

Items for the Information of the Outdoor Education Task Force

TO: Chair and Members of the Outdoor Education Task Force
Meeting #1/20, Monday, January 20, 2020

FROM: Darryl Gray, Director, Education and Training

RE: **OVERVIEW OF OUTDOOR EDUCATION IN JURISDICTIONS OUTSIDE OF ONTARIO**

KEY ISSUE

Summary of research regarding Outdoor Education (OE) practices and opportunities outside of Ontario.

RECOMMENDATION

IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT the following research summary on outdoor education in jurisdictions outside of Ontario be received.

BACKGROUND

At OETF Meeting #1/19 of the Outdoor Education Task Force, held on October 7, 2019, Res. #OETF4/19 outlined three working groups:

- **Principals, Values and Destinations:** working group to be formed January, 2020; presentation to the Outdoor Education Task Force February, 2020
- **Models and Mechanisms:** working group to be formed February, 2020; presentation to the Outdoor Education Task Force, May 2020
- **Recommendations and Policy Statements:** working group to be formed May, 2020; presentation to the Outdoor Education Task Force, October 2020

This report regarding the Outdoor Education (OE) activities and programs outside of the GTA school boards is intended to inform Outdoor Education Task Force members of potential OE practices and/or opportunities they may wish to consider as part of the strategic planning framework for the long-term provision of out-of-classroom learning related to natural science, conservation or the environment in the Toronto region.

RATIONALE

In assessing outdoor education systems and programs in other jurisdictions outside of Ontario, multiple variables were taken into consideration, including:

- Country and/or Region - Finland, Australia, Denmark, Singapore, New Zealand, Italy, Scotland, United States (specifically California) and Canada (specifically British Columbia);
- Type of OE Interventions – in-school (and school yard), day excursions (off school property activities but within the regular school day), overnight excursions, trips abroad;
- Curriculum Focus – mandated through curriculum, teacher-choice, offered by partners or outside agencies;
- Audiences – grade level and/or age of students;
- Funding Sources – publicly funded (through school systems), fee for service, grant/sponsored;

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- Additional Information;
- Reference(s).

For each country or jurisdiction evaluated, there exist a range of unique programs and/or pedagogy being employed which demonstrates the spectrum of approaches and frameworks being employed:

- In Finland, OE resides within the not only the need but the *responsibility* we have for the environment, one's personal well-being, and a sustainable future. Outdoor education resides within the core curriculum, and the majority of the costs associated with in-school programming, excursions, as well as nature and camp schools is included as part of the school system budget. Curriculum for primary, junior, and intermediate age students focuses on environmental education and responsibility for the environment while senior grades shift to sustainable development education.
- In Australia, students are also offered curriculum mandated OE, particularly in the subject areas of Health and Physical Education, Humanities and Social Sciences, Geography and Science. Curriculum experiences may include in-school, day, and/or overnight excursions. The Australian OE approach is based in building a *positive relationship with the natural world* for the sake of wildlife but also as an extension of human health;
- Denmark is home to *Udeskole*, which translates to "outdoor school". Children between the ages of 7-16 have weekly or bi-weekly outdoor school days. Udeskole is practiced in approximately 14% of all schools in Denmark;
- In Singapore, an "*Outward Bound School*" offers learners up to college-aged the opportunity to build a connection with nature while they build *tenacity and resiliency* for themselves;
- New Zealand, like Australia, has explicit curriculum linked OE with strong roots in physical education. OE focuses on creating opportunities for personal and social development, while protecting and caring for the environment. It also promotes adventurousness, cultural awareness, values development, and honouring tradition.
- Italy has strong OE roots in *social inclusivity*. The *Reggio Emilia Approach* to education sees children as powerful, capable, and inquisitive beings. It fosters following the children's interests versus a predetermined curriculum and student achievement is measured via pedagogical documentation versus testing. This approach is available to children in pre-school to 6 years of age;
- The *Curriculum of Excellence* in Scotland makes it every school employee's responsibility to foster OE for their students and extends this approach to volunteers and partners. It uses multiple funding sources to ensure multiple and ongoing OE learning experiences for students throughout the education system;
- In British Columbia, there are multiple parallels to the offerings in Ontario. British Columbia offers curriculum-linked OE programming within the Physical Education and Environmental Learning subject areas, as well as having it embedded with other subjects and teacher resources. This approach values OE for its capacity to not only develop outdoor skills, but also self-awareness, safe practices, nature appreciation, and leadership;
- California's *Blueprint for Environmental Literacy: Educating Every Student In, About, and For the Environment* also parallels the Ontario OE framework. The purpose of California's approach is to increase not only access to healthy natural environments but also integrate formal and informal education systems/providers, utilizing community

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resources to their full potential and maximizing the strength of the messaging.

While each jurisdiction offers unique approaches to the application of OE frameworks, the programs also share many primary elements. Analysis of the collective data suggests the following:

- Most systems considered used varied and multiple OE interventions throughout the grade school experience to be imperative to their OE framework;
- Early years experiences tended to focus on play, nature appreciation, and building confidence and resiliency, while older students would experience more knowledge building, critical thinking, independence and self-reliance;
- Funding to support OE often included multiple sources, with in-school activities most often being available to the students at no additional cost and some excursions funded with school system funding and some requiring additional funding sources such as student fee or grant/private support;
- Ethos and impetus for OE varied significantly, with rationale including physical and mental health benefits, social responsibility, leadership, science curriculum, geography curriculum, play theory, understanding of the nature/geophysical world, safety, nature appreciation, self-reliance and challenge, clearer cultural understanding, social interaction, academic excellence, well rounded citizenry, equitable relationships, and inclusiveness.

Relationship to Building the Living City, the TRCA 2013-2022 Strategic Plan

This report supports the following strategies set forth in the TRCA 2013-2022 Strategic Plan:

Strategy 4 – Create complete communities that integrate nature and the built environment

Strategy 5 – Foster sustainable citizenship

Strategy 12 – Facilitate a region-wide approach to sustainability

DETAILS OF WORK TO BE DONE

TRCA staff will continue to monitor and evaluate other jurisdictions for changes and advancements in policies, practices and models related to the delivery of out-of-classroom learning related to natural science, conservation and the environment.

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Attachments: 1

Attachment 1: Summary of Selected Outdoor Education (OE) Systems/Programs Offered Outside of Ontario