

Support for HB 4112; Increasing the biennial lottery allocation made for the outdoor school program:

I have been a student at Oregon outdoor schools, an educator at an Oregon outdoor school, a coordinator of an Oregon outdoor school, and a coordinator of an Oregon school's outdoor school program. I have seen outdoor school from many angles and I would like to share not only my personal experience, but how I have also seen the incredible positive impact of Outdoor School on Oregon students over the last 30 years. Outdoor school is an experience that leaves us more connected to our peers and our local environment, more motivated to learn, more mentally healthy, and more empowered with 21st century skills for our future.

As a student attending outdoor school (ODS), I was a motivated learner and skilled student, but I lacked confidence. At ODS, it was the first time I felt the openness to make decisions and try new things. My parents said I came home a week later as a more mature version of myself. 30 years later, I would watch the same transformation in my own child as he left and returned home. He was more confident, aware of others, and able to take on more challenges after the experience. Research shows that these outcomes are consistent in students after their ODS experience.

After graduating with a Bachelor's of Science in Environmental Sciences and Resources from Portland State University, I went on to teach and then organize school groups at OMSI's Hancock Field Station. The story continued in student after student. The teachers that chaperoned each group that came, would warn us about the 'problem students', and each group would leave, amazed at how these same students 'behaved well', were engaged, and connected to other students and the material. Research continues to show us that when students learn in the ways that meet their needs, their learning advances and they thrive. Even after a few days at an outdoor school, studies report that students' motivation in school increases long after the experience. Many outdoor schools also train high school or college students to lead and teach the elementary students who attend. These older students receive an opportunity to learn and practice 21st century and Career and Technical Education skills. These essential skills are challenging to incorporate in a traditional classroom, so students get few opportunities to learn and practice these skills in our school environments. In my 16 years as a classroom teacher, I have watched hundreds of students grow more from their ODS experience of a few days than in a whole year of school.

I am now working at an online school, teaching and then coordinating an outdoor school program for our students. Not only does this same story of positive impact continue, but the benefits have a much more intensely positive effect on students whose daily school life revolves around the computer. At our ODS, we not only bring students together, but we bring them from all over Oregon, to spend time together, connect, humanize, and create lasting friendships across the state.

Outdoor School has been integral to my educational advancement (ODS inspired me to get a Masters in Environmental Education, a Masters in Teaching Science, and to create classes and programming for which I received a Presidential Award in 2016) and has inspired me to continue to work to provide these opportunities for students. I have seen this impact in students I have taught,

peers who I have learned with, and my fellow teachers who have this same passion instilled in them to support the future of Oregon students.

The state of our world, our country and our state has a very different projected future now than it did 30 years ago. The percentage of students in virtual and online learning environments has increased steadily over the past decade. Essential jobs are losing skilled workers and struggling to find replacements. Mental health issues in our students are increasing. Outdoor school can help all of these things. Students who attend ODS report; increased positive mental health outcomes, increased motivation and achievement in school, higher attendance and success in Career and Technical Education (CTE) classes, and higher high school graduation rates.

Outdoor School is a fundamental part of being an Oregonian. It inspires, connects, supports, and gives back to students, to our PNW ecosystems, and to the future of our state and people. Oregonians have voted to use Lottery monies specifically for the funding of Outdoor Schools and it would be a loss of more than just funding if outdoor schools were no longer available to all students. Outdoor school is more than an opportunity for kids to be in nature. It is an opportunity for students to build skills, create relevance and inspire motivation toward their own future. Funding is essential to the continued offerings of outdoor school programming. And outdoor school is essential to our students' futures here in Oregon. Please support HB 4112 to increase funding for outdoor school and to provide these opportunities for our students' futures.