

To the Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Education

Dear Co-chairs Frederick and McLain, and members of the Committee,

I am writing to you today as a science teacher in the Oregon Trail School District, a parent, and former participant in Outdoor School.

Many people assume that kids in Sandy already know all about nature because so many of my students live rurally. Although we probably do have more kids who go hunting than in Portland, the area is quickly growing (I heard our population has doubled twice in the last ten years) and many more of my students play video games than go camping. For those that do get lots of nature time, this doesn't mean they understand the science of natural resources or are prepared to participate in the natural resources economy. For these reasons, I was so excited when I saw that for the first time ever, one of our middle schools participated in Outdoor School last year! I know this is part of the on-going effort funded by the Oregon Legislature and I want to thank the Oregon Legislature for its investment in Outdoor School over the last two biennia.

I see the fruits of this investment and how it will only continue to grow. As more students in our district experience outdoor school, more kids will be excited to take their turn. More of them will want to go back as student leaders. This will give them that empowering opportunity at leadership that simultaneously serves their community and also gives them real-life job skills. At the same time, they will grow connected to a wild corner of Oregon, and have that passion to guard our natural resources.

I love that Outdoor School is for everyone. In the past, access to nature may have mostly been a luxury for the wealthy and physically prepared. Outdoor school has knocked down those barriers, and introduced many kids who never would have otherwise had the opportunity to the beauty of the wild, and to a learning environment where they feel successful.

COVID-19 has done a number on our children's education, and Oregon's future. One of the hardest things I've witnessed as a teacher in the last year is the disengagement of our students from school. I know first-hand that Outdoor School is one of those programs that excites children and teenagers. It is already helping kids struggling for motivation to learn in their hometowns and backyards and playgrounds, and I know it will be a phenomenal tool for re-engaging our students back in the physical classroom.

Thank you for your support of this crucial program for our students!

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