



Outdoor Education Council Meeting

Minutes

Monday January 12, 2026 1:00 pm – 3:37 pm

1. **Call to Order** 1pm by Kendal Scott

2. **Introductions and Roll Call**

Present: Kendal Scott, Andrew Snyder, Julie Bless, Joe Girdner, Shelly Cruz-Crawford, Chip Peterson, Melanie Erquiaga

Absent: Max Carter

3. **Public comment**

Matthew Winterhawk: Stated that they were here to listen in and greeted the Council.

4. **Elect Chair and Vice-Chair**

Chair: Julie Bless – Nominated by Kendal Scott; motion passes unanimously and Julie Bless is elected as Chair.

Vice Chair: Shelly Cruz-Crawford and Melanie Erquiaga were both previously willing to be Vice-Chair, but Shelly Cruz-Crawford states that she will be unavailable in the coming months, so Melanie Erquiaga is nominated by Kendal Scott; motion passes unanimously and Melanie Erquiaga is elected as Vice-Chair. Chair Bless permits Kendal Scott to finish running this meeting and will take over at the next Council meeting.

5. **Advisory Working Group Report Review** 1:25pm-2pm

Kendal Scott provided an overview of the history of Advisory Working Group and Nature Everywhere support. Members of the council who served on the Advisory Working Group reviewed the recommendations from the 2024 report to the legislature, including the four focus areas in the report: Andrew Snyder summarized the Capacity Building section; Melanie Erquiaga summarized the Content Integration section; Julie Bless summarized the Outdoor Learning Infrastructure section; Kendal Scott summarized the Policy section.

Discussion: Shelly Cruz-Crawford: I like the capacity building piece. My teachers have received a lot of help with field trip training. We need to partner with school district to help communicate the resources. CCSD is converting to artificial turf, so the schoolyards are becoming even hotter, which then makes nature in schoolyards more important. One flag raised is that Nevada has one of the shortest

instructional days in the US –Making space for outdoor education there are only 291 minutes to work with. We should be aware that the request for 45 minutes of recess hits 12% of every school day. There would also need to be avocation for a longer school day with that recommendation.

Chip Peterson: Clark County already has a regulation that prevents teachers and staff from withholding physical activity.

6. **AB165 and Council Duties Outline**

Kendal Scott reviewed the text of AB165 and duties of the Council. The Council discussed frequency of elections and noted that bill language states that they should happen annually.

Discussion: Melanie: It may need to be a teacher for our purposes as outlined in the bill, but could we also recognize an educator and include non-formal educators?

Shelly Cruz-Crawford: I agree that it would be good to recognize both a teacher and an educator.

Chip Peterson: Nature Everywhere funding – is that similar or different to state funding from AB108?

Kendal Scott: No, this funding is all private from the Nature Everywhere grant and it is separate from AB108.

Kendal Scott reviewed what the Council can do with Nature Everywhere grant funding.

Chip Peterson: In regard to Nature Everywhere funding to support a school in Las Vegas, can that include a school in North Las Vegas or Henderson, or does it need to be in the City of Las Vegas?

Kendal Scott: I will review funding materials and verify the answer to that question.

7. **RECESS from 2:19-1:30pm**

Council Process: The Council discussed how to go about meeting in the future and how to address each Council duty.

Melanie: We should create some goals around outdoor school designations.
Proponent for nonformal educator. We should also be thinking about capacity and how do we find the funding to continue to build on this initiative.

Shelly Cruz-Crawford: Regarding centralized location for resources, the Purple Star Schools is mentioned as an example to look toward.

Andrew Snyder: The Department of Education can host a webpage with centralized resources. There is discussion on ADA compliance for resources.

Several Council members voice support for working in committees to address each Council duty.

Joe Girdner: Where is a good place to start?

Kendal Scott: Suggests that the Teacher of the Year award is a good place to start.

8. Outdoor Teacher of the Year Discussion

The Council discussed who they would like the teacher of the year to be including eligibility such as time spent teaching, licensure, public and private schools. The need for evidence is discussed and how to obtain that evidence but also make the nomination and verification process low barrier. They discussed demographics to track such as grade level, content area, county, and school. They discussed what they will be asking of the awarded teacher, including conducting a virtual workshop for other Nevada teachers and speaking at a conference about their work in outdoor education and about the Outdoor Education Council. This input will go to a future committee on Outdoor Teacher of the Year for consideration before coming back to the Council for approval.

