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# SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Senator Sasha Renée Pérez, Chair

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<b>Bill No:</b>	AB 2158	<b>Hearing Date:</b>	July 1, 2026
<b>Author:</b>	Hoover and Lowenthal		
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<b>Urgency:</b>	No	<b>Fiscal:</b>	Yes
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**Subject:** Pupil instruction: outdoor learning.

## SUMMARY

This bill recognizes outdoor learning as an effective and developmentally appropriate instructional method and requires the California Department of Education (CDE), on or before July 1, 2028, to curate and maintain resources for educators on outdoor learning on its internet website.

## BACKGROUND

Existing law:

- 1) Establishes the Office of Education and the Environment (OEE) in the California Department of Resources Recycling and Recovery (CalRecycle) and requires the OEE to implement a statewide environmental education program. (Public Resources Code (PRC) § 71300)
- 2) Requires the OEE, under the direction of CalRecycle and in cooperation with the CDE and the State Board of Education (SBE), to develop and implement a unified education strategy of the environment for elementary and secondary schools that does all of the following:
  - a) Coordinate instructional resources and strategies for providing active pupil participation in onsite conservation efforts.
  - b) Promote service-learning opportunities between schools and local communities.
  - c) Assess the impact of the unified education strategy on the achievement and resource conservation of participating pupils. (PRC § 71300)
- 3) Requires the CDE and SBE, in cooperation with CalRecycle, to develop and implement, to the extent feasible, a teacher training and implementation plan that guides the phased implementation of the unified education strategy in elementary, middle, and high school programs, for the education of pupils, faculty, and administrators on the importance of integrating environmental concepts and programs in schools. (PRC § 71300)

- 4) Requires the OEE, as part of the unified education strategy, to develop education principles for the environment for elementary and secondary school pupils, in cooperation with the Secretary for Environmental Protection, the Natural Resources Agency (CNRA), the CDE, and the SBE. (PRC § 71301)
- 5) Requires that the environmental principles and concepts be aligned to the academic content standards adopted by the SBE in the subjects of English language arts, science, history-social science, health, and, to the extent practicable, mathematics, and shall not conflict with any academic content standards. Requires that the environmental principles and concepts be used to do all of the following:
  - a) To direct state agencies that include environmental education components for elementary and secondary education in regulatory decisions or enforcement actions.
  - b) To align state agency environmental education programs and materials that are developed for elementary and secondary education.
  - c) For provision, by the office, of technical assistance to state agencies involved in the integration of the environmental principles and concepts in programs they operate, and in the integration of the environmental principles and concepts into state curriculum standards, frameworks, and instructional materials, as specified. (PRC § 71301)
- 6) Establishes the Instructional School Gardens Program, under the administration of CDE, for the promotion, creation, and support of instructional school gardens through the allocation of grants, and through technical assistance provided to local educational agencies (LEAs). (Education Code (EC) § 51796)
- 7) Authorizes school projects that support outdoor education on school grounds, including native gardens, orchards, vegetable gardens, outdoor classrooms, and other nature-based outdoor learning spaces, to not comply with accessible path of travel requirements if the cost of doing so would exceed 20% of the project's total construction costs. (EC § 17672)
- 8) Authorizes new construction and modernization projects funded through the Public Education Facilities Modernization, Repair, and Safety Bond Act of 2024 to support outdoor learning. (EC § 17072.35)

## ANALYSIS

This bill:

- 1) Defines the following terms:
  - a) "Environmental literacy" means the understanding of, and ability to, apply the environmental principles and concepts, as specified.

- b) “Local educational agency” means a school district, county office of education (COE), or charter school.
  - c) “Outdoor learning” means instructional activities occurring in outdoor settings, including, but not limited to, schoolyards, gardens, campuses, green spaces, community spaces, local parks, public lands, residential outdoor schools, outdoor environmental education facilities, coastal and watershed areas, and other natural or built outdoor environments.
- 2) Recognizes outdoor learning as an effective and developmentally appropriate instructional method that improves mental and physical health, environmental literacy, climate resilience, student engagement, attention and concentration, and whole child development.
  - 3) Encourages LEAs to integrate outdoor learning into standards-aligned instruction across all grades and subject areas, including, but not limited to, science, history-social science, mathematics, English language arts, health, physical education, and visual arts. Specifies that this encouragement shall not be construed as a specific curriculum.
  - 4) Requires the CDE, on or before July 1, 2028, to curate and maintain on its website resources for educators on outdoor learning.
  - 5) Requires that the resources curated and maintained include, at a minimum, the following components:
    - a) Best practices for delivering standards-aligned instruction in outdoor settings.
    - b) Safety and risk management considerations.
    - c) Strategies to ensure equitable access for unduplicated pupils, as specified, pupils with disabilities, and pupils from historically underserved communities.
    - d) Models for enhancing outdoor learning environments (OLEs) on school sites and on offsite field trips.
    - e) Strategies for partnering with community-based organizations, park agencies, tribes, and outdoor education providers.
  - 6) Requires the CDE, to consult with COEs, classroom educators, tribal partners, mental and physical health professionals and researchers, environmental literacy experts, and community organizations with expertise in outdoor learning. Authorizes the CDE to collaborate with nonprofit organizations, community-based organizations, and other entities with demonstrated expertise in environmental literacy and outdoor learning to support the curation, maintenance, and dissemination of the resources curated and maintained by the CDE.

