



South Canoe School

Outdoor Learning Program Review

Spring 2025



South Canoe Outdoor Learning Program Review

Student Survey & Interview Feedback

February & March 2025

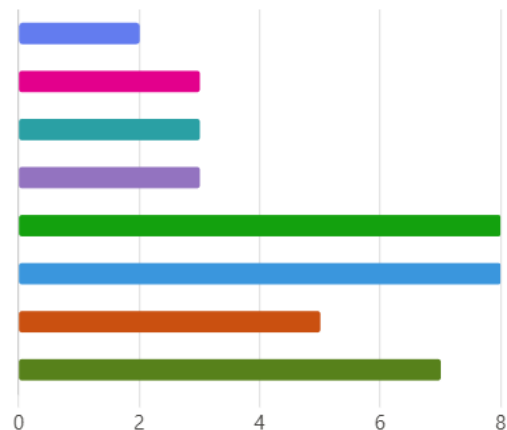
In September of 2018, the South Canoe Outdoor School opened its doors and began its new history as an outdoor learning program in School District 83. South Canoe is nestled in a rural community within the Salmon Arm city limits. The school site is on 5.1 acres of land adjacent to private properties and includes 2 sports fields, a school garden, and forested space. Currently, there are 7 divisions (K-8) with approximately 150 students.

The Outdoor Learning Program is a unique district program, providing students with opportunities to connect with nature, engage in hands-on learning, and develop important skills in an outdoor setting. To ensure the program continues to meet the needs of our students and school community, a comprehensive program review was conducted in February and March 2025. This process included gathering feedback from students, staff, and families through surveys and interviews to assess strengths, identify areas for improvement, and explore new opportunities for growth. By gathering feedback from all stakeholders, the goal is to enhance the program and create the best possible outdoor learning experience for our students.

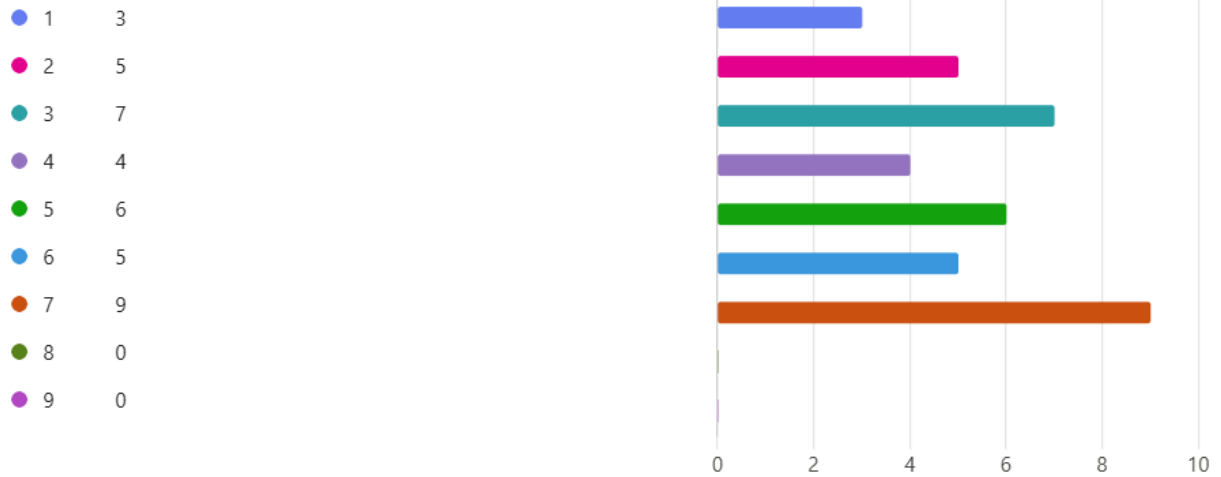
Jennifer Findlay, Director of Instruction – Early Years & Elementary, conducted in-person interviews with 39 students. All students in the senior Grade 7/8 class were invited to be interviewed (12 students chose to do so) and then a sampling of students from the remaining classes participated in the interview process.

Grade Level of Students Interviewed

● Grade 1	2
● Grade 2	3
● Grade 3	3
● Grade 4	3
● Grade 5	8
● Grade 6	8
● Grade 7	5
● Grade 8	7

