

Section I – Items for Authority Action

TO: Chair and Members of the Authority
Meeting #6/18, Friday, July 20, 2018

FROM: Darryl Gray, Director, Education, Training and Outreach

RE: **TORONTO DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD EXCURSION POLICY**
Ontario Camps Association Accreditation for Overnight Education Centres

KEY ISSUE

Request for exemption from Toronto District School Board Excursion Policy requiring Ontario Camps Association Certification for overnight education centres at Albion Hills and Lake St. George field centres and Claremont Nature Centre.

RECOMMENDATION

WHEREAS Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) and the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) have a history of partnerships and collaboration dating back to 1953 that provide for the provision and delivery of outdoor education and natural-science based learning programs for students of area schools;

AND WHEREAS TRCA and TDSB have formal agreements for the provision of greenspace, facilities and support services for TDSB students within TRCA conservation lands;

AND WHEREAS TDSB recently adopted changes to their Excursion policy requiring Ontario Camps Association Certification for overnight outdoor education centres;

AND WHEREAS TRCA meets and/or exceeds all current Ministry of Education endorsed excursion safety guidelines related to outdoor education;

AND WHEREAS TRCA education centres that provide overnight accommodations are not camps;

THEREFORE LET IT BE RESOLVED THAT TRCA, as its current operating standards adhere to Ministry of Education excursion safety guidelines, request an exemption from Toronto District School Board's Excursion policy requiring Ontario Camps Association Certification for facilities providing overnight education programs for TDSB students;

THAT TRCA request the opportunity to strengthen the partnership between TRCA and TDSB to identify mechanisms to further maximize the efficient use of public assets such as greenspace and education facilities to enhance student learning in the out-of-doors;

AND FURTHER THAT the TDSB Board of Trustees and the Minister of Education be so advised.

BACKGROUND

TRC) and TDSB have a long history of partnerships that support and enable TDSB student learning in the out-of-doors. This partnership extends back to 1953 through a unique collaboration between York Memorial Collegiate Institute and the then Humber Valley Conservation Authority. This partnership took the innovative approach of immersing students in the natural environment for a five day field trip to Bolton, Ontario which served to strengthen student understanding and learning outcomes related to watersheds and natural systems, and provided a 60+ year foundation for partnerships between the two organizations.

Since that initial five day field trip, the relationship between TRCA and TDSB has grown to include a significant suite of formal leases and collaborations that enhance and support learning opportunities for TDSB students, including:

- Three TDSB education centres located on TRCA-owned land:
 - Etobicoke Field Studies Centre at Claireville Conservation Area;
 - Etobicoke Outdoor Education Centre at Albion Hills Conservation;
- Forest Valley Outdoor Education Centre in the Don River watershed (lease administered by City of Toronto); Two TDSB outdoor education centres located adjacent to and utilizing TRCA-owned, City of Toronto managed, greenspace:
 - Warren Park Outdoor Education Centre in the Humber River watershed;
 - Hillside Outdoor Education Centre in the Rouge River watershed.
- Participation of over 7,000 students in TRCA in-class programs, including Watershed on Wheels, Aquatic Plants or Yellow Fish Road annually.
- Participation of approximately 18,000 students in day field trips to TRCA education centres and conservation areas, including Black Creek Pioneer Village, the Kortright Centre for Conservation, Tommy Thompson Park and Albion Hills Conservation Area.
- Participation of 1,500 students from TDSB schools in multi-day outdoor education experiences at TRCA overnight centres: Albion Hills and Lake St. George Field Centres and Claremont Nature Centre.

RATIONALE

From the inception of the partnership between TDSB and TRCA, leaders within both organizations, and the Province of Ontario, saw the benefit and efficiency of school boards and conservation authorities working together to ensure access for students to curriculum-linked outdoor education lessons that leveraged the value of public assets and public greenspace. This is to the extent that Section 197 (7 – 9) of the *Education Act* provides a mechanism for school boards to establish formal agreements with conservation authorities for the provision of out-of-class learning experiences.

It is through this mechanism within the *Education Act* that TRCA and local school boards, including TDSB, have been successful in creating a learning system where a large number of students within the region's watersheds have access to world-class outdoor learning centres that enhances student experiences and creates the foundation for a sustainable future. One example of the important relationship between TDSB and TRCA was the acknowledgement within TDSB Operational Procedure PR511 SCH: Excursions, "Appendix A", that TRCA overnight centres, with the exception of lake studies programs at Lake St. George Field Centre, were identified specifically as "not high-care", meaning that they are deemed to be of lower risk by TDSB and acceptable field trip destinations for TDSB schools. However, recent policy changes at TDSB related to Ontario Camps Association (OCA) accreditation requirements for overnight centres will result in students from TDSB schools no longer being able to participate in field trips to TRCA overnight centres at Albion Hills and Lake St. George field centres and Claremont Nature Centre.

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OCA certification is an accreditation program for summer camps operating in Ontario designed to ensure a high standard of operational quality and camp safety for certifying camps. While OCA certification may be appropriate for camps delivering summer programs for youth and families in Ontario, TRCA education centres are unique facilities operated by a government agency that provides curriculum-linked natural-science and watershed-based lessons related to the conservation authority legislated mandate to advance student understanding related to complex watershed and ecosystem issues.

Additionally, on May 1, 2018 the Ministry of Education, stemming from the Deloitte review and assessment of school board policies related to outdoor education/excursions following the July 2017 drowning, issued a memo emphasizing the Ministry's expectations that school boards have policies in place that meet or exceed Ophea's Ontario Physical Education Safety Guidelines. In keeping with Ministry of Education directives, TRCA, in consultation with school board partners, adheres to Ministry of Education endorsed Ontario Physical Education Safety Guidelines as administered by Ophea and has a robust and sophisticated risk-management program supported by professional risk-managers, TRCA's insurance providers and front-line teachers and staff.

FINANCIAL DETAILS

On average, TRCA hosts 26 TDSB school visits per year at one of the three overnight education centres. Of this, twenty schools participate in the Environmental Leaders of Tomorrow program, which provides funding support for classes that would not otherwise be able to access a trip to a TRCA field centre, and the remaining six schools pay the standard user fees applicable to overnight excursions to TRCA field centres.

The 20 visits funded under the Environmental Leaders of Tomorrow program have been re-allocated to classes at other school boards that meet the eligibility criteria, resulting in no financial implications, while the gross financial impact of the loss of six class bookings is approximately \$31,500.00, though a portion of this has been offset through classes from other area school boards reserving space historically utilized by TDSB.

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