WACO ISD EDUCATION FOUNDATION
COVER SHEET – PART II
Application for Grant:
2025-2026 Funding Cycle

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Assigned Grant Proposal #:	
Project Title:	
Grade Level(s):	# of Students DIRECTLY involved:
Subject Area(s):	
Amount Requested: \$	

**Grant Focus Area(s):** In order to be considered, Waco Education Foundation Innovation Grant proposals must fall under one or more of the E4 focus areas: early childhood development, enhanced programming for advanced students, extended education for staff, and emphasis on student performance. NOTE: In addition to meeting one of the E4 focus areas above, grant readers are especially interested in creative and innovative grant requests that target fine arts, STEM, literacy, or enrichment.

#### (check all that apply)

Early Childhood Development Enhanced Programming for Advanced Students Fine Arts Literacy Extended Education for Staff Emphasis on Student Performance STEM Enrichment

# We're Outta Here Outdoor School



#### **Project Description:**

The Fourth grade students will take a trip to The Outdoor School in Marble Falls, TX. The Outdoor School (TOS) is an overnight trip that provides an academically-integrated study trip designed around state standards. TOS is a place where kids can see, hear, touch, smell, and even taste nature. The students experience lessons while teambuilding and through peer collaboration. The lessons touch on the subjects of reading, math, science, social studies, and writing. These lessons are experienced through the natural environment and all hands-on. There's something for every age and every interest that will help students grow by facing challenges, overcoming their fears and doing things they never imagined they would! TOS has nature all around – the woods, the lakes, the stars.

### 1. Rationale:

The "We're Outta Here!" trip provides opportunities for students and teachers to learn and "experience" the content all together. Through this trip, everyone has the same experience to take back to the classroom. This "being there together" experience promotes the retention of material into long-term memory. Student to student dialogue increased greatly both during the trip and after returning to campus. It's an emotional experience that students will be able to draw from whether in math, science, language arts, social studies, or writing. Research shows that the body and the brain are inseparable. Dr. John Ratey states, "What the brain communicates to the body depends largely on what messages the body is sending to the brain. Together they collaborate for the good of the whole organism." In other words, by taking the students out into the real world and letting them move about and explore (as in this structured trip), then their brains will be able to simultaneously comprehend and learn all that they are experiencing. "Being there input occurs when real things are studies in their real-world context—literally, being there! All 19 senses are activated, producing maximum electrical and chemical activity in the brain. Input is rich, varied and plentiful." *Exceeding Expectations: A User's Guide to Implementing Brain Research in the Classroom*, Susan J. Kovalik and Karen D. Olsen, Susan Kovalik and Associates, Inc., 2015.

The Outdoor School uses proven challenges, initiatives, and ropes course training that enhance children's teamwork, trust, empathy, communication and group problem-solving skills. The activities are guided by facilitators as students work together to achieve common goals, think creatively to meet posed challenges and test their perceived limits to overcome physical obstacles. The activities are taught within the multiple disciplines in Science, Social Studies, Language Arts, and Math and are TEKS correlated. Students will be able to work on their problem solving, critical thinking, and teamwork skills. These skills are important in preparing students to be tomorrow's innovators.

The goal is to increase retention of academic material and to improve campus, district, and state assessment scores. TOS provides a "being there" experience where students are "unplugged" and become fully involved in learning through the natural environment. This trip will provide everyone the same experiences to take back into the classroom. The peer interactions and collaborations can lead to better problem-solving skills and retention of academic material. Through this engaged experience, we

have seen our students commit their learning to long-term memory. The student-to-student dialogue using academic vocabulary increases along with the understanding of academic material being taught.

The Outdoor School previously helped our students to build self-confidence and participate as members of a team. Many students experienced camp-life for the first time. They wrote about their experience in letters home to their parents. The writing assignment gave it a real "Hello Mother! Hello Father!" feel. Students were able to share their experiences with fellow students who could not make the trip. They readily became the teachers through in-class lessons and outdoor hands-on activities on campus grounds.

