

Date of Hearing: May 6, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Buffy Wicks, Chair

AB 2158 (Hoover) – As Amended April 13, 2026

Policy Committee: Education

Vote: 9 - 0

Urgency: No

State Mandated Local Program: No

Reimbursable: No

SUMMARY:

This bill recognizes outdoor learning as an effective and developmentally appropriate instructional method improving mental and physical health, environmental literacy, climate resilience, student engagement, and whole-child development and requires the California Department of Education (CDE), on or before July 1, 2028, to develop and maintain on its internet website statewide guidance on outdoor learning.

The bill also establishes the Statewide Outdoor Learning Pilot Program for three years, contingent upon an appropriation.

FISCAL EFFECT:

- 1) Minor and absorbable costs to the CDE to develop additional outdoor learning guidance beyond what it currently provides.
- 2) One-time Proposition 98 General Fund cost pressures of an unknown amount, likely in the low millions to high millions of dollars, for the Legislature to appropriate funding for the three-year pilot program.

The Legislative Analyst's Office recently warned of General Fund structural deficits of around \$35 billion per year in the 2027-28 fiscal year and ongoing.

COMMENTS:

- 1) **Purpose.** According to the author:

Outdoor learning is a commonsense, research-backed approach that helps reduce excessive screen time, improve student well-being, and support stronger academic outcomes. At a time when our kids are spending more hours than ever on screens, this bill gives schools a practical way to help students reconnect with the natural world while strengthening their focus and academic success. AB 2158 provides the guidance needed to create real change for our students.

- 2) **Background.** Currently, outdoor learning has a broad definition in most contexts and can include spaces on- or off-campus in both urban or rural settings utilizing parks, open spaces, or school gardens, among other things. Much research suggests outdoor learning is correlated with several positive outcomes for students, such as increased student engagement and

ownership of learning. According to Ten Strands, a nonprofit focused on statewide K-12 environmental literacy, and sponsors of the bill:

Time spent learning outdoors improves students' attention and concentration, strengthens social and emotional development, decreases stress and behavioral challenges, and increases academic performance. Outdoor learning also provides meaningful, structured alternatives to screen time, helping students reconnect with peers, educators, and their communities. Research indicates that while outdoor learning benefits all students, it benefits girls more than boys and students of color more than white students, making it a powerful resource for closing opportunity and achievement gaps.

The CDE provides several outdoor learning resources and links on its internet website and previously the state has invested in the school gardens program but its most recent appropriation was in the Budget Act of 2006. This bill would provide a statutory definition for outdoor learning, require CDE to develop statewide guidance on outdoor learning, and establish a three-year pilot program, subject to an appropriation, for up to six grant recipients to support partnerships between local educational agencies and community-based outdoor learning providers.

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