

Connections

A community partnership to get students connected online and outdoors in Support of Bellingham Public Schools | Fall 2020

Note: This program is supported by and complementary to a [wider-scale effort to serve districts across Whatcom County](#) facilitated by the Whatcom Coalition for Environmental Education, a program of the Whatcom Community Foundation.

COMMUNITY COLLABORATORS: Licia Sahagun (Wild Whatcom), Andy Basabe (Vamos Outdoors Project), Laura Plaut (Common Threads), Jeff Giesen (North Cascades Institute), Amy Brown (City of Bellingham Parks and Recreation Department), Priscilla Brotherton (Re Sources), and Char Waller (Whatcom Mountain Biking Coalition).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: The Connections program aims to provide academic learning, childcare, food, and social and emotional learning to those students in the district unable to access traditional childcare in fall of 2020. Leveraging the success of the Vamos Outdoors Project and Bellingham Public Schools (BPS) Migrant Summer Childcare Program in the summer of 2020, this program scales the proven model with the resources and expertise of several additional community-based organizations (CBOs).



The Connections program aims to mitigate barriers to accessing remote learning¹ for our district's most vulnerable youth, targeting the 10% furthest from opportunity, by providing childcare, meaningful interaction with peers and trusted adults, breakfast and lunch, and academic support in lower-risk outdoor settings². We envision building capacity for students to succeed at home in a remote learning environment and developing deeper connections between students, families, and educators.

ADAPTABILITY & CO-DESIGN PRINCIPLES: We recognize the ever-changing landscape within which we are working to prepare for the fall and the 2020-21 academic year. This program aims to center the needs of the students who are 10% furthest from opportunity, while also incorporating a program design that best suits the needs, capacity, and desired outcomes for the District. We have established a co-working, collaborative relationship between District leadership and CBO leaders to co-design the framework of the program. See the next page for more information about current program design.

¹ E.g. lack of adult support, lack of quiet space, and need for educational assistance to account for barriers related to language, behavior, and developmental abilities.

² The summer school pilot program at Kulshan Middle School, co-facilitated by Bellingham Public Schools and Vamos Outdoors, when assessed due to a positive COVID-19 case, was deemed to be extremely low risk by the Whatcom County Health Department. This program intends to follow similar guidelines and procedures to reduce exposure to and spread of COVID-19, informed by guidance from local, regional, and global health officials.

NEED STATEMENT: COVID-19 has increased inequality in education, as we've seen disparities in access to online learning environments and academic progress.^{3,4,5} Providing a safe environment for learners to experience the outdoors, interact with peers and adults, and receive support for academic engagement is a tool to increase equity.

Outdoor experiences in local green spaces can also reduce likelihood of spreading the virus and enable social distancing. In a review of 7,000 cases in China only one was transmitted outdoors.⁶ This program is modeled from a summer school pilot program at Kulshan Middle School, co-facilitated by Bellingham School District and Vamos Outdoors Project, which, when assessed due to a positive COVID-19 case, was deemed to be extremely low risk by the Whatcom County Health Department.

Time spent outdoors is not only associated with higher levels of physical activity, but is also linked with evidence-based health benefits including reduced stress, improved mental health, increased prosocial behavior and connectedness, greater happiness, decreased obesity and diabetes, and improved cognitive and motor development, among others.^{7,8} Now, more than ever, getting outside may be a vital resource, especially as many in our community are experiencing stress and trauma associated with COVID-19.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION: The Connections program will target students within "the 10% furthest from opportunity," as defined by Bellingham Public School District data; data will mirror "priority for service" criteria, which includes but is not limited to: (1) mobility/recent moves, (2) not yet met standard on state assessments, (3) not yet demonstrated proficiency in English, (4) retained/grade-age non-compatible, (5) attendance less than 80% of days during spring COVID shut down, (6) IEP, (7) houseless or formerly houseless. The number of students participating will vary significantly depending on (1) availability of classroom space, (2) number of people permitted in those spaces at one time, (3) required staffing ratios and number of staff available, and (4) transportation, but we are currently aiming to serve approximately 150 students this fall semester. The program will begin in Stage 2 of the district's Reconnect Plan and follow an A/B model with students attending in small-group cohorts on Mondays and Tuesdays or Thursdays and Fridays. Daily schedules include breakfast, indoor supported online learning, lunch, and afternoon outdoor enrichment activities (nature connection, garden education, mountain biking, and more) and supported indoor asynchronous learning support. The Connections program will be housed at Shuksan and Kulshan Middle Schools.

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY AND PARTNERSHIPS: The Connections program leverages the resources, expertise, and experience of several community partners in conjunction with Bellingham

³ Los Angeles Unified School District. Independent Analysis Unit. *Student Engagement Online During School Facilities Closures: An Analysis of L.A. Unified Secondary Students' Schoology Activity from March 16 to May 22, 2020*. July 2020. Available at: <http://laschoolboard.org/sites/default/files/IAU%20Report%202020%200707%20-%20Student%20Engagement%20Online%20During%20Closures.pdf>

⁴ Herold, Benjamin. *The Disparities in Remote Learning Under Coronavirus*. Education Week. April 2020. Available at: <https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2020/04/10/the-disparities-in-remote-learning-under-coronavirus.html>

⁵ Goldstein, Dana. *As School Moves Online, Many Students Stay Logged Out*. The New York Times. April 2020. Available at: https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/06/us/coronavirus-schools-attendance-absent.html?_ga=2.263588044.1306016049.1599254490-591466881.1599254490

⁶ Hua Qian, Te Miao, Li LIU, Xiaohong Zheng, Danting Luo, Yuguo Li. 2020. Indoor transmission of SARS COV2. <https://doi.org/10.1101/2020.04.04.20053058>

