

Exemplary Environmental Leadership/Sustainability Program or Initiative

School Board Simcoe County District School Board

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Name of Program/Initiative FDK Outdoor Education Training for Educators

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

Description of Program/Initiative

SCDSB offers a series of training days to all FDK educators including teachers and DECEs. Full day, seasonal workshops are held at the Education Centre on Saturdays. The first workshop, held in the fall was called Hands in the Dirt and was open to 120 educators. The second was held in January, called Mittens in the Snow and was open to 150 educators. All spaces were filled with waiting lists. Educators participated in a variety of workshops as if they were students. The workshops pertained to the pillars of the FDK curriculum including sensory, dramatic play, music, gross/fine motor, and outdoor inquiry based learning. Both events consisted of workshops facilitated by community partners including our conservation authorities, Back 2 Nature Network, County of Simcoe, internal program staff, and teaching staff. The idea was to create a day to bring FDK educators together to have them participate in workshops in small, hands-on groups, build capacity and confidence, give permission, provide tools and resources, network and learn to use near-by nature in the space you have.

The training days were coordinated by a diverse team at the Board level including active participation from planning, environmental, operations, administration, and curriculum. Funding for Hands in the Dirt came mostly from a Toronto Dominion Friends of the Environment (TDFEF) grant. Mittens in the Snow was funded through Ministry Transition Funding for FDK. In order to keep costs minimal, these events were held on Saturdays and most workshop facilitators presented in-kind. Success is being measured by the number of classes using their outdoor space, regularly, as an extension of their classroom.

What has been the Impact on Student Learning?

Capacity building for outdoor, inquiry based learning is contagious. There has been a transfer of ownership of space where students are the stewards of the yard. Behavioural issues are almost non-apparent when outdoors and students have an easier time self-regulating. Students have a say in what they are learning and are therefore more stimulated and engaged. Staff are more engaged in teaching and learning alongside their students and teaching partner. Learning in the outdoors allows staff and students to have a deeper connection to nature, giving them the desire to protect the environment.