9. Public comment

Matthew Winterhawk: For the record, speaking on behalf of myself and then other families that share similar situations. So you know, I'd like to share a perspective shaped by both experience and fairness. When I was a student outdoor education field trips were valuable, but they were also largely opt in experiences. I remember families chose what they could and could not participate in at the schools that I went to, and schools worked within their existing means. So, I also recognize that an opt in model can unintentionally create access gaps for students with less resourced families. So that concern is real and it deserves to be addressed thoughtfully. Where I want to be clear on the funding is in districts like Clark County, where we're talking about a biennium budget approaching like \$10 billion, given that scale, I struggled to see how the solution is to raise additional funds or place new financial strain on families, teachers or taxpayers. Before we talk about the new programs, new positions and new appropriations, I believe that Nevada owes it to students and educators to fully audit existing educational funding across all 17 counties to identify waste inefficiencies, and to redirect resources that are already existing in the system.

I also did want to note for clarity that the outdoor education is not being discussed in a vacuum. The legislature first appropriated what \$500,000 for this purpose on 1/28 in the 82nd session, 23/24 24/25 as well as those funds were awarded statewide. More recently, the legislature also did the Assembly Bill 108, which additional 250k. So, it's 750,000 and you know I raised that not as criticism but I assume that those funds are all being used appropriately. I've seen some of the reward paperwork with a total of \$1 million. Moving forward across multiple years, it's reasonable that Nevada families expect outcome reporting and evaluation before any further expansion to this program or any further funding.

I also want to address the green schoolyard and living schoolyard concepts that were discussed earlier as these I'm not opposed to those ideas. That's a great idea. Thoughtfully designed environments can benefit students and help create microclimates to make the outdoor learning more viable in our desert communities. That said, water has to be a part of the conversation from the start. Nevada, especially Southern Nevada, operates under strict acre feet limits and ongoing oversight. Any expansion of green infrastructure needs to be designed. Around desert appropriate standards, drought tolerant landscaping, efficient water use and clear accounting so we're not creating long term strain, unintended consequences.

And I also want to raise a practical concern around the implementation. Teachers already face a significant pressure from district requirements and union expectations, and their plates are pretty full. So I've heard recommendations about the 45 minutes a day outdoor environmental programming that's like roughly 12% as mentioned by someone today earlier of the teachers day and school day. And that's not a small adjustment. I'm not raising that to oppose the concept, but to be realistic, adding another

expectation without clear funding, staffing support and curriculum integration, risk pushing more responsibility onto teachers that are already stretched so thin. And I feel for them as well.

I'm at CCSD regularly. Outdoor education at Green School Yard should not become unfunded mandates and layered initiatives. If they're expanded, they should integrate into existing curricula, facilities, and budgets in a way that supports teachers rather than burdens them with an ongoing and new thing.

I support the goal of equitable access and I simply believe that the responsible stewardship of the existing funds, realistic planning around the water usage for future projects and with respect to the teacher, workload must come first. Nevada families expect to make better use of what we already have before asking for anymore.

And thank you again once you know I got to listen to everything. What a great meeting. I know you guys are working on a lot of things. I was in here and I just wanted to commend each and every one of you for working on these things because when we were kids and most of most of you, I'm 42 years old, so I would imagine that you remember the outdoor in the field trips and those were just like the best part of school was that outdoor experience in learning. So, I'm not against any of this, but I definitely do want to see that like that dollar per student or that that success rate right, to be able to communicate that to parents and communicate that the state and then legislation when we move forward, when you're saying, OK. We don't have more funding passed this year. I'd like to be able to make sure that those things can continue, but also if it exists within already existing funding throughout the 17 counties and school appropriations definitely to be pulled there first before any extra funding. So, thank you so much for letting me speak today.

10. **Next Meeting:** April 13, 2026, at 1pm.

11. **Adjournment** 3:37pm.

Action Items:

Kendal: Will schedule the April 13 meeting.

Kendal: Will send out an inquiry on teacher trainings to compile that information.

Andrew and Kendal: Will work on a webpage for resources on the Department of Education website.

Kendal: Will send out an inquiry about committee interest and schedule those meetings.

Attendance: Kendal Scott, Denise Beronio, Andrew Snyder, Julie Bless, Melanie Erquiaga, Kristofer Peterson, Max Carter, Shelly Cruz-Crawford, Joe Girdner, Elisabeth Johnosn, Matthew Winterhawk, David Beard, Roz Brooks, Nicole Hamblin, Alejandra Medina.