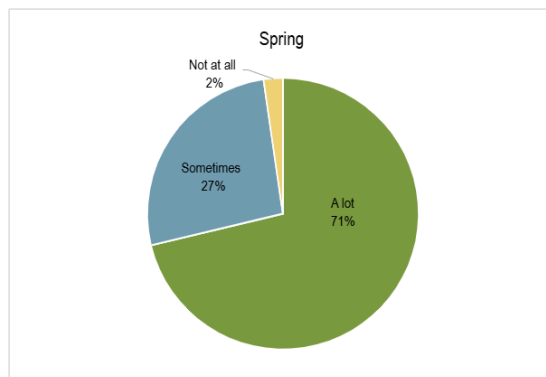
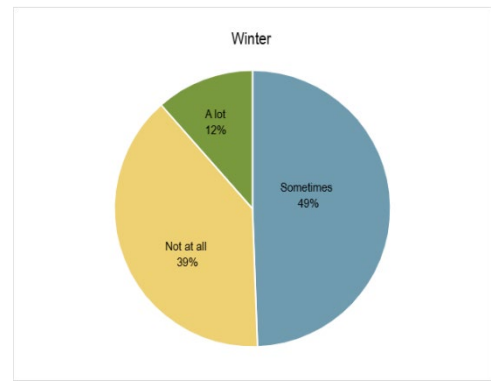
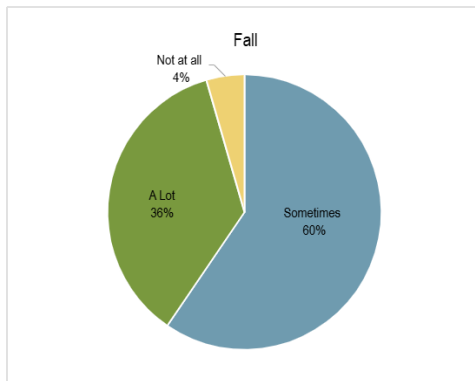


Numbers of Years Interviewed Students Have Attended South Canoe School

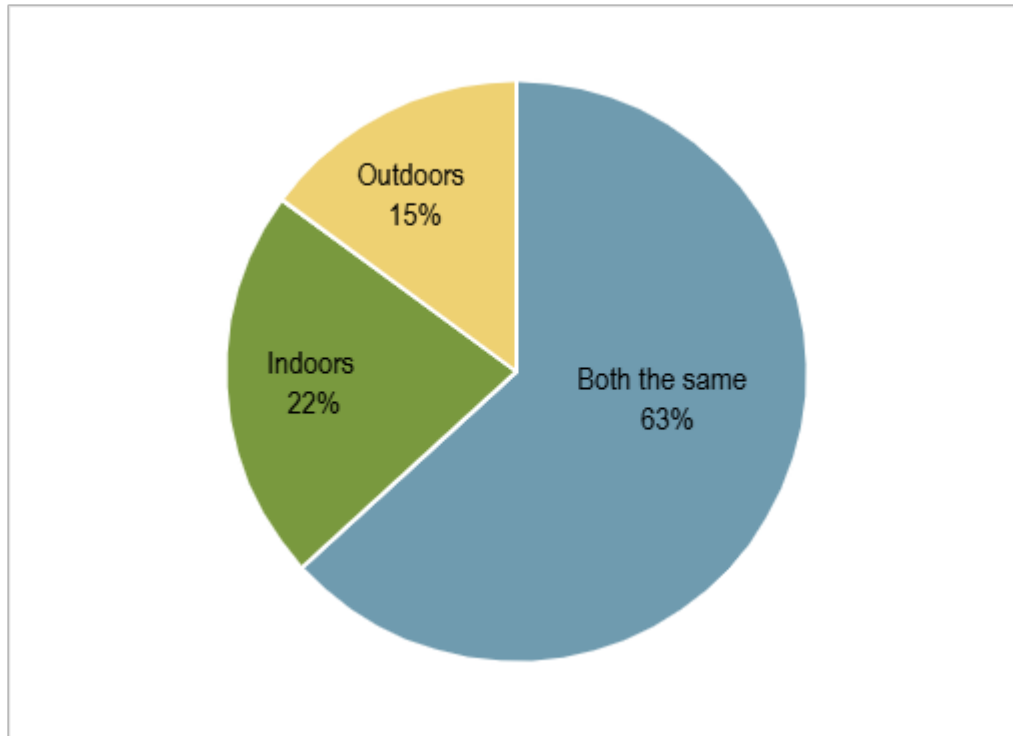


In addition to the 39 in-person student interview responses, Sandra Major, Principal, facilitated paper surveys for 87 students in Grade 1 to 6. The collated information in this report includes information collected from both the student interviews and paper surveys.

