

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: SURVEY OF TEACHERS REGARDING OUT OF CLASSROOM LEARNING

KEY ISSUE

Update and information pertaining to a survey of teachers from Greater Toronto Area (GTA) schools designed to assess current barriers to participation in out-of-classroom learning related to natural science, conservation and the environment.

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT any input from the Natural Science and Education Committee (NSEC) Trustee Members prior to its finalization be received;

AND THAT the 2025 Survey of Teachers be circulated to appropriate School Board staff for distribution to inform work of NSEC to identify and address barriers to the delivery of outdoor education programs.

BACKGROUND

Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) regularly engages with professionals from within the education system including teachers, administrators, education assistants and others, in order to understand and respond to changing and evolving needs within this particular line of conservation authority work. This engagement takes many forms, including ongoing dialogue with teachers, administrators or staff booking and/or visiting TRCA facilities, program or facility-related surveys or participation at teacher conferences.

In 2010, recognizing an ongoing decline in school participation in field trips to TRCA facilities and partner attractions, a survey of teachers was conducted to assess perceived or real barriers to out-of-classroom learning. The survey was intended to assist TRCA and partner

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organizations in understanding barriers to participation in out-of-classroom learning, along with the development of potential solutions or opportunities to remove barriers to participation.

The survey was conducted from February 4, 2010 to April 14, 2010 and circulated through TRCA's various education and school networks including school boards, the Ministry of Education, conservation authorities, practitioner associations and other organizations. Completion of the survey was voluntary with 631 respondents participating in the survey and provided a snapshot of some of the barriers that teachers at the time faced when planning an out-of-classroom learning experience for their students.

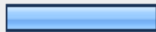
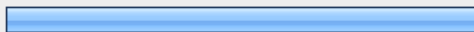



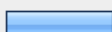

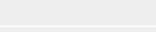

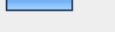

While the survey was primarily targeted towards practicing teachers, a small percentage of administrators and other education professionals completed the survey. Of the total number of respondents, teachers comprised 92.2% of those completing the survey.

On average responding teachers had been employed within the teaching profession for 13.3 years and were planning on taking, or had taken, their class on an average of 3.4 field trips in that given year. In asking respondents to identify specific barriers to participation in field trips from a select list, the following were the top five responses based on percentage selected:

1) Cost/Funding:	80.8%
2) Transportation Costs:	71.0%
3) Bus Timing and Availability	30.4%
4) Liability/Risk Management	25.7%
5) Policies	25.2%

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The following is a complete summary of all responses:

What, if any, are the major barriers that exist in taking part in a field trip?			
		Response Percent	Response Count
Policies		25.2%	159
Cost/Funding		80.8%	510
Transportation Costs		71.0%	448
Bus Timing and Availability		30.4%	192
Personal Time Requirements		12.7%	80
Workload		17.9%	113
Awareness of Field Trip Opportunities		17.4%	110
Liability/Risk Management		25.7%	162
Parent Buy-In or Concerns		10.6%	67
Complexity of Planning/Process		18.2%	115
There Are Currently No Barriers		2.2%	14
	Other (please specify)		99
	answered question		631
	skipped question		0

RATIONALE

Responses from the 2010 Survey of Teachers were used by TRCA to inform decision making related to fundraising activities, budget planning, advocacy, policy refinement and other mechanisms that were and are intended to remove barriers to participation in out-of-classroom learning. The NSEC and TRCA staff working with school boards are utilizing the results of the above survey to identify and remove barriers to equitable access.

Given the work of NSEC, TRCA is preparing to release an updated survey in 2025 to understand what, if any, changes to perceptions of barriers to participation might have occurred since 2010. This survey will

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also serve to inform continued collaboration between TRCA and area school boards in serving students of the Greater Toronto Area in the provision of out-of-classroom learning related to natural science, conservation and the environment.

Following discussions at the September 23, 2024 NSEC Leadership Session the survey has been updated to reflect the current context related to specific barriers to participation. Additionally, NSEC Staff Working Table, comprised of staff from participating area school boards and TRCA staff, reviewed and provided feedback on the draft survey.

2025 Survey of Teachers Perceptions of Field Trips Questions

- **Please select one of the following:**

- Teacher
- Education Assistant
- Principal
- Administrator
- Other

Please select your school board:

- Select One

What grade do you teach:

- JK/SK
- Grade 1
- Grade 2
- Grade 3
- Grade 4
- Grade 5
- Grade 6
- Grade 7
- Grade 8
- Grade 9
- Grade 10
- Grade 11

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- Grade 12
- N/A

How many years have you been in the teaching profession?

- Numerical Answer

How many field trips have you taken, or are planning to take, your students on during this school year?

- Numerical Answer

How many *nature-based or outdoor education* field trips have you taken (or are planning to take) your students on during this school year?

- Numerical Answer

How many field trips did you, on average, take your students on:

- 5 Years Ago
- 10 Years Ago

What, if any, are the top three major barriers that exist in taking part in a field trip? (Select Up To Three)

- Policies
- Cost/Funding
- Transportation Costs
- Bus Timing and Availability
- Personal Time Requirements
- Workload
- Volunteers/Supervisors
- Curriculum Demands
- Awareness of Field Trip Opportunities
- Liability/Risk Management
- Parent Buy-In, Reluctance or Concerns
- Complexity of Planning/Process

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- There Are Currently No Barriers

Open ended questions:

- What do you see as the key benefits of outdoor learning?
- What do you see at the barriers to getting outside in your school yard?
- Do you have any other comments you would like to provide?

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 3 Community Prosperity:

3.1 Connect communities to nature and greenspace

Pillar 3 Community Prosperity:

3.3 Informed citizens are conservation champions

Pillar 2 Knowledge Economy:

2.3 Advocacy and adaptability in the face of policy pressures

FINANCIAL DETAILS

There are no financial implications related to this report. Any work associated with the 2025 survey will be included in TRCA staff work plans.

DETAILS OF WORK TO BE DONE

TRCA will continue to work with staff from area school boards and NSEC members to finalize and circulate the 2025 Survey of Teachers in Q1 2025.

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