



Kim Silva <kim@friendsofoutdoorschool.org>

ODS and Equity

3 messages

Caitlin Shelman <caitlin.shelman@gmail.com>
To: schoolboard@pps.net, superintendent@pps.net
Cc: kim@friendsofoutdoorschool.org

Mon, May 14, 2012 at 2:38 PM

Dear PPS Leaders,

I am writing to support funding Outdoor School from an equity perspective. I am currently a 5th grade Spanish Immersion teacher at Bridger K-8 and next year I will be teaching 6th grade Spanish Immersion literacy. I grew up in Multnomah County and have had the opportunity to experience Outdoor School as a sixth grader, high school student leader and a sixth grade teacher. I have worked in PPS for the last two years, and in that time I have seen a positive and powerful push toward increased equity in our school system. I hope to convince you in this letter how important the Outdoor School program is to building an equitable education for all of our students.

As my sixth grade class at Corbett Middle School prepared for our week at Sandy River Outdoor School back in 1991, our teacher said something that I still remember clearly today. "Students," she explained, "we will be attending ODS with Ockley Green from Portland. These students are different from you, so you should watch your belongings carefully." Even at the time, I knew that didn't sound right. Of course, we all soon discovered that while Ockley Green students might have come from an urban environment, we were all still sixth graders, learning, eating, laughing and crying together in the mud.

After my sixth grade experience, I knew Outdoor School was something special. As soon as I was old enough, I signed up to be a high school student leader. I truly believe that the three weeks I spent as a student leader heavily influenced my academic and career paths later in life. Those weeks were the only opportunity I had to be surrounded by a diverse group of people. I learned to value cultural and economic diversity on an individual level. I learned that teaching is about guiding discovery and that every child has the capacity to learn and thrive when given proper support.

I never thought I would get to go back to Outdoor School, but last year I joined PPS in a temporary 6th grade position at East Sylvan. I was thrilled to find out that I would be taking 35 sixth graders to Adams (Milk Creek) Outdoor School. As you know, many of the students at East Sylvan come from more affluent backgrounds than at other schools in the district. I was interested to see how they would mix with the Sabin and Rigler students who attended our same week. **What I found out is that the power of Outdoor School is its ability to strip away all of society's inequalities and show us what happens when everyone is on equal footing.** Everyone sits and eats three family style meals together, completes chores together, wonders at our natural world together and sings together. At the end of the week, my students' designer jeans looked just like all the others; they were covered in mud.

We all know ODS is an incredible way for students to engage and learn about natural science, but I would argue that its far more important purpose lies in its ability to create equity among our students. PPS expects that we look at all our educational decisions through the lens of equity. I encourage you to hold yourself to this standard before you cut a program that has been showing our students what equity looks like since 1966.

Respectfully,

Caitlin Shelman

5th Grade Spanish Immersion (Mornings)

Bridger K-8