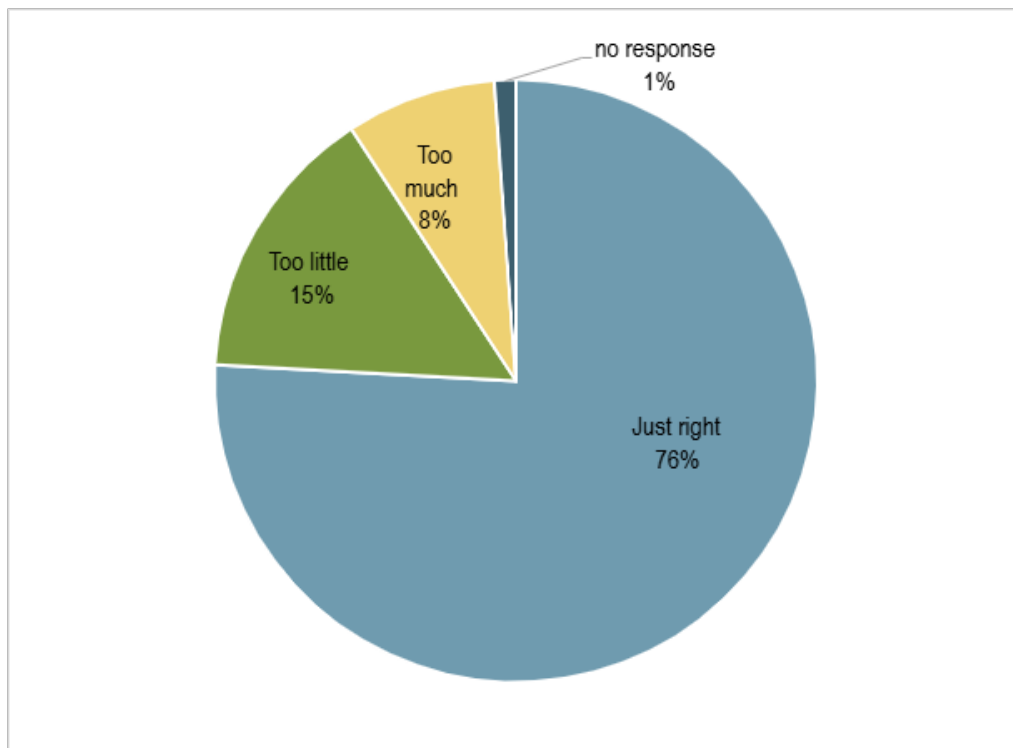
How much do you like learning outside during the different seasons?



Do you prefer learning indoors or outdoors?

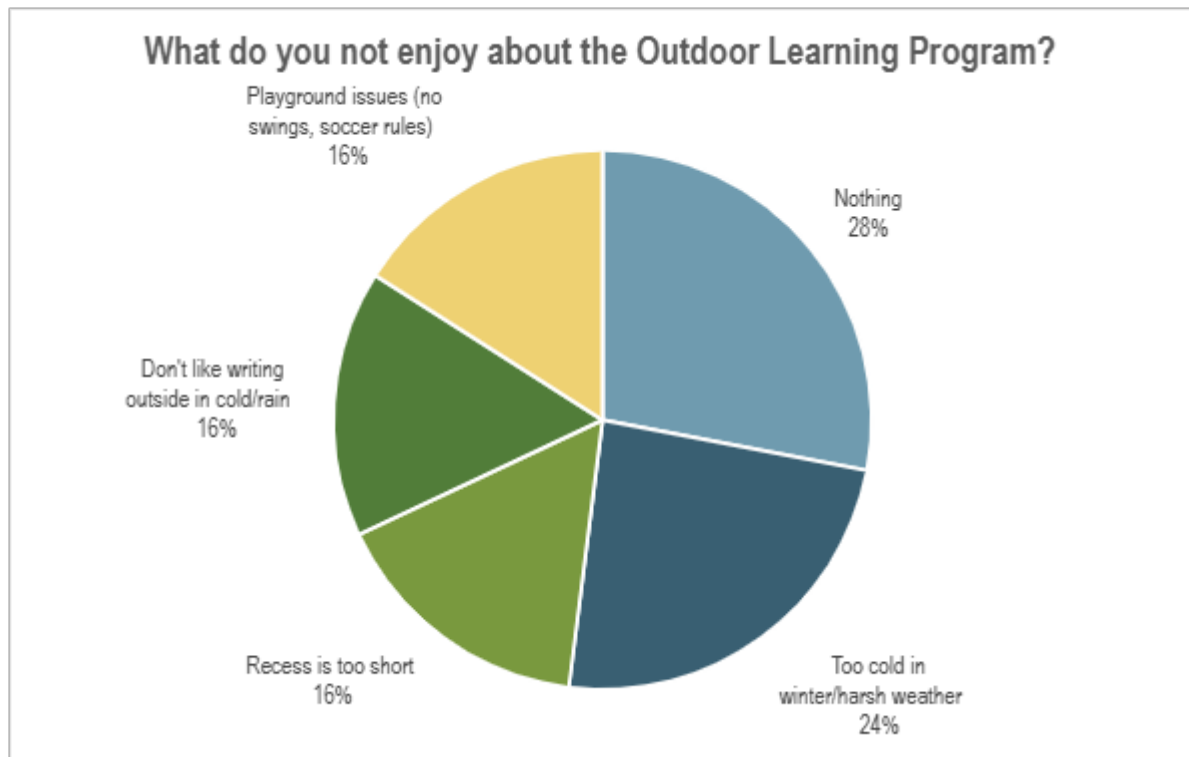


How do you feel about the amount of time spent learning outdoors?

