

NATURE-BASED LEARNING FOR ALL ONTARIO STUDENTS



The Power of Nature-Based Learning...

- **Enhanced Student Learning:** Boosts learning capacity, self-discipline, and physical/emotional wellness.
- **Environmental Stewardship:** Instills appreciation for nature, fostering future stewards of Ontario's natural resources.

That Only a Few Students Can Access

- **Inequity in Access:** While some school boards provide robust nature-based education, many students in the GTA and across Ontario lack regular access to nature-based field trips and out-of-classroom learning.
- **Financial Barriers:** Costs, logistics, and limited resources prevent equal opportunities for all students.



Existing Infrastructure: Strong...

Ontario has benefited from over 60 years of nature-based education through school boards and conservation authorities, with 30 learning centres in the GTA alone situated in or near biodiverse greenspaces for students to explore.

Yet Incomplete:

- Significant gaps in the system.
- No policies in place to ensure equitable access.
- Financial barriers still limit student participation.



The Path Forward: Addressing Key Challenges

Recognizing the urgency of the situation, eight Toronto area Public and Catholic school boards, along with the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, have come together to ensure long-term, equitable access to nature-based learning.

GOALS:

To provide stable, equitable, and consistent experiential education, linked to Ontario's elementary and secondary curriculum by:

1. Developing minimum standards for curriculum-linked, nature-based learning.
2. Addressing affordability barriers for families and schools.

Joint Recommendation

Understanding that ecological literacy is a critical competency for 21st century students, building on current Ministry of Education investments in outdoor education, and leveraging existing public assets, greenspace and expertise, we recommend the development of a province-wide program to provide sustained, curriculum-linked out-of-classroom learning programs for all students in Ontario in grades 2, 4, 7 and 9 through a **\$72M** investment. This investment would benefit over **581,000** students a year across Ontario, providing them with enriched learning experiences that will contribute to their overall development and well-being.

INVESTMENT OUTCOMES:

With long-term, stable funding from the Ministry of Education, we can ensure that all students in **Ontario have equitable access to nature-based learning experiences** in world-class centres that integrate sustainability and environmental design principles.

Such an investment would not only enhance educational outcomes but also foster a generation of environmentally conscious individuals committed to conserving Ontario's natural resources!



For more information please contact

Darryl.Gray@trca.ca

437-880-2280



Toronto and Region
Conservation
Authority