

February 11, 2026

Chair Hudson, Vice-Chairs Dobson and McIntire, and members of the House Education Committee:

As Superintendent of the Multnomah Education Service District (MESD), I am writing in strong support of **HB 4112**, the bill to restore funding to Outdoor School.

Outdoor School is a uniquely Oregon program, codified by voters through Ballot Measure 99, which passed with 67 percent support in 2016. The measure directed Lottery Funds to provide all fifth- and sixth-grade students with access to a week-long, hands-on outdoor learning experience focused on science, natural resources, and environmental literacy.

At MESD, we partner with all of our component school districts—Centennial, Corbett, David Douglas, Gresham-Barlow, Portland Public Schools, Reynolds, and Riverdale—to deliver Outdoor School to **6,084 sixth-grade students and 1,480 high school students** each year. Notably, **94% of participating sixth graders qualify for free or reduced-price lunch**, underscoring the program's essential role in advancing equity and access to high-quality instruction.

Outdoor School is not only an enrichment activity; it is **core academic instruction**. Students engage deeply in science, math, literacy, and data analysis throughout the day. They form hypotheses, collect and analyze field data, and write evidence-based conclusions. Outdoor School is one of the few instructional models that fully aligns with the Next Generation Science Standards, which emphasize learning by doing in real-world contexts.

Following the 20% funding reduction enacted last session, MESD had to eliminate **17.5 permanent, benefited positions**, representing a **39 percent reduction in staff**, and shortened staff calendars by **34 percent** (from 100 to 66 days). Program length has been reduced from **six days and five nights to four days and three nights** for the 2025–26 school year.

If we believe students learn best through active, meaningful engagement, the question before us is not whether Outdoor School is nice to have, but whether Oregon can afford to lose one of its strongest instructional models and most impactful special programs.

We respectfully urge the Committee to pass HB 4112 to restore Outdoor School funding and ask the Committee and the legislature to protect outdoor school funding this session. Doing so honors voter intent, supports equitable access for all students, and preserves a program that represents the very best of Oregon's educational and environmental legacy.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Dr. Paul Coakley

Superintendent, Multnomah Education Service District