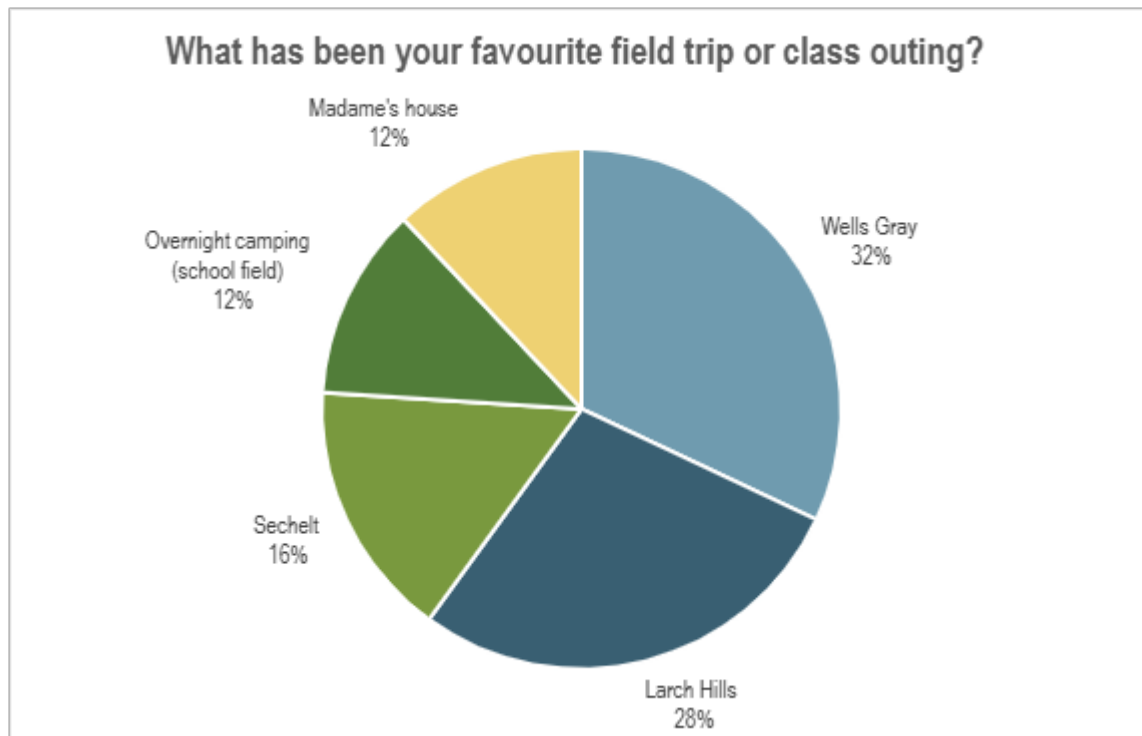




Students enjoy the Outdoor Learning Program for a variety of reasons, with the most common being the opportunity to spend time outside, participate in outdoor activities, and explore nature. Many appreciate the large outdoor spaces, including the forest, fields, and playground, which provide opportunities for games, fort-building, and physical activity. Field trips are a highlight for many, as well as the ability to learn in an open environment rather than being confined to a classroom. Students also value their teachers and CEAs, describing them as supportive and helpful. Additionally, the fresh air, recess time, and the chance to engage in hands-on learning about nature and wildlife contribute to the positive experience.



The most common concern among students about the Outdoor Learning Program is being outside in extreme weather conditions, particularly during the cold winter months. Many dislike writing outside when it is too cold, rainy, or snowy, as it makes it difficult to work comfortably. Some students also feel that outdoor time is excessive, especially when they are required to be outside even in harsh conditions. Others mention issues with the playground, noting that it is too small and lacks swings. Additionally, some students feel that recess is too short, and a few express concerns about shared bathrooms and certain school rules, particularly those related to soccer. However, several students stated that they have no complaints about the program.



The most popular field trip among students was the Wells Gray trip, with many mentioning it as their favorite outing, particularly in Grades 4 and 5. The Sechelt trip was also highly rated, with students enjoying the opportunity to meet pen pals and spend time with friends. Trips to Larch Hills for cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, and the Pirate Loppet, were also favourites, especially for those who enjoyed winter activities. Other memorable outings included the overnight camping trip on the upper field, visits to the Science Museum and RJ Haney, and unique experiences like going to the climbing gym and to Madame's house. While most students had a favourite trip, a few mentioned that none of them stood out.

The majority of students indicated that their parents made the decision for them to attend South Canoe Outdoor School. However, most of them also stated that they would choose to stay, citing reasons such as enjoying the outdoor environment, having friends at the school, and appreciating the unique learning opportunities. A few students mentioned that they transferred to the South Canoe Outdoor School due to space limitations at other schools or because their previous school was not a good fit.



