

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

Updated Report

March 8, 2020 (Version 2.0)

Executive Summary

Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) has convened a multi-stakeholder Outdoor Education Task Force (OETF) to study, develop and recommend strategic future directions connected to out-of-classroom learning related to natural science, conservation and the environment in the Toronto region. The Task Force membership is comprised of elected officials from local school boards and TRCA's Board of Directors.

An initial deliverable of the OETF workplan consisted of an inventory and assessment of the current state of out-of-classroom learning policies and programs related to natural science, conservation and the environment with member organizations.

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 in November 2019.

An initial report on the current state was prepared for OETF meeting #1/20 in January 2020. Following this report, feedback was received from three additional member school boards (for a total of six school boards) plus TRCA. The current state report was updated with the additional feedback and analysis of the data collected was undertaken.

This report provides a summary of key findings and an initial analysis of the data collected benchmarked against the objectives of the OETF through a gap analysis (Appendix A). The responses received from member organizations has been organized and summarized for reference.

This report will remain as a living document and will be updated as required to facilitate the collaborative development of strategic future directions connected to out-of-classroom learning related to natural science, conservation and the environment in the Toronto region by the OETF membership.

Objectives and Methodology

As outlined in Appendix A-Toronto and Region Outdoor Education Task Force Terms of Reference, approved at Authority Meeting #6/18, held on July 20, 2018, Resolution #A141/18, the objectives of the Task Force are to:

- Develop a framework for the long-term provision of out-of-classroom learning experiences related to natural science and the environment that meets the needs of the student population to the year 2040.

- Provide recommendations to strengthen and enable partnerships and collaboration between public sector agencies that maximize the use and value of public assets and infrastructure.
- Provide expertise and recommendations on strengthening experiential connections between the urban and natural environments, with consideration for the impact of urban intensity on student access to greenspace and natural systems.
- Provide recommendations related to long-term financial sustainability, including, but not limited to:
 - Government funding programs
 - Private grants, fundraising and endowments
 - Alternative business models (co-operatives, social enterprises, etc.).
 - Other funding models.

To realize these goals and develop recommendations for the future direction of out-of-classroom learning related to natural science, conservation and the environment in the Toronto region, an inventory and assessment of the current state of out-of-classroom learning policies and programs was undertaken with OETF member organizations including school boards and TRCA.

To understand the current state, a questionnaire was circulated to OETF members by email on November 19, 2019. The feedback form included the following 11 questions:

1. School Board Name:
2. What are the values and/or principles that guide the policies related to natural science, conservation and environmental out-of-classroom learning at your School Board?
3. Please list the policies at your school board that are related to natural science, conservation and environmental out-of-classroom learning. Please provide links or copies of any relevant policies (this may include policies related to day trips, overnight trips, off school property walking excursions, low/high risk activities, supervision and ratios).
4. What procedures are involved to approve a trip?
 - a. What is the typical lead time to plan a trip?
 - b. What paperwork is involved?
 - c. What levels of approval are necessary (day trip versus overnight trip)?
 - d. Please tell us about any other processes and procedures required.
5. Please tell us who you are currently partnering with for natural science, conservation and environmental out-of-classroom learning at your school board? (Approved vendor lists, foundations, etc.
6. How is your school board currently allocating the funding received through the Learning Opportunities Grant provided by the Ontario Ministry of Education, including specific activities, such as field trips, professional development, etc.?
7. What are your other outdoor education funding sources?

8. Does your school board have any policies or programs to ensure equitable access to outdoor educational facilities?
9. Does your School Board currently obtain feedback from students and/or teachers about their outdoor education trips & experiences along with their vision regarding out-of-classroom learning? If yes, please tell us how?
10. Does your School Board currently have practices that support or integrate the Indigenous voice into out-of-classroom learning related to natural science, conservation and the environment?
11. Does your Board have any further comments or suggestions that you would like us to consider?

