

Submitter: Allyson Haas  
On Behalf Of:  
Committee: House Committee On Education  
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB4112  
To: House Committee on Education  
Re: HB 4112  
Date: February 2026  
Subject: Written Testimony in Support of HB 4112

Hello, my name is Allyson Haas, though my students and colleagues at Outdoor School call me Flax. I am the Plants Field Instructor at Camp Namanu with MESD Outdoor School, serving students from across the Portland Metro area. I live in Gresham, Oregon, in Senate District 25 and House District 50.

Like many Oregonians, I have a long history with Outdoor School. I first attended Camp Namanu as a sixth grader in 2011, then returned six times as a high school student leader between 2015 and 2018, as many times as they would let me. After attending Oregon State University and working in agriculture and natural resource management, I felt called to return to camp as an instructor. For those who have not experienced Outdoor School firsthand, its impact can be difficult to explain, but once you see it, you do not forget it.

In the off-season, I also work as a K–12 substitute teacher. Even in strong schools with dedicated educators, I see how deeply Oregon’s youth are struggling with disengagement. Many students spend much of their day isolated behind laptops, navigating constant digital stimulation and trying to make sense of an overwhelming amount of information. Kids are spending less time outdoors than ever before, and many lack meaningful opportunities to connect with the world around them — especially students who are low-income, marginalized, or otherwise disadvantaged. These challenges are rooted in complex cultural changes, but Outdoor School is one factor we can choose to prioritize.

Outdoor School is something real. It provides a structured opportunity for students to interact directly with the natural world, making observations with their own eyes and hands instead of learning only from screens or textbooks. This fall, while leading a forest hike for Plants Field Study, a sixth-grade student asked me, “Who planted all these trees here?” In a state famous for its forests, this student had never been in one before. She had never had the chance to think about how a forest exists or functions. That moment perfectly captured why this program matters.

Outdoor School is an equalizer. Because it is publicly funded, it reaches students regardless of income, background, or prior access to nature. For many students,

Outdoor School is not an enrichment opportunity — it is their only chance to learn science by being in it. Students consistently return to school more engaged, more confident, and more connected to learning. At a time when classrooms are stretched thin and students are experiencing burnout, Outdoor School delivers lasting academic, social, and emotional benefits in a way few programs can.

I have also seen some of the most growth from students who arrive with long lists of behavioral warnings. Students who struggle in traditional classrooms often thrive at camp. They are focused, capable, and engaged, and they return home carrying that confidence back into their classrooms.

I know your work as lawmakers is complex and that you face difficult decisions. I ask that you vote yes on HB 4112 to restore funding for Outdoor School and take the time to understand what is truly at stake. Ask anyone wearing a wood cookie if they went to Outdoor School — odds are they will light up and tell you exactly where they went and what they remember.

The recent cuts to Outdoor School have been devastating. Staff are stretched incredibly thin, yet we continue to show up — at our sites, at the Capitol, and for Oregon's students — because we believe in this program. Please help keep Outdoor School alive at a moment when it is needed more than ever. Learn why this program is worth fighting for, and vote yes on HB 4112.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Allyson “Flax” Haas  
Proud Oregonian and Outdoor School Field Instructor