

RCW 28A.300.793 Outdoor learning grant program. (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, federally recognized tribes, 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 federally recognized tribes and 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.

(7) For the purposes of this section, "school districts" includes state-tribal education compact schools established under chapter 28A.715 RCW. [2022 c 112 s 2.]

Findings—Intent—2022 c 112: "(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." [2022 c 112 s 1.]