

HOUSE BILL REPORT

2SHB 2078

As Passed House:
February 12, 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:

Committee Activity:

Education: 1/25/22, 2/1/22 [DPS];

Appropriations: 2/5/22, 2/7/22 [DP2S(w/o sub ED)].

Floor Activity:

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

Brief Summary of Second Substitute Bill

- Establishes the Outdoor Learning Grant program (Grant Program) to develop and support educational experiences for students in Washington public schools.
- Establishes the Outdoor Education Experiences Program within the Grant Program, which develops and supports outdoor learning opportunities for fifth and sixth grade students in Washington public schools.
- Requires the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction to administer the Grant Program, allocate grants to eligible school districts, federally recognized tribes, and outdoor school providers, and partner with state environmental agencies for components of its implementation.

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.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 10 members: Representatives Santos, Chair; Dolan, Vice Chair; Ybarra, Ranking Minority Member; Berg, Bergquist, Callan, Ortiz-Self, Rude, Steele and Stonier.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 3 members: Representatives Walsh, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; McCaslin and McEntire.

Staff: Emily Stephens (786-7296) and Ethan Moreno (786-7386).

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Majority Report: The second substitute bill be substituted therefor and the second substitute bill do pass and do not pass the substitute bill by Committee on Education. Signed by 33 members: Representatives Ormsby, Chair; Bergquist, Vice Chair; Gregerson, Vice Chair; Macri, Vice Chair; Stokesbary, Ranking Minority Member; Chambers, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Corry, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; MacEwen, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Boehnke, Caldier, Chandler, Chopp, Cody, Dolan, Dye, Fitzgibbon, Frame, Hansen, Harris, Hoff, Jacobsen, Johnson, J., Lekanoff, Pollet, Rude, Ryu, Schmick, Senn, Springer, Steele, Stonier, Sullivan and Tharinger.

Staff: Jordan Clarke (786-7123).

Background:

The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) must approve requests by public schools to consider student participation in seasonal or nonseasonal outdoor-based activities as instructional days for the purposes of basic education requirements.

Washington Outdoor School Study.

In September 2021, the Center for Economic and Business Research at Western Washington University released the "Washington State Outdoor School Study." The study was prepared in response to a request from the Legislature to assess the feasibility and benefits of expanding outdoor residential school programs to serve fifth and sixth grade students statewide. The report had seven recommendations, including:

- funding at least one outdoor school program at a Washington State Parks and Recreation, Department of Natural Resources, or Department of Fish and Wildlife facility in each educational service district;
- allowing both residential and day programs ranging in length from three to five days to be eligible for outdoor school funding; and
- creating a list of standard learning outcomes for outdoor schools and requiring that programs meet at least a certain number of outcomes to be eligible for funding.

2021-23 Operating Budget.

In the 2021-23 Operating Budget, \$10 million was provided to the OSPI and the Washington School Principals' Education Foundation (WSPEF) to support pandemic-related learning loss through outdoor learning and overnight camp experiences. The provision required the WSPEF and the OSPI to provide grants to school districts to partner with accredited residential outdoor schools to provide up to 20,000 fifth and sixth grade students with up to five days of outdoor learning at an overnight camp. The outdoor schools were required to provide curriculum aligned to state learning standards and provide opportunities for accelerated learning.

Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

In addition to its constitutional charge of supervising all matter pertaining to public schools, the Superintendent of Public Instruction and its office has numerous and broad responsibilities prescribed in statute, including:

- making rules and regulations necessary for the administration of public education requirements;
- preparing courses of study and other materials and books for the discharge of education duties;
- fulfilling financial responsibilities, including distributing legislatively allocated funds to districts for the operation of the public school system, and awarding numerous state and federally funded grants; and
- satisfying numerous reporting and other duties assigned by the Legislature.

Summary of Second Substitute Bill:

Outdoor Learning Grant Program.

The Outdoor Learning Grant program (Grant Program) is established. The stated purpose of the Grant Program is to develop and support educational experiences for students in Washington public schools. In implementing the Grant Program, school districts and outdoor education providers should ensure equitable access for students in all geographic regions, and high levels of accessibility for students with disabilities.

Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) is directed to administer the Grant Program. Beginning in the 2022-23 school year, the OSPI must award grants to eligible school districts, federally recognized tribes, and outdoor education providers. Eligible school districts include state-tribal education compact schools. The OSPI may consult with the Washington Recreation and Conservation Office in awarding grants. The Grant Program must consist of two types of grants:

- allocation-based grants for school districts to develop or support outdoor school experiences; and
- competitive grants for outdoor school providers to increase capacity for outdoor learning experiences.

