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SENATE MEMORIAL

55TH LEGISLATURE - STATE OF NEW MEXICO - FIRST SESSION, 2021

INTRODUCED BY

Siah Hemphill

A MEMORIAL

REQUESTING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A TASK FORCE TO PROMOTE THE USE OF OUTDOOR CLASSROOMS IN NEW MEXICO SCHOOLS AND REQUESTING THE GOVERNOR TO DECLARE AN "OUTDOOR LEARNING DAY" IN 2021.

WHEREAS, New Mexico is rich in diverse natural resources and wildlife and features outstanding natural areas that provide residents with a wide variety of outdoor opportunities; and

WHEREAS, a growing body of research and literature indicates that being in nature is increasingly important for children, benefiting their emotional, mental and physical well-being; as one student put it, "Having fresh air and movement is essential."; and

WHEREAS, studies have shown that students who learn outdoors develop a sense of self, independence, confidence,

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1 creativity and decision-making skills; in the words of another
2 student, "It helps students know that learning can occur
3 anywhere, not just inside a classroom."; and

4 WHEREAS, studies have also shown that outdoor classrooms
5 can lead to better test scores, behavior and attendance; as
6 another student said, "Children don't want to be stuck at one
7 desk in a small classroom."; and

8 WHEREAS, outdoor classrooms are more important than ever
9 and are being successfully used across the country during the
10 pandemic; and

11 WHEREAS, outdoor classrooms can be a solution to having a
12 safe and distanced classroom in every school, giving students
13 the ability to learn in person while in a healthy environment;
14 another student summed it up in saying, "They help germs
15 disperse."; and

16 WHEREAS, outdoor classrooms can be applicable and
17 advantageous to all students, no matter their age, learning
18 ability or skills, and they are practical and affordable; and

19 WHEREAS, studies have shown that outdoor classrooms
20 encourage community and family involvement and can increase
21 enthusiasm for school; they can "give kids something to look
22 forward to when coming to school", as another student said; and

23 WHEREAS, outdoor classrooms can help students learn to be
24 good stewards of the natural environment; one student got to
25 the point by saying, "Being outdoors a lot teaches the kids how

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1 amazing nature is and can eventually help them become good
2 citizens and want to take care of the environment."; and

3 WHEREAS, the New Mexico legislature unanimously passed the
4 Children's Outdoor Bill of Rights in 2012 (Senate Memorial 10
5 and House Memorial 3), encouraging state agencies to develop
6 outdoor learning opportunities for New Mexico's youth, which
7 many have done; and

8 WHEREAS, these state agencies and other organizations have
9 expressed interest in establishing and expanding outdoor
10 classrooms for schools;

11 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE STATE
12 OF NEW MEXICO that, using existing resources, the New Mexico
13 outdoor recreation division of the economic development
14 department and the state parks division of the energy, minerals
15 and natural resources department be requested to convene a task
16 force to develop and recommend actions to establish and expand
17 the use of outdoor classrooms for schools and build career
18 paths for New Mexico's youth by coordinating existing efforts
19 on outdoor recreation and education and youth career
20 development; and

21 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the two divisions be requested
22 to include among the task force membership representatives from
23 the wild friends program, environmental education of New Mexico
24 and the following state agencies: the public education
25 department; the forestry division of the energy, minerals and

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1 natural resources department; the early childhood education and
2 care department; the state land office; the department of game
3 and fish; the cultural affairs department; and the tourism
4 department; and

5 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the task force be requested to
6 submit a report to the appropriate interim legislative
7 committees by October 31, 2021 that details the task force's
8 recommendations, including strategies to promote outdoor
9 classrooms in all schools in New Mexico; and

10 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the governor be requested to
11 declare an "Outdoor Learning Day" in 2021; and

12 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that copies of this memorial be
13 transmitted to the governor, the New Mexico outdoor recreation
14 division of the economic development department and the state
15 parks division of the energy, minerals and natural resources
16 department for dissemination to task force invitees; the wild
17 friends program; and environmental education of New Mexico.