

Mountain School is our 28 year-old residential education program at the Environmental Learning Center in the heart of North Cascades National Park. Over 3 days, students spend 60 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 Outcomes:

CONNECTION to nature and fellow classmates through cooperative learning



“Dear Owen, Remember my hiking group the Tiny Mosquitos. A piece of advice: being kind pays off. I realized this when I made friends with people in my group that I did not know well.”

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



“To: Future me, From: Present me. Remember the hike where I went by myself and found a quiet spot to sit. Now I am watching Diablo Lake’s waves rushing onto the shore.”

KNOWLEDGE of North Cascades ecosystems and the scientific process



“I learned a lot about biotic and abiotic factors. I should walk near my home to listen to living things. I liked sitting quietly listening to the sounds in the forest. I should come again with my family.”

SUPPORTING SCHOOLS in meeting state and national education standards



“I learned that the branches of the Ocean Spray plant are so strong, settlers used them for nails. Native people used them for tools after hardening them in the fire.”

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

Participant Snapshot

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

We prioritize participation of full local school districts and subsidize costs on a sliding-scale, based on Federal Free & Reduced Lunch percentages. We provide clothing and nutritious, locally-sourced meals.

11% ENGLISH LANGUAGE Learners

16 communities in the NORTH CASCADES ecosystem served

49% Title 1 LOW-INCOME schools

36% Identify as PEOPLE OF COLOR

2423 STUDENTS

\$451k TUITION SUBSIDIZED by the Institute

16% SPECIAL EDUCATION students

469 TEACHERS & PARENT participants

84% of schools received FINANCIAL AID

Mountain School Audience: Leveling the Playing Field for Environmental Education

In the past three years, we have experienced increasing demand for Mountain School, which is now full with a growing waitlist. In 2017, we evaluated audience prioritization.

Recommendations include:

- Increase impact by deepening curriculum integration with schools
- Support equity goals by serving full school districts
- Extend program season to serve more students



Benefits of serving full school districts: increases equity, stabilizes participation to improve planning, magnifies long-term impacts, strengthens curriculum integration, and deepens community engagement with the North Cascades ecosystem.

68% of participating teachers have attended for 2+ years

53% of teachers integrate Mountain School curriculum year-round



“Educating the whole child is important, which means extending learning beyond classroom walls. For some students, especially those in poverty, Mountain School is their first authentic outdoor experience.”

— **Greg Baker**, Superintendent of Bellingham Public Schools and Institute Board Member

Evaluating Program Outcomes

We conduct teacher surveys that assess students' short- and long-term development. High percentages of teachers report the following benefits of Mountain School:

TEACHER IMPACTS

- 85% Equalizing the learning environment
- 91% Writing curriculum around Mountain School
- 94% Enhancing science & environmental curriculum

“As a teacher, I value building connections with my students and their parents, as well as typing in real-life experiences to my curriculum.”

— **Joyce**, Roosevelt School Teacher

STUDENT IMPACTS DURING PROGRAM

- 73% Use of inquiry
- 94% Engagement in learning
- 94% Enthusiasm for learning

“Mountain School opens students' minds to what a scientist really does. They leave seeing science as fascinating and engaging.”

— **Andy**, Friday Harbor School Teacher

LONGER TERM STUDENT IMPACTS

- 74% Observation and investigation skills
- 85% Knowledge of local environment
- 91% Understanding of ecosystem concepts

“Students learn about their ecosystem in a hands-on way, becoming more attached to the North Cascades.”

— **John**, Centennial School Teacher

CLASSROOM & COMMUNITY IMPACTS

- 74% Attitude towards school
- 85% Collaboration and teamwork
- 91% Respect for the environment

“Students are away from life as they know it, connected to technology. They grow relationships that may have never happened otherwise.”

— **Cara**, Lummi Nation Teacher



Inspiring Instructor Team

Mountain School's instruction team consists of Institute Masters in Environmental Education students, naturalist instructors, and North Cascades National Park rangers. Each brings diverse experiences and expertise.

Before graduate students begin the teaching practicum, they engage in rigorous courses exploring curriculum design, natural history, and teaching methods.



Institute naturalists are a diverse group of professional scientists, educators, and artists across the globe.

Our 2017 team delivered a wide range of natural history lessons through art, literature, and scientific exploration. They designed new lessons about mycorrhizal networks, indigenous sovereignty, and geology. They reinforced concepts with new programs including a readers theater, watercolor, and hike quests.



“To me, the best thing about Mountain School is the kids! They broaden my perspective, make me laugh, make me frustrated sometimes, teach me so much, and fill me with joy. I am here because of them!”

— 2017 Mountain School Instructor

2017 Partners and Supporters

“Dear future self, Remember that I can make a difference. I believe that I can make the world a better place.”

This student's conviction and compassion is fueled by generous support from hundreds of organizations and individuals. Thank you.



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Anacortes Noon Kiwanis Foundation
Anonymous Foundation
Beardsley Family Foundation
Discuren Charitable Foundation

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Swinomish Indian Tribal Community
The Burning Foundation
Whole Foods Market

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ncascades.org/school
(360) 854-2599
info@ncascades.org