

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

As of January 3, 2020

The following report is based on feedback and information collected through an 11-question survey that was circulated to Outdoor Education Task Force members in November 2019. School Boards included in the summary report include:

- Conseil Scolaire Catholique MonAvenir (CSC MonAvenir)
- Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB)
- York Region District School Board (YRDSB)

Values and/or principles that guide policies related to natural science, conservation and environmental out-of-classroom learning

Similar general statements were provided by responding school boards with respect to the overarching values and principles that guide their school boards out-of-classroom learning (defined by all school boards generally as an educational excursion or activity has students leaving property). These include:

- Educational purpose/curriculum related
- Safe
- Inclusive
- Diverse (to include activities related to language, culture, faith, sports and the arts)
- Accessible (regardless of socio-economic status, special needs)
- Student focused and appropriate (age, maturity, experience, health, skill physical abilities and exceptionalities, cultural, faith)
- Respectful of values
- Considerate of funding, training, supervision, risk management, contingency planning and evaluation.

YRDSB provided an example that was specific to natural science, conservation and environmental out-of-classroom learning that is captured in their Outdoor Education Policy and Procedure (#350.0 currently undergoing revision):

The York Region District School Board is committed to providing students with multiple opportunities to learn in, of and about the natural world through outdoor education. The Board believes that the ultimate goal of outdoor education is to empower participants to contribute towards a sustainable community. The Board is dedicated to promoting outdoor education learning opportunities that allow all participants to experience the restorative benefits of being immersed in nature. The Board is committed to enhancing the lives of all learners through experientially profound outdoor education experiences that are connected to the curriculum and delivered at Outdoor Education Centres, schools and within the community.

In our 2018 Outdoor Education Review, the following priorities were identified. These align quite clearly with our Director's Action Plan and the YRDSB Multi-Year Plan.

- a) Nature Deficit Disorder in children is a serious current issue (Well-Being)*
- b) Students & teachers in YRDSB want to be teaching/learning outdoors more often (Indigenous Education and Equity)*
- c) The inquiry learning model and integrated studies make learning meaningful (Modern Learning)*
- d) Strong system leadership and support can bring significant change- (Leadership)*

School board policies and procedures

An inventory of school board policies and procedures related to natural science, conservation and environmental out-of-classroom learning can be found in **Appendix A** (this include policies related to day trips, overnight trips, off school property walking excursions, low/high risk activities, supervision and ratios and equity).

All school boards indicated that excursions including outdoor education activities are guided by Ontario Physical and Health Education Association (OPHEA) guidelines.

Inventory of current partners, organizations and locations

The following is an inventory of vendors, organizations and locations that responding school boards are currently partnering with for natural science, conservation and environmental out-of-classroom learning:

- Adventureworks
- Bird Studies Canada
- Blue Mountain
- Camp Robin Hood
- Camp Tournesol
- Centre Notre Dame de la Rouge
- City of Toronto outdoor play spaces, swimming pools etc.
- Earth Tracks
- EcoSchools Canada (formerly Ontario Eco-Schools)
- Education Leadership Centre (OELC)
- Envirothon
- Evergreen
- Georgina Island First Nation
- Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority (Scanlon Creek, Outreach)
- Learning for Sustainable Futures
- Monarch Teacher Network
- Municipal Community Centres (Town of Newmarket, Town of Aurora, City of Markham, City of Richmond Hill, City of Vaughan)
- Natural Curiosity
- Ontario Provincial Parks (Secondary Outdoor Credit Course trips)
- OPAL (Outdoor Play and Learning)
- Outdoor Council of Canada
- Region of York (Bill Fisch Education Centre)
- Sibbald Point Provincial Park

- Staff from Lakehead University- Orillia Campus
- St-Louis / Moonstone
- Teen Ranch
- The McMichael Art Gallery
- Toronto Orienteering and Ontario Orienteering
- Toronto Region Conservation Authority (Albion Hills Field Centre, Kortright Centre For Conservation, Lake St. George Field Centre, Outreach, Swan Lake Partnership, Burlington Outdoor Resource Centre Partnership)
- TRAILS Youth Initiatives
- Tree Bee

Ministry of Education Learning Opportunities Grant – Summary of allocation of funds by school boards

The Ontario Ministry of Education provides funding to school boards through a number of grants. The Learning Opportunities Grant provides funding to help students who are at greater risk of lower academic achievement and is made up of several allocations. Provision for funding to directly support outdoor education experiences for both elementary and secondary students is included under the Student Achievement Envelope.

