



Washington Office of Superintendent of
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

REPORT TO THE LEGISLATURE

UPDATE: Establishing the Outdoor School for All Program 2025

Authorizing Legislation: [RCW 28A.300.793](#) and [RCW 28A.300.795](#)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) is required to report annually on an evaluation of the Outdoor learning grant program as established by [RCW 28A.300.793](#). This report provides an update on the establishment and implementation of the **Outdoor School for All Program** in Washington State, as authorized by RCW 28A.300.793 and [RCW 28A.300.795](#).

The Outdoor School for All Program was created to expand outdoor educational experiences for students from pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade, with a focus on increasing equity and access for historically underserved populations in science education. Three main grant programs are administered by OSPI, the Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO), and Outdoor Schools Washington (OSWA). These programs fund outdoor school experiences, including overnight trips for fifth and sixth graders, and support for high school counselors.

Through the three programs, thousands of schools, districts, and students were served each year. The programs fostered inclusive, high-quality STEM opportunities, integrated outdoor learning with state standards, and promoted social-emotional development. Projects included place-based learning, garden revitalization, and culturally responsive experiences for American Indian/Alaska Native students. The Outdoor School for All Program supported communities historically underserved by science education through the collaborative efforts of OSPI, RCO and OSWA.

INTRODUCTION

In 2022, the Washington State Legislature passed Second Substitute House Bill 2078 (SHB 2078) to establish the Outdoor Learning Grant Program. This initiative aims to enhance outdoor educational experiences for students in Washington's public schools from pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade, particularly those historically underserved in science, thereby increasing equity and opportunity for all students.

The legislation, codified in RCW 28A.300.793 and RCW 28A.300.795, created two grant programs and provided funding to support fifth and sixth grade outdoor school overnight experiences, as well as related experiences for high school counselors. The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) administers the entire program, allocating grants to eligible schools, school districts, and educational service districts. Additionally, the Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) administers a second grant program for outdoor learning programs hosted by federally recognized tribes, agencies, and community-based organizations. The third program, managed by Outdoor Schools Washington (OSWA), reimburses schools for outdoor school expenses, including program fees and transportation.

Together, these programs provided outdoor education opportunities across the state, supporting content integration, the John McCoy (Iulilaš) Since Time Immemorial curriculum implementation, and social-emotional learning. By integrating outdoor learning into the curriculum, schools promoted academic excellence while nurturing essential life skills, environmental stewardship, and potential career paths. These programs reduced barriers to outdoor education, ensuring that all students, especially those historically underserved, had access to enriching outdoor experiences. Partnering with schools, federally recognized tribes, and outdoor education providers played a crucial role in enhancing outdoor learning in underserved communities. Their involvement brought diverse expertise and resources, ensuring that programs were culturally relevant and inclusive.

UPDATE STATUS

This report includes activities funded during the 2024-25 school year and is based on a compilation of grant reports and quarterly reports from RCO and OSWA.

Program Engagement Data Overview

OSPI funded opportunities

For OSPI’s Outdoor Learning Grants, successful applicants are from rural, tribal, or alternative schools, and/or be a school or district at or above the statewide level for one or more of the prioritized student audiences. Each application is reviewed to determine if it addresses state learning standards and engages students in real-world, hands-on science learning within a reasonable budget. If applicants meet these criteria, funds are awarded until all funding is expended.

Table 1: Beneficiaries of OSPI Support by School Year

	Schools served	School Districts served	Students served
2022-23 School Year	179	63	26,187
2023-24 School Year	206	79	31,016
2024-25 School Year	41	39	24,389

Source: For the 2024-25 school year, the methodology to count schools and districts was based upon grants awarded to applicant districts and from grantee reports.

RCO funded opportunities

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. Funding prioritized students historically underserved in science and covered all outdoor school expenses: program fees, transportation, meals/lodging, gear, teacher stipends, extra staffing (if needed), and substitute costs (if needed). Schools who had lesser need were allotted funds to cover transportation only.

Table 2: Beneficiaries of RCO Support by School Year

	Schools served	School Districts served	Students served
2022-23 School Year	174	52	22,039

2023-24 School Year	251	79	19,404
2024-25 School Year	373	105	25,510

Source: RCO grant reports

Projects funded by RCO reached students through place-based learning in geographically diverse areas of our state and exhibited the legislation’s commitment to serving traditionally under-served students in both the program partnerships and funded projects. Funding from this program also brought tribal voices and perspectives to educators across the state, further growing understanding that position stronger support for all students.

OSWA funded opportunities

Based on school requests and funding for the 2023-24 and 2024-25 school years, two tiers of funding were provided. Schools were prioritized for funding using student population metrics, taking into consideration historically underserved populations as well as the Washington State Improvement Framework (WSIF). Schools with factors (as determined by WSIF metrics) below 38% received half of the standard formula, while schools with factors 38% and above received the full standard formula. Starting with a school district’s percentage of free and reduced-price lunch (FRPL) as a base, additional percentage points were added for each student audience above the state average or school type identified as underserved by HB2078. Schools that opted for an extended day program due to limitations or cultural differences received \$88 per student.

Table 3: Beneficiaries of OSWA Support by School Year

	Schools served	School Districts served	Students served
2022-23 School Year	308	99	23,549
2023-24 School Year	652	170	45,554
2024-25 School Year	736	191	58,049

Source: OSWA grant reports

The majority of students (53%) were supported through two-night programs, and the majority of students engaged in OSWA supported programs were in fifth grade (68%). Most students attended programs in the spring of 2025.

