

Exemplary Environmental Leadership/Sustainability Program or Initiative

School Board: Waterloo Region District School Board

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Name of Program/Initiative: Board-operated Outdoor and Environmental Centres

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

<https://outdooredguys.wordpress.com/>

<http://www.wrdsb.ca/learning/programs/outdoor-and-environmental-education/>

Description of Program/Initiative

The WRDSB operates five Outdoor and Environmental Education Centres (OEEC), each of which offers a wide variety of environmental programming to students in both elementary and secondary schools. Four of the centres, Blair, Camp Heidelberg, Laurel Creek and Wrigley Corners, operate throughout the school year and provide programs for students across all grades. The Huron Natural Area OEEC operates seasonally (fall and spring) and focuses on environmental education for students in the primary grades. All programs are designed to align with Ministry curriculum and are staffed by WRDSB environmental education specialists. OEEC's are supported and coordinated centrally by Learning Services. Through our programs, students, teachers and parents/guardians learn about the natural world and the critical role that we as humans play in its preservation. Two of our facilities are board-owned (Blair & Wrigley Corners). The other three involve partnerships with the Grand River Conservation Authority (Laurel Creek), the Optimist Club of K-W (Camp Heidelberg) and the City of Kitchener (Huron Natural Area). We have recently developed a secondary school program that runs in partnership with the University of Waterloo. The outdoor and environmental specialists that staff our centres communicate with the global community through their blog <https://outdooredguys.wordpress.com/>

What has been the Impact on Student Learning?

Each year, over 20,000 students participate in our environmental education programs. Anecdotal feedback from students, teachers and parents indicate that we are making great strides to help erase "Nature Deficit Disorder" among our largely urban population of students. Many schools incorporate their visits to our OEECs as part of their EcoSchools certification, which promotes environmental stewardship. Our specialized environmental education programs for immigrant and refugee students helps them to feel more connected to the natural world of their new home land. It is our goal to have **all** students participate in multiple environmental education programs during their school careers, from grade 1 to graduation.