mazes
- Water Play Settings
- Wildlife Gardens and Much More!

Copies of *Playing by the Rules|Colorado* can be obtained from Early Childhood Health Outdoors Colorado (ECHO), an initiative of the National Wildlife Federation in partnership with the Natural Learning Initiative at North Carolina State University at: <https://www.nwf.org/ECHO>

Information contained in *Playing by the Rules | Colorado* was the most current available at the time of release (June 2019). Before using, refer to appropriate state or federal agencies to determine if regulatory updates have been issued.