As of March 2020, feedback from the following OETF member organizations has been received:

- Conseil Scolaire Catholique MonAvenir (CSC MonAvenir)
- Dufferin Peel Catholic District School Board (DPCDSB)
- Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA)
- Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB)
- Toronto District School Board (TDSB)
- York Catholic District School Board (YCDSB)
- York Region District School Board (YRDSB)

The feedback collected was organized and supplemented with additional details from school board websites where needed. The data and information were reviewed, and key findings and general trends have been summarized.

Additionally, a gap analysis of the data and information collected was undertaken to compare the current state of out-of-classroom learning related to natural science, conservation and the environment in the Toronto region with the desired future state, as defined by the Task Force objectives above.

Findings and Analysis

A summary of key findings and gaps related to natural science, conservation and environmental out-of-classroom learning can be found in Appendix A.

Responses from OETF Member Organizations

Responses and feedback received from OETF members is summarized below.

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 that have students leaving school 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-based)
- Respectful of values
- Considerate of funding, training, supervision, risk management, contingency planning and evaluation

Several responding OETF member organizations have established values and/or principles that are specific to natural science, conservation and environmental out-of-classroom learning. Their responses are provided below.

DPCDSB

Outdoor Education is an important part of experiential learning for all students. In particular, as a Catholic school board, elevating our students' appreciation for the glory of God's creation is of focused importance to us. Outdoor education compliments our science education and offers students an opportunity to learn in an environment we believe enhances their sense of well-being.

The Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board operates one centre offering a range of Outdoor Education. Silver Creek was opened in 1987. The centre and the assigned teachers at Silver Creek are available to support outdoor education objectives of all elementary and secondary classes.

Outdoor Education is one significant aspect of a broader category of environmental education across the curriculum as described in Acting Today, Shaping Tomorrow: A Policy Framework for Environmental Education in Ontario Schools, 2009, and in the Standards for Environmental Education in the Curriculum, 2008.

DUFFERIN-PEEL CATHOLIC DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD OUTDOOR EDUCATION PHILOSOPHY: NOT RESTRICTED TO THE SILVER CREEK SITE For the pillars of the earth are the Lord's, and on them he has set the world. Samuel 2:8

1. Experiences in Outdoor Education should be available to every child at every grade level.
2. Students should have access to out-of-classroom education to include all outdoor studies in the school year, community, and natural surroundings, and including studies in buildings other than the school.
3. Every child should have the opportunity to participate in residential or overnight educational programs because of the valuable experiences that they offer for intellectual, social, and emotional growth.
4. Outdoor Education need not be restricted to natural science, but should encompass all facets of learning.
5. Outdoor Education programs should incorporate training in recreational activities as a possible preparation for the profitable use of leisure time. Unless children learn to appreciate and respect the out-of-doors, conservation programs are in jeopardy.

TDSB

From the Toronto Islands to the western edge of Algonquin Park, the TDSB's five day and five overnight centres make the most of their geography, local ecosystems and resources to provide dynamic learning experiences for more than 90,000 TDSB students each year.

Our highly qualified staff are united by a common goal: immersing students in safe, active and enriching learning experiences in both natural and urban environments. From outdoor adventure and survival skills to 'sense of place' awareness, systems thinking and ecological literacy, students learn through curriculum-enriching direct experiences that cannot be duplicated within the walls of a classroom.

The value of these opportunities is recognized and supported by the TDSB – one of the few school boards in Ontario directly operating Outdoor Education Centres. This commitment ensures that all TDSB students have the opportunity to participate in programs at both day and overnight centres at least once during their elementary school years.

Opportunities for students in secondary schools are available through The Collaborative Leadership Program at the Etobicoke Field Studies Centre. Some centres also offer weekend leadership experiences and special programs.

During the summer, some centres offer traditional day/overnight camp experiences with an emphasis on the environment.

YCDSB

- Catholic Social Teachings - Environmental Justice
- Ontario Catholic School Graduate Expectations - Responsible Citizen
- Social Studies- Many Gifts - Stewards of Earth
- Religious Education Program - K-12 - Environmental Justice
- Church teaching as outlined by Papal Encyclical Laudato Si

YRDSB

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)

TRCA

TRCAs education and outreach programs support municipal and provincial objectives for environmental education in schools, build professional capacity and competitiveness in the region's sustainable economic sectors, and engage the broader population to become active in developing healthy, sustainable communities. Formal and non-formal education and training is delivered to develop a culture of life-long learning for residents of all ages at TRCA education centres, academic institutions and in the community.