## 2. Goals:

The "We're Outta Here!" trip will cover many testable standards in 4<sup>th</sup> grades, such as, but not limited to:

- demonstrate safe practices and the use of safety equipment as described in the Texas Safety Standards during classroom and outdoor investigations; and
- Earth and space. The student knows Earth's surface is constantly changing and consists of useful resources. The student is expected to:
  - explore the processes that led to the formation of sedimentary rocks and fossil fuels;
  - identify fossils as evidence of past living organisms and the nature of the environments at the time using models.
- Increase creativity, literacy, and STEM (Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics) in the classroom
- Improves performance on student work The creativity will enhance learning in each subject area.
- Improves student motivation The activities on the fieldtrip will provide opportunities to increase dialogue students have with their teachers, increase in personal responsibility to accomplish classroom assignments and stimulate discussions they bring home to their parents.
- Increase student learning and engagement Students will be able to consume the information and connect more interactively with the content being taught.



Rock Sedimentation



Rock Comparison

## 3. Plan of Operation:

The teachers will begin working on organizing the trip and scheduling the buses during the early weeks of school. Teachers will plan for students to take the trip in early Fall in order to give students the best opportunity to connect prior learning and a better opportunity to retain skills learned to apply as they prepare for state, district, and campus testing. Teachers have found the Fall Semester dates work best to prevent conflicts with state or district testing.

## Activities / Objectives / Strategies:

- Reinforce skills through peer learning
- Present presentations created by student or teacher
- Apply skills taught throughout the subject areas
- Create projects and power points presentations about the learning experience

Subject	TX State Standard (TEKS)	Teacher Comments
Reading	<ul> <li>4.6E make connections to personal experiences, ideas in other texts, and society</li> <li>4.7E Interact with sources in meaningful ways such as notetaking, annotating, freewriting, or illustrating</li> <li>4.7F Respond using newly acquired vocabulary as appropriate</li> </ul>	Academically, The Outdoor School not only engaged my students in incredible writing activities while they were there, but it also gave them a wealth of experiences and background knowledge that they use throughout the remainder of the school year and for years to come. While at The Outdoor School, the students were required to respond to each of their activities in a written journal entry. This required my students to process all that they had learned and experienced, interact with nature in a way that was more meaningful, and use their new vocabulary as they respond to each activity. I saw my students making connections to what they had already learned in the classroom, engage in lectures and activities and then write meaningful responses, USE newly acquired vocab and simply enjoy writing! When we came back to the classroom, I saw my students make connections to what we had learned at The Outdoor School for the remainder of the school year. As we have read new book, articles, and writing prompts, my students have made these come to life by having real life personal experiences to relate to.
	4.13A generate and clarify questions on a topic for formal and informal inquiry	Throughout the entire Outdoor School experience, my students were required to generate questions about each experience. The guides and leaders were incredible at making the students think through what was being taught, make connections to their work back in class, and think deeply about the content. The students were required to inquire informally all week which led to formal inquiry back in the class.
Math	<ul> <li>4.6C apply knowledge of right angles to identify acute, right, and obtuse triangles</li> <li>4.7C Determine the approximate measures of angles in degrees to the nearest whole number using a protractor.</li> <li>4.8C solve problems that deal with measurements of length, intervals of time, liquid volumes, mass, and money using addition, subtraction, multiplication, or division as appropriate.</li> </ul>	One of the stand out lessons my students often talk about is "How Tall Is That Tree". The class focuses on geometry and relationships in order to determine the height and age of a tree. The properties of an isosceles right triangle are learned/reviewed and used in order to determine height. Proportional measurement is also explored to determine height. Students also look at the age of a tree using the rings and circumference. Instrumentation includes triangulation devices, protractors, tape measures and rulers.

