
SENATE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Senator Sabrina Cervantes, Chair
2025 - 2026 Regular Session

AB 2158 (Hoover) - Pupil instruction: outdoor learning

Version: June 22, 2026

Urgency: No

Hearing Date: August 3, 2026

Policy Vote: ED. 7 - 0

Mandate: No

Consultant: Lenin Del Castillo

Bill Summary: This bill 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.

Fiscal Impact: The CDE estimates General Fund costs of about \$517,000 each year to comply with the bill's requirements, including contracts with writers and external curriculum experts and travel costs. However, to the extent that private donations are received for these purposes, this amount could be lower. The bill establishes the Outdoor Learning and Environment Literacy Account in which private donations can be deposited for the bill's purposes. It provides that the funds in the account shall be available to CDE, upon appropriation, to implement the bill's provisions.

Background: Existing law establishes the Office of Education and the Environment (OEE) in the California Department of Resources Recycling and Recovery (CalRecycle). The law 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 the following: coordinate instructional resources and strategies for providing active pupil participation in onsite conservation efforts; promote service-learning opportunities between schools and local communities; and assess the impact of the unified education strategy on the achievement and resource conservation of participating pupils.

Existing law 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.

Existing law 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, the CDE, and the SBE.

Proposed Law: This bill defines "outdoor learning" as 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. It 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.

This bill 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. The bill specifies that this encouragement shall not be construed as a specific curriculum.

This bill requires the CDE, on or before July 1, 2028, to curate and maintain on its website resources for educators on outdoor learning. It requires that the resources curated and maintained include, at a minimum, the following components:

1. Best practices for delivering standards-aligned instruction in outdoor settings.
2. Safety and risk management considerations.
3. Strategies to ensure equitable access for unduplicated pupils, as specified, pupils with disabilities, and pupils from historically underserved communities.
4. Models for enhancing outdoor learning environments (OLEs) on school sites and on offsite field trips.
5. Strategies for partnering with community-based organizations, park agencies, tribes, and outdoor education providers.

This bill 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. It also 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.

This bill authorizes the CDE to accept voluntary contributions, in cash or in-kind, to pay for the costs of implementation of this bill.

This bill 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. It specifies that money shall be available to the CDE, upon appropriation by the Legislature, for the purposes of implementing this bill.

Staff Comments: This bill requires the CDE to curate and maintain educator resources on outdoor learning which is defined by the bill as 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. 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.”

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