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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: **CURRENT STATE OF OUT-OF-CLASSROOM LEARNING RELATED TO NATURAL SCIENCE, CONSERVATION AND THE ENVIRONMENT**

KEY ISSUE

Summary of responses received from Outdoor Education Task Force member school boards regarding out-of-classroom learning related to natural science, conservation and the environment.

RECOMMENDATION

WHEREAS the Outdoor Education Task Force has been convened to study, develop and recommend strategic future directions related to out-of-classroom learning within the areas of jurisdiction of TRCA and participating school boards;

AND WHEREAS on November 19, 2019, Trustee Garry Tanuan, Chair, Outdoor Education Task Force issued a questionnaire to receive feedback from member school boards regarding the current state of programs and policies at their school boards with respect to out-of-classroom learning related to natural science, conservation and the environment;

THEREFORE, IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT the Outdoor Education Task Force members receive the attached summary of the questionnaire prepared by TRCA staff.

BACKGROUND

At Task Force Meeting #1/19 held on October 7, 2019, the Outdoor Education Task Force approved Resolution #OETF5/19, in part, as follows:

... THAT the following Mandate, Objectives and Timelines of the Outdoor Education Task Force be endorsed;

AND THAT the Outdoor Education Task Force Work Plan and Timelines as outlined in this report be approved.

An initial deliverable of the Outdoor Education Task Force (OETF) workplan consisted of the inventory and assessment of the current state of out-of-classroom learning policies and programs related to natural science, conservation and the environment at area and participating school boards. To facilitate this research, a questionnaire was developed to gain contextual information and useful background details to guide recommendations and/or further research. The questionnaire was circulated to OETF members by email on November 19, 2019. Completed questionnaires have been received from three school boards to date. The responses have been summarized in Attachment 1, appended to this report.

Key findings from the responses received so far indicate that school boards generally have similar values, principles and policies to guide out-of-classroom learning and that they seek

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appropriate ways to support and integrate the Indigenous voice into out-of-classroom learning related to natural science, conservation and the environment. School boards are partnering with various organizations with respect to natural science, conservation and environmental education and have programs in place to provide students with equitable access to outdoor education programming.

The Ontario Ministry of Education provides funding to school boards to directly support outdoor education experiences for elementary and secondary students through the Learning Opportunities Grant. Use of this funding by school boards is varied, which is reflective of the inherent flexibility provided by the government for the allocation of these funds. In addition, one of three responding school boards stated that they operate a number of outdoor education centres and that supplementary funding beyond the Learning Opportunities Grant for the operation of these facilities is required, and is allocated from other school board operating budgets.

It is anticipated that additional responses from the remaining OETF member school boards will be received in January 2020 at which time they will be incorporated into the summary report and the report will be recirculated to members.

RATIONALE

The OETF has been convened in order to establish a strategic planning framework for the long-term provision of out-of-classroom learning related to natural science, conservation and the environment that serve students of the Toronto region while maximizing the use and value of public assets and infrastructure.

The current state summary report will provide the groundwork for which the OETF can undertake its mandate through the formation of working groups.

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 3 – Rethink greenspace to maximize its value

Strategy 5 – Foster sustainable citizenship

Strategy 6 – Tell the story of the Toronto region

Strategy 7 – Build partnerships and new business models

DETAILS OF WORK TO BE DONE

TRCA staff will incorporate additional responses into the summary report as they are received and will circulate to OETF members as required.

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Date: January 7, 2020

Attachments: 1

Attachment 1: Current State of Out-of-classroom Learning Related to Natural Science, Conservation and the Environment. Summary Report.