

February 10, 2026

Dear Chair Hudson, Co-chairs Dobson & McIntire, and members of the Committee,

I am writing as a proud parent, educator, and lifelong Outdoor School participant to thank you for your continued commitment to Outdoor School and to urge you to support HB 4112 to restore full funding. Every Oregon 5th or 6th grader, and every high school leader deserves the opportunity to attend Outdoor School next year.

Outdoor School has shaped my life in profound ways. As a sixth grader, I attended Camp Howard and came home with confidence, independence, and a sense of belonging. During that week, my high school student leader gave me a small bear with our cabin name written on it and encouraged me to return one day as a student leader and pass it on.

In high school I did just that. I served as a Student Leader at Sandy River (Angelos) Outdoor School, where I discovered that I could truly make an impact on younger students. It was there that I found my love of teaching. In college, I returned several times as a Special Needs Student Leader, working one-on-one with incredible students and witnessing the true magic of Outdoor School: students connecting across neighborhoods, backgrounds, and social groups in ways that simply do not happen in their everyday lives. Those connections feel more important now than ever.

As a sixth-grade teacher, I took fourteen classes to Outdoor School. Each year, I watched students arrive nervous and unsure and leave confident, capable, and deeply connected to one another. Sixth grade is a magical age, not quite a teenager, no longer a little kid, and Outdoor School meets students exactly where they are. In a world where screens and anxiety have become the norm, Outdoor School gives students the gift of the real world: muddy boots, hands-on science, shared laughter, teamwork, and the quiet awe of standing in a forest and observing a glistening raindrop caught in a spiderweb, in a tree.

Now, as a high school biology teacher, I see the impact from yet another perspective. I actively encourage all of my students to attend the workshop training and become Outdoor School Student Leaders. I have watched students who are quiet in the classroom discover confidence in the woods. I have seen teenagers rise to the responsibility of mentoring younger students and return with stronger communication skills, empathy, and leadership. The growth I witness in my own students after they serve as leaders is remarkable and lasting.

I have also experienced Outdoor School as a parent. My son attended Outdoor School last spring as a sixth grader, and it had a tremendous impact on him. He came home exhausted, dirty, and full of stories, new confidence, and pride in what he had learned. He loved every minute and grew in ways that cannot be replicated in a classroom.

My daughter, now a 10th grader, is eagerly looking forward to serving as a student leader this spring. Because of COVID-19, she did not get to attend Outdoor School for a full week as a sixth grader. That loss was significant for her class. Becoming a student leader feels like both a second chance and an opportunity to give back. She is excited to mentor younger students, step into leadership, and help create the very experience she missed.

Outdoor School increases academic engagement, builds leadership skills, strengthens social-emotional growth, and fosters a lifelong connection to Oregon's natural resources. The leadership development it provides high school students is extraordinary. The growth it sparks in 5th and 6th graders is unforgettable.

The current budget cuts threaten this vital program for thousands of Oregon students. Voters made their intentions clear when they overwhelmingly supported Measure 99, dedicating 4% of Lottery funds to Outdoor School. I respectfully urge you to restore full funding so that every Oregon student, regardless of zip code, can experience this transformational program.

Thank you for your time, your service, and your continued support of Outdoor School.

Most sincerely,

*Jennifer Sorcinelli*

Jennifer Sorcinelli

Parent, Educator & Outdoor School Advisory Board Member

Grant High School, Portland, OR