



Programs & Places Spotlight

Northwest Outdoor Science School



Over the last few years, it has been a joy working with the new and enduring Outdoor School programs and sites around the state. With this new Outdoor School Programs & Places Spotlight, we will share stories focused on the important initiatives of the people doing great work for Oregon kids. I hope you enjoy getting to know them.

We start our tour with Lauriel “Sunshine” Amoroso with Northwest Outdoor Science School, a program of NW Regional ESD. Lauriel shared a detailed description of the important work they are doing to improve equity.

“Since I came aboard last year, I have been highly focused on how our Outdoor School program can better serve the diverse needs of all students and staff by changing both how we deliver content and how our staff understands

the ways that racism and oppression show up in our work. While I do not have personal experience with oppression based on my race, I am deeply committed to the notion that I/we cannot be fully free while any of us are oppressed. I do not see my work as “helping” others, but rather in collective liberation.”

With Lauriel’s help, Northwest Outdoor Science School has done extensive work with their staff. From sharing articles and information to in-person workshops and professional development around racial justice, trauma-informed care, issues around gender and sexuality, social and emotional learning, Indigenous perspectives, implicit bias, and more, the staff have taken upon themselves to learn more, diving into books on these and other related topics. They are sharing their learning with each other and creating safe spaces to speak about challenging issues all in the mission of better educating and creating a nurturing environment for the many different students they host.

While this primary focus is on students, Northwest Outdoor Science School staff are also working together to ensure their workplace is safe and inclusive, a place where people from all different backgrounds might want to work. From reviewing and updating hiring practices to improving workplace climate, the staff is all working together to ensure that each of them thrive in their important jobs.

Lauriel has also been reviewing their curriculum for content and delivery, seeking opportunities to improve. They are looking to ensure that their teaching is equitable and inclusive which is often challenging with a predominantly white staff. Lauriel shared, “We can honor and include other ways of knowing and coming to terms with the fact that science as a discipline has a long and complicated history that includes being used to justify racism and harm oppressed communities in a variety of different ways. This is not to say that we should not teach science, but rather to understand that science is not just a neutral entity that can be taught in a vacuum.” Once the staff is working in person again, Lauriel will work personally with each staff member to help them become the best educators they can be.



Lauriel is proud of the work they have done so far and acknowledges the work yet to be done. “We are really just in the beginning stages of this work. There is so much to do and I know that I still have much to learn both in my own understanding of these systems and how to best support staff in making needed changes in the organization.”

Excellent work, Northwest Outdoor Science School! We are proud of your work for your students, your staff, and your communities.