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**SENATE BILL 5925**

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**State of Washington 67th Legislature 2022 Regular Session**

**By** Senators Hunt, Braun, Lovelett, Nguyen, Saldaña, Van De Wege, and C. Wilson

AN ACT Relating to establishing the outdoor school for all program; amending RCW 28A.300.790 and 28A.320.173; adding a new section to chapter 28A.300 RCW; and creating a new section.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  (1) The legislature finds that time outdoors helps children thrive physically, emotionally, and academically, yet over the past few generations, childhood has moved indoors. On average, today's kids spend up to 44 hours per week in front of a screen, and less than 10 minutes a day doing activities outdoors. For too many kids, access to the outdoors is determined by race, income, ability, and zip code. All children deserve equitable access to outdoor spaces where they can learn, play, and grow. Current access to outdoor school is inequitable mostly due to funding and administrative constraints.

(2) From stress reduction to improved focus and engagement to better academic performance, outdoor-based learning helps kids thrive. Research shows participants in outdoor school have higher graduation rates, improved behavior in school and relationships with peers, higher academic achievement, critical thinking skills, direct experience of scientific concepts in the field, leadership and collaboration skills, and a deeper engagement with learning, place, and community. Outdoor school also offers new opportunities for career connected learning in science, natural resources, education, land management, agriculture, outdoor recreation, and other employment sectors. Outdoor school can also be a key element in the larger system of regular outdoor instructional time and outdoor experiences that includes STEM fields, after-school programs, summer camps, 4-H, scouting, and related programs that can spark a lifelong appreciation for the natural world.

(3) The legislature further finds that accessibility is a major obstacle to universal outdoor school. Most sites lack accommodation for children with disabilities and support staff for children who need social and emotional support. In addition, some youth may experience cultural barriers to outdoor school experiences. The legislature intends to establish a statewide program to address all these needs and to ensure all students have a chance to benefit from outdoor school.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 28A.300 RCW to read as follows:

(1) Within amounts appropriated for this specific purpose, or within funding made available, the outdoor school for all program is established. The purpose of the outdoor school for all program is to develop and support outdoor school experiences for all 5th or 6th grade students in Washington public schools with opportunities for high school students to volunteer as counselors. The program will consist of hands-on outdoor school experiences that are three to five days and zero to four nights, residential or day programs, and have a focus on environmental education aligned with the Washington state learning standards and the development of social and emotional learning skills.

(2) The office of the superintendent of public instruction shall administer the outdoor school for all program in accordance with this section.

(3)(a) The office of the superintendent of public instruction may work with a statewide nonprofit organization representing school principals to create guidelines for the outdoor school for all program.

(b) Within existing resources, the Washington state parks and recreation commission, the department of natural resources, the Washington department of fish and wildlife, the Washington department of agriculture, and the Washington conservation commission may partner with the office of the superintendent of public instruction for expertise on land management and career connected learning.

(4) The office of the superintendent of public instruction shall award grants to eligible school districts and outdoor school providers starting in the 2022-23 school year. The office may consult with the Washington recreation and conservation office on outdoor school grants.

(a) The outdoor school for all program will consist of two types of grants including:

(i) Allocation-based grants for school districts to develop or support outdoor school experiences; and

(ii) Competitive grants for outdoor school providers designed to support existing capacity and to increase future capacity for outdoor school experiences.

(b) School districts and outdoor school providers should ensure equitable access for students in all geographic regions and high levels of accessibility for students with disabilities.

(5) The office of the superintendent of public instruction will submit an annual report, beginning in 2024, to the appropriate committees of the legislature with an evaluation of the outdoor school for all program and may include reporting on all outdoor education and instructional time efforts and how they integrate with the outdoor school for all program.

**Sec.**  RCW 28A.300.790 and 2018 c 266 s 410 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) The superintendent of public instruction, subject to conformity with application or other requirements adopted by rule, shall approve requests by public schools as provided in RCW 28A.320.173 to consider student participation in seasonal or nonseasonal outdoor-based activities, including the outdoor school for all program established in section 2 of this act, as instructional days for the purposes of basic education requirements established in RCW 28A.150.220(5).

(2) The superintendent of public instruction shall adopt rules to implement this section.

**Sec.**  RCW 28A.320.173 and 2018 c 266 s 409 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) Public schools may develop curricula that:

(a) 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, and the outdoor school for all program established in section 2 of this act;

(b) Aligns with the ((~~essential academic~~)) state learning ((~~requirements~~)) standards under RCW 28A.655.070 that are a component of the state's instructional program of basic education; and

(c) Includes locally administered competency based assessments that align with the Washington state learning standards.

(2) Public schools that develop curricula under this section may request authorization from the superintendent of public instruction as provided in RCW 28A.300.790 to consider student participation in seasonal or nonseasonal outdoor-based activities as instructional days for the purposes of basic education requirements established in RCW 28A.150.220(5).

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