

Facilities for 21st Century Learning Initiative: Outdoor Experiential Education

If DoDEA is to offer a world class education, Outdoor Experiential Education (OEE) needs to be a critical component of the *Facilities for 21st Century Learning* initiative. This program provides the whole child with the necessary skills needed to navigate a world that increasingly values the domains of leadership, teamwork, wellness, and problem-solving. Today's employers want a workforce that is team-oriented and well-suited to tackle the unique and complex problems of the twenty-first century. Research-based OEE practices support First Lady Michelle Obama's *Let's Move* initiative and President Obama's efforts to strengthen military families. The Obama administration's efforts, combined with OEE, offer the ideal opportunity to create a DoDDS-E program that utilizes and enhances the experiential pedagogy previously applied at the now-closed Hinterbrand Lodge facility in the German Alps. This program was eliminated due to increased force protection measures and a push for outdoor education programs to be administered at the school level. Local OEE programs at the school level have fallen short of providing the unique experiences necessary for a worthwhile, life-changing curriculum. We propose that DoDEA consider opening a central OEE hub site located on a base with proper force protection, much like Kean's Lodge in Garmisch, Germany. Our OEE program below is a comprehensive plan that bridges an innovative educational approach with both wellness and DoDEA curricular standards. The program's primary goal would be to implement a versatile multi-disciplinary curriculum that meets the needs of all students in a rapidly-changing world. We are passionate about providing a world class education for the children of overseas military service members and other federal employees. We are confident that OEE needs to be a key component of DoDEA's curriculum for the 21st century—for the sake of our students!

Thank you for offering us this forum to share our plan, ideas, and passion for education in the 21st Century.

Sincerely,

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Outdoor Experiential Education

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION: Outdoor Experiential Education (OEE), based on the Outward Bound concept, is defined as: *The search for the boundaries of the physical, social, intellectual, and emotional self which extends the walls of the classroom to confront the challenge and appreciate the beauty of nature. It is applied as a series of challenges and problem-solving tasks, which are designed to promote self-confidence, self-discovery, and acceptance of others.* The outdoor environs are the physical settings for student activities and are vehicles for providing personal growth in the form of OEE. Experience-based, OEE deals with both the affective and cognitive learning domains: group initiative challenges; constant group and individual processing; knowledge of navigation/map reading, geocaching (using a GPS unit to locate significant locations) environment, ecological concerns, flora and fauna, geology, ecosystems, nutrition, and first aid; and psychomotor skills of hiking, peak ascents, orienteering, rock-climbing, cross-country skiing, rappelling, ropes adventure courses, zip lining, camping, cultural studies, and fitness levels.

The OEE Program, both a specialized process and program which deals with learning's affective domain, adheres to and supports the Mission Statement:

Using the great outdoors as the classroom, OEE challenges students mentally, physically, emotionally, and socially to confront and solve problems and achieve goals, whether personal or group-related.

With self-image and perseverance as key determinants in a person's future success, students in OEE are placed in challenging adventures, calling upon the individual's resources and courage, combined with the willingness to work effectively with others—all toward overcoming adversity. Out of this confrontation with self, others, and the forces of nature emerge students who are more self-aware and confident. The students also gain valuable insights into the natural world, as well as insights into the behavior of other human beings.

Additionally, OEE utilizes the following **Mission Strategies:**

- *Clear and specific educational objectives.*
- *Systematic assessment.*
- *Effective leadership, quality instruction, competent staff, parental involvement, and community support.*

- *Training and staff development.*
- *Prejudice-free climate.*
- *Enhanced self-esteem.*

In facing the challenge of outdoor activities, the student confronts self and group to the point of high emotional involvement. At these times, the student overcomes inhibitions and attains new appreciation of relationships and responsibilities to self, others, and nature. The environment stimulates and heightens the senses as it combines aesthetic awareness and potential hazards. Risk-taking and sense of beauty, vital qualities often not found in learning experiences, are strategic components of the OEE Program. Since they are best learned through direct contact with the natural environment, where self-discovery and challenges unite as the unique teacher, these qualities are absorbed by the student through participation in the variety of OEE “experiences.” The student is offered the opportunity to view the familiar from new perspectives, develop peer interdependency, and exercise discretion and good judgment.

