

Items for the Information of the Outdoor Education Task Force

TO: Chair and Members of the Outdoor Education Task Force
Meeting #2/20, Monday, June 15, 2020

FROM: Darryl Gray, Director, Education and Training

RE: **SUMMARY OF OUTDOOR EDUCATION TASK FORCE WORKSHOP ONE
AND SCHOOL BOARD STAFF SURVEY RESULTS**

KEY ISSUE

Summary overview of the combined results of the Outdoor Education Task Force (OETF) *Workshop One* and the school board survey related to principals, values, and anticipated destinations of outdoor education in the Greater Toronto Area school boards .

RECOMMENDATION

IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT the following workshop and survey summary from the Outdoor Education Task Force *Workshop One* held on January 20, 2020 be received.

BACKGROUND

At Outdoor Education Task Force meeting held on January 20, 2020, staff from *I-Think* facilitated a workshop with OETF members focusing on principals, values, and destinations as they relate to outdoor education praxis in the Greater Toronto Area school boards. Task force members explored multiple parameters in small groups, encouraging exploration of their position on the following themes:

- Choice – *What degree of choice should teachers in Ontario have to engage with outdoor education?*
- Location – *Where should outdoor education take place in Ontario?*
- Assets – *How should school boards think about the land they use for outdoor education in Ontario?*
- Leadership – *What should be the purpose of outdoor education in Ontario?*
- Experience – *What would work best for Ontario [context – how student experience in OE varies by jurisdiction from embedded in school to specific outdoor education programming]?*
- Achievement – *What should be the definition of success in outdoor education?*

During discussion at the workshop, it was suggested by trustees that they would appreciate knowing how school board staff would respond to the same inquiries. From this request, a survey was generated to allow trustees to invite staff from their school boards to answer questions that aligned with the queries posed to the task force members at the January 20th workshop.

Results from this exercise are intended to provide context and insight for OETF members during the subsequent working group meetings focused on models and mechanisms related to the formulation of a strategic framework for the long-term provision of out-of-classroom learning related to natural science, conservation and the environment.

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RATIONALE

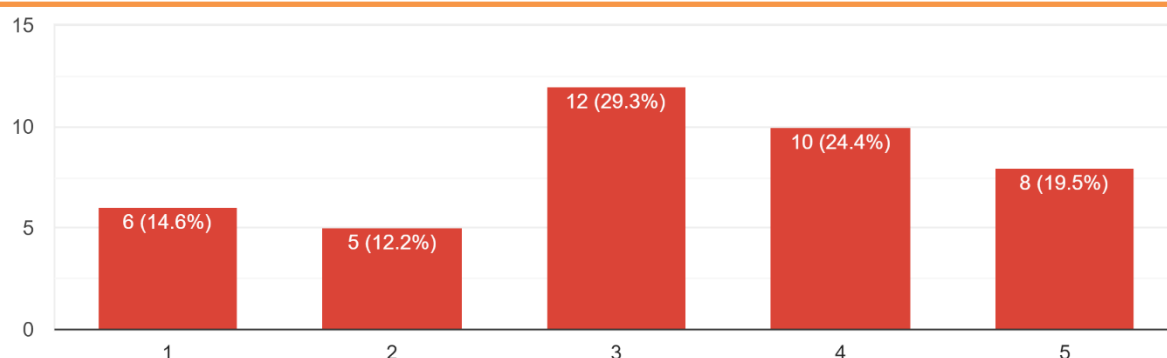
The survey was available from February 3-23, 2020, and generated a total of 41 responses from two school boards. It is understood that some school board staff may have been unable to support the survey at the time of initiation due to job action.

The results from the survey have been amalgamated with the workshop results and presented below. Each theme of inquiry along with its question is offered prior to the graphical results. Included after each graph are comments from trustee worksheets (completed in groups) followed by comments from staff participating in the survey. Staff comments were included across the breadth of responses, with a maximum of three responses taken from each of the Score 1, 3 and 5 option. In the cases where there were less than three responses in a scoring category, all responses for the category were included.

