Students spend 3 to 5 days with their classmates, teachers and parent chaperones learning about the natural and cultural history of the mountains through one of two curricular tracks. Pre- and post-trip visits prepare students for the concepts they will learn and support the application of conservation principles into their daily lives. Many post-trip visits include stewardship work in public green spaces near schools.
A partnership with Bellingham Parks and Recreation created an opportunity for 765 students to engage in 14 hands-on stewardship projects within walking distance of their schools. Work to remove invasive species and maintain and rehabilitate trails benefitted the following public spaces:

Carl Cozier Community Forest, Connelly Creek Nature Area, Cordata School Campus, Cornwall Park, Euclid Park, Laurelwood Trail, North Ridge Park, Old Village Trail, Roosevelt Nature Trail, Squalicum Creek Park, St. Peter’s Trail, Memorial Park and Fairhaven Park
NEW & NOTABLE

Two schools were rescheduled because of an avalanche that closed Highway 20 for one week in March. Following the Oso mudslide, the Institute invited all Darrington 2nd and 3rd graders for a special 1-day Mountain School experience at no cost. Darrington 5th graders will participate in the 3-day program for the first time in 2015!

The Institute became a Field Research Collaborator with UC Berkeley's Lawrence Hall of Science BEETLES Project (Best Environmental Education Teaching and Learning Expertise Sharing). Mountain School is our first program to benefit from this work to develop best practices in science teaching and learning for field instructors.

TEACHER EVALUATION

31% said their students had an increased appreciation for the environment and interest in their surroundings
18% noticed that students had an increased respect for each other and the local environment

A NEWFOUND APPRECIATION

From Associate Director, Jeff Giesen

One of my daughter’s classmates is an 11-year-old who suffers from severe anxiety disorder. Their teachers were understandably concerned about how she would fare at Mountain School this year. She wears headphones, cries and growls for most of the school day. As a chaperone for their class, I sat with her at each dinner and watched, with amazement, her change over the next three days.

After learning outside all day, there were no tears at our first dinner and she wasn’t wearing headphones. She did growl at me though and said she was “Wild Wolverine.” I shared all of the ways I think wolverines are cool and – eventually – out came a smile as she relaxed and wolfed down her second helping of salad.

The next night I sat with her and her teacher. Guess who slept through the night without a problem? Guess who was engaged more than usual? Guess who looked at a frozen woodpecker? And guess who was on her second plate of salad again?

The last day of Mountain School is always hard for kids, and she was no exception. To help students transition and say goodbye, we have a tradition of making an unselfish wish as part of a closing circle. And when it was her turn, she was able to articulate her wish on her own – more than most kids could do. It reminded me that Mountain School brings out the best in kids, giving them a chance to show a side of themselves that they may often hide away—which is so critical for connection and learning.
FROM TEACHERS & PARENTS

“These students have the opportunity to explore and learn about their place in the natural world and the concept of sustainability. I can’t think of a more important mission.”

– Overlake School Teacher (Redmond, WA)

“These kids will remember that they did this and that they did this together for a long time. They bonded and got to experience “school” in a different way.”

– Little Mountain Elementary School Chaperone (Mount Vernon, WA)

“The students love learning by being in an outdoor classroom, where they can move and play and sit and think and explore all at the same time and in the same place.”

– Happy Valley Elementary School Chaperone (Bellingham, WA)

PARTNERS

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