

COPACS Outdoor Education Event:

Environmental Education through Nature-based Experiences

February 3, 2024

Cordova Bay Elementary School

<https://copacs.sd63.bc.ca/mod/forum/discuss.php?d=358>



Agenda

- 12:05: Indigenous land and water acknowledgement (outside)
 - Location: Cordova Bay School yard, at the WĪ,ĆISTENS ET TFE XPĀ,ENEŁ (Cedars' Teaching Garden), next to parking area
 - Mary Lynn Heron ([Cordova Bay Elementary School](#) Principal)
- 12:10: Welcome and Purpose of Workshop (outside)
 - Megan Misovic ([COPACS](#) President)
 - Andrew Pape-Salmon (COPACS event organizer)
- 12:20: [Nature Wagon](#) Demonstration (outside)
 - Jenica Moore (Lochside Elementary teacher, District Teacher Leader, Early Learning)
 - Lisa Kinshella (Nature Wagon program founder, SD63 educator)
- 12:45: Inspiration and Stories of Nature-based Education Experiences (inside)
 - Location: Cordova Bay School learning commons
 - Sarah Miller and Jenni Erickson (Lochside Elementary teachers)
 - Rae Dennett (Bayside Middle Principal)
 - Daniel Cammiade and Mia Barkasy ([Nature Trails Society](#), high school trail building experiences)
- 13:25: Summary of key take-aways
 - Andrew Pape-Salmon (parent, COPACS volunteer)

Notes

Territorial Acknowledgement

- Mary Lynn Heron
- Video: [link](#)

Nature Wagon Demonstration

- Leaders : Jenica Moore, Lisa Kinshella
- Jenica and Lisa led an interactive activity with children and families in the WĪĆISTENS ET TFE XPÁ,ENEŁ (Cedars' Teaching Garden), including reading stories, collecting nature samples, having participants articulate observations and answering questions.
- Photos: [link](#)

Panel Discussion

- Speakers: Jenica Moore, Sarah Miller, Jenni Erickson, Rae Dennett, Daniel Cammiade and Mia Barkasy

Sarah & Jenny – Lochside – Grade 1

- Near Lochside there are so many great parks and trails, including McMinn Park.
- Goal to create a green space at the back of the school – “Beyond the fence” – a space that teachers could go to easily, on school grounds, easily accessible, no permission forms needed. It is used a lot by K-5.
- Learning in nature – structured and unstructured. Structured learning that ties into the curriculum. In Grade 1 we may do a math activity, classify items and counting them. Developing an outdoor curriculum that we can use. Have a nature journal for all students and do different activities: the story of the little mouse in the fir tree and retell the story. Unstructured: materials for the kids to move and build with, kitchen and dig. See what they’re interested in and building on it.
- Learning about the land, the plants and the animals. They develop a sit spot and notice the space. Connecting with Indigenous knowledge keepers and teachers. Make some signage. All students worked to create the signage and drew the pictures. We learned the SENĆOŦEN words. Finding natural ways for students to learn about identifying plants.
- Having a space that children can go back to and be an active part of creating and taking care of it and come back to time and time again. Removing the blackberries.
- Habitat Acquisition Trust (HAT) – planted the plants together. Every year we get mulch delivered from Saanich and the kids and teachers transport the mulch back. They love that hands-on labour that means something and are caring for a space.
- Ways to get involved: Parent volunteers, community connections, grants, school initiatives. The space took a lot of community partners. Connection to a landscaper, plant knowledge, expert leader, mulch – these are all things that are required to keep the places maintained. Maintenance is the key. The kids are super keen and adults supervision is needed. Connect with teacher and admin team at school – here’s an idea.
- We looked into a lot of grants HCP, Go Grant.

