

National Outdoor School for All

The National Outdoor School For All Initiative: The **ANCA Outdoor School Consortium's** goal is to increase opportunities for school children across the country to connect, learn and be inspired at an Outdoor School. This includes: 1) **establishing new Outdoor Schools**, 2) **strengthening existing programs**, and 3) **providing the funding needed for more students to access these schools**.

The ANCA Outdoor School Consortium is a national coalition of learning centers providing multi-day overnight programs to immerse students and adults alike in the natural world. The Consortium is distinguished by cutting-edge curricula and green economy technologies and operational practices that will cultivate the next generation of community leaders. While the consortium members represent different geographical regions and diverse programming, together each Outdoor School contributes ongoing innovation and excellence within a critical sector of the field of environmental education.



Outdoor School for All - Why Now?

Children today are suffering from learning loss, stalled emotional and social growth, and diminished physical ability. They need movement. We need a movement. This is the moment. We failed our children during the pandemic as they were locked out of schools, on screens, masked and isolated. We now have a chance to connect millions of kids to the great outdoors through their schools and teachers. In fact, in an overwhelmingly bipartisan win (95-5), Washington State recently approved its *Outdoor Schools for All* legislation. US Senators Collins, Reed, and Merkley introduced federal **No Child Left Inside** legislation on April 7, 2022. The time is now to seize the momentum. Healthy, happy children outside should be a national priority. **Please join us in this effort to get youth to the outdoor schools across the country that prioritize physical and mental well-being along with**

active environmental citizenship.

Outdoor School for All - An immersive, multi-day approach to environmental education

Outdoor Schools are a nationwide network offering immersive, overnight programs to connect children and adults to nature and each other. These programs are youth-based and academic, focused primarily on public school partnerships where students and classroom teachers stay for multiple days and nights, sharing educational activities, meals, and sleeping accommodations. While Outdoor Schools hold most programs outdoors, they also have indoor spaces such as classrooms, labs, dining halls, and dormitories to comfortably accommodate students, classroom teachers and adult chaperones.

Because Outdoor School programs are academically focused, they go beyond recreational activities by partnering with school systems to incorporate experiential learning in science, conservation, and sustainability; students learn hands-on through observation and study. Outdoor School programs also focus on social and emotional learning that develops participants' sense of self and community. Because they **live and learn together**, students develop close ties to their surroundings and peers, all the while engaging in the immersive study of ecological processes and how people connect to the environment. **Outdoor schools are the antidote to the isolation and emotional turmoil of recent years.**



National Outdoor School for All will promote *Excellence*

Outdoor School *Excellence* helps to distinguish those organizations that constantly and consistently striving for best practices in their programming and operations. This includes a commitment to **modeling environmental stewardship** as well as providing **outstanding hospitality** through comfortable lodging and delicious meals along with education pedagogy and tools that have been shown to improve teaching and learning.

An Outdoor School achieves *Excellence* when their programs are **holistic** and go beyond the basics of nature education; students learn about sustainability, energy usage, history, human connection to the environment, and more. These programs align with **state and national education standards** and Outdoor School staff achieve *Excellence* when they maintain the administrative **infrastructure that supports high-quality programs**, such as documented curricula with listed outcomes and assessments of learning.

Outdoor Schools are learning centers rooted in **operational best practices and good governance**, and they maintain strong partnerships with other institutions and professional associations, regionally and nationally and stress collaboration across communities. As models of *Excellence* in Outdoor Schools, these learning centers support the development of other Outdoor Schools and related environmental literacy programs.



National Outdoor School for All will increase *Innovation*

Outdoor Schools are thought leaders, active collaborators and positive **change agents** in their communities. These organizations take on bold new initiatives that address widespread environmental and social issues, such as pollution, climate change, and inequities in education. They develop programs and facilities that impact their region and beyond, and follow changing trends in education, sustainability, and organizational management. Such centers are examples of constant improvement for how to operate and inspire and guide other Outdoor Schools to make beneficial changes and to evolve and maintain relevance. By seeking out new opportunities, innovative Outdoor Schools act as **agents for systemic change**.



