

This Document can be made available in alternative formats upon request

State of Minnesota

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

NINETY-THIRD SESSION

H. F. No. 3924

02/19/2024 Authored by Urdahl, Igo, Hollins, Davids, Burkel and others
The bill was read for the first time and referred to the Committee on Environment and Natural Resources Finance and Policy

1.1 A bill for an act
1.2 relating to natural resources; creating Outdoor School for All grant program;
1.3 appropriating money; proposing coding for new law in Minnesota Statutes, chapter
1.4 84.

1.5 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF MINNESOTA:

1.6 Section 1. LEGISLATIVE FINDINGS AND INTENT.

1.7 (a) Minnesota is known for its rich outdoor heritage and ethic. The state prides itself on
1.8 its close connection to nature through outdoor recreation, appreciation, and conservation.
1.9 The state is viewed nationally as a leader for its stewardship of and strong relationship
1.10 fostered with its natural resources. Yet the state's children are losing their connection to the
1.11 outdoors. Today, the state's children spend up to 44 hours per week in front of a screen and
1.12 less than 10 minutes each day doing outdoor activities. The legislature finds that time
1.13 outdoors helps children thrive physically, emotionally, and academically. Yet over the past
1.14 few generations, childhood activities have largely moved indoors. In addition, access to the
1.15 outdoors is too often determined by race, income, ability, and zip code. All children deserve
1.16 equitable access to outdoor spaces where they can learn, play, and grow. But unfortunately
1.17 today, access to outdoor opportunities is not equitable.

1.18 (b) Research shows participants in outdoor educational activities have higher graduation
1.19 rates; improved school and peer relationships; higher academic achievement; enhanced
1.20 critical thinking skills; more awareness of the relationship between science and nature; and
1.21 improved leadership and collaboration skills. Outdoor educational programs also offer new
1.22 opportunities for work-integrated learning in science, natural resources, education, land
1.23 management, agriculture, outdoor recreation, and other employment sectors. Outdoor-based

2.1 learning activities can also be a key element in the larger system of regular outdoor
 2.2 instructional time and outdoor experiences that includes STEM fields, after-school programs,
 2.3 summer camps, 4-H, scouting, and related programs that can spark a lifelong appreciation
 2.4 for the natural world.

2.5 (c) The legislature intends to establish a statewide Outdoor School for All grant program
 2.6 to address these needs and opportunities. The program will support immersive multiday
 2.7 and accredited overnight educational experiences for students in grades 4 to 8. The program
 2.8 will also ensure that all Minnesota students have a chance to benefit from outdoor education.

2.9 **Sec. 2. [84.9766] OUTDOOR SCHOOL FOR ALL; GRANT PROGRAM.**

2.10 Subdivision 1. **Establishment.** The commissioner of natural resources must establish
 2.11 and administer a program to provide grants to learning centers eligible under subdivision
 2.12 2 for outdoor education programs serving students in grades 4 to 8.

2.13 Subd. 2. **Eligibility.** (a) The commissioner may award grants under this section to
 2.14 accredited overnight outdoor school providers established under section 84.0875 and to
 2.15 other regional nonprofit learning centers offering similar programming.

2.16 (b) To be eligible for a grant under this section, the outdoor education program must:

2.17 (1) provide a multiday, residential educational experience that is comprised mainly of
 2.18 outdoor-based learning activities;

2.19 (2) provide students with opportunities to directly experience and understand nature and
 2.20 the natural world, including field study opportunities for student learning;

2.21 (3) use a research-based environmental, ecological, agricultural, or other
 2.22 natural-resource-based educational curriculum;

2.23 (4) be integrated with local school curricula to help students meet academic standards;

2.24 (5) provide students with opportunities to develop:

2.25 (i) leadership;

2.26 (ii) critical thinking;

2.27 (iii) self-sufficiency;

2.28 (iv) decision-making skills; and

2.29 (v) social and emotional skills; and

3.1 (6) address accessibility of outdoor educational opportunities for underserved students,
3.2 including students with disabilities.

3.3 **Sec. 3. APPROPRIATION; OUTDOOR SCHOOL FOR ALL.**

3.4 \$..... in fiscal year 2024 and \$..... in fiscal year 2025 are appropriated from the general
3.5 fund to the commissioner of natural resources for the Outdoor School for All program under
3.6 Minnesota Statutes, section 84.9766.