The most common suggestion for improving the Outdoor Learning Program was adding swing sets, which many students felt were missing from the playground. Others wanted a larger outdoor basketball court, additional gym equipment, and more space for sports. Some students requested more variety in field trips, including indoor options like climbing gyms and movie theaters. Several mentioned wanting more recess time, sledding opportunities, and clubs beyond basketball and the library club. There were also calls for more fort-building supplies, leadership opportunities, and stricter enforcement of rules regarding behavior. A few students suggested increasing academic rigor and reducing split classes, while others wanted a quiet space for learning. Some also mentioned a need for gender-specific bathrooms, longer basketball seasons, and the ability to warm up inside during extremely cold weather.

At the end of the interviews, the majority of students had no additional comments, suggestions, or questions at the end of the survey. However, a few expressed a desire for more flexibility with rules and the removal of the morning circle, suggesting it could be done over announcements instead. The most common additional request was for a swing set, which was mentioned multiple times.

Key Findings from Student Surveys and Interviews

1. Positive Aspects:

- **Outdoor Activities:** Students enjoy spending time outside, participating in activities, and exploring nature. The large outdoor spaces, including forests and fields, are highly appreciated.
- **Field Trips:** Memorable outings such as the Wells Gray trip, Sechelt trip, and Larch Hills trips are highlights for many students.
- **Supportive Staff:** Teachers and CEAs are valued for their support and helpfulness.
- **Hands-On Learning:** Opportunities to learn about nature and wildlife in an outdoor environment are well-received.

2. Student Concerns:

- **Extreme Weather:** Discomfort during cold, rainy, or snowy conditions is a common concern. Writing outside in harsh weather is particularly challenging.
- **Playground:** The playground area is considered too small (especially the basketball area) and is lacking swings.
- **Recess Time:** Some students feel recess is too short and concerns around certain school rules, especially related to soccer, were noted.

3. Suggestions for Improvement by Students:

- **Playground Enhancements:** Adding swing sets and expanding the outdoor basketball court.
- **Field Trip Variety:** Including more indoor options like climbing gyms and movie theaters.
- **Additional Activities:** More recess time, sledding opportunities, a longer basketball season, and clubs beyond basketball and the library club.
- **Academic and Structural Changes:** Increasing academic rigor, reducing split classes, and providing quiet learning spaces.

Conclusion

The South Canoe Outdoor Learning Program is highly valued by students for its unique outdoor learning opportunities and supportive environment. Addressing concerns related to extreme weather, playground facilities, and recess time, along with incorporating student suggestions, will further enhance the program's effectiveness and student satisfaction.