CHOICE

Choice | Jurisdictions around the world have gone in different directions when it comes to the level of choice teachers have to integrate outdoor education into their classroom. What degree of choice should teachers in Ontario have to engage with outdoor education? Choose a number on the following scale:

Experiences are mandatory for students 1 2 3 4 5 Teachers voluntarily connect their classrooms with outdoor education learning.



RANGE OF COMMENTS TO “CHOICE” INQUIRY (OETF Members)

- Teachers voluntary – students mandatory
- Both are important – providing resources and support are key; students as stakeholders
- Development of kits

RANGE OF COMMENTS TO “CHOICE” INQUIRY (School Board Staff Survey)

Score 1:

- It is important that every child experience various types of outdoor activities for their physical and mental well-being.
- It helps to connect the curriculum to the whole person. It is an experience that builds upon social/emotional characteristics that in turn help to establish a foundation for core curriculum.
- Most of the students in the province are based in urban centres, so it is important that outdoor education become a part of their learning experiences at school. In addition, outdoor experiences could influence young people to pursue leisure activities that are

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active and physical, instead of sedentary. Finally, these outdoor experiences are also beneficial to mental health and well-being.

Score 3:

- Balance
- A big factor will be the comfort level and confidence in delivering outdoor ed. Also training staff will be another factor in teacher confidence.
- Should have input from both sides.

Score 5:

- Teachers need to feel that they have the expertise to participate in a variety of outdoor activities.
- Educators know what works for their given class and students, flexibility is important.
- Curriculum shall be delivered as the classroom teacher chooses

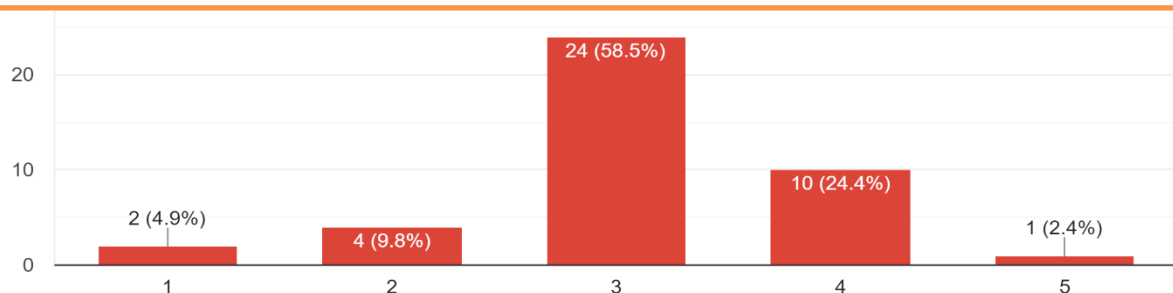
LOCATION

Location | Jurisdictions around the world use location as a way to drive their outdoor education programming. Where should outdoor education take place in Ontario? Choose a number on the following scale:

All experiences happen offsite

1 2 3 4 5

All experiences happen on school property or within walking distance.



RANGE OF COMMENTS TO “LOCATION” INQUIRY (OETF Members)

- Well planned greenspace to facilitate local experiences
- Sense of place versus peak experience; playing versus exploration/investigation; unstructured
- Utilize any and all locations; what would it look like if there were no prohibitive costs?

RANGE OF COMMENTS TO “LOCATION” INQUIRY (School Board Staff Survey)

Score 1:

- Walking distance away is still offsite.
- Experiences offsite I believe offer a richer experience.

Score 3:

- Field trips and excursions could also be part of the outdoor education programming.

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- A balance is always best. Teacher's discretion as to when and where the outdoor learning should take place. While offsite experiences may offer more in terms of variety, equipment, environmental exposure, local experiences are less expensive and can happen more often - even spur of the moment.
- There should be a combination of locations to suit various purposes.

Score 5:

- Equity and inclusivity. Offsite activities may cost more and be less accessible to all students.

