

Submitter: Tana Shepard

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Education

Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB4112

Written Testimony in Support of HB?4112 – Restoring Funding for Oregon’s Outdoor School Program
February 10, 2026

I am writing to urge the Committee to support HB?4112, which restores the \$6?million appropriation for Oregon’s Outdoor School program beginning in 2026. As a lifelong Oregon resident, an educator, and co-founder of Oregon Educators for Climate Education (OECE), I have both personal and professional insight into the indispensable value of this program.

Personal Connection

Growing up in Oregon, Outdoor School was a formative experience that shaped my identity. The immersion in Oregon’s forests, rivers, and coastlines fostered a deep connection to the natural world and to the community of peers sharing those experiences. This bond continues to influence my work as an educator and my commitment to climate education.

Professional Perspective

During my tenure as a fifth-grade teacher, I observed repeatedly how Outdoor School:

Provides equitable access to nature for students from all socioeconomic backgrounds.

Transforms science instruction by allowing students to conduct real-world investigations of water quality, biodiversity, and ecosystem dynamics.

Cultivates leadership and community skills as students live and work together in a camp setting, stepping beyond their comfort zones.

Leaves a lasting impact, inspiring many alumni to pursue careers in environmental stewardship, outdoor recreation, and civic engagement.

These outcomes cannot be replicated within a conventional classroom and are essential for preparing Oregon’s youth to meet the challenges of a changing climate.

Impact of Recent Budget Cuts

A recent 20?% budget reduction shortened camp experiences for thousands of 5th- and 6th-grade students, reducing instructional time and limiting the depth of student-nature interaction. This contraction runs contrary to the intent of Measure?99, which earmarked lottery revenues specifically to sustain Outdoor School. Ignoring voter intent undermines public trust and threatens a program that is both culturally iconic

and scientifically vital.

Rationale for HB?4112

HB?4112 restores the \$6?million funding previously eliminated, thereby:

Ensuring full, multi-day Outdoor School experiences for all eligible 5th- and 6th-grade students.

Maintaining equitable access across urban, rural, and tribal districts, helping close opportunity gaps.

Preserving the integrity of the curriculum, which integrates science, leadership, and community development.

Advancing Oregon's broader climate-education objectives as outlined in the state Climate Action Plan.

Restoring this funding demonstrates a commitment to experiential learning and acknowledges the intrinsic link between human well-being and a healthy environment.

Request

For the reasons outlined above, I respectfully request that the Committee:

Vote in favor of HB?4112 to reinstate full funding for the Outdoor School program in 2026.

Reject any further reductions to the program's budget during the upcoming February session.

Your support will protect an essential educational resource, safeguard equitable experiences for Oregon's students, and reinforce the state's dedication to climate education and environmental stewardship.

Thank you for considering this testimony. I am available to provide additional information or answer any questions regarding the impact of Outdoor School on student learning and community well-being.

Kind Regards,

Tana Shepard

Co-Founder, Oregon Educators for Climate Education (OECE); Current Educator