⁷ Bratman, Hamilton, Kahn, Daily, Gross (2015). Nature experience reduces rumination and subgenual prefrontal cortex activation. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* Jul 2015, 112 (28), 8567-8572. doi:10.1073/pnas.1510459112

⁸ Frumkin, et. al. (2017). Nature Contact and Human Health: A Research Agenda. *Environmental Health Perspectives*, Jul 2017, 125 (7). Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1289/EHP1663>

Public Schools. Collaborating community organizations include: Wild Whatcom (program lead), Vamos Outdoors Project, Common Threads, City of Bellingham Parks and Recreation Department, North Cascades Institute, Re Sources, and Whatcom Mountain Biking Coalition. Wild Whatcom will provide an on-site program manager as well as manage grants, financial management and reporting, staff training, and coordination among partnering organizations. Each partnering organization will contribute varying levels of staff capacity, financial resources, and material resources as outlined in a Memorandum of Understanding.

This program would not be possible without the direct support of Bellingham Public Schools. Thus far, the district has already provided support through staff time for program planning and coordination. During the duration of the program, the district will also be providing in-kind support including, but not limited to, transportation (busses and drivers), meals, facilities usage, and support staff (i.e. janitorial support, onsite nurse, administrative liaison).

LEADERSHIP TEAM

This program will be managed by staff members from Wild Whatcom, a local non-profit organization dedicated to creating lifelong connections to nature. Wild Whatcom has partnered directly with Bellingham Public Schools for more than five years, providing free and subsidized programs during and after the school day.

Licia Sahagun, Executive Director, Wild Whatcom: Licia brings a decade of non-profit experience to Wild Whatcom, ranging from AmeriCorps volunteer, Program Manager, Executive Director, and most recently, Deputy Director at the Green Energy Institute at Lewis & Clark Law School. Licia graduated cum laude with her bachelor's degree in International Studies and Sustainable Development from the University of Illinois and received her master's in Environmental, Natural Resources, and Energy Law from Lewis & Clark Law School in Portland, OR. Licia also has nearly 10 years of experience working directly with underserved and vulnerable populations as the Executive Director of a resource center and afterschool program in a low-income housing complex in the Chicagoland area serving Spanish-speaking, predominantly immigrant families. For this program, Licia will oversee and facilitate: grant requests and reporting, financial management, marketing and outreach, and partnership engagement among organizations and the district..

Samantha Jolly, Program Director, Wild Whatcom: Sammy has more than 5 years working in outdoor education, many spent working for organizations that prioritize providing outdoor access to low income and under resourced communities both in the U.S. and abroad. Sammy graduated cum laude from Kalamazoo College with a B.A. in Religious Studies and is a certified Wilderness Emergency Medical Technician (E.M.T.) and a Nationally Registered E.M.T. She has been with Wild Whatcom for three years and currently oversees Wild Whatcom's field staff and programming. She was vital in launching our community projects in the Sterling Meadows and Villa Santa Fe farmworker housing communities, as well as a new partnership with Lydia Place to serve formerly houseless families. For this program Sammy will facilitate staff training and onboarding as well as spearhead COVID-19 risk management policies and procedures.

Nicole Keeler, Schools Program Manager, Wild Whatcom: Nicole holds a B.S. in Biological Sciences and is a Master Naturalist, a certificate received through the University of Georgia. Starting her work in outdoor education on the east coast as an environmental educator and naturalist, Nicole brings more than 5 years of experience developing programs and managing program implementation.

Nicole has been pivotal in developing Wild Whatcom's EdVentures and SEED programs, which serve Bellingham Public School's Lifeskills classrooms (students with moderate to severe disabilities) and Title 1 classrooms (students from low-income families). For this program, Nicole will be the program manager, providing onsite support and coordination for all program logistics (scheduling, gear, facilities, etc.).

Each participating organization will also provide a liaison for this program as well as staff members as outlined in a Memorandum of Understanding. Leaders in participating organizations are also providing support for the program including, but not limited to, family engagement, food and meal preparation, gear donations, and more.

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN AND MILESTONES

Timeline	Activities	Goals	Metrics/Assessment
Oct 5 2020	All staff training on COVID-19 risk management, risk management in the outdoors, outdoor education basics and district technology for remote learning	Ensure COVID-19 safety protocols are understood and implemented	Participation in training; risk management quiz completion
Oct 12-Dec 18 2020	Program delivery	Serve 150 vulnerable students with free meals, outdoor education, and online learning.	Participation data and teacher surveys regarding student success in program (quantitative and qualitative)
Dec-Jan 2021	Program assessment, evaluation, and planning for spring	Gather feedback from instructors to inform future development of program	Feedback from program instructors, participants, families, and district leadership

COVID-19 AND RISK MANAGEMENT: An extensive COVID-19 Risk Management plan will guide procedures implemented throughout this program to reduce exposure to and the spread of COVID-19 in the community. Procedures to be implemented include, but are not limited to, stable cohorts of students no larger than 16 with dedicated staff members, mask wearing, social distancing, screening at drop off, and daily temperature checks. If you would like to see our risk management plan, please let us know. This program will also be guided by basic risk management policies and guidelines to reduce risk during outdoor programming. Each staff member will undergo a full-day training on risk management in the outdoors and COVID-19 risk management. Lead instructors during outdoor education will be first aid and CPR certified, with accessible support to an onsite Bellingham Public School nurse.

AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST: Letters of support from Bellingham School District and each collaborating organization, Memorandum of Understanding among collaborating partners, program budget detail, COVID-19 Risk Management Plan, Board Of Directors List for lead and/or participating organizations.