



## **Use of Outdoor Spaces for Instructional Time**

**To:** Program and School Services Committee

**Date:** 13 January, 2021

**Report No.:** 01-21-4008

### **Strategic Directions**

- Transform Student Learning
- Create a Culture for Student and Staff Well-Being
- Provide Equity of Access to Learning Opportunities for All Students

### **Recommendation**

It is recommended that the report on the use of outdoor spaces for instructional time be received.

### **Context**

On December 9, 2020, the Board decided that the following be referred to staff:

- a. Present a report to the Program and School Services Committee in the January 2021 cycle of meetings, on the feasibility and implementation plan of the following:
  - i. In the short term, provide consistent and clear messaging, protocols, and program resources to all schools, in-person and especially virtual schools, elementary and secondary, that support use of the outdoors in day-to-day learning and support timely approaches to the use of outdoor spaces for learning, and include messaging and healthy living resources for families that highlights the importance of outdoor activities.
- b. Present a report to the Program and School Services Committee and the Finance, Budget and Enrolment Committee outlining a long-term plan for encouraging and supporting all schools, both elementary and secondary, to use outdoor spaces for instructional time throughout the day and that the plan:

- i. be based on approaches used in the Outdoor Play and Learning (OPAL) program successfully piloted at TDSB schools;
  - ii. consider the use of pilots distributed across learning centres for an initial group of up to 24 schools (six per Learning Centre) as soon as possible, using an equity lens, including the use of disaggregated, race-based data, to determine which schools will be eligible, and depending on the timing of implementation include an outdoor learning program for virtual schools;
  - iii. include collaboration between the Sustainability Office and Outdoor Education in supporting schools with this work;
  - iv. include concrete steps for how outdoor learning can be encouraged at the secondary level as well;
  - v. include costs and funding source for implementation;
- c. Ensure that the concerns raised by employee groups in written delegation to Planning and Priorities meeting of December 8, 2020 are addressed in the development and execution of parts (a) and (b).
- d. Provide an update in the February – March 2021 cycle of meetings.

The following report will address Part (a) from the above motion, outlining a plan to support the use of outdoor spaces during instructional time.

Parts (b) and (c) will be addressed through a subsequent report to be presented in the May cycle of meetings, after the Environmental Sustainability Community Advisory Committee (ESCAC) and the TDSB's Joint Management-Labour Environment Committee (JMLEC) have been invited to provide input.

An update on progress will be presented to the Program and School Services Committee (PSSC) in the March cycle of meetings.

### **Learning in the Outdoors**

Through the Multi-Year Strategic Plan, the TDSB has committed to transforming student learning by providing positive and supportive learning environments and creating school and workplace cultures that support mental health and well-being. Encouraging the use of outdoor spaces during instructional time provides an opportunity to put these commitments into practice during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. Outdoor spaces, including the schoolground, can foster authentic learning and should be considered an extension of the classroom.

The TDSB has a long history of supporting outdoor learning, both through its EcoSchools program and Toronto Outdoor Education Schools (TOES). Recognizing the

need to adjust the way in which resources were made available to TDSB communities during the COVID-19 pandemic, staff modified program delivery. In collaboration with OISE, EcoSchools developed and delivered 25 webinars targeted at educators, reaching approximately 2,100 participants, to help strengthen the quality of environmental education in TDSB schools. Since September 2020, TOES staff have delivered outdoor education programs to 7,246 staff and students in-person and 9,656 staff and students virtually.

While resources related to using outdoor spaces during instructional time are currently available, it is clear that a more coordinated effort is needed to ensure all schools are supported and consistent messaging is conveyed to the system. To achieve this, Sustainability and TOES staff will develop an online portal for learning in the outdoors aimed at providing the following:

- i. Consistent messaging regarding the TDSB's position on the use of outdoor spaces for instructional time, including protocols;
- ii. Resources to support teaching and learning in the outdoors;
- iii. Healthy living resources for families that highlight the importance of outdoor activities;
- iv. Information on how to access infrastructural resources, such as picnic tables, to enhance outdoor spaces; and
- v. Examples of projects/initiatives undertaken at TDSB schools that support learning in the outdoors.

Once existing materials and content have been compiled and the online portal has been launched, staff will begin to work on identifying and closing any gaps in information that would assist in supporting outdoor learning. This will include conducting an environmental scan of resources from other school boards to identify best practices to support outdoor learning.

The Environmental Sustainability Community Advisory Committee and the TDSB's Joint Management-Labour Environment Committee will be invited to provide input into the portal.

## **Action Plan and Associated Timeline**

**February 2021** – Launch online portal.

**March 2021** – Present an update to PSSC.

**May 2021** – Present long-term plan, including associated costs, to PSSC and FBEC.

## **Resource Implications**

As the long-term project plan is developed, associated costs will be identified. Estimates of these costs will be reported in the May cycle of meetings.

## **Communications Considerations**

Support from Communications will be required to disseminate information regarding the launch of an online outdoor learning portal.

## **Board Policy and Procedure Reference(s)**

P033 – Excursions

P028 – The Environment

PR511 – Excursions

## **From**

Maia Puccetti, Executive Officer, Facility Services at [Maia.Puccetti@tdsb.on.ca](mailto:Maia.Puccetti@tdsb.on.ca) or at 416-393-8780.

Richard Christie, Senior Manager, Sustainability at [Richard.Christie@tdsb.on.ca](mailto:Richard.Christie@tdsb.on.ca) or at 416-396-8554.

David Hawker-Budlovsky, Centrally Assigned Principal, Outdoor Education at [David.Hawker-Budlovsky@tdsb.on.ca](mailto:David.Hawker-Budlovsky@tdsb.on.ca) or at 416-396-3408.