

## Appendix A

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

## Summary of Key Findings and GAP Analysis of Feedback

March 8, 2020

### Summary of Key Findings:

A summary of key findings specific to out-of-classroom learning experiences related to natural science, conservation and the environment is provided below:

- DPCDSB, TDSB, YCDSB and YRDSB have strong value statements that are specific to out-of-classroom learning experiences related to natural science, conservation and the environment.
- DPCDSB and YRDSB have formalized their commitment through policies specific to Outdoor Education while TRCA and other OETF member school boards do not.
- OPHEA Guidelines are followed by all OETF member organizations including TRCA.
- Some school boards have partnerships and agreements with other organizations to provide out-of-classroom learning experiences related to natural science, conservation and the environment (for example, TCDSB and YRDSB have agreements with TRCA), however school boards are not partnering with each other.
- An array of policies, plans and programs related to equity are in place by school boards to provide students with some access to out-of-classroom learning experiences related to natural science, conservation and the environment, however only DPCDSB, TDSB and YRDSB have mandated these experiences to every student in their board. Furthermore, TDSB and YRDSBs mandates covers multiple grades.
- TRCA does not have formal equity and inclusion policies, however there are social equity programs in place at TRCA to support financially challenged communities access programs through funded field trips and bus grants (target of approx. 20% of overnight bookings).
- Use of the Ministry of Education's Learning Opportunities Grant by school boards is varied, which is reflective of the inherent flexibility provided by the government for the allocation of these funds. School boards also supplement this funding through other sources such as parents/families, donations, and other school board budgets.
- DPCDSB, TDSB, TRCA and YRDSB operate outdoor education centres in the Toronto region. At YRDSB, supplementary funding beyond the Learning Opportunities Grant for the operation of these facilities is required and is allocated from other school board operating budgets. TDSB also generates revenue through summer and weekend programming and third-party site bookings.
- The year-round operation of TRCA outdoor education centres is funded through user fees, agreements, municipal capital funding, grants and private fundraising.
- OETF member organizations that operate outdoor education centres have mechanisms to obtain feedback from teachers on out-of-classroom learning experiences related to natural science, conservation and the environment. None of the responding organizations have formal feedback mechanisms that involved student participants.
- OETF member organizations seek appropriate ways to support and integrate the Indigenous voice into out-of-classroom learning experiences related to natural science, conservation and the environment.

GAP Analysis of Feedback:

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 Outdoor Education Task Force objectives.

OBJECTIVE	DESIRED FUTURE STATE/ GOAL STATE	CURRENT STATE	GAP IDENTIFICATION/ DEFICIENCY	ACTIONS/HOW
Theme/Focus Area (Taken from the OETF Terms of Reference Objectives)	Where would we like to be? (OETF exemplars included)	Where are we now?	Difference between desired state and current state	How will we get there?
Needs of student/youth population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Students are equipped with the right skills necessary to succeed in the future.</li><li>- Students value and appreciate nature and the outdoors and understand their role in taking care of their environment.</li></ul> <p>Exemplar: DPCDSB, TDSB, YCDSB and YRDSB values statement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Students are growing up in heavily urbanized environment with little access to greenspace on a regular basis.</li><li>- Students are spending less time outdoors in nature.</li><li>- The physical and mental well-being of our youth is being negatively impacted (Nature Deficit Disorder).</li><li>- Some school boards have strong value statements regarding out-of-classroom learning related to natural science, conservation and the environment.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- No cohesive values system that acknowledges the impacts of urbanization on students/young people.</li></ul>	
Access to programming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Equitable access to programs and services for students and youth across the Toronto region regardless of school board.</li><li>- Partnerships are created with organizations that have technical and scientific expertise (best knowledge &amp; skills). Lean on the strengths of individuals and organizations.</li></ul> <p>Exemplar: mandated multi grade access to curriculum-linked learning experiences at both day and overnight centres ( TDSB, YRDSB).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Students from K-12 are offered wide-ranging outdoor education experiences including in-school/school yard, local walking trips in community, day excursions off school property, overnight trips off school property.</li><li>- Variability of student experience is dependent on several factors including school board policy (mandated vs optional), administration/teacher interest/knowledge/comfort level, grade level, cost.</li><li>- Some school boards ensure every child has access to outdoor education and offer their students multiple opportunities to participate in outdoor education programming and</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Inconsistent access to curriculum-linked learning experiences.</li><li>- Little collaboration or sharing of programming between school boards.</li></ul>	

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		activities as they move though the school system.		
Access to assets and infrastructure – Facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Maximize use and value of public assets and infrastructure.</li></ul> <p><i>Exemplar: Agreement bookings with TRCA and TCDSB/YRDSB).</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- TDSB, YRDSB and DPCDSB operate outdoor education facilities (Day centres and overnight) and students from these school boards can attend these facilities.</li><li>- Students from other school boards attend third-party outdoor education centres for their experiences.</li><li>- Some school boards have agreements with third party organizations to provide outdoor education experiences while others do not and must rely on administrators and/or teachers to plan their experiences.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Inconsistent and inequitable access to assets and infrastructure.</li><li>- Little to no sharing of assets within the public system.</li><li>-</li></ul>	
Access to greenspace and natural systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Strengthened experiential connections between the urban and natural environments (with consideration for the impact of urban intensity on student access).</li><li>- Students feel safe and comfortable in nature and the outdoors.</li></ul> <p><i>Exemplar:</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Students have access to their school yard daily, however school yard composition varies – some have greenspace and outdoor classrooms (or back on to publicly owned natural areas) while other spaces are heavily paved and fenced with little to no access to nature.</li><li>- The Toronto region has an abundance of publicly owned greenspaces and natural areas including school yards, municipal parks, conservation parks, provincial and federal parks and outdoor education centres. Some of these spaces are free and some are accessible through user fees.</li><li>- Variability of student access to greenspace and natural systems is</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Inconsistent and inequitable access to assets and infrastructure.</li><li>-</li></ul>	

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<i>Theme/Focus Area (Taken from the OETF Terms of Reference Objectives)</i>	<i>Where would we like to be? (OETF exemplars included)</i>	<i>Where are we now?</i>	<i>Difference between desired state and current state</i>	<i>How will we get there?</i>
		dependent on several factors including school board mandate, access to transportation, administration/teacher interest/knowledge/ comfort level and cost to participate.		
Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Long-term financial sustainability.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- There is variability between school boards on how funding is used for outdoor education.</li><li>- Ministry of Education funding is often used to support transportation costs for out-of-classroom learning.</li><li>- School boards supplement their funding for outdoor education trips through other sources such as parents/families, donations, and from other school board budgets.</li><li>-</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- No strong framework for how funding is used.</li><li>- The cost of transportation to out-of-classroom learning needs to be considered.</li></ul>	
Policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Strong policy statements that align across the Toronto region are established to support out-of-classroom learning related to natural science, conservation and the environment.</li></ul> <p><i>Exemplar: DPCDSB and YRDSB Outdoor Education Policies; OPHEA Guidelines are followed by all school boards and TRCA.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- School boards have a variety of policies related to out-of-classroom learning in general. These policies also cover learning related to nature, conservation and the environment such as off school walking trips, day trips, overnight excursions, low/high risk activities, supervision and ratios)</li><li>- DPCDSB and YRDSB have policies that address Outdoor Education specifically.</li><li>- Some school boards have policies related to environmental responsibility, environmental education, equity and inclusion, healthy students etc.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Inconsistently applied policies.</li></ul>	