

Saanich Schools
Nature Program Working Group
The Nature-Child Reunion



“Passion is lifted from the earth itself by the muddy hands of the young; it travels along grass-stained sleeves to the heart. If we are going to save environmentalism and the environment, we must also save an endangered indicator species: the child in nature.”

— Richard Louv, *Last Child in the Woods*

Our Goal: To increase the amount of daily time that all Saanich Elementary students spend in nature, in order to support and increase mental well-being and academic success.

Our Mission: To design and implement nature-based learning programs that increase time learning in nature and align with the Literacy, Mental Health and Wellness and Indigenous Learner Success goals of the 2022-2027 district strategic plan.

Our First Step: To support all 8 elementary schools in taking learning outdoors by providing schools with 1-2 wonder wagons as a key resource. Please see proposed wonder wagon content list below.

Wonder Wagon Contents

Please do not remove individual items from the wagon! Sign out the wagon on the schedule in the Resource Room. Do not remove the schedule from the Resource Room. Take a look at all items inside the wagon before and after use. **Please replace anything that gets lost, used up, or broken.*

- Magnifying glasses (24)
- Tweezers (24)
- Plastic clipboards (6)
- Pencils (24)
- Pencil Sharpener (1)
- Buckets (16)
- Plastic digging spoons (14)
- Magnifying jars (24 + 3 green)
- Metal bowls (5)
- Metal kitchen utensils (9)
- Waterproof wagon cover (1)
- “Trees” identification booklets (5)
- Teacher supplies bag (1)
 - Masking tape (2)
 - Sharpie (2)
 - Scissors (1)
 - String (1)
 - Band-aids (10) **Replace when used!*
- First Aid Kit (1)
- STEM building cards (1 bin)
- Watering can (1)
- Plastic trays (3)
- Walking rope with handles (1)
- Tarp (1)
- Small white square sheets (4)
- Handheld microscope (1)
- iPhone micro/macro/fisheye lenses & clip (1)

How Can COPACS Support?

COPACS can support by:

- Creating a shared understanding with all PACs around the Nature Program Working Group’s goal, mission and first step plan.
- Ensuring equity across all schools in terms of access to nature spaces and acquisition of key resources, such as the Wonder Wagon

- Researching possible grants and funding available to schools for implementing nature-based programs
- Seeking resource donations for Wonder Wagons from local businesses

How will our working group support schools?

- Mentorship and training for school nature reps
- Ongoing opportunities for professional development
- Ordering and purchasing wagons and wagon resources for schools
- Support in collecting qualitative and quantitative data from teachers' nature-based experiences using the wagons
- Shared Teaching and Learning Resources available on the HUB for ongoing lesson development (e.g. collection of outdoor lessons to accompany the wagon – native plants, Sencoten language learning, Indigenous Principles of learning for place-based instruction, games, etc.)
- Commitment to supporting nature reps at each school to be active in their schools in promoting the use of the Wonder Wagon and collection of data to inform nature program development

What we know from the current research:



spending time in nature, even in a state of inactivity, has been shown to improve recall of information, attention spans, social and motor skills and decrease childhood obesity, depression, stress and learned helplessness. (1)



EEG research has shown the restorative properties of time spent in nature. Exercise in outdoor natural environments produces increased cognitive performance and significantly higher meditative and relaxed states which are retained long after the outdoor exercise/play – the benefits are lasting (1)



Some theorists have suggested that time in nature is a critical factor in healthy emotional, cognitive, and spiritual development (1)



A recent Canadian study suggests that spending time in nature is a protective factor for mental health in young people - as little as half an hour in nature each week reduced girls' prevalence of psychosomatic issues by 24% - depression, irritability, bad temper, feeling nervous, difficulty sleeping, and dizziness, as well as head, stomach and back aches (1).



Children are spending half as much time outdoors as they did 20 years ago (2)



Children who play outside are more physically active, more creative in their play, less aggressive, and show better concentration (2)



Sixty minutes of daily unstructured free play is essential to children's physical and mental health (2)



The most direct route to caring for the environment as an adult is participating in "wild nature activities" before the age of 11 (2).



Spending even a short amount of time outdoors helps children focus for learning (3)

Research:

1. Book: *Nature-Based Therapy*, by Harper, Rose, Segal pp 35-
2. *The National Wildlife Federation*: <https://www.nwf.org/Kids-and-Family/Connecting-Kids-and-Nature>
3. *Children and Nature Network*: <https://www.childrenandnature.org/schools/>
4. Poster – Nature Can Improve Health and Wellbeing
https://www.childrenandnature.org/wp-content/uploads/CNN_NatureImprove_16-10-27_O_newlogo.pdf
5. Poster - Nature Can Improve Academic Outcomes
https://www.childrenandnature.org/wp-content/uploads/CNN_AcademicOutcomes_16-10-27_O_newlogo.pdf