



(picture of the trail to the beach at camp Westwind, an outdoor school site in Otis Oregon)

Started as an opportunity for students in both fifth and sixth grade to help them learn natural science, not in a school classroom but hands-on and out in nature Outdoor Science School has since been a staple of Oregon education. In Oregon, most outdoor school programs are housed in resident camps where students will stay on site for up to five days. While at camp they will learn about rocks, water, plants, animals and much more, all following Oregon standards for sixth-grade science.

Outdoor school (ODS) for many children can be the first time that they are getting out in nature by hiking, getting down on the beach, playing a stream or seeing wildlife pout in the forest. Ods can give kids a perspective on the world around them that they would not be able to get in their average day-to-day life. These experiences are vital in shaping young minds in how they see nature and the need for stewardship. Where ODS was created to help sixth graders get better ideas about nature and natural sciences the younger children aren't the only ones that this program can touch in meaningful ways. Another group can be vastly and vitally changed are the high school and college student volunteers that help make the program tick.

The majority of ODS programs rely on high school counselors (also referred to as Student Leaders) to help with the needs of all the children. Outdoor school Student Leaders are on average between the ages of 15-19 and are usually high school students.

In addition to volunteer hours and leadership skills student leaders often also receive a sense of community, new friends from all over the state and an instilled sense of how vital outdoor education is. As a student leader myself with six five-day outdoor school weeks under my belt, I can speak to how the program affects both the students and the counselors. For counselors, it can be a fantastic opportunity for them to connect to other high schoolers that are passionate about science and the environment as well as working with children. It is also a chance for them to strengthen their skills as a leader in improving their confidence.

I know personally that Outdoor school has increased my confidence and sense of self ten-fold. It has allowed me to grow as both a leader and a person in so many surprising ways; Ods has also gifted me



(Five student leaders are pictured hanging out during their lunch break after teaching about the forest and hiking all the way up to "High Meadow" the, the highest place at camp Westwind)

some of the best friends that I have ever had. The Outdoor school program has brought me so much joy and turned me into the person that I am today.

“It’d challenging to find the [right] words to explain the beauty of outdoor school but going to outdoors school and being a student leader is the best thing I’ve done ever because [without it] who knows how long I would’ve been a person I didn’t want to be [and] living a life where I was constantly mentally and physically exhausted. Outdoor school is where I found my love for teaching and working with kids which is why I hope to become a teacher.” Says Echo, a returning student leader who has used outdoor school to hone her teaching skills.

A survey conducted by the Multnomah ESD Outdoor School found that students who volunteer for at least one week of outdoor school reported many benefits. 90% said increased confidence, 85% said better public speaking skills and 79% reported better self-advocacy skills with numbers like these it’s no wonder that student leaders like echo and me keep coming back.

This excellent program would however not be possible if it weren't for Measure 99 that the Oregon State Legislature passed in November of 2016. Measure 99 directed \$44 million in lottery dollars per biennium, and this investment was made to allow all



(The beach at camp Westwind on a clear day in late march. Sticks in the middle of the photograph are often called our “Beach Grove”)

sixth and fifth graders in Oregon to attend outdoor school. The investment allowed and enabled 14,482 additional students to attend Ods in 2017. Where only a small number were able to participate in a full week, the investment still allowed many students to experience outdoor education. The program still needs the total funding to make sure that every student no matter what school they go to, how much their family earns, or where they live can attend a full week of outdoor school and get the whole experience.