

4/27/2021

Dear Representative McLain,

I want to personally thank the Oregon legislature for continuing to support funding for Outdoor School. Your ongoing support for this program provides for an equitable and accessible experience for students statewide.

My appreciation comes from a lifelong commitment to, and passion for, Outdoor School. As the youngest of four children of a single mom in the 1960s and 1970s, my experience at Camp Colton Outdoor School with the Multnomah Intermediate Education District (now Education Service District) in the spring of 1972 launched what would ultimately become my career and the basis for my family and social life for the next, nearly fifty years. I am currently the Director of Global Business Development for Vernier Software & Technology, a global education technology company in Beaverton, but I got my start in education as a Junior Counselor at Outdoor School.

I continued my passion for teaching and real world engagement as I pursued my bachelor's degree in science education and eventually a master's in educational leadership and innovation. I have been an instructor and eventually director of the Northwest Regional Education Service District's Outdoor School, led science education programming at OMSI, earned my Oregon School Administrator license and founded an alternative high school for the Beaverton School District (Terra Nova High School). Later I was the academic leader of a global online school before coming to rest at Vernier six years ago.

I have seen economic fluctuations over the decades take a toll on Outdoor School programs throughout Oregon and nationally. Programs have always had to struggle to be financially sustainable which makes it hard to continue to grow and improve. Stable financial funding allows programs to embrace equity and inclusion in new ways that we never dreamed possible back when I was involved. Stable funding allows staff to take advantage of the great resources available from the Oregon State University Extension office and to allow leaders and educators to collaborate to improve and grow their programs. Stable ongoing funding tells the world that Outdoor School is not an "add-on" or optional experience, but rather an integral component of the science curriculum for 5th or 6th grade students in this state.

As I travel the world promoting science and STEM education with educational innovators and entrepreneurs, I often share the story of Oregon's voters sending a clear and unambiguous message to the legislature that we want every child in the state to have an Outdoor School experience. It gives me a special boost of pride to say that my boss, Christine Vernier, was a chief petitioner on the ballot measure that made this possible.

Please continue to support Outdoor School. If you ever need another voice to help share the value of this program, please let me know.

Gary Myers, M.Ed.
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Resident of Forest Grove