

May 5, 2021

Representative Susan McLain, Co-Chair
Senator Lew Frederick, Co-Chair
Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Education

Re: Support Full Funding for Outdoor School

Dear Co-Chairs Representative McLain and Senator Frederick, and Members of the Committee,

“Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn.” -Benjamin Franklin

When students are actively involved in their learning process and have a safe, positive environment in which to learn, magic can happen. That magic happens at Outdoor School. Residential outdoor school programs offer more than just hands-on learning but give students a chance to learn from a whole community and engage in social emotional learning.

Outdoor School changes lives and creates a love of learning. But Outdoor School relies on state funding and now more than ever we need to commit to that funding. We know the importance of investing in our youth. We want our Oregon students to not only earn a high school diploma but seek higher education for a better quality of life. But what engages a student to want to continue their education? Connection and caring adults.

Teachers at outdoor school programs connect with students on a deeper, more involved level. It is different to teach from a text book than to teach in the outdoors, in real time. Nature becomes your classroom. Engagement happens. Connections happen. Living at an outdoor school program for a week, creates social engagement, with community systems at work. Students that may never have that engagement at home, become part of a bigger community with support, creativity and growth.

Outdoor School for all students carves a path towards equitable education. All students should have the opportunity of Outdoor School. Students can be outside, learning how systems work, social connections and the importance of knowing our backyards. If a student doesn't live near a green space, or have the means to attend a summer camp, they may never have that connection to nature. Outdoor School allows all students the opportunity to be outside and connect.

I wasn't able to attend summer camps. But I attended outdoor school for a week in 6th grade. That put the bug to counsel as a high school student, which I did throughout high school. It was the first time I was seen as a leader and an educator. Outdoor School steered my life into education and service to my community. I have been in education ever since.

Mary Thomas
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