

Submitter:

Steffanie Altenbern

On Behalf Of:

Committee:

House Committee On Education

Measure, Appointment or Topic:

HB4112

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Steffanie Altenbern, and I am the parent of three children in our public school district. I am writing to respectfully oppose HB 4112 as currently written.

Outdoor School was created to provide hands-on, standards-based environmental science education. That mission is worthy of support. However, the implementation of the program in many districts has expanded far beyond environmental science and into social and identity-based programming that is not directly tied to academic outcomes.

According to publicly available materials (what is listed on their website), the program places a significant emphasis on inclusion frameworks and student identity work under ADEI (Anti-Discrimination, Equity, and Inclusion) policies. While ensuring student safety and belonging is important, the balance has shifted. The focus on identity-affirming structures appears to be a central feature of the program rather than a supporting one. The program goes so far as to intertwining gender identities within the same cabins; a practice that most parents may not be aware of until they have done a deep dive into the policies.

As a parent of a middle school child, I have serious concerns about age-appropriateness and instructional scope. Students at 11 and 12 years old are at a vulnerable developmental stage. Outdoor School should be centered on ecology, biology, watershed science, forestry, and conservation, not structured identity discussions or programming that extends beyond environmental education. While it may not be explicitly stated, the environment of ADEI focuses solely on the promotion of supporting the LGBTQIA+ population and fails to focus on any other ADEI (cultural inclusivity or sensitivity, etc) area.

Furthermore, when programming heavily emphasizes specific identity frameworks, some students report feeling awkward or uncertain about how to participate if they do not strongly identify with those frameworks. Inclusion should not unintentionally create discomfort or social pressure for others. True inclusion is balanced and viewpoint-neutral.

This is not about denying safety or respect to any student. It is about ensuring that:
Outdoor School remains focused on science instruction
Instructional time is not diluted

Programming is age-appropriate
Parents are fully informed about non-academic content
Public funds are tied to measurable academic outcomes

At a time when Oregon continues to struggle with literacy and math proficiency, every dollar and every class period hold a significant amount of weight. Before renewing this funding, the legislature should require clear guardrails limiting the program to environmental science standards, transparent reporting of curriculum content, and evidence of academic impact. Additionally, there should be clear educational outcomes. If those exist, they are difficult to find or are not made publicly available.

Outdoor School can be a valuable program. But mission drift, lack of academic accountability, and expanded scope beyond science raise legitimate concerns. As a parent, I do not have enough information as to whether my child can have an educationally valuable experience, that would allow me to send them to this school. Instead, I have received feedback from previous families and the information on their website that shows the environment is too focused on an underlying political agenda rather than science outcomes. To request \$54 million in taxpayer dollars with vague or skewed information warrants an opposition in the current form.

I urge you to reconsider HB 4112 in its current form and to prioritize academic rigor, transparency, and parental trust.

Thank you for your time and service.
Respectfully,

Steffanie Altenbern