PROGRAM EVALUATION

Outdoor learning helps students connect what they learn in school to real life, while also building important social and emotional skills that support their growth as they continue through school. Students experienced hands-on learning that may inspire future career paths like agricultural science, aquaculture, sustainable forestry, medicine, and horticulture. In many cases, districts not only increased the number of students who participated; the efforts made towards inclusion meant fulfilling the intended purpose of the legislation.

The activities supported by the grant funds fostered inclusive, high-quality STEM opportunities in outdoor settings. As one grantee wrote, "The lessons go beyond science - students develop confidence, cultural pride, and a sense of belonging in the natural world around them."

The reach of impact extended beyond students to their families; as one district reported, "Funding from HB2078 has allowed us to fully fund all of our adventures without having to ask families for support. This is critical for ensuring that our historically underserved scholars can participate fully."

Areas of Impact

Content/Standards Alignment and Integration

Collaboration with school districts provided the opportunity to align outdoor education sessions with Washington State Learning Standards, Next Generation Science Standards, Social and Emotional Learning Standards and the John McCoy (Iulilaš) Since Time Immemorial curriculum. This alignment ensures that outdoor learning is directly connected to classroom instruction and increases opportunity for content integration across academic disciplines. Integration of content helps to position outdoor learning to improve academic performance, particularly in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) by offering hands-on field activities that make complex concepts concrete and improve retention (Oberle, et al., 2021), thereby improving academic performance.

Several projects referred to supporting gardens to engage students in year-round, place-based, and integrated learning. In one example, students integrated indigenous knowledge with learning standards in learning about the river while on the river. This created immediate place-based learning relevance and opportunities to use authentic and real-time data as part of their learning. In another example at Ida Nason Aronica Elementary, where 56% of students come from low-income families, the school revitalized their outdoor courtyard garden by installing a greenhouse and a storage shed, making it a more functional and year-round learning space. Every student at the school now benefits from regular engagement in garden-based learning, including students with disabilities, who access the space alongside their peers. This project directly advanced HB 2078's intent by promoting inclusive, hands-on science learning in an accessible outdoor environment for a historically underserved student population.

Collaboration with Schools and District

Attendance at conferences, meetings and training facilitated collaboration across agencies and communities, expanded access to high-quality, standards-aligned outdoor education, and supported the development of innovative curricula and pathways.

Having presence at a variety of convenings presented opportunities to impact educator growth and certification, not only increasing opportunities for students to continue to benefit from standards alignment and content integration in the future but also helping support growth in a teacher pipeline.

Working with schools and districts helped support system-wide shifts to increase access for all students. As reported by one district, "Lessons learned include that equity for students requires intentional planning for translation, accessibility, and differentiated needs to be met, that investing in teacher confidence with training, mentorship, and field previews pays off, and that pre-trip site tours and orientation for our transportation department improved coordination and understanding of our learning objectives among the transportation staff."

Building strong partnerships across agencies ensures sustainable experiences and learning for students and consistently high-quality experiences for students across the state.

Student Agency

Support from across all three programs enabled students to grow in confidence and agency which are key skills for growth and academic success. Students from Foster and Evergreen High Schools participated in overnight camping in Vantage where they experienced the outdoors, some for the first time, and learned skills that promote teamwork and self-sufficiency.

In another project, a teacher indicated, "Many of our students had never hiked before! Going to Mt Rainier National Park was a highlight as many would not have that opportunity. Many of them had never done any work around camping such as building a fire. Many had never eaten foods that can be of use in the wild such as fish! It was an eye-opening experience for them. They felt proud to be able to build a fire."

The intentional work of cultivating culturally responsive learning experiences means an increased sense of belonging by all students in their learning experiences. As reported by one grantee:

This project had the opportunity to support cultural outdoor learning for over 350 American Indian/Alaska Native students from kindergarten all the way through 12th grade. Achievements accomplished during our grant period included but were not limited to creation of a traditional Native American school garden, creation of an Indigi-STEM lesson based on traditional plant teachings, harvesting, and preserving. The Project also did various cultural hands-on lessons around seed and plant identification, as well as planting seeds for their own home garden, The outdoor work occurred around their school campus and on the nearby Puyallup Indian reservation. There were field trip opportunities, several family night events with plant and cultural experts who shared their wisdom with students and

parents throughout the year. In the spring there was the creation of an Indigenous plants' mural at one of our high schools designed by a local artist with student input and painted by our Native students from the district.

Finally, educators reported observable growth in students' social emotional skills through their outdoor learning experiences. Outdoor overnight programs support the development of communication, empathy and teamwork as students practice collaboration, resilience, and problem-solving in real time (Mahoney et al., 2021).

CONCLUSION & NEXT STEPS

Funding for this body of work has been discontinued by the legislature. Beginning July 1, 2025, OSPI is no longer implementing this grant or program activities.

Resources developed with prior funding continue to be available to schools and partners in the work. Supported by possible grant funding, OSWA plans to maintain their webpage, which holds several resources for schools and outdoor education sites and will continue to maintain an email connection so that outdoor learning questions may be addressed.

The systems developed to award funding and opportunities for outdoor learning could be re-started with future funding including:

- Applications for funding and systems for awarding funding which prioritizes equity in allocation using needs-based funding formulas to reach under-resourced districts and marginalized student populations first.
- Building cross-sector partnerships and encouraging collaboration between districts, outdoor education providers, tribal nations, and community organizations to align resources and increase participation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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