

2SHB 2078 Outdoor Learning

Statutory and/or Budget Language

\$20,000,000 of the general fund—state appropriation for fiscal year 2024 and \$20,000,000 of the general fund—state appropriation for fiscal year 2025 are provided solely for the office to administer an outdoor learning grant program to develop and support outdoor educational experiences for students in Washington public schools. A portion of the amount provided must be used to provide outdoor educational opportunities for people with disabilities. The office may consult with the Washington recreation and conservation office on outdoor learning program grants. Of the amounts provided in this subsection (3)(n):

- (i) \$195,000 of the general fund—state appropriation for fiscal year 2024 and \$195,000 of the general fund—state appropriation for fiscal year 2025 are provided solely for the office to implement chapter 112, Laws of 2022 (outdoor learning grant prg.).
- (ii) \$3,903,000 of the general fund—state appropriation for fiscal year 2024 and \$3,903,000 of the general fund—state appropriation for fiscal year 2025 are provided solely for the outdoor learning grant program, which consists of two types of grants:
 - (A) Allocation-based grants for school districts to develop or support outdoor educational experiences; and
 - (B) Competitive grants for outdoor education providers that are designed to support existing capacity and to increase future capacity for outdoor learning experiences.
- (iii) \$15,902,000 of the general fund—state appropriation for fiscal year 2024 and \$15,902,000 of the general fund—state appropriation for fiscal year 2025 are provided solely for the outdoor education experiences program. The office must prioritize providing the program to fifth and sixth grade students in high poverty schools, expanding to other fifth and sixth grade students subject to available funds.

Purpose

The purpose of this proviso is to implement and support 2SHB 2078, Outdoor Learning Grant Program. OSPI contracted with the Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) and the Washington School Principals Education Foundation's Outdoor School Washington to administer this multi-tiered proviso.

Description of Services Provided

Funding supported state level leadership and programmatic support, as well as administrative support for the development, approval, selection and distribution of the contract and grants necessary to implement the Outdoor Learning Program. To support the tribes, outdoor schools, and other community partners offering these outdoor learning experiences, OSPI staff hosted a series of seven workshops for Educational Service Districts (101, 105, 112, 113, 123, 171, 189). These workshops nurtured a community of practice in each region to ensure that students



receive high-quality outdoor learning opportunities aligned with standards, culturally responsive, considered best practices in environmental education, and are anchored in local, relevant phenomena. OSPI staff also hosted quarterly and ad hoc meetings for the 20+ member HB2078 Advisory Committee, with representatives from state agencies and community-based organizations that serve similar student audiences, as well as OSPI content area experts. Through this committee, we have been able to guide the process of implementing the Outdoor Learning Grant with fidelity to the vision of the legislation: equity, and equitable geographic distribution of funds for all students across the state.

The Outdoor Learning Grant Program funded three programs:

- Outdoor Learning Grants (OLG) for Schools and Districts at OSPI for \$1.95 million
 - **OSPI's Outdoor Learning Grants** opened September 26, 2023. Funds were dispersed on a rolling basis, completed by January 2024. A total of 62 projects from \$5,000–40,000 were funded to serve 31,016 students in 134 schools.
- OLG for Community Based Organizations (CBOs) at the Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) for \$1.85 million
 - **Outdoor Learning Grants contracted through RCO:** A total of 111 applications were submitted to RCO by the July 13, 2023, deadline from a wide range of organizations, primarily nonprofit organizations, including Washington outdoor schools and institutes, environmental education organizations, community-based organizations, regional fisheries enhancement groups, and land trusts. Applications were received from four federally recognized tribes, 89 applications from qualified nonprofit corporations, ten conservation districts, eight regional fisheries enhancement groups, five local governments, and three state agencies. The total funding request for all 111 applications was \$15,363,491. The ranked list including the 27 finalists and scoring detail can be found on RCO's Outdoor Learning Grant [website](#).
- Overnight Outdoor Educational Experiences (OOEE) through Washington State Principal's Education Foundation's Outdoor School Washington (OSWA) for \$15.9 million
 - **Overnight Outdoor Education Experience contracted with Outdoor Schools WA (OSWA).** OSWA aims to support every school district in our state in their outdoor school planning and implementation by providing reimbursements for outdoor school fees, based on need. OSWA reduced barriers to attending outdoor school by subsidizing expenses. Their funding expanded existing programs, and jump-started schools who have never been to outdoor school. OSWA held two week-long Outdoor School trainings to continue building a community of practice statewide. They conducted safety and management reviews for 30 outdoor school sites to ensure all students are welcomed to safe