- 7) Authorizes the CDE to accept voluntary contributions, in cash or in-kind, to pay for the costs of implementation of this bill.
- 8) Establishes the Outdoor Learning and Environmental Literacy Account in the State Treasury in which private donations shall be deposited for the purposes of this bill's implementation. Specifies that money shall be available to the CDE, upon appropriation by the Legislature, for the purposes of implementing this bill.
- 9) Makes a series of legislative findings and declarations related to the importance of outdoor learning access.

## STAFF COMMENTS

- 1) ***Need for the bill.*** 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 student."
- 2) ***Outdoor learning.*** This bill requires the CDE to curate and maintain educator resources on outdoor learning. Outdoor learning offers a variety of engaging learning experiences and methods for integrating standards-based knowledge and skills with environmental education. OLEs provide flexible spaces for diverse learners, on or off campus, and are possible for all student populations in urban, suburban, and rural settings. While taking learning outside can be as simple as utilizing green spaces and school gardens, local school communities often formally embed OLEs in their learning programs in a variety of ways.

The CDE highlights the following research on the benefits of outdoor learning:

- Outdoor learning offers opportunities for students to engage in physical activity and teambuilding. (Finn et al., 2018)
- Outdoor learning improves access to nature, which is beneficial to mental health, reduces stress, increases student engagement, and improves cognitive function. (Ming et al., 2018; Chawla, 2015)
- A study of outdoor education programs showed improvements for at-risk youth in self-esteem, conflict resolution, relationships with peers, problem solving, motivation to learn, and behavior in class. (American Institutes for Research, 2005)
- Children who attended outdoor science school significantly raised their science scores by 27%, and the increase in science knowledge was maintained six to ten weeks after program participation. (American Institutes for Research, 2005)

On its existing resource page on OLEs, the CDE provides guidance on how to expand access to OLEs by developing planning committees, emphasizing inclusive design, and utilizing free tools and strategies like the Green Schoolyards America toolkit, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Schoolyard Habitat Guide, and the CNRA's *Outdoors for All: Providing Equitable Access to Parks and Nature* initiative.

- 3) ***Environmental literacy and environmental education.*** This bill recognizes outdoor learning as an effective and developmentally appropriate instructional method that improves, among other things, environmental literacy. California has advanced several initiatives and investments aimed at enhancing environmental literacy and education, including the following:
- a) Environmental Principles and Concepts (EP&Cs): The Legislature passed AB 1548 (Pavley, Chapter 665, Statutes of 2003) and AB 1721 (Pavley, Chapter 581, Statutes of 2005), which ultimately established OEE under CalRecycle to develop education principles for the environment for elementary and secondary school pupils. The resulting California Environmental Principles and Concepts (EP&Cs) are comprised of five environmental principles and 15 supporting concepts that highlight the deep relationship between humans and the natural world and serve as “big ideas” intended to inform standards-based instruction and fuel student inquiry. These EP&Cs have been integrated into several state curriculum frameworks for California public schools serving kindergarten through grade twelve, including the 2016 History and Social Science Framework, the 2016 Science Framework, and the 2019 Health Education Framework.
  - b) The California Blueprint for Environmental Literacy: In 2014, the Superintendent of Public Instruction, Tom Torlakson, convened the Environmental Literacy Task Force to create a blueprint for achieving environmental literacy for all California students. The resulting *Blueprint for Environmental Literacy: Educating Every Student In, About, and For the Environment* highlights the need for expanded environmental literacy education by referencing a survey of 520 California school principals. The Blueprint features six guiding principles that frame six overarching strategies to ensure environmental literacy for all students.
  - c) California Regional Environmental Education Community (CREEC) Network: The CREEC Network fosters regional partnerships throughout the state to promote environmental education and environmental literacy by providing teachers with access to high quality professional learning opportunities and education resources. Along with statewide sponsors and partners, each of the 11 California CREEC Regions provides professional learning opportunities and resources to educators as well as foster communications among schools and organizations interested in supporting the environmental literacy of California's teachers and students.
  - d) Green Ribbon Schools Award Program: The California Green Ribbon Schools (CA-GRS) recognition award honors Kindergarten (K)–12

schools, school districts, and COE that demonstrate exemplary achievement in three key areas: resource efficiency, health and wellness, and environmental and sustainability education. This recognition is part of a broader statewide effort to identify and promote effective practices that enhance student engagement, academic performance, graduation rates, and career readiness.

