

Empowering Students through Climate Education and Outdoor Learning

Purpose

This document outlines the importance of environmental literacy and proposes strategies to integrate climate education and outdoor place-based learning into New Brunswick schools. It also provides recommendations for implementing province-wide, hands-on climate change education programs.

Issue Summary

Environmental literacy among New Brunswick students is inconsistent, and many schools lack access to programs that teach students about climate change and environmental issues through outdoor, real-world experiences (Environment and Climate Change Canada, 2024).

Background and Challenges

- The Conservation Council of New Brunswick, in partnership with Nature NB and NBEN, has been a leader in advancing environmental literacy across the province. Since 2012, these organizations have delivered hands-on, curriculum-linked climate education tailored to individual school needs, creating a deeper understanding of local environmental issues. (CCNB, 2024)
- The "Growing Seeds of Change" project, funded through the Department of Environment and Climate Change Canada (not publicly known; announcement to come), focuses on creating standardized climate education and outdoor learning experiences. It aims to engage 50 schools and 7,500 students throughout New Brunswick. This program is designed to equip young learners with the tools to address the challenges of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution.

- Programs like the Conservation Council's Learning Outside program emphasize hands-on learning in outdoor settings. These programs connect students and their communities while addressing global environmental challenges. These initiatives cultivate critical thinking and stewardship among New Brunswick's youth by linking classroom learning with real-world applications (CCNB, 2024)
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Recommendations

1. Collaborate with environmental organizations to implement standardized, place-based environmental education programs across New Brunswick. This initiative would:
 - Train teachers to deliver engaging, outdoor, curriculum-aligned lessons.
 - Establish outdoor learning spaces to support lessons.
 - Integrate climate education across all subjects, ensuring consistent access for students in all schools through an established partnership with the Conservation Council of New Brunswick and partners.
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Significance and Impact

- Standardized, place-based environmental literacy programs give students the knowledge and skills to address critical issues like climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution (Environment and Climate Change Canada, 2024)
 - Outdoor hands-on learning creates stronger connections between students and their communities while enhancing understanding of local environmental challenges (CCNB, 2024)
 - Collaborating with environmental organizations ensures access to expertise, resources, and programs tailored to meet New Brunswick schools' unique needs (UNESCO, 2019)
 - Teacher training through the Great Minds Think Outside program, of which the Conservation Council is a member, provides educators with the tools and confidence to deliver curriculum-linked outdoor education, ensuring lasting program success (NBEN, 2015)
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Analysis

Impact on Stakeholders and Rightsholders

1. **Students:** Standardized, place-based climate education equips students with the knowledge and skills to tackle pressing environmental challenges. This enhances critical

thinking, fosters a sense of responsibility, and strengthens connections to the natural world (Environment and Climate Change Canada, 2024)

2. **Educators:** Teacher training through the Great Minds Think Outside program provides educators with the tools and confidence to incorporate outdoor learning into existing curricula, ensuring that climate education is accessible, engaging, and effective (NBEN, 2015).
3. **Communities:** By fostering stronger ties between students and their local environments, these programs cultivate community engagement and support for sustainable practices, benefiting municipalities and local organizations (CCNB, 2024)
4. **Policymakers:** Successfully implementing these programs aligns with provincial educational and climate goals, demonstrating leadership and accountability in addressing environmental and societal challenges (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2023).

Risks and Opportunities

Risks:

- Without clear provincial support and funding, access to climate education and outdoor learning may remain inconsistent across schools, leading to unequal student access.
- Resistance from educators unfamiliar with outdoor learning techniques could delay program adoption without sufficient training and resources.

Opportunities:

- Standardized programs create a framework that can be used across the province, ensuring every student can access high-quality environmental education.
- Investing in teacher training and outdoor learning spaces can reduce long-term educational costs by fostering innovative, interdisciplinary teaching methods.
- These programs address climate goals by cultivating an informed, environmentally conscious generation prepared to support sustainable initiatives.

Current Status

Programs like Learning Outside and Great Minds Think Outside support educators and students through hands-on learning opportunities. However, the reach of these programs is limited without province-wide adoption.

The Growing Seeds of Change initiative aims to expand place-based environmental literacy to 50 schools and 7,500 students across New Brunswick, providing a scalable model for future implementation.

Key Contacts

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