The ANCA Outdoor School Consortium

The organizational members of the *ANCA Outdoor School Consortium* are national leaders in the field and recognize the value and critical importance of a peer network, and they contribute to the success of other members through ANCA's programs and services. The seven *Consortium* leadership organizations represent environmental living and learning centers across the country in the Northeast, Midwest, South, and Western regions:

IslandWood, Washington; **The Cuyahoga Valley Environmental Education Center**, Ohio; **Great Smoky Mountains Institute at Tremont**, Tennessee; **NatureBridge** w/ multiple sites in California, Olympic National Park in Washington, and Virginia; **North Cascades Institute**, Washington; **The Ecology School**, Maine; **Wolf Ridge Environmental Learning Center**, Minnesota.

Each member of the Outdoor School Consortium is a member of the **Association of Nature Center Administrators (ANCA)**. Based in Logan, Utah, ANCA promotes and supports best leadership and management practices for the nature and environmental learning center profession. ANCA has supported the Outdoor School and Nature Center Community for more than three decades and has coordinated the *Outdoor School Consortium* for the past two years.

The Immediate Goal of the ANCA Outdoor School Consortium – Funding for National Capacity

Currently two states in the U.S. have established *Outdoor School For All* programs: Oregon and Washington. Oregon's program was approved by voters in 2017 authorizing funds from the state lottery to provide all fifth- or sixth-grade students in Oregon an opportunity to access a week of outdoor school. Legislation to establish a permanent program in Washington passed the House and the Senate in 2022 and allocates \$10M this year. The bill explains that "*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.*"

In addition, nine states have dedicated state funding or are working toward a common mission of Outdoor School for All: Colorado, Connecticut, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Wisconsin.

With funding from the federal government, *Outdoor School For All* could be expanded to reach more students in the U.S. and the *ANCA Outdoor School Consortium* is poised to be a leader in this effort. Several other states have established strong Outdoor School programming including California, Minnesota, and Maine, where the *Environmental Living & Learning for Maine Students* network has provided over \$3,000,000 in Outdoor School scholarship funds to students and classroom teachers since 2010.

Current ANCA Capacity Building & Strategic Networking Funding Needs

1. Capacity Building and Advocacy: ANCA's goal is to raise an additional \$440,000 to enable the capacity to create the Outdoor School For All nationwide initiative.

In 2021, The *ANCA Outdoor School Consortium*, hired Solomon Strategies Group (SSG), a strategic governmental relations, lobbying, and business consultant, to assess and recommend a federal legislative/appropriations pathway to identify policy and funding opportunities for Outdoor School For All. SSG reviewed legislative opportunities on the horizon, created a matrix of influencers and supporters in Congress, and outlined recommended next steps for The Consortium.

SSG recommends The Consortium build on three potential funding approaches:

- *No Child Left Inside Act* (potential Federal level funding)
- *National Outdoor School For All* movement (inspired by work Oregon and Washington)
- *Great American Outdoors Act* (recent bi-partisan federal legislation for the National Parks)

To move the *National Outdoor School for All Initiative* forward this year, SSG recommended hiring a federal advocacy consultant to explore and propose a congressional funding effort. **Of the overall \$500,000 fundraising goal, members of the Consortium have already committed \$60,000 to our effort – \$20,000 was raised to hire SSG and \$40,000 has been pledged for our next steps.**

2. Outdoor School for All: Nationwide Opportunities for Children Outside

Our Goal is for 3.9 million children* to gain the benefits of Outdoor School. **Our Vision** is a shared commitment for funding from federal, states, foundations and local organizations. Based upon analysis of existing states funding these types of initiatives, nationwide support at \$10M per state per year would achieve the goal, \$500,000,000.



This cannot be the future of Outdoor School – Kids stuck inside!

* # 5th graders from National Center for Education Statistics https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d13/tables/dt13_203.10.asp