ASSETS

Assets | Jurisdictions around the world either own the property they run outdoor education on or they collaborate with non-profits and use their land. How should school boards think about the land they use for outdoor education in Ontario? Choose a number on the following scale:

School boards own all the outdoor education properties.

1

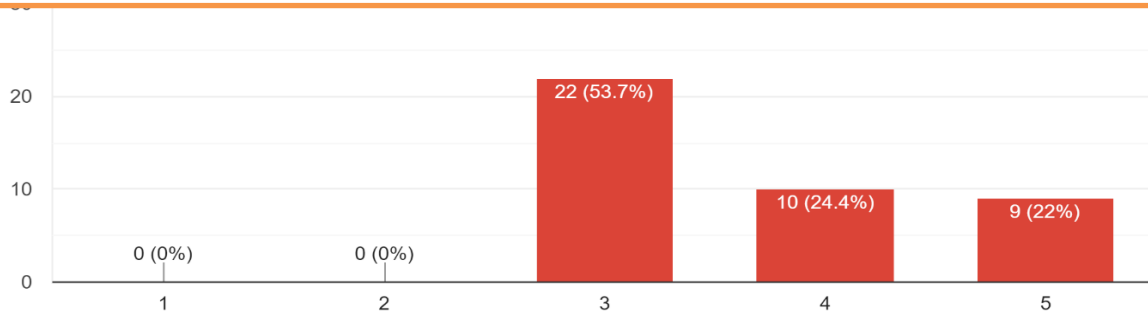
2

3

4

5

Non-profits own the outdoor education properties that school boards pay to use.



RANGE OF COMMENTS TO “ASSETS” INQUIRY (OETF Members)

- Combination
- What if...we had outdoor classrooms (or TRCA) centrally located that were used by multiple schools?
- Question how relevant ownership is as it pertains to student learning

RANGE OF COMMENTS TO “ASSETS” INQUIRY (School Board Staff Survey)

Score 3:

- It all depends on budget and what makes most sense but what is most important is that outdoor education cannot be a pay as you use for the students and families. It MUST be accessible to ALL students.
- Partnerships need to be forged so all can benefit from the properties in the public and non-profit domains.
- I don't think it is cost efficient or a possibility to have school boards pay for the use of non-profit education properties or to own all outdoor education properties. Really need to look at budgetary cash flow and where it can be allocated.

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Score 5:

- There is a cost to maintaining properties. Money not always there. It is more sustainable with non-profits.
- Better management of properties.
- No need to purchase outdoor properties, plenty out there, free and fee based.

LEADERSHIP

Leadership | Jurisdictions around the world defined the purpose of outdoor education quite differently. They are interested in creating students as leaders, and outdoor education is a tool to do this. However, leadership is defined in very different ways. What should be the purpose of outdoor education in Ontario? Choose a number on the following scale:

Learn how to collaborate and lead teams

1

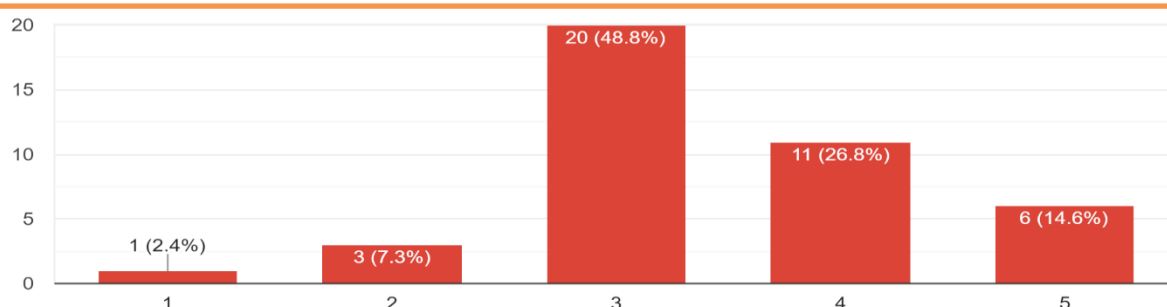
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3

4

5

Develop a personal connection to issues and inspire youth to take action.



