
Education Committee

HB 2078

Brief Description: Establishing the outdoor school for all program.

Sponsors: 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 Summary of Bill

- Establishes the Outdoor School for All Program (Program) to provide fifth and sixth grade students with opportunities to attend residential or day outdoor school experiences.
- Requires the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction to administer the Program, allocate grants to eligible school districts and outdoor school providers, and partner with state environmental agencies for components of its implementation.

Hearing Date: 1/25/22

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

Background:

Public schools are authorized to develop curricula that link 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. The curricula must align with state learning standards that are a component of the state's instructional program of basic education.

The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) must approve requests by public

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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 3-5 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 Bill:

The Outdoor School for All Program (Program) is established. The stated purpose of the Program is to develop and support outdoor school experiences for all fifth or sixth grade students in Washington public schools, with opportunities for high school students to volunteer as

counselors. The Program must consist of residential or day programs with student experiences of 3-5 days and up to four nights. The Program must focus on environmental education aligned with state learning standards and the development of social and emotional learning skills. 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. The Program is delineated as a curriculum that links student learning with engagement in seasonal or nonseasonal outdoor-based activities.

The Program is to be established within amounts appropriated for its creation or funding made available.

Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) is directed to administer the Program. The OSPI is authorized to work with a statewide nonprofit organization representing state principals to create guidelines for the Program.

The OSPI must submit an annual Program report beginning in 2024 to the appropriate committees of the Legislature. The report may include information on all outdoor education and instructional time and how they integrate with the Program.

The Superintendent of Public Instruction must consider the Program as instructional days for the purposes of basic education requirements.

Grants and Grant Allocations.

Grants must be awarded by the OSPI to eligible school districts and outdoor school providers starting in the 2022-23 school year. The OSPI may consult with the Washington Recreation and Conservation Office on these grants. The Program will 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 designed to increase capacity for outdoor school experiences.

Partnership with Environmental Agencies.

For expertise on land management and career-connected learning, 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.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 24, 2022.

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