and enriching experiences. As a result, more than 48,410 students experienced outdoor school this past school year.

For all three programs, initial requests exceeded available funding. A total of 98,070 students were served in the 2023–24 school year.

Criteria for Receiving Services and/or Grants

The legislation prioritizes student populations that are underserved in science. Research shows that outdoor learning benefits all students, and students underserved in science benefit the most. This is known as the equigenic effect. For the RCO and OSPI grant programs, eligible grantees serve pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade experiential youth outdoor education program activities learning in, for, and about the outdoors. For **OSPI's Outdoor Learning Grants**, successful applicants had to be from a rural, tribal, or alternative school, and/or be a school or district at or above the statewide level for one or more of the prioritized student audiences. Each application was reviewed to determine if it addressed state learning standards, and engaged students in real-world, hands-on science learning within a reasonable budget. If applicants met these criteria, funds were awarded until all funding was expended.

For **RCO's Outdoor Learning Grants**, eligible applicants included, federally recognized tribes, outdoor education providers, local governments (cities, towns, counties, port districts, park and recreation districts, etc.), nonprofit organizations (501(c)3, 501(c)1, or 501(c)4 tax-exempt organizations), or state agencies. The grant application process was highly competitive, with only 27 of 111 applications funded. Funding prioritized tribal schools and communities, rural and remote schools, alternative learning environments, low-income students, migrant students, students of color, emergent multilingual learners, and students receiving special education services.

To best serve the student groups listed in the legislation, **Outdoor Schools Washington (OSWA)** developed a funding formula that allocates the most robust funding to schools/districts with the most need. A standard funding formula was adopted using the Western Washington University (WWU) study from 2022. The standard funding formula allocated \$125 per student per day up to the maximum of 4 nights/5 days. Schools were prioritized for funding using Free and Reduced Lunch student population percentages as a base, and then adding a percentage for each of the historically underserved populations above state average, as well as whether the school is included in the Washington State Improvement Framework. Based on school requests and funding available for the 2023-24 school year, two tiers of funding were provided. Schools with cumulative factors below 38% received half of the standard formula, while schools with factors 38% and above received the full standard formula. This funding covered all outdoor school expenses: program fees, transportation, meals/lodging, gear, teacher stipends, extra staffing (if needed), and substitute costs (if needed). Schools that opted for an extended day program due to limitations or cultural differences received \$88 per student.

Beneficiaries in the 2023-24 School Year

Number of School Districts	329
Number of Schools	1,109
Number of Students	98,070
Number of Educators	3,532
Other (Community Partners)	300+

Are Federal or Other Funds Contingent on State Funding?

No

State Funding History

EU – 2SHB 2078 (Outdoor Learning)

Fiscal Year	Amount Funded	Actual Expenditures
2024	\$195,000	\$189,432
2023	\$195,000	\$148,223

EV – Outdoor Learning Grants

Fiscal Year	Amount Funded	Actual Expenditures
2024	\$3,903,000	\$3,874,114
2023	\$3,903,000	\$3,817,223

EW – Outdoor Learning Experiences

Fiscal Year	Amount Funded	Actual Expenditures
2024	\$15,902,000	\$14,135,110
2023	\$5,902,000	\$5,898,425

Number of Beneficiaries Per Fiscal Year (e.g. School Districts, Schools, Students, Educators, Other)

EU – 2SHB 2078 (Outdoor Learning)

Fiscal Year	Number of Beneficiaries
2024	79 School Districts, 206 schools, 31,016 students, 1,194 educators
2023	63 school districts, 179 schools, 26,187 students, 2,670 educators

