

The Impacts of Outdoor School on Classroom Culture, Learning, and the Lives of Students



Outdoor Schools WA
Summer Conference, 2023



We find ourselves in an interesting situation...

Covid did a number on all of us, but especially our students

Teachers report:

- an increase in aggressive behaviors
- a decreasing interest in learning
- students have lost their sense of independence
- students have lost the understanding of how to "be" together





Benefits of time spent in nature

- Reduces anxiety, stress, and depression
 - Boosts creativity
 - Improves memory and cognition
 - Enhances concentration and focus
 - Improves physical health/supports longevity
 - Improves sleep
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- <https://www.onemedical.com/blog/healthy-living/health-benefits-nature/#:~:text=Research%20has%20shown%20that%20spending,an%20hour%20interacting%20with%20nature.>



The impact outdoor school makes is powerful in two time frames

The impacts on the here and now

- Classroom culture and relationships
- School success
- Learning

The impacts on the future

- (which we'll get to a little later)



Impacts on relationships

- Students report making new friends
- Students and school staff create stronger bonds
- Students and teachers have a shared common experience, which creates a foundation of trust and well-being
- Students and teachers know each other at a level different than a typical classroom year
- An increase and improvement in conflict management and problem solving



School Success

Teachers see:

- Kids who are more engaged in their learning
- Fewer behavior situations that require adult intervention
- An increase and improvement in conflict management and problem solving
- Increased attention to lessons



Impacts on learning and learning behaviors:

- Increased interest in classroom learning, especially in subjects related to outdoor school topics (building of background knowledge)
- Development and improvement of critical thinking skills
- Improved performance in STEM and natural history
- Better attendance
- Higher standardized test scores
- Higher graduation rates

<https://oregonstate.app.box.com/s/ekoct3zs0lx8z7a7kyxhh09mbyzq5zkr>



We make it a point to never call outdoor school "camp"



Outdoor school is not camp



As noted in the legislation (SHB 2078), a day at outdoor school is a school day



A day at outdoor school is focused on hands-on learning, meant to enhance and enrich classroom learning across disciplines

However...

The best parts of camp manage to emerge during overnight outdoor school

- Kids try new things
- Kids overcome fears
- Kids discover they can trust themselves and others
- Kids learn they can be independent
- Kids arrive wanting to go home and leave wanting to stay forever



By providing students with overnight outdoor learning experiences, we are playing the long game

We never fully understand the full impact outdoor school has on lives!

- Life-long friends meet at outdoor school
- Someone decides they want to become a wildlife biologist at outdoor school
- Someone overcomes their anxiety being in unfamiliar situations at outdoor school
- Someone decides they want to become a teacher at outdoor school
- Someone becomes a steward for the environment at outdoor school
- Someone discovers they are smart at outdoor school
- Someone sees that accepting people for who they are makes the world a better place at outdoor school
- Someone finally feels like a regular kid at outdoor school

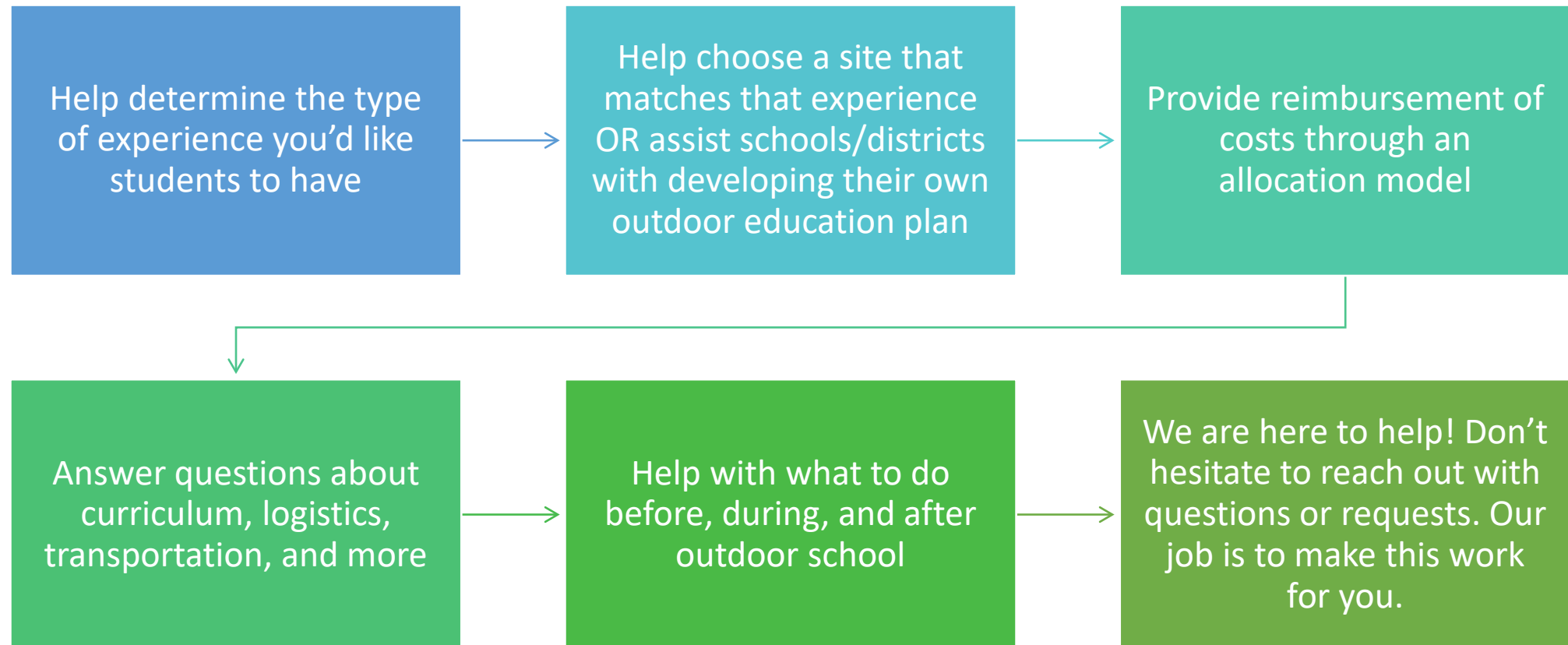




What is Outdoor Schools WA?



How can we help you?



Pro-outdoor school resources

<https://www.outdoorschoolswa.org/new-page-1>

Contact us!

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