Beginning in 2024, the OSPI must submit an annual report to the appropriate committees of the Legislature with an evaluation of the Grant Program. The report may include information on other outdoor education and instructional time efforts, and how they compare with other programs funded through the Grant Program.

Partnership with Environmental Agencies.

The OSPI may partner with 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 to provide relevant expertise on land management and work-integrated learning experiences and opportunities.

Outdoor Education Experiences Program.

The Outdoor Education Experiences program (Experiences Program) is established within the Grant Program. The stated purpose of the Experiences Program is to develop and support outdoor learning opportunities for fifth and sixth grade students in Washington public schools, with related opportunities for high school students to volunteer as counselors. The Superintendent of Public Instruction must consider the Experiences Program as instructional days for the purposes of basic education requirements. The program must 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 the Washington learning standards and the development of social and emotional learning skills.

The OSPI may work with a statewide nonprofit organization representing school principals to create guidelines for the Experiences Program. In implementing the program, the OSPI must give priority focus to schools that have been identified for improvement through the Washington School Improvement Framework and communities historically underserved by science education. These communities can include but are not limited to:

- federally recognized tribes, including state-tribal education compact schools;
- migrant students;
- schools with high free and reduced-price lunch populations;
- rural and remote students;
- students in alternative learning environments;
- students of color;
- English language learning students; and
- students receiving special education services.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Education):

(In support) Children who experience nature are happier, healthier, and smarter, and their test scores go up in science, math, and literature. Outdoor School for All also provides opportunities for career-connected learning, and creates education workforce pathways in areas like forestry, timber, marine biology, and river management. Children who lack formative experiences in the outdoors don't feel at home in the outdoors and don't want to pursue careers in outdoor fields. Accessibility is also a major obstacle to outdoor school, and all schools should have access to resources to be inclusive for all families, including children with and without disabilities and parents with and without disabilities.

(Opposed) None.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Appropriations):

(In support) This bill will change school experiences for Washington students and school communities by including outdoor education experiences. Students grow academically, socially, and emotionally when they participate in outdoor education. Outdoor education is an interdisciplinary approach to science, encouraging students' natural curiosities as they observe nature in nature, as opposed to through screen time. This bill would expand the reach of outdoor education to more schools and support the creation of new centers in underserved areas of Washington and will ensure that supports are available for the needs of all students and learners.

The bill provides equitable access, removes economic barriers, creates access for all abilities, and advances strong academic curricular collaboration with the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), school districts, and outdoor education providers for the physical and emotional well-being of every Washington student. The bill also allows various state agencies to partner with the OSPI to provide outreach to students in under-resourced communities that lack easy access to green spaces. The bill helps students from diverse backgrounds go outdoors and learn about natural resources and will be a meaningful program that introduces students to the outdoors to support their physical and mental well-being.

The bill elevates the importance of the outdoors and will help students connect to their place in the world. Outside in nature, a real relationship is important for students. Being outside in nature builds empathy and stewardship, brings people together, helps students work on solutions in real time, and develops leaders for our future. Students who participate in outdoor education experiences walk away with more confidence and understanding of natural resource management and a potential career path. Many will work in outdoor fields, with some selecting science, forestry, biology, or the trades for their career paths. All

students, however, need to have a basic appreciation of the outdoors, and should have a tangible moment at one point that makes them appreciate Washington as their home. This bill celebrates outdoor education and revitalizes the context it brings to a healthier existence and a way of life for generations to come.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying (Education): Representative Alicia Rule, prime sponsor; Samantha Fogg; Jacob Fogg; and Hilary Franz, Department of Natural Resources.

Persons Testifying (Appropriations): Roberta McFarland; Brian Considine, Department of Natural Resources; and Chase Buffington, Cispus Learning Center.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Education): Liza Rankin, Seattle Public Schools; Jen Kidder, NatureBridge; Roberta McFarland, Highline Public Schools-Waskowitz; Hanford McCloud, Nisqually Huckleberry Camp; Chase Buffington, Cispus Learning Center; Rex Burkholder, Oregon Outdoor Education Coalition; Ray Yurkewycz, Mt. St. Helens Institute; Emmett O'Donnell; and Jeff Giesen, North Cascades Institute.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Appropriations): None.