



February 3, 2026

Senator Kate Lieber and Representative Tawna Sanchez
Co-Chairs, Joint Committee on Ways and Means
Oregon Legislature

Re: Support for Outdoor School Funding

Dear Co-Chairs and Members of the Committee,

I am writing on behalf of the Oregon Museum of Science and Industry (OMSI), which is dedicated to inspiring curiosity through engaging science learning experiences, fostering experimentation and the exchange of ideas, and stimulating informed action. In alignment with these values, we respectfully urge you to support the passage of HB 4112 and restore Outdoor School funding for the remainder of the current biennium. The 20% cut that was enacted significantly reduced the ability of Oregon and OMSI to ensure that every Oregon student has access to this transformative educational experience.

Outdoor School is a powerful and proven program that provides Oregon students with hands-on learning and meaningful connections to the natural world and each other. It also offers young adults early career opportunities and develops leadership skills. Since its inception, the state-provided Outdoor School funding has served over 223,000 students and has demonstrated clear, positive impacts on critical thinking, STEM engagement, environmental awareness and skills, and social-emotional growth. Based on surveys from participating schools, teachers consistently highly rated STEM/Natural History, Food/Agriculture/Forestry, and Environmental Education as relevant and significant areas of lesson content within their school's outdoor school program.

At OMSI, our educators see the difference this program makes every day. We operate Outdoor School programs in Newport and Fossil, and support programs in Pendleton, La Grande, and Wallowa County – serving schools across the state, the majority of which are outside the Portland metro area. These programs offer students unique learning opportunities they would not otherwise have access to, especially during times of economic strain for school districts. Because of the funding cut, OMSI has seen a reduction in the number of students attending our outdoor school program. We are experiencing a 15% drop in enrollment from this school year compared to last school year. This percentage drop translates into more than 650 fewer students attending Outdoor School.

Over the years, we have worked in close partnership with the Oregon State University Extension Outdoor School Program to ensure these experiences are inclusive, high-quality, and accessible. With the help of Outdoor School funding, we have been able to strengthen our curriculum, support educator training, increase facility accessibility, and build more inclusive learning environments. These efforts directly enhance student success and broaden the program's statewide impact.

When voters passed Measure 99 with strong bipartisan support and no formal opposition, it reflected a shared value across Oregon: that every student should have access to hands-on, outdoor learning. Because Outdoor School funds come from lottery dollars - not the general funds - it offers these opportunities without drawing resources away from other vital educational programs.

At a time when our education system faces many challenges, Outdoor School represents a successful, equitable investment in Oregon's future. We ask that you support HB 4112 to restore full funding to Outdoor School to once again provide an opportunity for all 5th or 6th graders to be able to participate in this impactful program.

Thank you for your consideration and your continued support for Oregon students.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Erin Graham". The signature is fluid and cursive, with "Erin" on the top line and "Graham" on the bottom line.

Erin Graham
President and CEO
Oregon Museum of Science and Industry