

# HOUSE BILL REPORT

## HB 2078

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**As Reported by House Committee On:**  
Education

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

**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 History:**

**Committee Activity:**

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

**Brief Summary of 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 and outdoor school providers, and partner with state environmental agencies for components of its implementation.

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### HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

**Majority Report:** The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass.

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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.*

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).

**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.
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### **Summary of 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 and outdoor education providers. 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:

- tribal nations, including tribal 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.

### **Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:**

The substitute bill differs in numerous ways from the original bill, including the following:

1. the Outdoor School for All program is replaced with the Outdoor Learning Grant program (Grant Program). The Grant Program develops and supports educational experiences for all students in Washington public schools, rather than fifth and sixth grade students as in the original bill;
2. the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) is authorized to include information in its annual report evaluating the Grant Program that compares programs funded by the Grant Program to other outdoor education and instructional time efforts, rather than identifying how the programs funded by the original grant program integrate with other outdoor education and instructional time efforts;
3. the Outdoor Education Experiences program (Experiences Program) is established within the Grant Program. The Experiences Program generally resembles the Outdoor School for All program in the original bill;
4. the OSPI is authorized to work with a statewide nonprofit organization representing school principals to create guidelines for the Experiences Program;
5. a requirement that 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 is added; and
6. a requirement that the Superintendent of Public Instruction must consider student

participation in the Experiences Program and in programs established in accordance with the Grant Program as instructional days for the purposes of basic education requirements is added. In the original bill, the Superintendent of Public Instruction was required to consider participation in the Outdoor School for All program as instructional days.

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**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Preliminary fiscal note available.

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

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:**

(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.

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

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying:** 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.