Objectives specific to school programs:

- Improve knowledge, understanding and awareness related to environment, conservation, and sustainability issues and translate knowledge into actions that improve the sustainability of the Toronto region.
- Promote positive behavioral change to foster individual and social health and well-being
- Enhance social equity and equalize access of youth to environmental education and leadership development experiences
- Contribute to integrated TRCA Community Outcome objectives

TRCA designs and delivers environmental education programs that complement provincial curriculum outcomes and objectives. This approach leverages TRCA's long-standing relationships with district school boards in the co-creation of programs tailored for both classroom and TRCA field trip locations.

Additionally, out-of-classroom learning related to natural science, conservation and the environment is supported through Strategy 5 – Foster sustainable citizenship – in TRCAs 2013-2022 Strategic Plan, specifically:

Engage school boards and governments in discussions on how to achieve cost efficient and equitable access for students to curriculum out of class nature – science based educational activities.

Policies and procedures related to natural science, conservation and environmental out-of-classroom learning

An inventory of school board policies and procedures related to natural science, conservation and environmental out-of-classroom learning can be found in Appendix B. Depending on the school board, this may include policies related to outdoor education, day trips, overnight trips, off school property walking excursions, low/high risk activities, supervision/ratios and equity. Additionally,

- All school boards indicated that excursions including outdoor education activities are guided by the Ontario Physical Education Safety Guidelines which are managed by the Ontario Physical and Health Education Association (OPHEA) and represent the minimum standard for risk management practice for school boards in Ontario.
- DPCDSB and YRDSB have specific policies that support outdoor education objectives at their school boards.
- CSC MonAvenir, TDSB and YRDSB have policies that support environmental education and sustainable facility management practices.
- TRCA does not have formal policies specific to outdoor education or natural science conservation and environmental out-of-classroom learning however, TRCA education centres are committed to providing a safe and healthy learning environment for all visitors to our facilities. This standard is achieved by following the policies and guidelines of the visiting school board (supervision ratios etc.) and adhering to the Ontario Physical and Health Education Association (OPHEA) Guidelines as a minimum standard.
- Additional policies and procedures are in place at TRCA education centres where an added level of safety is required, or specific guidelines are needed. For example, TRCAs Working in and Around Water (non-watercraft) policy and procedure ensures the safety of participants, TRCA staff and volunteers from hazards associated with working in and around water. Each TRCA education facility have a site-specific Emergency Action Plan (EAP) to protect human health and safety, ensure that there is a coordinated response to emergency situations and minimize damage to property and infrastructure in the event of an emergency.

Current partners, organizations and locations

DPCDSB (1 Day Centre), TDSB (4 Day Centres, 5 Overnight Centres), TRCA (4 Day Centres, 3 Overnight Centres and Conservation Parks for sport activities and festivals) and YRDSB (5 Day Centres) operate outdoor education centres within the Toronto region. A detailed inventory of conservation authority and school board operated outdoor education centres can be found in

OETF Agenda #1/19, October 7, 2019 (Item 10.1 Summary Report on Outdoor Education Centres).

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 is outlined below.

