Strengthening Utah's Outdoor Legacy: HB 375 & Every Kid Outdoors

Codifying Utah's Every Kid Outdoors (EKO) Initiative

Why HB 375?

- **Codifies Success:** Transforms the 2019 HCR 004 "Every Kid Outdoors Initiative"—which delivered a strong **proof of concept in 2025**—into a permanent state program
- **Fiscal Oversight:** Uses a 2% administrative cap from existing restricted funds—protecting the General Fund while managing **$50M+ in annual grants.**
- **Expands Access:** Expands **UCORE grant** eligibility to include more community-based partners, ensuring no Utah child is left behind.
- **The Results**
- **20,000+ Kids Served:** Reached through strategic grants and 14 Adventure Challenge badges (Trail, Water, Starry Skies).
- **Educator Support:** A Curriculum Hub with **500+ lessons** and direct resources for 270+ Utah teachers.
- **Private Investment:** Leveraged **$9,000+** in private-sector prize donations, proving strong industry buy-in.
- **Smart Economics:** No new taxes; drives health and economic benefits for Utah families.

EVERY KID OUTDOORS

Vision: Every Utah kid deserves a healthy, active, nature-based childhood.

ARE WE OVERLOOKING THE OUTDOORS?

EVERY KID OUTDOORS ADVENTURE CHALLENGE

Spending time outdoors, or "green time," is a powerful counterbalance to the negative effects of screen time.

Did you know that children ages 8 to 18 get 7.5 hours of daily screen time for entertainment alone? That adds up to **nearly four months a year spent looking at screens** for fun. Compare that to the four to seven minutes a day the average American child spends playing outside.

THE SCREEN TIME EFFECT

BRAIN DEVELOPMENT:

Negatively impacts the development of brain areas responsible for attention, complex memory, visual processing, and empathy in young children.

EYESIGHT:

Linked to increased rates of myopia (nearsightedness) due to prolonged close-up focus and lack of natural light.

MENTAL WELL-BEING:

Associated with cognitive decline and memory problems in adolescents, and linked to higher risks of Internet addiction.

SENSORY PROCESSING ISSUES:

The highly stimulating, two-dimensional nature of screens overloads a child's visual and auditory systems, depriving them of the diverse sensory input necessary for healthy development. This can lead to sensory overload, fidgeting, and difficulty concentrating in real-world settings.

POOR POSTURAL CONTROL:

Sitting and staring at screens can weaken a child's core and neck muscles, leading to poor posture and fatigue. This lack of foundational stability can also make fine motor tasks, such as writing, more difficult.

BALANCE & COORDINATION DEFICITS:

Screen time replaces the active, dynamic movements necessary for developing the vestibular and proprioceptive systems. As a result, children may struggle with balance, spatial awareness, and coordinated movements.

GREEN TIME ADVANTAGE

BRAIN & SKILLS:

Mitigates the negative neurodevelopmental outcomes of screen time. Outdoor experiences can improve skills in attention, memory, and even nonverbal social cues.

VISION HEALTH:

Proven to slow the deterioration of vision in children with myopia. Regular outdoor time is crucial for healthy eye development.

MENTAL RESILIENCE:

Protects against the mental health conditions and cognitive decline linked to excessive screen use. Nature can serve as a protective buffer.

SENSORY & MOTOR SKILL DEVELOPMENT:

Outdoor play helps children integrate their senses and build a strong foundation for learning. Exposing them to various textures, temperatures, and sounds it helps develop essential sensory and motor skills. Activities like climbing and swinging also help build the vestibular sense, which is vital for balance and attention.

CORE STRENGTH & STABILITY:

Outdoor activities like climbing, jumping, and balancing strengthen a child's core muscles. A strong core is essential for good posture, handwriting, and overall coordination.

EMOTIONAL REGULATION & PROBLEM SOLVING:

Outdoor play often involves risks and challenges, which help children learn about their own capabilities. Without pre-programmed activities to guide them, they learn to think independently and solve problems creatively. This can help them develop self-regulation and reduce stress.