South Canoe Outdoor Learning Program Review

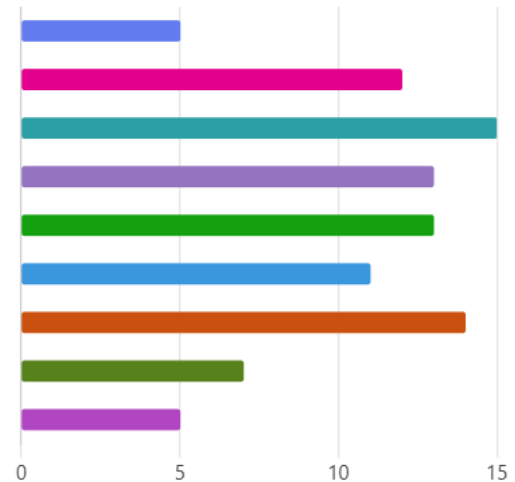
Family Survey Feedback

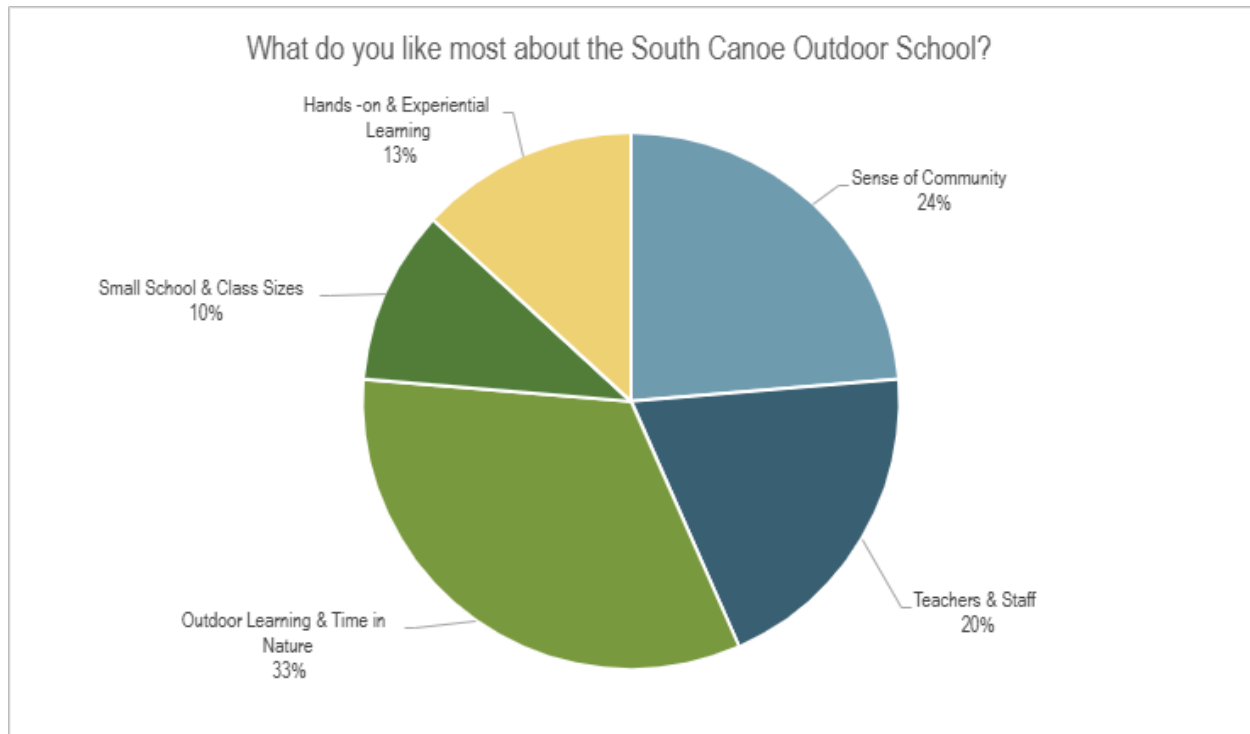
February 2025

All South Canoe School families were invited to complete an online, anonymous survey during the month of February 2025. This report is based on the 63 survey responses that were received and collated by Jennifer Findlay, Director of Instruction – Early Years & Elementary.

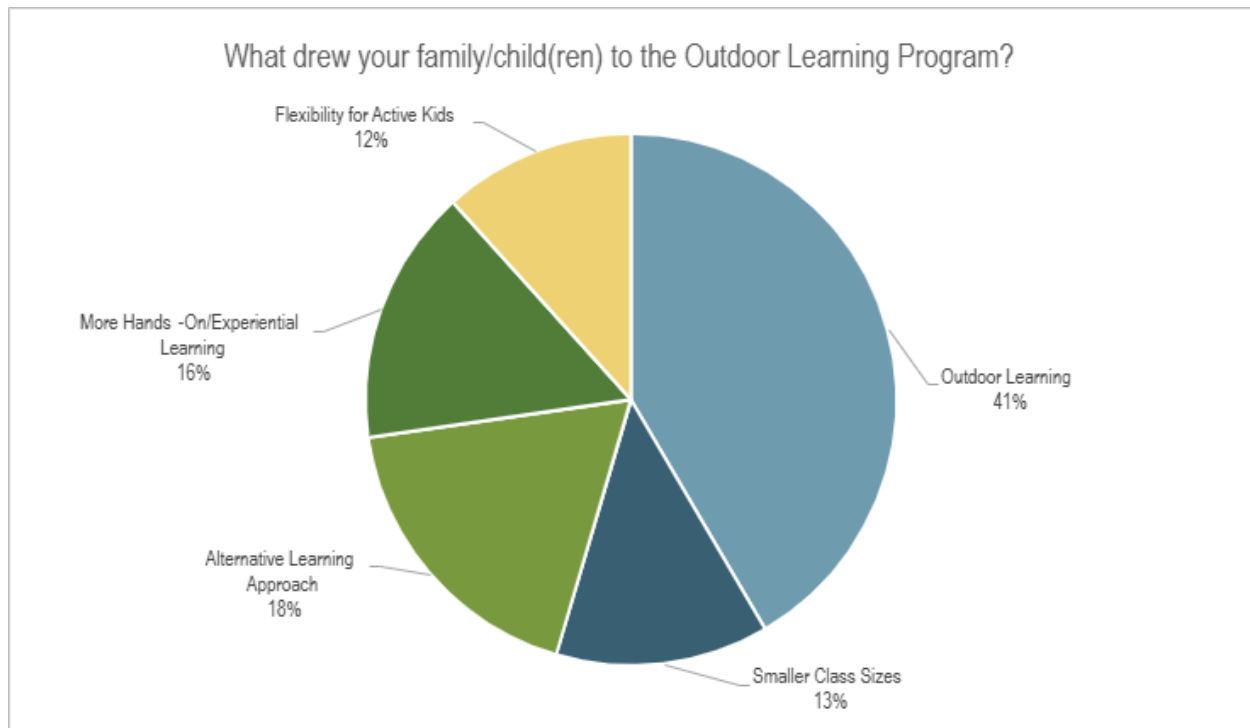
Grade Levels of Students of Family Survey Respondents