Responses received by school boards varied which is reflective of the inherent flexibility provided by the government on how boards may use and allocate this funding.

- Fees related to participation in outdoor education activities (day and overnight excursions) provided by school boards or other third-party organizations (development of learning experiences for both students and educators in a broad range of inquiry areas).

Example: The Outdoor Education Department at TCDSB organizes and supports overnight school trips to board subsidized outdoor education sites. Schools are offered trips on a rotating basis. Each elementary school within the TCDSB will be offered a trip approximately every 2 years. TCDSB partners with TRCA field centres (Lake St. George Field Centre) and have partnerships with Teen Ranch and Mansfield Outdoor Education Centre. Fees are used to cover the cost of overnight accommodations, meals/snacks, and programming/activities.

- Fees for safety-related training and/or certification for students and/or teachers, including professional development opportunities for teachers

Example: Outdoor Council of Canada field leader program (YRDSB)

- Fees to enlist expertise and/or facilities/resources of community agencies in outdoor learning activities

Examples: Summer Institute, Residential Program, Georgina Island (YRDSB)

- Transportation costs

Examples: Busing to outdoor education centres, inquiry learning and secondary outdoor learning, credit courses, overnight trip subsidy.

- Teacher release time

Examples: Professional learning, supporting student learning, safety training

Summary of other outdoor education funding sources

Currently, the TCDSB participates in TRCA's Environmental Leaders of Tomorrow program which provides a subsidized experience for high priority students that pairs in class learning with an overnight outdoor education experience.

In addition, YRDSB operate five outdoor education centres. Costs to operate these facilities are funded through separate school board budgets.

Policies/programs to ensure equitable access to outdoor education facilities

All responding school boards have policies to guide equity and inclusion of students and schools within the school board.

Specific to outdoor education facility access, the following examples were provided:

- All grade 2, 4 and 7 YRDSB students participate in outdoor learning opportunities at school board run Outdoor Education Centres.
- Specific transportation requirements for YRDSB students are covered by the board including the provision of funding to subsidize transportation and program costs for credit course outdoor education programming.
- At YRDSB run facilities, decisions around program design and facility renewal are guided by AODA principles.
- At TCDSB, schools are selected to participate in the Environmental Leaders of Tomorrow program (a highly subsidized overnight outdoor education experience hosted at TRCA operated outdoor education facilities) based on the financial need of students.

Practice of obtaining feedback from students and/or teachers about their outdoor education trips and experiences and vision

While both the TCDSB and YCDSB indicated that they currently obtain feedback from educators after participating in a field trip or professional development activity, the surveys they fill out are general in nature and are not specific to outdoor education activities.

Specific to outdoor education, YRDSB indicated that their professional learning communities (including Grade 2 and 4 teachers, Eco School teams, secondary Outdoor Education course teachers, Secondary Geography and Science Heads) have engaged in visioning activities to support the direction of professional learning as well as the identification of specific opportunities for student learning.

Practices that support or integrate the Indigenous voice into out-of-classroom learning related to natural science, conservation and the environment.

All three school boards indicated that they currently have practices that support or integrate the Indigenous voice into out-of-classroom learning related to natural science, conservation and the environment. Examples are provided below.

- Through the Indigenous Education Department at the Toronto Catholic District School Board, students can apply to participate at no charge in the Gathering of Nations Summer Camp for Indigenous Students, a high school credit course that includes a trip to a camp in Muskoka as part of the course. The mission of this program is: to provide Indigenous students and those Indigenous students who are considered at-risk with Secondary School credit courses in a safe and caring environment based on the philosophies, aesthetics, and worldviews of Indigenous peoples in Canada.
- YRDSB collaborate directly with members of the First Nations, Metis and Inuit (FNMI) team at Inclusive Schools and Community Services in the design of learning opportunities for staff and students. One example is the four part “Natural Curiosity” professional learning community with OISE, the FNMI team, partners on Georgina Island and YRDSB educators.
- YRDSB have engaged directly with the Chippawas of Georgina Island to support learning opportunities for staff and students in these areas through professional learning opportunities (including visits to Georgina Island and facilitated learning sessions provided by the community for students and educators) and student activities (such as SHSM ICE challenges, with “empathy sessions” supported by Indigenous facilitators).