Objectives: The OEE Program, which provides a great variety of student outcomes, includes five basic objectives, written below in terms of Student Outcomes:

- (1) **Personal Mastery:** OEE will provide experiences that enhance and expand self-concept, as evidenced by, but not necessarily limited to,
 - overcoming initial hesitation, fear, and fatigue when confronted by physical and mental challenges
 - articulating personal views, especially when they differ from prevailing or dominant positions
 - conveying positive self-regard, attitude, and manner
 - accepting responsibility for personal actions and feelings
 - accepting and following through on leadership assignments
 - recognizing personal strengths and limitations
 - helping and supporting when needed via empathy
 - asking for help
 - taking initiative in accomplishing various tasks or in undertaking new things
 - enlisting the support of others when needed
 - assuming the responsibility to make experiences positive
 - persevering in overcoming challenges
- (2) **Interpersonal Effectiveness:** OEE will provide experiences that enhance interpersonal communication, cooperation, sense of community, and team building as evidenced by, but not necessarily limited to,
 - communicating honestly, openly, and effectively
 - developing cooperative relationships around common goals
 - demonstrating willingness to help companions achieve by giving physical and mental support

- having empathy and compassion for and being responsive to the needs and feeling of others
- deferring personal wishes in favor of group interests when appropriate
- understanding and respecting others
- participating in leadership or support roles as appropriate
- demonstrating personal and group safety when engaged in group activities
- demonstrating a willingness to discuss differences and defend the rights of others
- demonstrating self-control
- demonstrating sensible self-denial such as reducing sugar intake for wellness

(3) **Environmental Awareness:** OEE will provide experiences that develop a stronger knowledge base and understanding of and appreciation for sustainability and the natural environment, as evidenced by, but not necessarily limited to,

- demonstrating curiosity and a willingness to learn about the natural environment and stewardship
- exhibiting care toward living things and natural objects
- adhering to backcountry techniques and ethics
- describing and practicing low-impact use of the environment
- describing the importance of and practicing the principles of recycling
- describing the importance of and practicing the principles of composting bio materials
- being aware of sustainability and energy conservation issues
- recognizing factors affecting weather and climate
- being aware of the individual's and the group's impact on the environment

(4) **Problem-Solving:** OEE will provide activities that develop an attitude of curiosity, discovery, experimentation, and an appreciation for life-long learning, as evidenced by, but not necessarily limited to,

- asking relative questions
- being willing to try new things
- listening/persisting in trying to understand new information and skills
- gaining mastery over newly acquired knowledge and skills
- making compromises and working towards common solutions within the group

(5) **Outdoor Experiential Education:** OEE will provide experiences and situations using a residential social setting in a high impact environment that is unfamiliar to the student, which will allow the student to master problems unique to the outdoor environment as evidenced by, but not necessarily limited to,

- demonstrating an understanding of the formal and informal rules of alpine hut etiquette
- understanding weather data and the mountain environment to make appropriate preparations for changing weather conditions
- demonstrating an increased level of competence and safety in an outdoor setting
- planning appropriate nutritional menus conducive to the demands of outdoor activities and wellness
- assuming the responsibility for the organization, preparation, and clean-up of group meals
- recognizing symptoms of hypothermia and knowing how to avoid it
- selecting appropriate clothing and equipment for outdoor activities
- recognizing safe practices in a variety of outdoor activities such as rappelling, climbing, cross-country skiing, and hiking
- understanding and demonstrating basic principles of navigation on mountain trails using map/compass and GPS technology
- assuming responsibility for the general upkeep and cleaning of equipment and outdoor education facilities
- practicing appropriate personal hygiene in the outdoor environment
- practicing appropriate social practices in a residential setting

PROGRAM DELIVERY:

OEE Residential Center

The OEE Residential Center would serve elementary, middle, and high school groups from DoDDS-Europe.

- OEE residential hub site located on or near Sheridan Kaserne in Garmisch, Germany (i.e. Kean's Lodge) would allow for
 - planning, evaluating, and creating nutritious meals
 - team-building initiatives
 - orienteering
 - navigating
 - geocaching (GPS)
 - planning nature tag-trails
 - devising low ropes challenge courses
 - devising high ropes challenge course
 - constructing indoor climbing wall
 - climbing
 - rappelling
 - hiking
 - mountain biking

