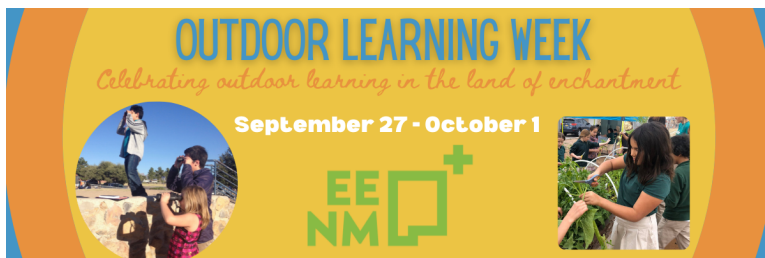


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# New Mexico's first 'Outdoor Learning Week' set for this fall

Students, teachers encouraged to learn outside the classroom from Sept. 27-Oct. 1

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Outdoor Learning Week, a new state initiative set to take place from Sept. 27-Oct. 1 in New Mexico, is meant to encourage schools to realize the benefits that come from learning outside as opposed to a traditional classroom setting.

Courtesy of Environment Education of New Mexico

Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham declared the first annual Outdoor Learning Week (OLW) will occur from Sept. 27 through Oct. 1 this year as a time to encourage learning outside the traditional classroom setting.

“It had overwhelming bipartisan support, which is really awesome,” said Stephanie Haan-Amato, communications and development director at Environmental Education of New Mexico (EENM).

Outdoor Learning Week is a result of Senate Memorial 1, which passed this year in the New Mexico state legislature. Gov.

Grisham has declared Sept. 29 as Outdoor Learning Day, which is also set to recur each year.

“Any subject can be taught outside, so we’re trying to get as many teachers as we can, to take their classes outdoors – either on their school grounds, or perhaps on field trips with local organizations around New Mexico,” said Haan-Amato.

School districts can choose to fund outdoor learning activities, like the federal Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Funds (ESSER) through the Coronavirus Aid Relief and Economic Security

(CARES) Act, which is aimed to mitigate the spread of coronavirus in the schools.

OLW is timely, according to Haan-Amato, because teachers and families are concerned about COVID cases transmitted in classroom settings. Senate Memorial 1 was intended to alleviate some concerns about transmission of COVID-19 inside the classroom by encouraging learning outdoors; the measure adds “outdoor classrooms are more important than ever and are being successfully used across the country during the pandemic.”

The possible learning and well-being benefits for students was central to the creation of OLW. Senate Measure 1 adds that “students who learn outdoors develop a sense of self, independence, confidence, creativity and decision-making

skills.” The measure also suggests that outdoor learning can improve attendance and result in better test scores.

“We’re hoping the benefits will extend far beyond the pandemic...the sense of discovery that kids get from being outside is not matched by anything they can do in the classroom,” said Haan-Amato.

In Taos, one example of OLW can be found at Vista Grande High School, where Vista Grande High School has an elective class focusing on sustainable agriculture.

Instructor Nora Corbett said students gain experience "harvesting carrots and potatoes, processing beans, cooking recipes they've brought in from home, helping to prepare for garlic planting." The school will also have other outdoor learning programs next week.

More information about OLW can be found on the Environmental Education of New Mexico website or calling (505) 859-3366.