



NORTH CASCADES INSTITUTE MOUNTAIN SCHOOL

2018

PROGRAM REPORT

Mountain School is our 29 year-old residential education program at the Environmental Learning Center in the heart of North Cascades National Park. Over 3 days, students spend 26 hours learning about ecological communities with their classmates, teachers, and parent chaperones. Hands-on, interdisciplinary experiences connect students to the natural and cultural history of our watershed. For most, this is the first time they visit a national park, spend a night away from home, and discover the connections between their lives, communities, and the environment.

Program Goals and Outcomes

SUPPORTING SCHOOLS in meeting state and national education standards



“ Two things I want to remember are the hikes we took up to the river and the tadpoles I saw when I got there. And also when I got to teach the things I knew about moss and lichen.

— Keira, Winthrop

INSPIRATION to continue learning and connecting with public lands and the natural world



“ It feels good to listen to the nature. I love sitting next to the slow trickling stream and watching the water flow. As I wait to get home I think of how I need to pay attention to the things around me that are beautiful.

— Patrick, Seattle

KNOWLEDGE of North Cascades ecosystems and the scientific process



“ I learned that the North Cascades are really important because they give our animals here a home and protection from predators. I say that we should take care of our environment here.

— Julio, Friday Harbor

CONNECTION to nature and fellow classmates through cooperative learning



“ Yo quiero recordar las largas caminatas entre los arboles y el tiempo que pase en la orilla de la playa con mis amigos. [I want to remember the long walks between the trees and the time I spend on the shore of the beach with my friends.]

— Marelly, Burlington

Quotes are from student-penned postcards, written to themselves, and mailed after Mountain School.

Participant Snapshot

To reduce participation barriers, we prioritize serving full school districts and subsidize fees on a sliding-scale, based on percent of low-income students. We provide clothing and nutritious, locally-sourced meals.

\$325 cost per participant to North Cascades Institute | **\$124** average price paid by schools per participant

14% transitional
BILINGUAL

16 communities in the
**NORTH
CASCADES**
ecosystem served

46% students are
LOW-INCOME
according to free &
reduced lunch

39% Identify as
**PEOPLE
OF COLOR**

2,736
STUDENTS

94% of schools received
FINANCIAL AID

16% **SPECIAL
EDUCATION**
students

514 **TEACHERS
& PARENT**
participants

\$509k **TUITION
SUBSIDIZED**
by the Institute

2018 Program Expansion: Burlington-Edison School District Joins Mountain School

In 2018, the Institute added six, 3-day Mountain School sessions. This allowed us to meet a long-standing request to serve *all five* elementary schools in the Burlington-Edison School District elementary schools, **313 additional participants!**

Engaging the entire district embodies the Institute's commitment to equity. Over half the students are low-income and fewer than half currently meet state science standards. Students will come together in middle and high schools from across Burlington-Edison, able to build upon shared Mountain School experiences. This was an important step forward in our goal for Mountain School to become a universal cornerstone of childhood education in Skagit Valley.



“ *I have observed many excellent classroom lessons, field trips, and learning experiences. There's no question that Mountain School was the best. Three uninterrupted days of experiential learning about the most pertinent topic of all—our relationship to our environment—indeed, our survival as a species.*

— Molly, Counselor from Lucille Umbarger Elementary School in Burlington

Evaluation and Outcomes

We conduct teacher surveys that assess students' short- and long-term development resulting from Mountain School. Teachers report the following:

Short Term Impacts on Students

97% increased comfort being outdoors

93% increased engagement in learning

87% increased use of inquiry

“ [The best part of Mountain School was] being outside and learning about where they live...seeing a kid's eyes light up when they fall in love with the outdoors and the sense of adventure and stewardship.

— JJ, Lowell Elementary parent chaperone

Long Term Impacts on Students

96% enhanced understanding of science

93% increased respect for peers

90% increased use of observation & investigation

“ I value the teachings that the students get at Mountain School dealing with science because they get that actual hands-on experience in a real-time situation.

— Stacie, Mary Purcell Elementary teacher

Impacts on Teachers

93% increased teamwork & cooperation

73% increased positive attitude towards learning

70% equalized experiences in nature

“ Mountain School equalizes the playing field—all students can access the content. Their shared experience in nature is the necessary background knowledge.

— Gracie, Madison Elementary teacher

Classroom and Community Impacts

87% valuable opportunity to integrate parents

87% increased responsibility for actions

84% increased connection to local landscapes

“ Our school struggles with attendance, so Mountain School is a hook for our middle school students. Our school is emphasizing getting kids out in the community with authentic learning opportunities and engagement, and Mountain School is in line with those goals.

— Janice, Lummi Nation School teacher





Setting Mountain School Apart: M.Ed. Student Teachers

Our 14 M.Ed. students each taught over 250 hours of Mountain School as a part of their practicum last spring. This unique model created multiple levels of experience-based learning. M.Ed. candidates:

- Actively role-modeled for participants, while they built teacher skills and contribute to re-visioning 21st-century education
- Exposed participants to a range of career pathways, including a marine biologist, classroom teacher, park ranger, and eco-therapist
- Energized participant learning by sharing individual academic passions and expertise
- Reflected the identities and backgrounds of Mountain School participants--a key element of Institute's our work to diversify environmental education

We offer a diversity of programs for people of all ages, and when they overlap like this, both cohorts of students benefit. We love opportunities to foster intergenerational teaching, learning and mentorship!



“ This was my 4th time at Mountain School. By far the best group of instructors!
 — Glen, Blaine Elementary Teacher

“ Mountain School's unique schedule, teaching resources, and social learning opportunities is more sustainable than peer programs and supports quality environmental education. It's been confidence-building to learn from local park experts like Jon Ridell in our Place-Based Natural History course and then integrate climate science and geology in teaching Mountain School.

— Darcy Page, Graduate M.Ed. Alumni, 2019

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