

Exemplary Environmental Leadership/Sustainability Program or Initiative

School Board_ Halton District School Board_____

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Name of Program/Initiative___ Naturalization of FDK Outdoor Learning Spaces_____

Hyperlinks to Documents or Website(s) Describing this Program/Initiative

<http://www.hdsb.ca/BoardroomTrustees/Board%20Agendas%20and%20Minutes/BdAg-October%201%202014-public.pdf#page=40>

Description of Program/Initiative

The FDK curriculum encourages physical development, play-based inquiry learning and use of the natural outdoor environment. At HDSB, kindergarten outdoor spaces were often fenced asphalt areas. Four priorities were established: enough space (within reason), a variety of surfaces (hard and soft), shade (natural and man-made) and sand play to meet program needs and develop environmental stewardship of students. By the end of 2014/15, every FDK school will have their outside learning space modified. The introduction of natural elements into the spaces has had impacts on teaching and custodial staff. Snow clearing protocols have changed, as have entry practices into the classrooms. Having natural materials, such as mulch and sand, do have top up requirements in the spring; trees also need attention (curriculum and stewardship connections). The FDK implementation team included the use of the naturalized spaces in PD, extending the traditional classroom to one where learning flows inside out and outside in seamlessly. Some of the indicators of success were initially unexpected: a decrease in bullying and the need for discipline, the provision of a wider variety of experiences, and the natural development of collaborative problem solving skills during less structured outside time. Key in the implementation has been the professional development enhancing the understanding that outside is not just for recess anymore!

What has been the Impact on Student Learning?

Prior to the development of the outside space as a learning area, it was generally an open space to run, bounce a ball or otherwise be physically active. Learning occurred in the classroom at specific locations. Since the development and integration of the outside as a learning area, ecological inquiry, literacy, numeracy, collaborative problem solving as well as fine motor and gross motor skill development opportunities have been enhanced, with the learning occurring at a much more natural and child specific pace.