

Section I – Items for Board of Directors Action

TO: Chair and Members of the Board of Directors
Meeting #11/19, Friday, January 24, 2020

FROM: Darryl Gray, Director, Education and Training

RE: **MINISTRY OF EDUCATION BUDGET CONSULTATION**
Education Funding Feedback 2020-2021

KEY ISSUE

Input into the Province of Ontario's consultation on the 2020-2021 Ministry of Education Budget

RECOMMENDATION

WHEREAS the Province of Ontario is currently seeking stakeholder input into the preparation of the 2020-2021 Ministry of Education budget;

AND WHEREAS the Province of Ontario provides funding to school boards for outdoor education programs and services within the Outdoor Education Allocation of the Learning Opportunities Grant of the Ministry of Education budget;

AND WHEREAS conservation authorities are named in Section 197 of the Education Act, R.S.O. 1990, CHAPTER E.2 as agencies which school boards may enter into agreements with for the provision of out-of-classroom learning;

AND WHEREAS Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) provides out-of-classroom learning experiences for schools and school boards in the Greater Toronto Area;

AND WHEREAS TRCA recently convened a multi-stakeholder Outdoor Education Task Force with a mandate to study, develop, and recommend strategic future directions related to out-of-classroom learning related to natural science, conservation and the environment in the Toronto region;

THEREFORE, LET IT BE RESOLVED THAT a formal request be made for the Ministry of Education to consider the work of the Outdoor Education Task Force as a collaborative means through which to optimize the current Outdoor Education Allocation for Greater Toronto Area School Boards;

AND FURTHER THAT staff be directed to prepare a formal submission to the Ministry of Education budget process in advance of the January 31, 2020 deadline.

BACKGROUND

On January 13, 2020 the Ontario Ministry of Education released a call for stakeholder input into the 2020-2021 Education Budget. As noted in the Memorandum to stakeholders, the Ministry of Education is seeking feedback on:

“all areas pertaining to education funding, with a particular interest in receiving comments on initiatives that could support reducing red tape and administrative burden for the education sector.”

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Through the Learning Opportunities Grant, the Ontario Ministry of Education currently provides \$17.5M to school boards to provide elementary and secondary students with learning experiences in the outdoors. This funding is based on a fixed amount for \$5,000 per board and \$8.51 per pupil, calculated using Average Daily Enrollment (ADE).

As one of Ontario's largest providers of out-of-classroom learning for students within the education system, TRCA works closely with area schools and school boards to ensure access for students to experiential learning opportunities that reinforce Ministry of Education curriculum related to natural science, conservation and the environment. These experiences are directly linked to specific learning outcomes, take place in unique local natural systems, leverage the science expertise of TRCA, and provide unparalleled learning opportunities that are not replicable within the classroom.

RATIONALE

While TRCA has a long history of working with area school boards to provide elementary and secondary students with out-of-classroom learning experiences related to natural science, conservation and the environment, including direct delivery of learning programs for schools at TRCA sites or the provision of local greenspace for schools or school boards to provide board-led activities there is no regional planning framework that ensures the efficient use of public funding or maximizes public facilities and greenspace assets.

At Board of Directors Meeting #6/18, held on July 20, 2018, Resolution #A141/18 approved the creation of a multi-stakeholder Outdoor Education Task Force (Task Force) with a mandate to study, develop, and recommend strategic future directions of out-of-classroom learning related to natural science, conservation and the environment in the Toronto region. With representation from area Boards of Trustees and TRCA's Board of Directors, the Task Force will be preparing recommendations that provide a framework for the future provision of out-of-classroom learning models and mechanisms to support improved collaboration and partnerships between area school boards and TRCA for the delivery of student learning in the out-of-doors. The work of the Task Force is currently underway with a final report anticipated in first quarter 2021.

Given that the Province of Ontario currently allocates funding for outdoor education within the Ministry of Education Budget, and that area school boards and TRCA, through the Outdoor Education Task Force, are working together on a shared strategic framework for the long-term provision of out-of-classroom learning for students related to natural science, conservation and the environment, staff recommend that a formal request be made to the Ministry of Education through the Education Funding Feedback process to consider the Outdoor Education Task Force as a mechanism to optimize outdoor education funding in a way that ensures improved student experiences in the out-of-doors while enhancing the use of public resources.

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 5 – Foster sustainable citizenship

Strategy 7 – Build partnerships and new business models

DETAILS OF WORK TO BE DONE

TRCA staff will prepare a formal submission to the Ministry of Education in advance of the January 31, 2020 deadline for stakeholder input into the Ministry of Education Budget.

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