

March 2, 2026

Co-Chairs Nosse and Girod, members of the Capital Construction Subcommittee,

Outdoor School is an extension of the classroom – it provides students the opportunity to learn in the great outdoors for four days and three nights. Students immerse themselves in hands-on, engaging lessons with their peers, our educators, student leaders and educators from their schools at one of our five beautiful sites. Our goal is students will have a memorable experience learning foundational science, want to return to Outdoor School as a Student Leader, or choose other outdoor fields as a possible career path. **Northwest Regional ESD, Multnomah ESD and Portland Public Schools urge the subcommittee to include \$6 million in the end of session budget bills to restore Outdoor School funding.**

Last year, the Oregon Legislature cut the Outdoor School budget by 20%. For Northwest Regional ESD, which houses Northwest Outdoor Science School (NOSS), serving about 10,000 students in seven counties every year, NOSS weathered the worst of this storm by using **one-time** reserve funding and making modest reductions to programming for this year. NOSS does not have reserves for next school year. The \$6 million dollars correction saves them from gutting student programming. Stable Outdoor School funding provided after Measure 99 allowed NOSS to provide necessary staffing expansion to meet ACA ratios and implement new supports like translation and family outreach that ensure every child can participate.

MESD partners with all of their 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. Following the 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.

Many school districts across the state are facing budget cuts. Portland Public Schools is facing a \$50 million budget deficit and cannot backfill funding to Outdoor School even if they wanted. 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. 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 urge the legislature to restore funding, honor voters' intent, and support equitable access for all students, and preserve a program that represents the very best of Oregon's educational and environmental legacy.

Respectfully,