EV – Outdoor Learning Grants

Fiscal Year	Number of Beneficiaries
2024	79 school districts, 251 schools, 19,404 students, 1,034 educators

2023	52 school districts, 174 schools, 22,039 students
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EW – Outdoor Learning Experiences

Fiscal Year	Number of Beneficiaries
2024	171 school districts, 652 schools, 47,650 students, 1,304 teachers
2023	99 school districts, 308 schools, 23,549 students, 942 teachers

Programmatic Changes Since Inception (If Any)

To improve targeting funds to students historically underserved in science, the Recreation and Conservation Office Outdoor Learning Grant staff made two changes to their process. First, they used the data from OSPI's Targeted Equitable Funding Tool to generate focus areas for the social media posts promoting the grant opportunity to the communities prioritized for this funding. Second, they adjusted the scoring criteria for the grant applications to make the types of students served the most heavily weighted criteria in the grant application process. These two adjustments to their processes did create an improved distribution of funds towards our targeted students.

Program Evaluation or Evaluation of Major Findings

OSPI collaborated with Western Washington University's Center for Economic and Business Research (CEBR) to collect feedback from teachers, administrators, and support staff on outdoor education programs in Washington funded through these provisos. To achieve this objective, a survey was produced in late summer of 2023 and distribution began October of 2023. OSPI and project partners Recreation and Conservation Office and Outdoor Schools Washington, managed the survey distribution to gather as many responses as possible from funded programs, ensuring a valid and representative sample from across the state. The survey collected responses through July 20, 2024, and gathered 1,359 responses. Some of the highlights for this survey include:

- 99% of respondents plan to create future outdoor learning experiences
- 90% of respondents plan to find ways to make outdoor learning a regular part of their students' educational experience.

Teachers were given the chance to choose between five ranges of change in their student's behavior between strong negative change and strong positive change (including a not observed option.) More than half (50%) of the respondents noticed strong positive behavior change among students in six of the behavior options.

- Relationship with peers (57.9%)
- Engagement with Learning (51.3%)
- Engagement with place and community (57.7%)

- Comfort outdoors (55.71%)
- Connection to nature (67.14%)

School administrators selected positive changes for approximately 80% of each category.

Positive changes were recorded for more than 80% of the categories of support staff. Close to 70% of support staff respondents noticed a strong positive change in students' relationship with peers and connection with nature. 96% agreed that learning experiences were hands-on and experiential. 84% indicated that their outdoor learning lessons provided considered students' previous knowledge, lived experience, and cultural context.

The majority of OSPI and RCO grantees partnered with additional community-based organizations, upwards of 300 different partners, amplifying the impact of the funding. From the WWU survey, 76% of respondents indicated that additional content providers added a high amount of value, and 19% responded they added some value. Less than 5% responded that additional partners added little or no value.

Grant funding increased accessibility. For example, Easton School District reported "we ensur(ed) everyone, including those with disabilities, could fully participate. This inclusive approach meant that every student felt valued and capable, no matter their background. This hands-on experience in collecting and analyzing data made science come alive for them, showing them that they can be real scientists."

Across both RCO and OSPI Outdoor Learning Grant programs, teachers are qualitatively reporting improvements in students' behavior and academic engagement. Outdoor learning provides powerful context for curriculum integration in science, math, English language arts (ELA), social studies, Social-Emotional Learning, and Since Time Immemorial curriculum.

In a feedback form specific for OSWA's programming, teachers shared the transformative experience of outdoor education across Washington state. Students of diverse abilities participated in activities like canoeing, archery, and hiking, with support for those facing motor challenges or language barriers. Personal growth, friendship, and newfound confidence emerged as key themes. Teachers shared stories of reluctant campers overcoming fears, developing leadership skills, and gaining emotional resilience. Highlights include students dissecting squid, discovering wildlife, and bonding over shared meals. Both students and educators expressed deep appreciation for this unique learning environment, emphasizing the invaluable emotional and educational benefits.