	4.1A apply mathematics to problems	
	arising in everyday life, society, and	
	the workplace.	
	4.1C select tools, including real	
	objects, manipulatives, paper and	
	pencil, and technology as	
	appropriate, and techniques,	
	including mental math, estimation	
	and number sense as appropriate, to	
	solve problems.	
	4.7 Earth and space. The students	At the Outdoor School, the camp had a science class that took place in a dried
	know that Earth consists of useful	up river bed full of broken down pieces of rock (sediment). As we found our
	resources and its surface is	seats there, the camp's instructors taught the kids about what causes the
	constantly changing. The student is	sediment to look the way it does. They went into how rocks weather down,
	expected to:	erode and get deposited in new areas. This was great because the 5th graders
	(B) observe and identify slow	on the trip already had prior knowledge of this concept from when they
	changes to Earth's surface caused by	learned about it in 4th grade. In addition, it was also beneficial for the 4th
	weathering, erosion, and deposition	graders since their hands-on experiences from the Outdoor School helped
	from water, wind, and ice	assisted them in gaining prior knowledge for what we would learn just several
		weeks later. It was an incredible experience as they sifted through the
		sediment and were able to see exactly what the instructor described to them.
	4.2 Scientific investigation and	At the Outdoor School, the students partook in many different activities that
	reasoning. The student uses	implemented their knowledge and experiences from their classes at school. At
Science	scientific practices during laboratory	the Outdoor School, students were given journals on Day 1 to record their
Science	and outdoor investigations. The	observations, measurements, descriptions, and notes given to them as they
	student is expected to:	rotated to each activity. Between the numerous activities, they were expected
	(A) plan and implement	to correctly use the camp's tools while also keeping up with their journals. For
	descriptive investigations, including	example, one rotation took place in a dried up river bed, which allowed the
	asking well defined questions,	students to investigate the sediment left there. The students started out by
	making inferences, and selecting and	filling in notes as the camp's instructors were teaching them. After that, they
	using appropriate equipment or	were doing hands-on activities down in the dried up river bed while
	technology to answer his/her	simultaneously filling in their journals with their observations and findings, and
	questions Process Standard	pictures. They were also given sieves to sift through the sediments, goggles,
	(B) collect and record data by	and more!
	observing and measuring, using the	
	metric system, and using descriptive	
	words and numerals such as labeled	
	drawings, writing, and concept maps	

#### Timeline/Calendar:

August – October - Submit purchase order for all budgeted items. Send information about trip to parents. Prepare students for fieldtrip with post activities. Secure reservations with the Outdoor School and finalize preparations with the buses.

September – Meet with parents to communicate field trip information as trip components are finalized. Will meet via Zoom if in-person meeting is not possible.

October - Students will take the fieldtrip

October – February – Teacher will prepare and provide rigorous, engaging lessons across the 4<sup>th</sup> grade curriculums. Students will engage in team-building and collaborative-learning activities.

March - May - Students will reflect on the fieldtrip experience through discussions and writing. They will also continue their learning's through Science and Math activities.



How Tall Is That Tree

#### 4. Communication & Dissemination:

As we continue to improve in safely meeting together, members of the community, staff and faculty are encouraged to participate in this trip. This year, community members and parents were again invited to give the students an enthusiastic send off. Staff and Chaperones sent pictures in real-time to campus administrators to post on the campus Facebook Page. Upon returning, students and staff were highlighted on the campus webpage.

We would like to again be included in a district Foundation Focus to be featured on the Waco Education Foundation website and aired on WISD-TV. In addition, trip photos will be submitted to the Education foundation as well.

Parents and community members will again be invited to gather at the school prior to the trip and meet with the different teachers to discuss the expectations and the academic areas that are going to be taught in the different locations.

#### 5. Evaluation:

The student's complete and total immersion in the integrated academia on this study trip will result in a higher comprehension of the standards being taught; and the result will be an increase in the state standardized tests (STAAR) scores for all students in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade. Following previous trips, student scores improved on both district a nd state tests. So far this year, the same has held true for our campus and district tests. Prior to the trip there was a slight decline in Reading, Math, and Science average scores from Unit 1 to Unit 2 testing. Yet on average, students were still meeting district and state expectations. After the trip scores increased by nearly 20% in Math, 10% in both Reading and Science. The continued growth of our students is vital to instruction and the student's continued progress. Teachers have noted that when covering a unit students have expressed remembering a skill that learned about and used during The Outdoor School field trip.