- Adventureworks
- Bird Studies Canada
- Blue Mountain
- Camp Robin Hood
- Camp Tournesol
- Centre Notre Dame de la Rouge
- Conservation Authorities
 - Credit Valley Conservation Authority (Silver Creek Conservation Area)
 - Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority (Scanlon Creek, Outreach)
 - Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (Albion Hills Field Centre, Kortright Centre for Conservation, Lake St. George Field Centre, Bruce's Mill Conservation Area, Outreach/Watershed on Wheels, Swan Lake Partnership, Burlington Outdoor Resource Centre Partnership)
- Earth Tracks
- EcoSchools Canada (formerly Ontario Eco-Schools)
- Education Leadership Centre (OELC)
- Envirothon
- Evergreen
- Georgina Island First Nation
- Learning for Sustainable Futures
- Monarch Teacher Network
- Municipal Community/Recreation Centres, Parks and play spaces (City of Brampton, City of Mississauga, Town of Caledon, Town of Newmarket, Town of Aurora, City of Markham, City of Richmond Hill, City of Vaughan, City of Toronto)
- Oak Ridges Moraine
- Ontario Provincial Parks
 - Sibbald Point Provincial Park and various other parks (Secondary Outdoor Credit Course trips)
- OPAL (Outdoor Play and Learning)
- Outdoor Council of Canada
- Outward Bound
- Bill Fisch Education Centre (Region of York)
- Lakehead University- Orillia Campus (staff)
- St-Louis / Moonstone
- Teen Ranch
- The McMichael Art Gallery
- Toronto Orienteering and Ontario Orienteering
- TRAILS Youth Initiatives
- Tree Bee

- Riverwood Conservancy (Enabling Garden)
- University of Toronto (OISE) / Natural Curiosity

The TDSB have developed an “Excursion Directory” which includes vendors who have been approved for schools to access after being reviewed by Legal, Risk Management and Academic Merit. While exceptions can be made, the expectation is that TDSB schools choose an approved vendor for activities deemed “High Care”.

TRCA have developed programs with a wide-range of partners, including school boards, municipalities, federal and provincial governments, non-government organizations (NGOs), social service agencies, philanthropic foundations and others.

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 on how they spend this grant varied which is reflective of the inherent flexibility provided by the government on how boards may use and allocate this funding. Allowable Outdoor Education expenses and school board examples are included below:

- Fees related to participation in outdoor learning activities provided by third-party organizations such as not-for-profit or community groups.

TCDSB

- Organizes and supports overnight school trips to third party outdoor education sites including Lake St. George Field Centre (through a formal agreement with TRCA), Teen Ranch and Mansfield Outdoor Education Centre. Schools are offered trips on a rotating basis. Each elementary school within the TCDSB will be offered a trip approximately every 2 years. Funding is used to subsidize the cost of overnight accommodations, meals, and programming/activities. TCDSB schools may also independently book overnight trips at TDSBs Toronto Island Science School. The Grant is also used to fund day excursions for elementary and secondary students.

YRDSB

- Development of learning experiences for educators and students in a broad range of inquiry areas.
- Fees for safety-related training and/or certification for students and/or teachers, including professional development opportunities for teachers.

TDSB

- Certifications for staff, Modules of Learning for Classroom Teachers and ECEs and subsidize excursions.

YRDSB

- Outdoor Council of Canada field leader program.
- Enlisting the expertise and/or facilities/resources of community agencies in outdoor learning activities.

YRDSB

- Summer Institute, Residential Program, Georgina Island.
- Transportation costs to destinations within the Province of Ontario.

DPCDSB/TDSB/YRDSB

- Busing to outdoor education centres, Transportation for inquiry learning and secondary outdoor learning, credit courses, overnight trip subsidy.
- Teacher release time related to the Outdoor Education initiative/field trips within the Province of Ontario.

YRDSB

- Professional learning, supporting student learning, safety training.

Summary of other outdoor education funding sources

Additional funding sources provided by school boards include:

- Donations
- Parents
- School board budgets
- School budgets
- Student user fees
- Retreat funds (DPCDSB)

For school boards that operate their own outdoor education centres, costs to operate these facilities are funded through separate school board budgets. TDSB indicated that they also generate revenue through summer programming third-party site bookings and programming outside of school parameters (weekends, and summer).

Funding for TRCA education programs and facilities is derived from a wide range of sources, including:

- User Fees – Fees paid by students, parents, schools or school boards, professionals, businesses and others.