RANGE OF COMMENTS TO “LEADERSHIP” INQUIRY (OETF Members)

- We need both; climate change; shifting culture; culturally responsive to change and taking action on their values
- Must recognize curiosity and encourage exploration

RANGE OF COMMENTS TO “LEADERSHIP” INQUIRY (School Board Staff Survey)

Score 1:

- Collaboration is a highly needed skill. It can work to inspire youth to take action as well.

Score 3:

- Outdoor education should be defined as both of these.
- This continuum seems to contain two different issues: leadership and education issues that students are expected to absorb and become leaders of change. There could potentially be room for both types of purposes. Traditionally, students go for outdoor education to learn about collaboration and team skills - definitely a good idea for early adolescents. The connection to outdoor ed issues can be an advanced eco course for older adolescents.
- Yes, leadership is important but it should not replace the inclination to just 'do good' for the environment and feel connected to it.

Score 5:

- Students can develop leadership skills at school and don't need to be outdoors.

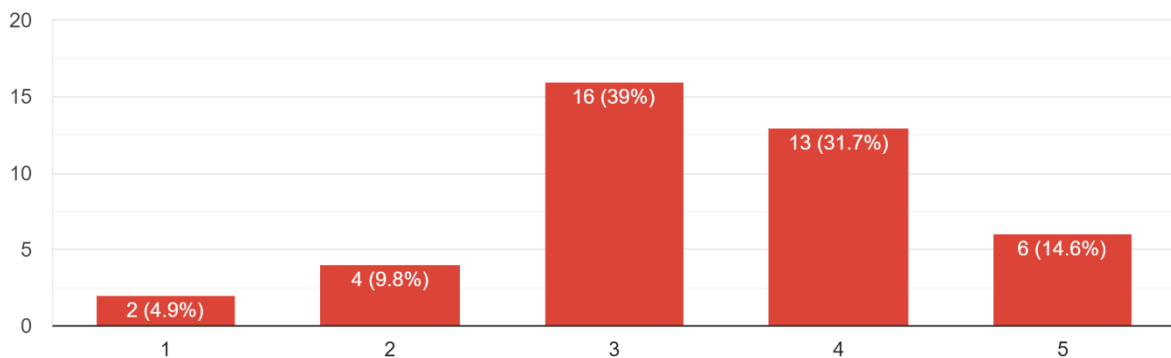
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- Leadership and team building is important, and is easy to build throughout the curriculum in or outdoors, but the imperative of outdoor education to me is to make students aware of environmental issues and respect/appreciation for the natural world.
- It's all about taking care of our environment and relishing in the mental health benefits of Outdoor Ed.

EXPERIENCE

Experience | How students experience outdoor education varies by jurisdiction. For some it is embedded throughout school and for others there is specific outdoor education programming. What would work best for Ontario? Choose a number on the following scale:

Intentional programming by partner organizations. 1 2 3 4 5 *Embedded into classroom learning by teachers.*



RANGE OF COMMENTS TO “EXPERIENCE” INQUIRY (OETF Members)

- Leaning more towards embedded into classroom by teachers BUT we need equitable access to programming with partner organizations
- Good teaching will use both

RANGE OF COMMENTS TO “EXPERIENCE” INQUIRY (School Board Staff Survey)

Score 1:

- I strongly believe in outdoor experiential learning. I was fortunate to be able to participate in a variety of outdoor ed. experiences and I know this opened many doors for me. Given the state of our Earth, as educators, we must provide a sense of hope to our students and equip them with opportunities to learn to problem solve the challenges that will face them, through real world experiences - outside!
- Teachers may not implement if left to them.

Score 3:

- I think a variety of stakeholders would serve students well and provide varied experience
- Teachers can monitor what works best for their classroom.
- There is a benefit to relying on the expertise of partner organizations.