USING VITAMIN N (NATURE)

THE BEST ANTIDOTE TO SCREEN TIME

☐ LABEL
REFILL 0 1 2 4 ~~5~~ PRN

Rx PRESCRIPTION

NAME _____ AGE _____

ADDRESS _____ DATE _____

DOSAGE:

Experts suggest a daily dose of "Vitamin N." **Aim for at least 60 minutes of unstructured outdoor time** to support healthy vision, brain development, and overall well-being. Many child development experts suggest up to 3 hours a day.*

HOW TO USE:

Getting your dose is simple and doesn't require a special trip.

- **Play in the backyard.** A few minutes of unstructured outdoor play can be a powerful antidote to screen time.
- **Take a family walk.** A post-dinner stroll can improve sleep and provide valuable bonding time.
- **Explore local spaces.** Head to a nearby park, playground, or trail. Even a short visit to a new spot can feel like an adventure.
- **Do an activity outside.** Try eating a meal on the porch, reading a book under a tree, or even doing homework on a blanket in the grass.

POSITIVE SIDE EFFECTS:

A regular dose of "Vitamin N" has been shown to improve mood, reduce stress, and strengthen family bonds.

REFILLS:

No prescription needed! Your daily dose of "Vitamin N" is always available.

*Angela Hanscom, a pediatric occupational therapist, author of *Balanced and Barefoot: How Unrestricted Outdoor Play Makes for Strong, Confident, and Capable Children*, and founder of the therapeutic outdoor program "Timbernook", prescribes three hours per day for children—a figure that is consistent with recommendations from other child development specialists.

UTAH DNR RECREATION

EVERY KID OUTDOORS ADVENTURE CHALLENGE

This message is brought to you by the **Utah Division of Outdoor Recreation.**

For more ideas for family fun in the outdoors, visit **Recreation.Utah.gov/eko**

BENEFITS OF OUTDOOR RECREATION FOR CHILDREN

UTAH DNR RECREATION

EVERY KID OUTDOORS ADVENTURE CHALLENGE

HEALTH UNIVERSITY OF UTAH

PHYSICAL HEALTH

- Strengthens bones & muscles
- Increase Vitamin D absorption
- Enhances motor skills
- Improves vision/eye development
- Increases physical well-being and improves sleep quality
- Improves fitness & reduces obesity risk

MENTAL & EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

- Reduced stress & anxiety
- Boosted mood & happiness
- Enhanced emotional resilience & mental health
- Sense of mastery & connection with nature
- Promotes and deepens spirituality
- Strengthens relationships with families & communities

COGNITIVE GROWTH

- Increased volumes of both gray and white matter in the brain
- Improves the ability to deal with risk, problem solve, think creatively, & cooperate with others
- Improved spatial & directional awareness
- Increased attention span
- Better emotional regulation

ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

- Improves focus, concentration & working memory
- Improves academic achievement & scores on standardized tests
- Improves mental processing for tedious activities
- Fewer discipline issues
- Increased motivation for & understanding of STEM learning

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SOCIAL SKILLS & DEVELOPMENT

- Enhanced teamwork, communication & interpersonal relationships
- Stronger friendships
- Improves social and emotional learning

STUDIES CITED:

Cognitive Growth: Nicole et al. 2018; Bento et al.2017; Fayanto et al., 2019;
Social Skills: Cooley et al. 2015; Thorsteinsson et al. 2023; Molyneux et.al. 2022
Physical Health: McCurdy McPhil et al., 2010; Gunter et al., 2012; Ouyang et al., 2024; Lee et al., 2020; Zayatz et al., 2025; Karthikeyan, et al., 2022.
Mental & Emotional Wellbeing: Jackson et al., 2021; Wicks et al., 2022; Benham, 2023; Puhakka, 2025; Harris, 2016; Schein 2014; Izenstark et al., 2016.
Academic Performance: Wade et al.,2020; Vella-Brodrick et al., 2002; Mackenzie et al. 2018; Aspinall, 2011; Wang et al. 2023