- e) Seeds for Solutions: The 2021-22 State Budget appropriated \$6,000,000 to San Mateo County Office of Education (SMCOE) to contract for the creation of free and open K–12 standards-based curriculum resources on climate change and environmental justice. The resulting Seeds for Solutions Environmental Literacy Curriculum helps educators provide lessons that empower students to become environmentally literate and engaged community members, ready to act for the well-being of their families, communities, and the environment.

The CDE currently maintains an information page that highlights current environmental literacy resources and grant opportunities.

- 4) ***Practical effect.*** This bill requires the CDE, on or before July 1, 2028, to curate and maintain resources for educators on outdoor learning on its internet website. It also requires that those resources include, at a minimum, the following:
  - a) Best practices for delivering standards-aligned instruction in outdoor settings.
  - b) Safety and risk management considerations.
  - c) Strategies to ensure equitable access for unduplicated pupils, as specified, pupils with disabilities, and pupils from historically underserved communities.
  - d) Models and approaches for enhancing OLEs on school sites. schoolsites and on offsite field trips.
  - e) Strategies for partnering with community-based organizations, park agencies, tribes, and outdoor education providers.

As previously discussed, the CDE already maintains a resource page for a similar purpose. In terms of a practical effect, the bill would likely provide the benefit of ensuring that those resources, as well as those related to environmental literacy, are more easily identified and accessed on the CDE website.

- 5) ***Prior and related legislation.***

SB 1048 (Becker, 2026) establishes the voluntary State Seal of Climate Literacy (SSCL) to be affixed to the diploma of qualifying high school graduates and requires the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) to recommend criteria under which participating LEAs may award said seal to qualified students.

Requires participating LEAs to collect and annually submit to the CDE specified data related to SSCL participation.

SB 341 (Perez, 2025) would have re-established the Instructional School Gardens Program as a competitive grant program, and shifts its administration from the CDE to the California Department of Food and Agriculture. *SB 341 was held in the Senate Appropriations Committee.*

SB 1091 (Menjivar, Chapter 1014, Statutes of 2024) allows, for school construction projects approved by the Division of the State Architect (DSA) on or before December 31, 2030, for certain school ground construction projects to not comply with accessible path of travel requirements if the cost of doing so would exceed 20% of the project's total construction costs.

AB 247 (Muratsuchi, Chapter 81, Statutes of 2024) allows new construction and modernization projects funded through the Public Education Facilities Modernization, Repair, and Safety Bond Act of 2024 to support outdoor learning.

SB 720 (Allen, Chapter 374, Statutes of 2018) revised provisions relating to the education principles for the environment by, among other things, (1) renaming them the environmental principles and concepts; (2) revising the process for, and entities involved in, updating the environmental principles and concepts; and (3) requiring the Instructional Quality Commission (IQC) to ensure that the environmental principles and concepts are integrated into content standards and curriculum frameworks whenever those standards and frameworks are revised.

AB 1548 (Pavley, Chapter 665, Statutes of 2003) established the OEE within the California Environmental Protection Agency and required it to develop environmental education principles and a model curriculum.

## **SUPPORT**

Ten Strands (sponsor)  
7th Generation Advisors  
Active San Gabriel Valley  
Adolfo Camarillo High School  
Adventure Risk Challenge  
Alameda County Office of Education  
American River Natural History Association DbA Effie Yeaw Nature Center  
Amigos de Bolsa Chica  
Arc  
Association for Environmental and Outdoor Education  
Association of Nature Center Administrators  
Audubon Center at Debs Park  
Bay Area Wilderness Training  
Bay Tree Design  
Black in Marine Science  
Black Thumb Farm  
BlueSky Consulting  
Burbank Eco Council

Cadman Cooking and Garden Education Program  
Caldwell Fisher Family Foundation  
California Academy of Sciences  
California Afterschool Advocacy Alliance  
California Association of Science Educators  
California Association of Student Councils  
California Catholic Conference  
California Environmental Education Foundation  
California Outdoor Recreation Partners  
California Outdoor Schools Association  
California State Parks Foundation  
California State PTA  
Camp Chrysalis  
Camp Ocean Pines  
Center for Ecoliteracy  
Center for Environmental Health  
Center for Land-Based Learning  
Center for the Study of the Force Majeure  
CFT- A Union of Educators & Classified Professionals, AFT, AFL-CIO  
Children & Nature Network  
Children and Screens: Institute of Digital Media and Child Development  
Climate Action Campaign of the Humboldt Unitarian Universalist Fellowship  
Climate Action Pathways for Schools  
Climate Psychology Alliance - North America  
Clockshop  
Coloma Outdoor Discovery School  
Common Vision  
Community Nature Connection  
Community Resources for Science  
Conservation Earth/WildMind  
Craig Strang Consulting  
Creek Lands Conservation  
Crystal Cove Conservancy  
Davey's Locker Whale Watching  
Davis Forest School  
dfusion Inc.  
Earthday.org  
East Merced Resource Conservation District  
Edventure More  
Elders Climate Action Northern California Chapter  
Elders Climate Action Southern California Chapter  
Environmental Action Committee of West Marin  
Environmental Center of San Diego  
Environmental Charter Schools  
Environmental Volunteers  
Eternal Generations Emerging Foundation  
Explore Ecology  
Exploring New Horizons Outdoor Schools  
Fieldguides Outdoor Education  
Foodwise