Score 5:

- Outdoor Ed can easily be part of the curriculum - it should not be an add on

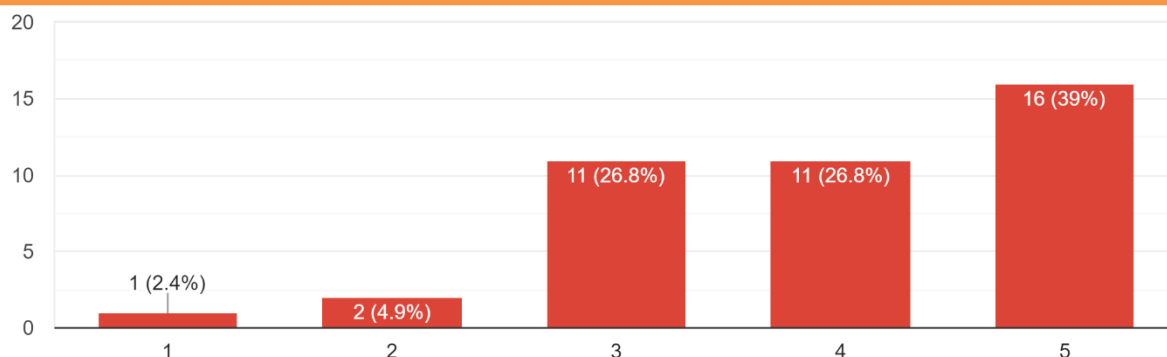
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- It should be a natural part of the day/curriculum.
- I believe it would be more equitable when embedded into the classroom

ACHIEVEMENT

Achievement | There is no single, agreed-upon definition of success in school. Jurisdictions around the world define the success of outdoor education differently. What should be the definition of success in outdoor education in Ontario? Choose a number on the following scale:

Experiences are designed to reinforce MoE curriculum expectations. 1 2 3 4 5 *Experiences support the development of learning skills and global competencies.*



RANGE OF COMMENTS TO “ACHIEVEMENT” INQUIRY (OETF Members)

- Problem solving; mindfulness; survival skills; connected away from technology
- This needs to be in synch
- All outdoor experiences support some curriculum expectations; focus on exploration

RANGE OF COMMENTS TO “ACHIEVEMENT” INQUIRY (School Board Staff Survey)

Score 1:

- The goal is to reinforce Ministry Education Curriculum expectations.

Score 3:

- A good blend of the two ends of the continuum is key.
- balance of both
- Needs to be open for interpretation.

Score 5:

- I would also add that outdoor education experiences should provide a strong foundation of knowledge and inquiry about our role in biodiversity and how our actions impact the Earth.
- The LS [learning skills]and GC [global competencies]are more enduring for students than the grade-level content expectations.
- We need to prepare students to be global citizens.

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To summarize, the combined results from the OETF workshop and the staff surveys suggests that:

- Under the theme, *choice*, it was preferred that teachers manage OE learning through voluntary versus mandated processes;
- Under the theme, *location*, it was shown that both onsite (at the school) and offsite (near and distance field trips) were equally valued;
- Under the theme, *assets*, there was a preference towards non-school board ownership of properties related to OE;
- Under the theme, *leadership*, results showed a preference to the personal connection and individualized action over the group or collaborative leadership foci;
- Under the theme, *experience*, there was a preference for having instruction embedded by teachers versus intentional programming by partner organizations; and
- Under the theme, *achievement*, it was preferred to see experiences supporting learning skills and global competencies rather than driven by Ministry of Education curriculum expectations.

Workshop facilitators also offered that the overall comments from the Trustee workshop suggested the outdoor education experience is about community building, activism (as caring) and leadership, and problem solving in fun ways but must be framed in achieving maximum access as well as fostering appreciation.

This summary report creates insight into the underlying values associated with various themes of OE relevant to school boards within the Greater Toronto Area. With these values identified and explored, a point of reference for subsequent OETF workshops has been established which will aid the OETF in achieving its mandate.

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

Report prepared by: Nancy McGee, extension 5877

Emails: nancy.mcgee@trca.ca

For Information contact: Nancy McGee, extension 5877, or Darryl Gray, extension 5881

Emails: nancy.mcgee@trca.ca and darryl.gray@trca.ca

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