- Agreements – Formal partnerships or lease agreements for the provision of learning opportunities for students and professionals from a range of sectors, including school boards (TCDSB, YRDSB), colleges, universities, corporations and others. These agreements provide for a range of learning opportunities, including the lease of space, provision of classroom space, provision of teaching expertise, etc.
- Federal Funding – Capital funding for major retrofit projects (example - Facility upgrades at Kortright Centre for Conservation, Claremont Nature Centre Accessibility Upgrades)
- Provincial Funding – (example - Ontario Trillium Foundation grants for bee education program at Kortright Centre for Conservation)
- Municipal Capital – Municipal capital supports special program funding such as the Environmental Leaders of Tomorrow program d Peel EcoSchools (Peel Region).
- Private Fundraising – Private funders and philanthropic organizations support specific programs or resources (example - Environmental Leaders of Tomorrow, Monarch Teacher Network, purchase of fat bikes at Albion Hills Field Centre).

Across the Toronto region, six school boards are currently participating in TRCA's Environmental Leaders of Tomorrow program (DCDSB, DPCDSB, PDSB, TCDSB, TDSB and YCDSB). This program provides a multi-phased subsidized overnight outdoor education experience for students attending high priority schools. This program is currently being funded through a combination of municipal capital funding provided by the Region of Peel and private funders including The W. Garfield Weston Foundation and others.

Policies/programs to ensure equitable access to outdoor education facilities

All responding school boards have policies and or action plans that guide equity and inclusion of all students and schools within the school board.

School boards that operate outdoor education facilities provided specific examples related to out-of-classroom learning related to natural science, conservation and the environment.

DPCDSB

- An Outdoor Education Grant is available to all schools including all Special Education Programs.

TCDSB

- Through an agreement with TRCA, a set number of dates are provided for TCDSB elementary schools to book overnight elementary excursions at Lake St George Field Centre at a rate that is subsidized by the school board. Each elementary school within the TCDSB will be offered a trip approximately every 2 years.

TDSB

- Current mandate is that each elementary student should have access to 2 day visits between grades K-8, and 1 overnight experience between grade 5-8. TDSB also run a designated day program for secondary students. Once these “mandated” visits are

offered, additional opportunities are made available to additional classes at all sites for students K-12.

- The decision has been made to shift from collecting individual user fees from students to invoicing schools for a nominal amount for classes attending their Day sites.
- TDSB - User Fees at board operated Overnight Centres are based on a tiered sliding scale based on the Learning Opportunities Index (LOI).

TRCA

- While TRCA do not have a specific policy or mandate regarding equitable access to their outdoor education facilities, through social equity programs such as Environmental Leaders of Tomorrow, TRCA are able to support financially challenged communities access overnight opportunities through funded field trips and bus grants (target of approx. 20% of overnight bookings).

YRDSB

- All grade 2, 4 and 7 students participate in outdoor learning opportunities at school board run Outdoor Education Centres.
- Specific transportation requirements for students are covered by the board including the provision of funding to subsidize transportation and program costs for credit course outdoor education programming.
- Decisions around program design and facility renewal are guided by Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (2005) principles.

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.

Some OETF member organizations provided examples specific to outdoor education including:

DPCDSB

- Silver Creek Outdoor Education Centre collects student feedback letters regarding their outdoor experiences.
- Teachers track using exit and feedback tickets as well as observational assessments.
- The Board tracks use of Outdoor Education funding and Silver Creek bookings.

TDSB

- After every visit to the board run education centre, a feedback form is given to the visiting teacher(s). Student exit cards, debriefing and surveys are also practiced in different forms at different sites with different grade levels.

TRCA

- Formal post-trip surveys are provided to teachers to obtain feedback on their experience at both day and overnight education facilities. These surveys are provided for both single and multi-day experiences and touch on both feedback regarding the facility itself as well the programming received. Program specific feedback is also requested from teachers for special programs such as Environmental Leaders of Tomorrow (ELT), Specialist High Skills Major (SHSM) programs and teacher professional development workshops.

YRDSB

- 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

Several OETF member organizations indicated that they currently have programs that support or integrate the Indigenous voice into out-of-classroom learning related to natural science, conservation and the environment. An overview of opportunities is provided below.