Kindergarten	5
Grade 1	12
Grade 2	15
Grade 3	13
Grade 4	13
Grade 5	11
Grade 6	14
Grade 7	7
Grade 8	5



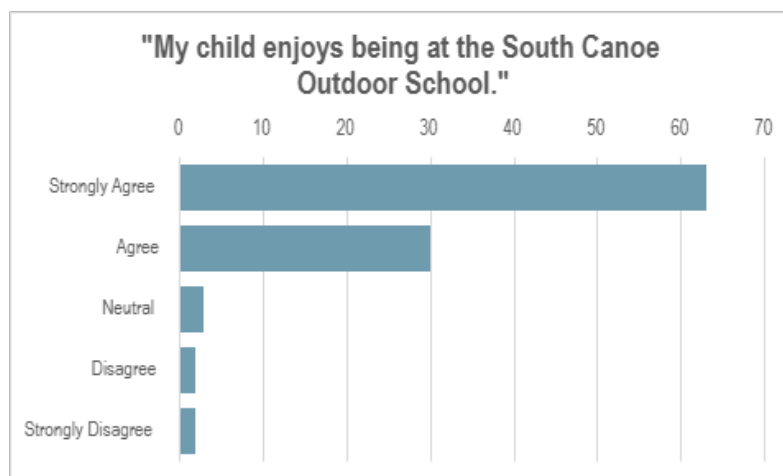


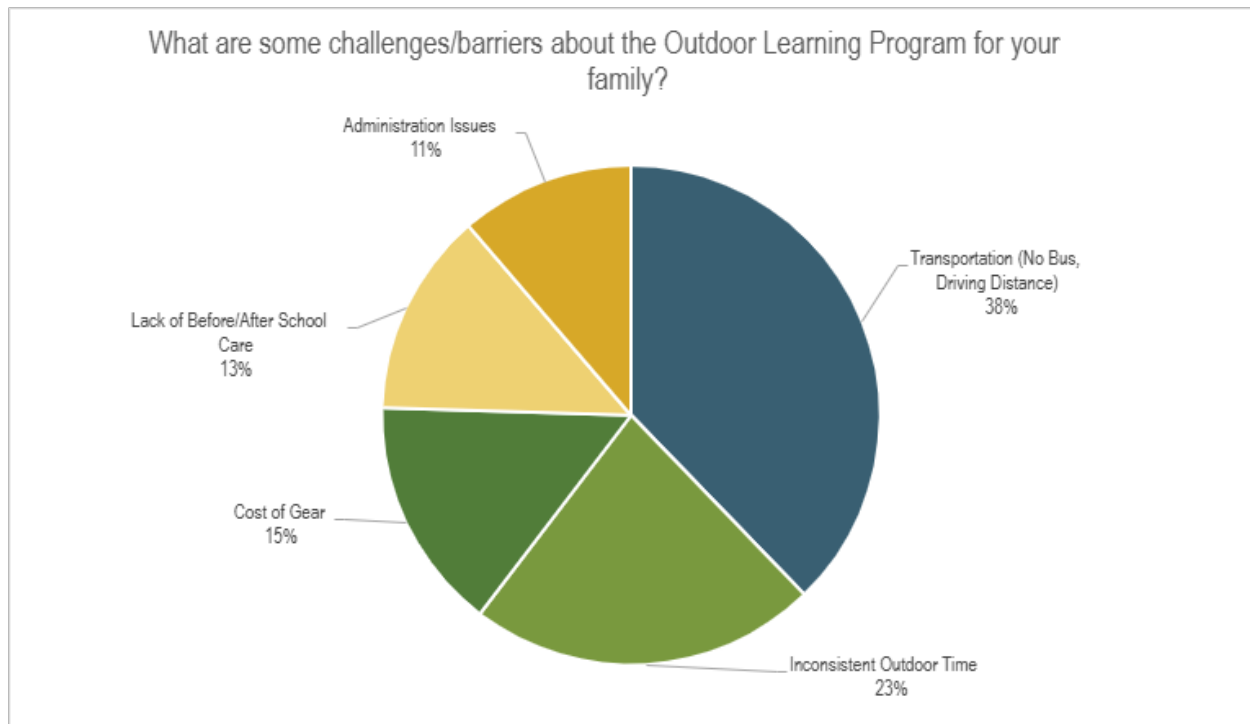
The South Canoe Outdoor School is highly valued for its strong sense of community, dedicated teachers, and unique approach to outdoor learning. Parents appreciate the opportunity for their children to spend significant time outside, engaging in hands-on, nature-based education that fosters resilience, creativity, and well-being. Many feel that the multi-age classrooms and experiential learning methods create a close-knit and supportive environment where children thrive academically, emotionally, and socially. The integration of sustainability, stewardship, and real-world learning experiences—such as field trips, nature walks, and practical skill-building—further enhances students' connection to their environment. Many families also highlight the exceptional staff, the collaborative spirit between teachers and parents, and the inclusive, child-centered philosophy that makes South Canoe a truly special place to learn and grow.



