

To the Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Education

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

Thank you for your continued support for and investment in the statewide Outdoor School program. Stable, statewide funding has allowed an opportunity for so many children who may not have had the chance to experience meaningful outdoor education in school. I am writing to respectfully request that you continue full funding for Outdoor School in this budget.

I grew up in Oregon and was fortunate to attend Outdoor School in the 6th grade; volunteer as a leader in high school; and work as an instructor in the program. These experiences set me on a career path of teaching. In my first year as a teacher, more than 20 years ago, I was able to bring my class of 6th graders to Outdoor School, fulfilling a wonderful cycle.

Not only did Outdoor School inspire me to teach, it continues to inform my teaching to this day. Even though I now teach Kindergarten, my experience at Outdoor School provided me a deep understanding of how best to engage and inspire my young learners.

As a parent, it was so important to me that my own children had the chance to experience Outdoor School. Our small, rural school district at that time could not afford a full Outdoor School program for the students, so we stepped up and raised the necessary funds. For five years we took over the grade school cafeteria for a community-wide summer yard sale. Our little community raised tens of thousands of dollars to help five years of students get to Outdoor School. My children did go to Outdoor School, and both were high school leaders, gaining incredible levels of confidence, communication skills, and leadership.

But yard sales are no way to fund public education (as you know).

Statewide Outdoor School funding has been game-changing for students across Oregon, changing Outdoor School from a privilege for some to a right for all. Our rural students get to learn with and make friends with their urban Oregon neighbors. Since our students get to experience first-hand scientific careers in the natural resources, it provides many of them with important insights into careers that can be rewarding, sustaining, and allow them to stay in a rural area with family and friends.

As we emerge from the pandemic, getting kids outside with their classmates and new friends from across Oregon will be critically important. Outdoor School is an excellent way to help students recover from the past months of challenge.

Yours truly,

Jennifer Prince
Corbett, Oregon