



February 09, 2026

House Committee on Education  
900 Court St. NE  
Salem, OR 97301

*RE: Support for SB 4112: Increasing the biennial lottery allocation for Outdoor School*

Dear Chair Hudson, Vice-Chair Dobson and McIntire and the Committee:

Gray Family Foundation is a supporting organization of Oregon Community Foundation. Founded in 2012, we champion the belief that a connection to the natural world is essential to a child's education. We support schools, educators, and camp facilities across Oregon to ensure students have safe, enriching opportunities to learn outdoors.

Gray Family Foundation is a strong advocate for the power and impact of Outdoor School on students' lives and learning. Over the past 11 years in my role at Gray Family Foundation, I have heard countless stories demonstrating the positive impacts of outdoor education on our youth across Oregon. Research consistently shows that outdoor education is not merely a curriculum enhancement, but a cornerstone of cognitive development, mental health, and a critical tool for preparing youth to engage with and address local and global issues.

Through Outdoor School, students gain confidence, build relationship skills, and return from outdoor school with increased self-awareness – as well as critical math, science, and social studies instruction. Outdoor learning fosters curiosity, critical thinking skills, and a sense of stewardship that influences the way our kids see and engage with the world. Many students report that Outdoor School is the most impactful week of learning throughout their K-12 grade experience.

Before stable statewide funding for Outdoor School, Oregon Community Foundation research showed that only about half our state had consistent access to *any* Outdoor School program, and even fewer had access to what is

considered a “best practice” program. Beginning in 2016, thanks to the commitment of Oregon State University Extension Services Outdoor School program and the will of the voters, best practice statewide outdoor school programs have become the norm. OSU Outdoor School’s formal research, robust resources for teachers and program providers, and dedication to ensuring Outdoor School is available for all students has led to steady increases in participation and significant improvement in program quality and inclusivity.

However, funding cuts to the program in 2025 have put Outdoor School programming at serious risk. Outdoor School providers, camp facilities, school districts and classroom teachers have all been negatively impacted by the 20% budget reduction last year. While Gray Family Foundation continues to be committed to providing outdoor education opportunities for our youth across Oregon, we cannot do it without the consistent, continued support of the state.

Oregon’s economy and future rely on preparing our next generation to develop the skills, knowledge, and motivation to protect the health of our communities and natural resources. Gray Family Foundation strongly supports a continued investment in Outdoor School as an essential educational experience for all students in Oregon. Our students need and deserve an opportunity to attend Outdoor School – now more than ever. We respectfully ask you to consider restoring funding for Outdoor School.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Nancy Bales".

Nancy Bales

*Executive Director*

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