Appendix A**Inventory of school board policies, procedures and supporting documents**

School Board	Language	Title	Type	Link	Year *	Primary Focus Area
CSC MonAvenir	French	SORTIES ÉDUCATIVES ET ACTIVITÉS SCOLAIRES (PSE.11.0)	Policy	https://www.cscmonavenir.ca/publications/politiques/PSE.11.0.pdf	2019	Out of classroom educational field trips and activities
CSC MonAvenir	French	PLANIFICATION DE LA MATERNELLE À LA 12E ANNÉE (PSE.6.3)	Policy	https://www.cscmonavenir.ca/publications/politiques/PSE.6.3.pdf	2016	Planning student programs and activities
CSC MonAvenir	French	INCLUSION DES ÉLÈVES AYANT DES BESOINS PARTICULIERS (PSE.2.1)	Policy	https://www.cscmonavenir.ca/publications/politiques/PSE.2.1.pdf	2016	Provision of equitable and inclusive education
CSC MonAvenir	French	ÉDUCATION ENVIRONNEMENTALE (PSE.5)	Policy	https://www.cscmonavenir.ca/publications/politiques/PSE.5.pdf	2010	Environmental education and sustainable facility management
CSC MonAvenir	French	INCLUSION DES ÉLÈVES AYANT DES BESOINS PARTICULIERS	Policy	https://www.cscmonavenir.ca/publications/politiques/PSE.2.pdf	2016	Support and respect of all student needs

Attachment 1

		RS (PSE.2.0)				
TCDSB	English	School Excursions (S.E.01)	Policy	https://www.tcdsb.org/Boards/Policies/Documents/SE01.pdf	2019	School sanctioned excursions
TCDSB	English	Excursions Handbook	Procedure	http://www.tcdsb.org/ProgramsServices/SchoolProgramsK12/HealthOutdoorPhysicalEd/ExcursionHandbook/Pages/default.aspx	2015	Operational procedures to support the School Excursions policy
TCDSB	English	Equity Action Plan 2018-2021	Action Plan	https://www.tcdsb.org/Boards/EIE/Documents/TCDSB_Equity_Action_Plan_Web_2019.pdf	2018	Diversity, equity and inclusive education
YRDSB	English	Field Trips (#642.0)	Policy	https://yrdsb.civicweb.net/document/37407	2013	Out of classroom field trips and educational activities
YRDSB	English	Field Trips: One Day (#642.1)	Procedure	https://yrdsb.civicweb.net/document/37407	2013	Field trips that are no more than one day
YRDSB	English	Field Trips: Two to Five Days (#642.2)	Procedure	https://yrdsb.civicweb.net/document/37407	2013	Field trips that exceed one day and are completed within five days and five nights.
YRDSB	English	Field Trips: Beyond Five Days (#642.3)	Procedure	https://yrdsb.civicweb.net/document/37407	2013	Field trips that are five or more nights
YRDSB	English	Outdoor Education (#350.0)	Policy & Procedure	http://www.yrdsb.ca/board/docs/Documents/PP-outdoored-350.pdf	2014	Outlines the Outdoor Education opportunities that are available including school visits to Outdoor Education Day Centres, stays at residential facilities and the loan of outdoor education equipment (Currently undergoing revision).

Attachment 1

YRDSB	English	Environmental Responsibility (#235.0)	Policy & Procedure	http://www.yrdsb.ca/board/docs/Documents/POL-environment-235.pdf	2016	Support the stewardship of Board resources and the Board's commitment to environmentally responsible practices (Currently undergoing revision).
-------	---------	---------------------------------------	--------------------	---	------	---

*Year the document was created/reviewed or updated