Bayside Middle School

- 10% Indigenous students and a lot of outdoor space, much more than other middle schools. Staff are able to access on a daily basis. When fields are mucky Bayside has other places to access.
- Opportunities: lots of great parks (Todd Inlet, easy to walk to, invasive species from school property, Gorr Park and Happy Day Park). Access to spaces within walking distance. 2018 created outdoor classroom.
- SENĆOŦEN class – have a SENĆOŦEN program out of the school. Teacher would take the students out there for drumming. Teachers go to access. For the past 5 years our SENĆOŦEN students, student on-reserve, have gone with knowledge keepers at Goldstream to catch fish. They go to the river and then go to the smoke house that was built in 2017. They learn how to filet it and smoke it. With the salmon that was caught. They didn't catch any salmon this year. The most we've caught is 5 salmon. All students are from Tseycum and Tsartlip and they are allowed to be in the river. Billy Thomas went back to the river and he caught us three salmon. When we do the cutting we invite all the classes and learn about the different parts. Every division got to eat the salmon chowder and fry bread.
- Our home ec teacher, each Home Ec. division sponsors a plot. One is just for native plots. Garden club that is helping to clean up the garden for the fall. We have some landscaping families in our community. When they fall trees they drop a few logs. An adult will supervise and connection of farm to table.
- Through **Victoria foundation** – Geronimo canoe club – Tsartlip two days a week and would Len Morriss – would learn – any student can participate. Welcoming us to their community and being proud. Leaders in that piece. That last two years.
- Question: Royal Oak Middle School is a beautiful school but there's no green space. There's potential, but I'm one person. How did you start it? Over the years it's been different staff and leadership with passion. We talk a lot about how to support our learners. What things of permanence can we put into play? Asking questions, what else can we do to create these? Sometimes it's geography but there are places in the school grounds that kids can't go and that are overgrown with blackberries.
- Question: When outdoor is there more creativity in teaching? A couple French immersion teachers who like to deliver their lessons with that space. Tech free space.

Daniel & Mia – Southern Vancouver Island Nature Trail Society

- We have such a dense population – we have to learn to work with the environment – the best way to be experienced is to be exposed and learn. Trails are an integral part of our nature experiences. Trails are a venue to shape our understanding of the natural environment. Many things we learn in schools can be learned outside in the natural environment.
- Teaching middle school students. Daniel founded the society 8 years ago. When I was hiking, I wouldn't pay much attention to how the trails were made, their impact on the environment. The impact that we are having in combination with climate change is very detrimental.
- The way to change that is to educate youth – they are the next ones to use the trails. Understand the impact of our use, how we maintain them and make them a natural part of our world.

- We designed a 3-day curriculum and delivered to the middle schools. Tried to get into high schools. We have this three day curriculum and we did it for free.
- Power to Be organization allowed us to do the curriculum with their group. Did it with all the middle school students.
- We haven't done the curriculum yet to adapt it to elementary school, but believe it could be. The intention was to teach in the outdoor classroom, teach a little bit indoors and then a bit outdoor.
- It does need to be taught outside. When in the classrooms it was so much harder to keep their attention. There are foundational aspects (trail history, trail safety, impact of trails and how they came to be). How might we teach these through stories to get the same information but not in the traditional classroom. When they are out of the trails the engagement was off the scale. They just want to get out there.
- How to use the tools correctly and being safe. 26 students, 2 teachers and two nature trail staff and a parent. The students learned and were excited.
- We did a portion in the class. We broke the class into two – those who wanted to build and those who wanted to beautify. It was a really nice opportunity to give them different skills and help them understand their impact in maintaining and beautifying the trails.
- The difference in moods with the beginning of the day and the end of the day. They were challenging us – they were so positive.
- There was a study in 2021 – 952 participants – learning something inside, learning something in nature – getting into the forest – surrounded by trees, not the same constructs of building and concrete. They had people learn inside and in nature - 83% of adults reported elevation in the mood in the outside than inside. Asked them questions on the learning inside – when learning in nature – the children always had something positive to add. When inside, they had something challenging to add.
- Would love schools when renovated and when new schools are being built to incorporate an outdoor classroom – you need a classroom you almost need an amphitheatre.
- Volunteer opportunities for high school students – Parkland High has a long list of volunteer opportunities. Nature Trail Society does trail maintenance days (Saturdays) or choose an existing trail and bring that group. Have not reached out to schools to get on that list. Have a volunteer coordinator Lorna – she can be on the mail-out list.
- Program costs involves transportation (\$1,200).
- Volunteering is so much more valuable – impress upon younger people the importance of giving – Start at a younger age of the value they get to volunteering. Working with families – limited time – help youth to understand.