While we missed achieving a letter grade of "B" by a small margin during the last documented year TEA graded schools, we believe the "being there" experience that The Outdoor School will provide will go far in helping close the gaps for our students. During the variety of tests administered following our previous trip to The Outdoor school, a particular area of success shown was in our Checkpoint data for our fourth graders in Math and Science. In Math our fourth graders went from 49% on Checkpoint 2 to 66% on Checkpoint 3. This was a significant increase and exceeded the minimal standard to pass of the STAAR expectations at that time. Our fourth graders also maintained an average of 62% - 65% on Checkpoints 4 and 5. These percentages are well above the minimal standard for of the STAAR expectations at that time as well. In Reading, our fourth graders have been averaging between 47% - 54% on the district Checkpoints since the field trip. While Science is not STAAR tested until beginning with 5<sup>th</sup> grade, the curriculum taught in KG-4<sup>th</sup> grades is vital to the students' success. Thus far Science scores have increased and continue to average 61% or above on campus and district assessments. Fourth grade met standard on the STAAR test for general purposes last year. These are just a few of the accomplishments and evaluations noted for our students as we continued to build on what they had learned during the trip to help them be more successful. We are confident increased success will be achieved by providing this field trip opportunity again for our students.

#### 6. Long Term Implications:

Improving student interests and motivation in Science and Math continue to be a focus for our campus and we continue to pursue our 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning goals for our students. Our 4<sup>th</sup> teachers believe that the results of giving the students the opportunity to experience the state's standards in the real environment will be outstanding! "Studies of the Proster Theory" that have proved in practice to be immediately valuable to teachers in planning and effecting gains in learning say that the brain "uses the principle of "the match" by which incoming pattern information matches, more or less exactly, the pattern stored in the brain, or else it is not recognized." *Human Brain & Human Learning, Updated*, Leslie A. Hart, Longman, Inc, 2010. In other words, if the students are given the experiences in a real-world setting, when they get back to the classroom the brain will recognize the "pattern" that was experienced and will be able to layer new information onto the already existing information (pattern).





Measure the Tree

### 7. Key Personnel:

Personnel	Responsibilities				
Principal	budgeting issues				
	misc. administration responsibilities related to study trips				
4 <sup>th</sup> Grade Teachers	<ul> <li>making necessary contacts and arrangements with community for "being there" experience for students</li> <li>organizing materials for the 4<sup>th</sup> grade community members that will be accompany on the trin</li> </ul>				
	<ul> <li>preparing the study trip materials for the students to take notes/record data/and other information</li> </ul>				
	<ul> <li>help with securing transportation details for participants (students and adults) for the being there experience</li> </ul>				

#### 8. Budget and Budget Narrative/Justification:

Budget: Please see attached sheet.

ltem	<u>Cost</u>
Were Outta Here – The Outdoor School Fieldtrip	\$8,500.00
	\$8,500.00
TOTAL	

Every year our teachers work hard to teach curriculum in an integrated, brain-compatible way. However, when the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders took this trip in the past, students were able to relate back to the study trip as they continued to build and layer new knowledge on top of what they experienced while on the trip. The students remained excited and showed an increased energy when finding they had prior knowledge on subjects that they're learning in the classrooms. We want to provide that feeling of enjoyment of learning in our new 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade classes. Students will have a better sense of the "world" and how to apply what they are learning. In addition, they will understand and have a better appreciation for the outdoors because they can visualize the different items they're discussing in class.

Due to our small campus, we simply do not have the funds to fund such a trip. This grant is much needed. In the past, we've taken this trip with both 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade students. We would like to continue to take both grade levels. However, the rising costs of camp fees, transportation, lodging, food, etc. has greatly surpassed the previous costs in years past. In hopes of being able to take this trip again, it has become necessary to have each grade level apply for their own grant to secure funding to cover this increased cost. Our Fourth graders are looking forward to the opportunity to return to The Outdoor School as Fifth Graders.

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