

2114 C St
Forest Grove
OR 97116
4 May 2021

Dear Rep. Susan McClain,

My name is Sofie Dobberfuhl and we've actually met briefly at an event taking place in a library a number of years ago. I've grown up in Forest Grove, beginning at the Forest Grove Montessori School, followed by the Forest Grove Community School and FGHS, and am currently in my 3rd year at Pacific University. By far the most influential program that I've taken part in during my educational experience has been Outdoor School, and I'd love to take a moment to talk about why. As a 15-time returning student leader, the reason I began volunteering was simple: I wanted to give back to the place that had provided me with excellent community, role models, and a love for exploring the natural world back when I was a 5th and 6th grade student attending Outdoor School.

One of the things I am most proud of as an Oregonian is Outdoor School and the transformative experience it offers for those involved. There is simply no way to put into words the magic created in a singular week of Outdoor School. For the students, there is a unique opportunity to find confidence in new independence, relationship skills through collaborative learning communities, and increased self-awareness of themselves and their environments, to name just a few. As a volunteer student leader, there is an overabundance of lessons from this experience and, to quote an article I wrote for my school newspaper titled *The Case for Outdoor Science School*, "no class, sport, or club can ever compete with the experience of Outdoor School. It has challenged me to grow in so many ways, has given me...empathy and compassion for people, and ultimately has defined who I want to be in the world."

That all being said, on behalf of both the Outdoor School and Friends of Outdoor School programs, I would like to express gratitude to the Oregon Legislature for its investment in

Outdoor School over the last two biennia. This has allowed the opportunity for many children to experience the outdoors for the first time, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender identity, ability, or socio-economic status, and I've witnessed it firsthand. As a person of color, being a cabin leader to 6th-grade students who were all from nonwhite backgrounds was an indescribably empowering feeling. I've been fortunate to interact with students from low-income communities, students who have a first language other than English, students with Cerebral Palsy, and students from all walks of life from all over the state. This diversity is one of the most incredible and beautiful parts of Outdoor School and the connections that are made.

In our world's current state of the climate crisis, environmental education is more important than ever. Oregon's economy—and future—relies on supporting our natural resource industries, such as timber, tourism, outdoor recreation, farming, and more. Outdoor School is a great way to teach future generations that they don't need to choose between our economy and our environment. My final thought for this letter is that now more than ever, students absolutely need to be getting outside and physically participating in education. With over a year of struggling with distance learning and feeling the emotional impact of COVID-19, students have been denied the social interaction and integral hands-on curriculum that are cornerstone pieces of Outdoor School.

I hope this letter finds you well, and thank you for your time and consideration.

Warmly,

Sofie Dobberfuhr