



April 30, 2021

Oregon Legislature  
Ways and Means Subcommittee on Education

*RE: Support for full funding for Oregon's Outdoor School program*

Dear Co-Chairs Frederick and McLain,

The Gray Family Foundation, a supporting organization of the Oregon Community Foundation, was founded on the belief that fostering an understanding and appreciation of the natural world is a crucial part of a child's education. A robust Outdoor School program is integral to our commitment to building lasting, meaningful, and often transformative connections to nature for Oregon's children. Since our founding in 2011, we have granted nearly \$8 million to program providers, camp facilities, and schools to facilitate safe, inclusive, and equitable outdoor school programs across Oregon.

However, it is the state's investment in Outdoor School that has enabled every student, regardless of their geographic location or economic situation, to participate in this impactful education program. Gray Family Foundation is grateful to the Oregon Legislature for your steadfast support of Outdoor School over the last two biennia. Your commitment enables this meaningful hands-on learning opportunity to be part of every Oregon students' K-12 experience.

Throughout the past year, Oregon State University Extension Services Outdoor School program was there, thanks to your funding, providing resources to assist parents and teachers in connecting kids to the outdoors, whether it was in their backyard or neighborhood park. The effects of COVID-19 have sharply highlighted the structural inequities in our state and among our students. As students slowly return to in-person learning, Outdoor School will be a critical way for teachers to build connections among their class and for students to gain confidence, develop relationship skills, and enhance their self-awareness – as well as learn critical math, science, and social studies lessons.

Our economy and future rely on supporting our next generation to develop the skills, knowledge, and motivation to protect the health of our communities and natural resources. Gray Family Foundation's Board of Directors strongly support the continuing investment in Outdoor School as an essential experience for all students in Oregon. We support full funding from the Oregon Legislature for Outdoor School in the budget for the next biennium.

Sincerely,

*Gray Family Foundation Board of Directors: Janet Webster, Charles F. Sams, III, Traci Rossi, Corrine Oishi, Maria Ramos Underwood, Kristin Walrod*

Nancy Bales, *Executive Director*