COPACS closing points

- Funding for outdoor infrastructure is complicated by the fact that PACs cannot under support infrastructure costs and the standards and funding for outdoor education through the Ministry of education.
- In 2023, COPACS submitted a number of resolutions relating to nature and climate initiatives. All of the [motions passed](#).

Outdoor classroom infrastructure

Type of Resolution: Ordinary

Resolution Wording:

Be it resolved that the BCCPAC advocate for the Ministry of Education and Childcare support outdoor learning and facilities/infrastructure.

Proposer's Positioning Statement in Supporting the Resolution:

Outdoor learning facilities to 'bring the classroom' outdoors (benches, stumps, covered areas and natural areas) offer [numerous health benefits](#) for children however outdoor classroom infrastructure and natural resources are not consistently available across schools. PACs face challenges in supporting outdoor classroom infrastructure due to the requirement that '[classroom infrastructure be funded by the MofE and childcare](#)'. The BCSTA passed a similar resolution at its 2002 AGM, for the Ministry of Education and Childcare to review its Area Standards for new schools and expansion of existing schools and include guidelines within for covered outdoor learning spaces. The resolution also called for the provision of additional funding in the Annual Facilities Grant so districts can create covered outdoor learning spaces on school sites where they currently do not exist.

Implementers: Ministry of Education, Boards of Education

Interested Parties: BCSTA, BCSSA, BCPVPA, BCTF, CUPE, Evergreen

Biodiversity standards for school grounds

Type of Resolution: Ordinary

Resolution Wording:

Be it resolved that the BCCPAC advocate for the Ministry of Education and Childcare to set standards for tree cover and biodiversity targets for school grounds

Proposer's Positioning Statement in Supporting the Resolution:

Outdoor spaces within school grounds are important extensions of the classroom for learning and play. Outdoor spaces are also important islands of green space for community members and nature. Many schools have sparse tree cover, limited shrubs and plantings due to safety concerns, maintenance limitations and costs. Trees offer shade and cooling benefits and help protect students from harmful ultraviolet radiation ([SunSense](#)). Native plantings offer curriculum tie-ins, reduce flooding risk and require less maintenance and water. A partnered approach/mechanisms is requested to support the creation of these important spaces through coordination with partners that share common mandates. [Initiatives](#) across the country are recognizing school grounds as significant public spaces for learning, play and spaces for habitat restoration, community place making and environmental literacy. ([Climate Ready Schools | Evergreen](#)) and align with Nature based solution

principles engrained within [BC's Climate Preparedness and Adaptation Strategy Actions](#).

Implementers: Ministry of Education, Boards of Education

Interested Parties: BCSTA, BCSSA, BCPVPA, BCTF, CUPE, Evergreen

Supporting healthy school foods and food literacy

Type of Resolution: Ordinary

Resolution Wording:

Be it resolved that BCCPAC advocate to the Ministry of Education and Childcare to support access to healthy foods and food literacy (e.g. supportive policies, curriculum focus and time, funding for equipment and expertise and leveraging strategic partnerships).

Proposer's Positioning Statement in Supporting the Resolution:

Currently the running and funding of healthy school food, food literacy and gardening programs in BC are largely driven by parents, PACS, teachers, and staff volunteers and therefore inconsistently available for children. A focus on healthy foods, food literacy and food production in our schools offers multiple co-benefits including addressing climate change, food security, mental wellness, reconciliation and connection to place and other cultures ([The Research | Coalition for Healthy School Food | Canada](#); <https://www.healthyschoolfood.ca/why-it-matters>). Supporting access to healthy school foods aligns with mandate letters for the Minister of Education and Childcare ([Mandate Letter](#)). Numerous partnerships are developing in BC school districts to support gardening and food production (including [Nanaimo-Ladysmith Public Schools District \(SD 68\)](#) and [Sea to Sky School District \(SD 48\)](#)). Other Canadian provinces are recognizing the importance of this topic (an Ontario [food literacy bill](#) has been introduced to amend the Education Act to ensure that "students are given opportunities to grow food, prepare food and learn about local foods"). [Budget 2023](#) put aside \$214 million over three years to expand existing school food programs and increase capacity to address student hunger in all districts. The program will help school-age children reliably access nutritious food in partnership with the Feed BC program, so that kids can eat healthy, local food and focus on learning.

