

SENATE BILL REPORT

2SHB 2078

As of February 25, 2022

Title: An act relating to establishing the outdoor school for all program.

Brief Description: Establishing the outdoor learning grant program.

Sponsors: House Committee on Appropriations (originally sponsored by Representatives Rule, Barkis, Ryu, Fitzgibbon, Simmons, Shewmake, Berry, Leavitt, Berg, Senn, Callan, Dent, Johnson, J., Kloba, Bergquist, Chambers, Wicks, Orwall, Tharinger, Taylor, Klippert and Pollet).

Brief History: Passed House: 2/12/22, 92-6.

Committee Activity: Ways & Means: 2/24/22.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Establishes the Outdoor Learning Grant Program, subject to appropriations, to develop and support educational experiences for students.
- Creates the Outdoor Education Experiences Program, within the grant program, to develop and support outdoor learning opportunities for fifth and sixth grade students.
- Includes these programs within outdoor-based activities that student participation in may be considered instructional days.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

Staff: Kayla Hammer (786-7305)

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This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Background: Outdoor-Based Activities. State law allows public schools to develop curricula that:

- links student learning with engagement in seasonal or nonseasonal outdoor-based activities, including activities related to academic requirements in science, health and fitness, and career and technical education;
- aligns with the state learning standards that are a component of the state's instructional program of basic education; and
- includes locally administered competency based assessments that align with the standards.

Public schools that develop this curricula may request authorization from the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) to consider student participation in outdoor-based activities as instructional days for basic education requirements. OSPI must adopt rules to approve these requests.

2021-23 Operating Budget. The 2021-23 operating budget included \$10 million for OSPI to contract with the Washington School Principals' Education Foundation to support pandemic related learning loss through outdoor learning and overnight camp experiences. This funding provides up to 20,000 fifth and sixth grade students with up to five days of outdoor learning at an overnight camp. Prioritization is given to schools that have been identified for improvement and students who are most impacted by opportunity gaps as determined by measures of the Washington School Improvement Framework.

The budget also directed Western Washington University to assess the feasibility and benefits of expanding outdoor residential school programs to equitably serve fifth and sixth grade students. A report was published in September 2021.

Washington School Improvement Framework. Released in March 2018, and last updated in February of 2020, the Washington School Improvement Framework identifies how schools can improve the education of all students. According to OSPI, this framework combines as many as nine indicators into a 1 to 10 score. A school's score determines the state supports for the school to improve.

Summary of Bill: Outdoor Learning Grant Program. Subject to appropriations, or within funding made available, the Outdoor Learning Grant Program is established. The purpose of this program is to develop and support educational experiences for students.

OSPI must administer the program. Within existing resources, other specified agencies may partner with OSPI to provide relevant expertise on land management and work-integrated learning experiences and opportunities.

Beginning in the 2022-23 school year, OSPI must award grants to eligible school districts, state-tribal compact schools, federally recognized tribes, and outdoor education providers. OSPI may consult with the Washington Recreation and Conservation Office.

The program must consist of two types of grants:

- allocation-based grants for school districts and state-tribal compact schools to develop or support educational experiences; and
- competitive grants for federally recognized tribes and outdoor education providers to support existing capacity and to increase future capacity.

School districts, state-tribal compact schools, and outdoor education providers should ensure equitable access for students in all geographic regions and high levels of accessibility for students with disabilities.

Beginning in 2024, OSPI must submit an annual report with an evaluation of the program. The report may include information on other outdoor education and instructional time efforts and how they compare with programs funded through this grant program.

Outdoor Education Experiences Program. Subject to appropriations, the Outdoor Education Experiences Program is established within the Outdoor Learning Grant Program. The purpose of this program is to develop and support outdoor learning opportunities for fifth and sixth grade students with related opportunities for high school students to volunteer as counselors.

The program will consist of hands-on learning experiences that:

- are three to five days in duration and up to four nights;
- are residential or day programs; and
- have a focus on environmental education aligned with state learning standards and the development of social and emotional learning skills.

OSPI may work with a statewide nonprofit organization representing school principals to create guidelines for the program.

The priority focus of OSPI must be given to schools that have been identified for improvement through the Washington School Improvement Framework and communities historically under-served by science education.

Instructional Days. The Outdoor Learning Grant Program and the Outdoor Education Experiences Program are included as outdoor-based activities that student participation in may be considered instructional days.

Appropriation: The bill contains a section or sections to limit implementation to the availability of amounts appropriated for that specific purpose.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: Students' lives can be changed by outdoor experiences, and these experiences help students grow and understand natural resources. Every child in this state should have an opportunity to access these outdoor experiences, and these experiences are needed even more after the last two years. Income, ethnicity, and physical and emotional challenges should not be a barrier to having these experiences. This school year 20,000 students will have attended outdoor programs, including schools that have not had these opportunities, due to funding provided in last year's budget. Schools and providers are eager to expand the number of students. Overnight outdoor providers need one-time funding to be able to maintain and expand capacity given the uncertainty during the last two years.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Joseph Manson, Seward Park Audubon Center; Roberta McFarland, Highline Public Schools –Waskowitz; Chase Buffington, Cispus Learning Center.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.