DPCDSB

Through the Indigenous Consultant, the Equity and Program Departments there are several professional development opportunities offered to teachers, schools and classrooms including:

- **NTIP: Deepening Our Understanding of Our Relationships with Indigenous Peoples** - Tehahenteh Miller a Mohawk Elder from the Six Nations of the Grand River provides participants with a historical timeline overview of the Onkwehonwe (Iroquois) people, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy and their relationship with the Anishinaabek people, and how they come to now be living here in this territory.
- **Indigenous Education School Presentations** - Presentations on various topics can be booked. Environmental stewardship and sustainability through Indigenous knowledge are one example of a workshop being offered.
- **Indigenous Artist Available for School Presentations**
 - **No Word for Art – Exploring the Roots of Indigenous Creativity** - Explores the Indigenous creative process, meaning and methods from a historical context to a contemporary perspective. One, two- and three-day sessions are offered. Presentations and activities such as Hair Pipe Bracelet, Deer Hide Miniature

Moccasins, Beaded Corn Fob, Medicine Bag, Tiny Turtles Beaded Medallion, Native Beaded Strawberry can be chosen depending on the session

- **Wesli Day- Guest speaker for schools** - Presentations covering an array of topics including Indigenous Multi Media (past, present and future), Indigenous Hip Hop Culture, Addressing Indigenous stereotypes, Environmental stewardship and sustainability through Indigenous knowledge, Indigenous treaties (pre- and post-contact).
- **Lessons From the Earth (two-day in-service): Storytelling, Art & Indigenous Knowledge** - Grounded in a traditional Anishinaabe story, Jiig Nong Aadsookan (The Sacred Fisher Story), participants will interact with digital resources & iBooks that provide a practical application of Indigenous Knowledge within the classroom. Produced in collaboration with many Traditional Teachers and Elders, this resource will give students a glimpse into the old stories of the Indigenous Peoples from this land in order to further understand the connection to the great spirit, our Mother Earth.
- **Storytelling with Author Isaac Murdoch** - Isaac Murdoch will be sharing stories from his new book THE TRAIL OF NENABOOZHOO and Other Creation Stories. This collection presents legends of Nenaboozhoo, the Ojibway creator spirit, along with other creation stories; sacred stories which were transcribed from the oral storytelling of Isaac Murdoch. The Trail of Nenaboozhoo and Other Creation Stories is a book of art and storytelling that preserve the legends of the Anishinaabe people.

TCDSB

- Through the Indigenous Education Department at the TCDSB, 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.

TDSB

- Through the Urban Indigenous Outdoor Education Centre (UIEC) and other departments, every site offers a variety of programs which have an Indigenous focus including integrating differing world views.
- During the 2018-19 school year, the “Learning from the Land” Conference supported classroom teachers to take students out of the classroom and highlight the “Get Outside Month” Lessons which had an Indigenous focus in May 2019.

TRCA

- **Indigenous Studies Program (offered at TRCAs Education Centres)** - In this curriculum-linked program students learn about the history and culture of Canada’s First Peoples, including their migration from Northeast Asia. The program provides a window onto their daily life and includes activities that simulate the important traditions of

hunting, gathering and trading, the use of fire bows, baking bannock (bread) over a fire, and/or Indigenous games.

- **Coueurs de Bois (offered at TRCAs Education Centres)** - This curriculum-linked program introduces students to the lifestyle of the coureurs de bois (“Runners of the Woods”) the early French settlers who traded with Indigenous Peoples for furs. Students participate in an orienteering and bartering activity that simulates a season as a coureur de bois.
- **Nikibii Dawadinna Giigwag, in Anishinaabemowin (Manitoulin dialect) means Flooded Valley Healing.** - This program explores a participatory model for practice that includes the voices of Indigenous youth and Elders/Traditional Knowledge Keepers (TKK) in the planning and designing of green infrastructure.

Guided by Elders/TKK, professionals and practitioners, this initiative provides Indigenous youth with employment opportunities, an introduction into sustainable design building, hands-on ecological learning opportunities and aims to address a growing inter-generational gap on traditional environmental knowledge.