- camping
 - cross-country skiing
 - canyoning
 - spelunking (caving)
 - learning through nature trail courses
 - canoeing
 - discovering natural history
 - planning overnight expeditions
 - constructing adventure courses
- OEE hub center staffing:
 - outdoor education coordinator(s)
 - coordinates learning objectives based on visiting school needs
 - schedules groups OEE day program
 - outdoor education instructor(s)
 - conducts OEE training workshop
 - instructs hub center program with assistance of teacher/group sponsors
 - maintains safety of equipment/facilities
 - school group teacher/sponsor(s) who have completed OEE training workshop
 - serves as instructional assistants to coordinator
 - schedules, organizes and brings groups
 - Groups served outside of bus commuting distance from hub center or activity site
 - OEE activities held at school or nearby site
 - Group composition
 - elementary, middle school, and high school groups
 - all abilities and intellectual capabilities can be met

It is a program based on individual improvement and achievement in which anyone can take part and which everyone can enjoy. It is flexible enough to meet everyone's enthusiasm and aptitudes whatever their background or ability and no matter how plentiful or limited their resources.

Non-competitive

- a personal challenge and not a competition against others

Available to all

- award is gained through individual improvement and achievement

Flexible

- provided the basic age requirements are met, young people can take as long as they wish to complete an award and enter for whatever level of award best suits them

Progressive

- through its three levels, the award demands more time and an increased degree of commitment and improvement

Achievement-focused

- students cannot fail
- students and teachers use a notebook to record positive achievement and improvement only—about trying—not an exam—students cannot fail, they can only learn from their mistakes and triumphs

Enjoyable

- young people and adult helpers will find that the intrinsic value of the experiences motivate and drive learning through enjoyment

What young people get out of the OEE program:

- learning a healthy lifestyle
- connecting with the natural world
- discovering new skills and interests
- embracing challenge and adventure
- discovering the chance to develop talents and abilities
- having the opportunity to meet new people and make new friends
- having the opportunity to take responsibility for oneself and others
- decision-making and communication skills
- discovering the chance to develop enterprise, initiative and leadership
- life-changing experiences
- realizing increased self-confidence
- embracing a sense of achievement
- understanding the evidence of effort and success
- having fun!

The aims of Service, Expeditions, Physical Recreation, and Skills (SEPS) are:

Service

- to encourage service to others and the environment

Expeditions

- to encourage the spirit of adventure and discovery

Physical Recreation

- to encourage participation in physical recreation and improvement of performance

Skills

- to encourage the discovery and development of personal interests and practical skills

Service:

- The opportunity to:
 - give personal commitment
 - appreciate the needs of other people

- accept responsibility
- develop trust
- support people in need
- increase self-esteem
- understand their own strengths and weaknesses
- overcome prejudice
- become actively involved in the community
- care for the environment

Expeditions:

- demonstrate enterprise
- work as a member of a team
- respond to a challenge
- develop self-reliance
- develop leadership skills
- recognize the needs and strengths of others
- make decisions and accept the consequences
- plan and execute a task
- reflect on personal performance
- enjoy and appreciate the countryside

Physical recreation:

- enjoy keeping fit for life
- improve fitness
- discover new abilities
- raise self-esteem
- extend personal goals
- respond to a challenge
- derive a sense of achievement

The wide range of physical activities is divided into three groups to help young people make the right choice:

- activities with relevant National Governing Body Awards
- activities which have participation programs
- team games

Skills:

- maintaining healthy habits
- developing practical skills
- getting organized
- discovering how to research information
- developing enterprise and initiative
- trying something different
- working with other people
- developing abilities

- discovering new talents
- having fun!

There are over 200 skills, which are divided into 11 groups to help young people make the right choices:

- collections, studies, and surveys
- communications
- crafts (i.e. needlecraft)
- technology
- graphic arts
- life skills
- music
- nature
- sustainable living
- recreational skills
- wellness

To learn more about Outdoor Experiential Education, please visit the following links:

- <http://www.aee.org/> (Association for Experiential Education)
- <http://www.outwardbound.org/> (Leading Experiential Education Organization)
- https://www.facebook.com/home.php?sk=group_2239868687 (Hinterbrand Lodge – Project Bold Facebook page with testimonials and archives)
- <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=5189392917> (Another Hinterbrand Lodge Facebook page)
- <http://www.outdoored.com/> (Professional Resource for Outdoor Education professionals)
- <http://www.stripes.com/news/dodds-europe-s-outdoor-education-program-site-likely-to-close-for-good-1.14131> (Stars and Stripes article stating documenting the closure of Hinterbrand Lodge and the void left behind by its closing)