

Items for the Action of the Natural Science and Education Committee

TO: Chair and Members of the Natural Science and Education Committee
Monday, March 17, 2025 Meeting

FROM: Darryl Gray, Director, Education and Training

RE: ESTABLISHMENT OF AN AD-HOC ADVOCACY AND AWARENESS WORKING GROUP

KEY ISSUE

Establishment of an Ad-Hoc Advocacy Working Group specific to Natural Science and Education Committee (NSEC) activities.

RECOMMENDATION:

WHEREAS AT MEETING #3/24 held on November 25, 2024, the NSEC endorsed an Advocacy Agenda specific to seeking improved funding to remove barriers to access to out-of-classroom learning related to natural-science, conservation and the environment;

AND WHEREAS it is desirous to develop a coordinated approach to raising awareness around the shared school board and TRCA priorities specific to out-of-classroom learning, including, but not limited to, advancing adoption of policies related to minimum standards of access, unified performance measurement systems, and others;

THEREFORE LET IT BE RESOLVED THAT an Ad-Hoc Working Group comprised of up to four (4) members of NSEC be convened from amongst its membership or other appropriate school board appointees as recommended by NSEC.

BACKGROUND

At Meeting #3/24, held on November 25, 2024, NSEC endorsed an advocacy agenda which is intended to be used by school board officials and TRCA to raise awareness of both the gaps and opportunities to strengthen the overall system of out-of-classroom learning related to natural science, conservation and the environment.

In order to focus efforts related to advocacy, key messages were developed to support Trustees, TRCA Board Members and others working

Item 8.3

in this regard. The advocacy agenda is intended to highlight key messages in support of shared goals of area school boards and TRCA, in this case specifically to ensure equitable access for all students to nature-based learning, enabled through enhanced funding for student learning in nature. The following are the key messages and outcomes:

MAIN AND SUB-MESSAGES:

Main Message:

Students in the highly urbanized Greater Toronto Area, and other urbanized areas of Ontario, experience significant inequity as it relates to both learning in, for and about nature, as well as regular access to nature.

Sub-Message 1:

Student experiences in nature improve learning outcomes related to natural science, conservation and the environment, as well as providing mental health and wellness benefits.

Sub-Message 2:

An investment in nature-based out-of-classroom student learning is an investment in the future appreciation and conservation of the unique and unparalleled natural resources of Ontario.

OUTCOMES:

Recognition within Ministry of Education Policy that every student in Grades 2, 4, 7 and 9 is to receive out-of-classroom learning related to natural science, conservation and the environment.

Benefit 581,000 students across Ontario through the allocation of \$79M (\$32M for Toronto and Region Boards) in annual funding for students in Grades 2, 4, 7 and 9 to access out-of-classroom learning related to natural science, conservation and the environment (colloquially known as outdoor education experiences).

Dramatically improved out-of-classroom learning opportunities for students in the Province, including improved learning outcomes in target curriculum areas related to natural science, conservation and the environment.

RATIONALE

In an effort to ensure coordination and leverage existing Trustee and TRCA Board Member relationships with Provincial Ministers and Ministries, TRCA staff are proposing an ad hoc advocacy working group of NSEC specific to raise awareness about the importance of establishing equitable standards of access for all students, including enhanced funding for out-of-classroom learning related to natural science, conservation and the environment.

The establishment of an ad hoc working group would allow for a coordinated approach to raising awareness about the work of NSEC and area school boards in the area of out-of-classroom learning related to natural science, conservation and the environment.

To realize the shared objectives and goals of participating school boards and TRCA, TRCA staff are proposing an Ad Hoc Advocacy Working Group comprised of members of NSEC which will meet on an as-required basis to formalize the previously endorsed advocacy program. Expectations of members would be to attend meetings as necessary, advocate with Government of Ontario Ministers, MPPs and officials and generally raise awareness of the work of NSEC in improving access to nature-based learning for students of Ontario.

Relationship to TRCA's 2023-2034 Strategic Plan

This report supports the following Pillars and Outcomes set forth in TRCA's 2023-2034 Strategic Plan:

Pillar 2 Knowledge Economy:

2.3 Advocacy and adaptability in the face of policy pressures

Pillar 3 Community Prosperity:

3.1 Connect communities to nature and greenspace

Pillar 3 Community Prosperity:

3.2 A culture of diversity, equity and inclusion contributing to community well-being

Pillar 3 Community Prosperity:

3.4 Inspired communities take environmental action

FINANCIAL DETAILS

There are currently no financial implications or costs associated with this report. As additional advocacy materials and campaigns are developed

Item 8.3

further costs may be incurred or resources required. These will be funded through TRCA's Education and Training Operating Budget.

DETAILS OF WORK TO BE DONE

Pending endorsement by NSEC, TRCA staff will work with the Ad Hoc Working Group to finalize and execute on the endorsed Advocacy Agenda, including targeted outreach initiatives with the Minister of Education and other key Ministry and sector stakeholders. TRCA staff will provide secretariat function, coordinate meetings and prepare necessary materials based on the needs and requirements of the Ad-Hoc Working Group.

Regular reporting of progress will be provided to NSEC.

Report prepared by: Darryl Gray, Director, Education and Training

Email: darryl.gray@trca.ca

For Information contact: Darryl Gray, (416) 791-0327

Email: darryl.gray@trca.ca

Date: February 25, 2025