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**SUBSTITUTE HOUSE BILL 2078**

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

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

AN ACT Relating to establishing the outdoor school for all program; amending RCW 28A.300.790; adding new sections 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, but current access to outdoor educational opportunities is inequitable.

(2) From stress reduction to improved focus and engagement, and better academic performance, outdoor-based learning helps kids thrive. Research shows participants in outdoor educational activities 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 educational programs also offer new opportunities for work-integrated learning in science, natural resources, education, land management, agriculture, outdoor recreation, and other employment sectors. Outdoor-based learning activities 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 which can spark a lifelong appreciation for the natural world.

(3) The legislature further finds that accessibility is a major obstacle to universal outdoor education. 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 learning experiences.

(4) Therefore, the legislature intends to establish a statewide grant program and corresponding outdoor education experiences program to address these needs and to ensure that all students have a chance to benefit from outdoor education.

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

(1) Subject to the availability of amounts appropriated for this specific purpose, or within funding made available, the outdoor learning grant program is established. The purpose of the grant program is to develop and support educational experiences for students in Washington public schools.

(2) The office of the superintendent of public instruction shall administer the grant program in accordance with this section.

(3) 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 to provide relevant expertise on land management and work-integrated learning experiences and opportunities.

(4) Beginning in the 2022-23 school year, the office of the superintendent of public instruction shall award grants to eligible school districts and outdoor education program providers. The office may consult with the Washington recreation and conservation office in awarding grants under this section.

(5)(a) The grant program must consist of two types of grants, including:

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

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

(b) In implementing student educational experiences under this section, 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.

(6) Beginning in 2024, the office of the superintendent of public instruction, in accordance with RCW 43.01.036, must submit an annual report to the appropriate committees of the legislature with an evaluation of the program established by this section. The report may include information on other outdoor education and instructional time efforts and how they compare with programs funded through the outdoor learning grant program.

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

(1) Subject to the availability of amounts appropriated for this specific purpose, the outdoor education experiences program is established as a program within the outdoor learning grant program established in section 2 of this act. The purpose of the outdoor education experiences program is to develop and support outdoor learning opportunities for 5th and 6th grade students in Washington public schools, 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 the Washington state learning standards and the development of social and emotional learning skills.

(2) The office of the superintendent of public instruction may work with a statewide nonprofit organization representing school principals to create guidelines for the program established by this section.

(3) In implementing the program established by this section, the priority focus of the office of the superintendent of public instruction must be given 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, tribal nations including tribal compact schools, migrant students, schools with high free and reduced-price lunch populations, rural and remote schools, students in alternative learning environments, students of color, English language learner students, and students receiving special education services.

**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 programs established in accordance with section 2 of this act, and the outdoor education experiences program established in section 3 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.

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