

Submitter:

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On Behalf Of:

Committee:

House Committee On Education

Measure, Appointment or Topic:

HB4112

Hello Oregon House Committee On Education. I am a concerned citizen of Portland, Oregon writing to you today to communicate the vital importance of the Outdoor School program. I have participated in the Outdoor School program both as a sixth-grade student and a high school Student Leader, and I am preparing to return as a Special Needs Volunteer in the spring. Outdoor School is a place like no other: it is a place where middle schoolers can learn the power of unapologetic kindness and imagination, high schoolers can unlearn the cynicism taught in the hallways, and adults can return to the best parts of childhood while learning how to protect that preciousness for future generations. Outdoor School nurtures both the idealistic--with silly songs, beads as currency, and alter egos--and the realistic--the power of alternative education for neurodivergent and traditionally excluded learners, the teaching of earth sciences and sustainability, and the preaching and practice of the fundamental values of inclusion and empathy. I have attended Outdoor School for a collective seven weeks, and believe me when I tell you I've seen kids of every walk of life get off those buses: poor kids, rich kids, abused kids, happy-go-lucky kids, naive kids, too-wise kids, autistic kids, neurotypical kids, bullies, the bullied, and I've loved every one of them, nurtured every one of them, taught every one of them soil sciences that high school won't even teach them, taken them to the bathroom at three in the morning, held every one of them while they cried on the final night and finally realized that they don't want to go home. That is the power of Outdoor School that cannot be replicated anywhere else and why it is so fundamentally essential to the development of kids, high schoolers, and adults alike: it builds an interconnectedness that would never have happened otherwise; for five days, or four days with the new system, these strangers become family, these cynics and misfits are best friends, and these wanderers find a home. And this is encapsulated by the song that we sing at the end of every nightly campfire at Outdoor School: "Green trees around us/Blue skies above/Friends all around us/In a world full of love." This is why we need Outdoor School, because the world IS full of love, and Outdoor School helps us to fully realize this.