Major Challenges Faced by the Program

Across all three programs, there are consistent challenges in both bus and substitute teacher availability, costs, and unpredictability. Buses are necessary to transport students to the field sites for habitat restoration, trail building, garden/agricultural activities, science learning in the context of the real-world (forestry, snow science, habitat analysis surveys, water testing, etc.) and

other forms of Field STEM and service learning. School and staff comfort levels taking students outside limited student participation on several occasions. In some regions, schools aren't aware of high-quality curriculum to implement outdoor learning successfully, which points to the need for more professional development. In the WWU survey, 30% of respondents indicated they need additional planning and execution support to allow improvement in what is offered or how it is applied in their classroom.

We are limited in the ability to fund summer activities due to the fiscal year's timeline, accounting, and contracting processes. This is problematic for summer programs designed to help underserved students retrieve high school credit. In some programs, grantees and schools hoped to pay students to participate to address equity issues. For example, some students depend on income from summer jobs, and scheduling doesn't allow them to participate in these credit retrieval opportunities, too. It is understood that these funds are not eligible for student stipends or wages.

While initial funding requests exceeded available funds, the ability for grantees to utilize funding did result in each proviso allocation showing as underspent.

Future Opportunities

All participating schools were asked to identify students participating in these programs in OSPI's Comprehensive Education and Research System (CEDARS) for the 2023–24 school year, allowing OSPI to track the expected student outcomes of 2SHB2078 through improved grades, behavior, attendance, and eventually, graduation rates.

OSPI and Outdoor Schools Washington are working with Clemson University and Virginia Tech on a National Science Foundation Grant award. The project will develop a community of practice focused on collaborative learning, program evaluation and continuous improvement for Outdoor School multi-day program providers in Washington. Participation provides open and collaborative spaces for meaningful partnerships, thoughtful exchanges of ideas, and information for continual program improvement. Each participating outdoor school will receive confidential evaluation reports, professional development, and an opportunity to enhance our collective knowledge of effective practices that enhance student outcomes in outdoor programs.

OSPI is using a Targeted Equitable Funding Tool developed within OSPI to ensure funding is going where it is needed most. Improvements in equity mapping layers could be made by combining it with statewide overburdened communities' data, including environmental health risks. This will provide the ability to update evaluation criteria to ensure that grants are reaching the students in communities and schools historically underserved in science and outdoor learning opportunities.

OSPI hopes to continue to improve our targeted outreach to and support for outdoor learning providers that could serve high need districts and/or expansion of areas that some providers

currently serve to reach the school and students that may not have outdoor education providers readily available.

School districts find that having a Teacher on Special Assignment (TOSA) or another form of district-level outdoor learning coordinator greatly benefits efforts to incorporate professionals from tribes, natural resource agencies, and local nonprofits with expertise in local ecosystems and environmental science issues in their communities. This adds the valuable element of career awareness to outdoor learning. TOSA's are also able to coordinate volunteer participation, such as parents, retired teachers/natural resource professionals, local college students, community service organizations, etc. In our more rural areas, Educational Service Districts are exploring the idea of hosting a similar position to support smaller school districts.

There are a handful of classes for high school students to earn credits for serving as counselors at outdoor school through Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs. Outdoor education coursework was recently approved by the Superintendent as a statewide course equivalency. Similarly, there are a few programs for our Native American students that enable them to earn P.E., history, and science credits for cultural activities (Canoe Journey, Huckleberry Camp, Deer Camp, etc.) OSPI aims to reduce barriers for our Native American communities by creating systems within OSPI that make it a clear and reasonable process for any tribe or school to attain.

OSPI's Special Education, Outdoor Education, and Civil Rights and Equity Office are collaborating on a Guidance Document for Inclusion that should be available sometime this fall.

Other Relevant Information

Here is a summary of grant projects focused on tribal communities and tribal ways of knowing. Here is a collection of other 2SHB2078 [Press and Media Coverage](#).

Schools/Districts Receiving Assistance

[Click here to see a list of all OSPI grant recipients in the 2024 Fiscal Year.](#)

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