Implementers: Ministry of Education, Boards of Education, Minister of Agriculture and Food

Interested Parties: BCSTA, BCSSA, BCPVPA, BCTF, CUPE, Coalition for Healthy School Foods, Public Health Association of BC Farm to School BC program, BC Agriculture in the Classroom, Minister of Agriculture and Food

Supporting agricultural visibility and opportunities

Type of Resolution: Ordinary

Resolution Wording:

Be it resolved that BCCPAC advocate the Ministry of Education and Childcare to support the integration of farming into Career prep requirements and educational experiences.

Proposer's Positioning Statement in Supporting the Resolution:

The growing of sustainable local foods is a way to learn about climate change, food insecurity, health and mental wellness and connection to place. Many of Canada's farmers are retiring and the next generation of farmers face many challenges to producing sustainable, quality foods including the high costs of land. The education system has not typically had a lot of content relating to food production. Students need to learn about the technology and innovation in the agriculture sector to appreciate the valuable and dynamic hi-tech jobs available to sustain our domestic food supply. A recent evaluation of the [Young Agrarians Land Matching program](#) found that investments in education is necessary to sustain the farming sector in BC. "Growing new farmers is a complex developmental process that requires strong educational and policy resources" More curriculum, local food experience and visibility of BC food in schools will teach children to understand where their food comes, that food production is valued, and to see farming and agri-technology as an occupational option.

Implementers: Ministry of Education, Boards of Education, Ministry of Agriculture and Food

Interested Parties: BC Agriculture in the Classroom Foundation, BCSTA

- The current work underway is being done off the side of people's desk and is driven by passion and interests. This is making great things happen, but it also means that some schools and students don't benefit from this important learning. Advocacy at provincial and district levels is important.
- The impacts of outdoor education on the health and wellbeing of our children is well documented. The tie-in to our district strategic plan is clear with the 4th goal of global citizenship, though the specific objectives as it relates to climate-related and ecological connections should be more explicitly outlined.
- Investigate opportunities to have nature-based activities for kids who need more physical movement or who may be needing to make amends (hauling mulch, digging blackberries?). Identify nature-based volunteer opportunities that can be added to the list of high school volunteer hour placements.

How can PACs and Parents help?

- Talk to your teacher, admin staff and PAC about outdoor curriculum opportunities. Ask questions and state your interest and the importance of this topic to you.
- Exercise your civic duty and vote.
- Identify and share information on partnerships with other community groups, non-profits and grant opportunities. Some partnership ideas shared included:

- “Pulling together” – invasive species club, 55+ club, a woman who is a registered clinical counselling who does counselling.
- Designate fundraising dollars to supporting outdoor curriculum supplies and resources (native plants, signage, teaching supplies, training)
- Write to the Minister of Education about how this topic is important to your family.
- Get involved in provincial wide efforts at the provincial PAC level (with BCCPAC) or join the COPACS climate work group

How PACs, COPACS, Admin and teachers could work to support and coordinate efforts within schools and district wide

- Have another gathering next year! Invite other educators and parents who are interested
- Share programming, challenges and wise practices across schools
- Invite educators with outdoor curriculum interests and skills to present at your PAC
- Advocate for a garden coordinator/nature-based educator support person.
- Advocate for educator training workshops on trail building and nature-based education
- Shine light on important champions of this work, whether teachers, students or admin by nominating them for [awards](#)
- District wide, map the green space available within and nearest to school grounds for nature based learning. Identify opportunities to open up more school ground space and ease access to nearby off-school space for learning.
- Reinvigorate the district-wide coordinating body or working group for nature-based education advocates and enthusiasts. There is an educator group that will be meeting again, ensure that parents and admin, PACs and educational partners.
- Advocate to the Board of Trustees to outline outdoor learning and climate related activities explicitly within the school strategic plan