Fresno Discovery Center  
Friends of Big Morongo Canyon Preserve  
Friends of Joshua Tree  
Friends of the Los Angeles River  
Friends of the Lost Coast  
Golden Gate Bird Alliance  
Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy  
Green Schoolyards America  
Greenspace - the Cambria Land Trust  
Groundwork San Diego Chollas Creek  
Headwaters Science Institute  
Heal the Bay  
HED  
Hidden Villa Ranch  
Human Values Center  
iCREST Education Foundation  
In Good Company  
Inclusion Outdoors  
Inside the Outdoors Foundation  
Justice Outside  
Kathryn and Robert Riddell Fund  
Kern County Superintendent of Schools Office  
LA STEM Collective  
Laguna Beach Unified School District  
Latino Outdoors  
Life Lab  
Literacy for Environmental Justice  
Living Classroom  
Los Angeles County Office of Education  
Marin County Superintendent of Schools  
Marine Science Institute  
Master Gardener Association of San Diego County  
MEarth  
Mendoparks  
Merito Foundation  
Mocse  
National Marine Educators Association  
Naturalists at Large  
Nature Bridge  
Nature for All  
Nevada City School of the Arts  
North American Association for Environmental Education  
Northern California Recycling Association  
Nurture Nature  
O'Neill Sea Odyssey  
Oakland Goes Outdoors  
Orange County Department of Education  
Outdoor Afro  
Outdoor Outreach  
Outdoorism Collective

Outward Bound Adventures  
Outward Bound California  
Pacific Grove Museum of Natural History  
Partnership for Children & Youth  
People, Food and Land Foundation  
Pittsburg Unified School District  
Pogo Park  
Point Blue Conservation Science  
Project Green  
Recreation, Parks & Tourism Department at San Francisco State University  
Rialto Unified School District  
Richmond Outdoors Coalition  
Roots to Branches Education  
Sacramento Chinese Community Service Center  
Sacramento Splash  
Samuel Lawrence Foundation  
San Bruno Mountain Watch  
San Diego Bird Alliance  
San Diego Children and Nature  
San Diego County Office of Education's Innovation Department - Outdoor Education  
San Diego County Outdoor Education Foundation  
San Diego Natural History Museum  
San Diego Pediatricians for Clean Air  
San Francisco Bay Wildlife Society  
San Joaquin County Office of Education  
Santa Cruz Climate Action Network  
Santa Cruz County Office of Education  
Save Our Shores  
Scaling Student Success  
Sci-Lingual Education  
Sembrando Lab, LLC  
Sequoia Riverlands Trust  
Shady Creek Outdoor School  
Sierra Nevada Alliance  
Sierra Nevada Journeys  
Sierra Streams Institute  
Silicon Valley Youth Climate Action  
Slide Ranch  
South Yuba River Citizens League  
Stanislaus County Office of Education  
Stanislaus County Office of Education, Foothill Horizons Outdoor School  
Steam Learning Institute  
Stewards of the Coast and Redwoods  
Strategic Energy Innovations  
Sustainable Marin Schools  
Sustainable Mill Valley  
Sustainable Solano  
SustainConsulting, LLC  
Tahoe Rim Trail Association  
The Ecologik Institute

The Escondido Creek Conservancy  
The Friends of Daley Ranch  
The Gardens at Heather Farm  
The Nueva School  
The Sage Garden Project  
The Watershed Project  
The Wildlands Conservancy  
Three Oaks Outdoor Science School, Inc  
Together in Nature Consulting, PLLC  
Tree Fresno  
Tri-County Gate Council  
Trubel&Co  
Trust for Public Land  
UC Davis Center for Community and Citizen Science  
UC Davis Center for Occupational and Environmental Health  
Un Mar De Colores  
UndauntedK12  
University Elementary At LA Fiesta Garden Committee  
Ventana Wildlife Society  
Ventura Land Trust  
Web of Life Field School  
Wildward Institute  
Woodcraft Rangers  
Words in the Wild  
World Ocean Observatory  
Yes Nature to Neighborhoods

**OPPOSITION**

None received

**-- END --**