- **Boyd Archeological Field School** - Founded in partnership with the Royal Ontario Museum and TRCA in 1975, the Boyd Archaeological Field School (BAFS) is Canada’s only high school credit course offering students the opportunity to earn Ontario High School Credits while participating in real archaeological fieldwork. The Boyd Archaeological Field School takes place at the Claremont Nature Centre. Students gain important background material on archaeology and Indigenous history through online learning and classroom sessions and get full on-the-job training in real archaeological skills including excavation of a real archaeological site. Additionally, the Sebastian Scholarship which covers the full tuition for the course is available to any Canadian high school students of First Nations, Métis or Inuit heritage. Two scholarships are awarded annually.
- **Sugar Bush Maple Syrup Festival (Kortright Centre for Conservation and Bruce’s Mill Conservation).** - The Sugar Bush Maple Syrup Festival is a yearly program that offers school groups the opportunity to experience demonstrations and activities related to maple syrup. The First Nations process of making maple syrup for food and medicine is integrated into programming and demonstrations.

YCDSB

- YCDSB supports and integrates the Indigenous voice into out-of-classroom learning related to natural science, conservation and the environment through their Indigenous Steering Committee

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.
- 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).

Additional comments and suggestions

The following feedback was provided:

TCDSB

- The TDSB has their own outdoor education centers, and do not use any of the other school board centers and they do not allow TCDSB to program at their locations.
- The health and well-being of our students is always our top priority, and the Board is always looking for ways to encourage healthy and active lifestyles.
- We always welcome the opportunity to partner with other boards, other levels of government, Toronto Public Health and others who share our commitment to health and well-being.
- TCDSB already has some sharing arrangements in place with the City and coterminous school board to share outdoor play space, swimming pools and the like. In terms of curriculum, TCDSB is committed to ensuring that programming is delivered by Catholic teachers who ensure that curriculum reflects Catholic teachings and values.
- School Boards are funded through Ministry of Education grants, therefore any need for additional resources—staffing or otherwise—would need to come through Provincial funding.
- We have limited funds at our disposal, and the Board makes every effort to channel funding to the neediest school communities who do not have the capacity to raise additional funds through the parent councils. Our Equity Action Plan focuses on our commitment to levelling the playing field as much as we can and trying to provide all students with the same opportunities regardless of the neighbourhood they live in.

Recommendations:

- Look for more opportunities for students
- Equitable access to outdoor learning sites and or centers
- Continued or improved funding to allow for even wider participation in Outdoor Education opportunities for as many students as possible
- Increased funding to allow more teachers from our board to offer opportunities to our students.
- Anchor outdoor education utilizing the DMOT to promote indigenous ways of learning that focuses on professional learning opportunities and capacity building on the following TRC’s calls to Action # 62 and 63:

62. We call upon the federal, provincial, and territorial governments, in consultation and collaboration with Survivors, Aboriginal peoples, and educators, to:

- i. Make age-appropriate curriculum on residential schools, Treaties, and Aboriginal peoples’ historical and contemporary contributions to Canada a mandatory education requirement for Kindergarten to Grade Twelve students.

- ii. Provide the necessary funding to post-secondary institutions to educate teachers on how to integrate Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods into classrooms.
- iii. Provide the necessary funding to Aboriginal schools to utilize Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods in classrooms.

63. We call upon the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada to maintain an annual commitment to Aboriginal education issues, including

- i. Developing and implementing Kindergarten to Grade 12 curriculum and learning resources on Aboriginal peoples in Canadian history, and the history and legacy of residential schools.
- ii. Sharing information and best practices on teaching curriculum related to residential schools and Aboriginal history.
- iii. Building student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect.
- iv. Identifying teacher-training needs relating to the above.

YCDSB

- Formation of Steering Committee to explore possibilities for enhancing student experience and assess the impact of the experience.
- Volunteer opportunities for Secondary students to develop their leadership and a greater awareness of environmental stewardship.