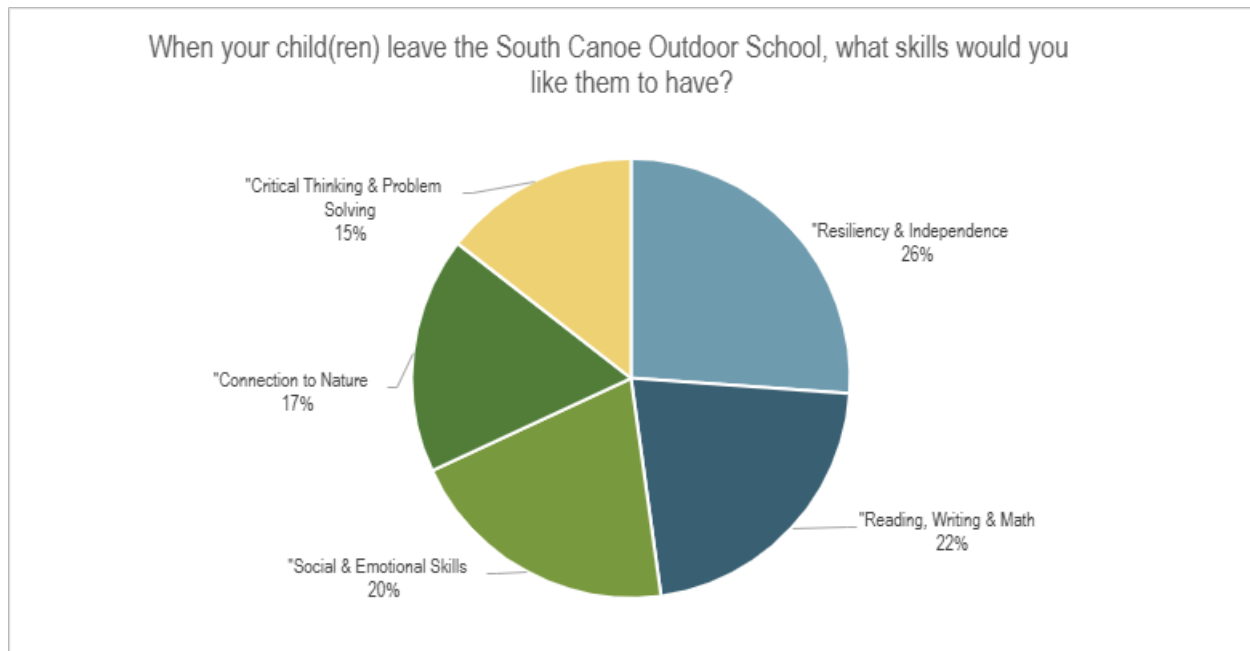
Families were drawn to the Outdoor Learning Program for its emphasis on nature-based, experiential education that allows children to learn outside traditional classroom settings. Many sought a flexible, hands-on approach that fosters curiosity, resilience, and a deep connection to the environment. The perception of smaller class sizes, a strong sense of community, and the opportunity for children to move freely and engage in active learning were key factors. Some families were inspired by the school's philosophy, Indigenous knowledge integration, and real-world learning experiences. Others chose the program to support children who struggled in conventional school settings or to provide a healthier, more balanced education aligned with their values. Ultimately, the appeal of outdoor learning, combined with passionate teachers and an inclusive environment, made the program an ideal choice for many families.

Responses to the prompt:





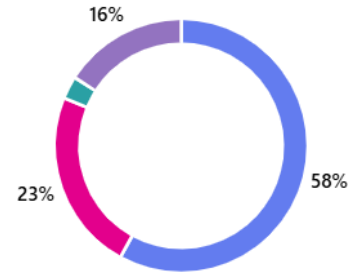
Families identified several challenges with the Outdoor Learning Program, with transportation being the most common issue. Many parents expressed difficulty in coordinating daily drop-offs and pick-ups due to the lack of bus service. Some also noted the need for before- and after-school care to make the program more accessible. The cost of appropriate outdoor gear and concerns about gear frequently getting lost were mentioned as financial and logistical barriers. A few parents highlighted inconsistencies in outdoor time depending on the teacher, as well as a need for more structured support for children with learning differences. Additionally, weather challenges, particularly in winter, were noted as an occasional obstacle. While some families experienced difficulties with administrative leadership and communication, others found that the supportive school community helped mitigate certain barriers.



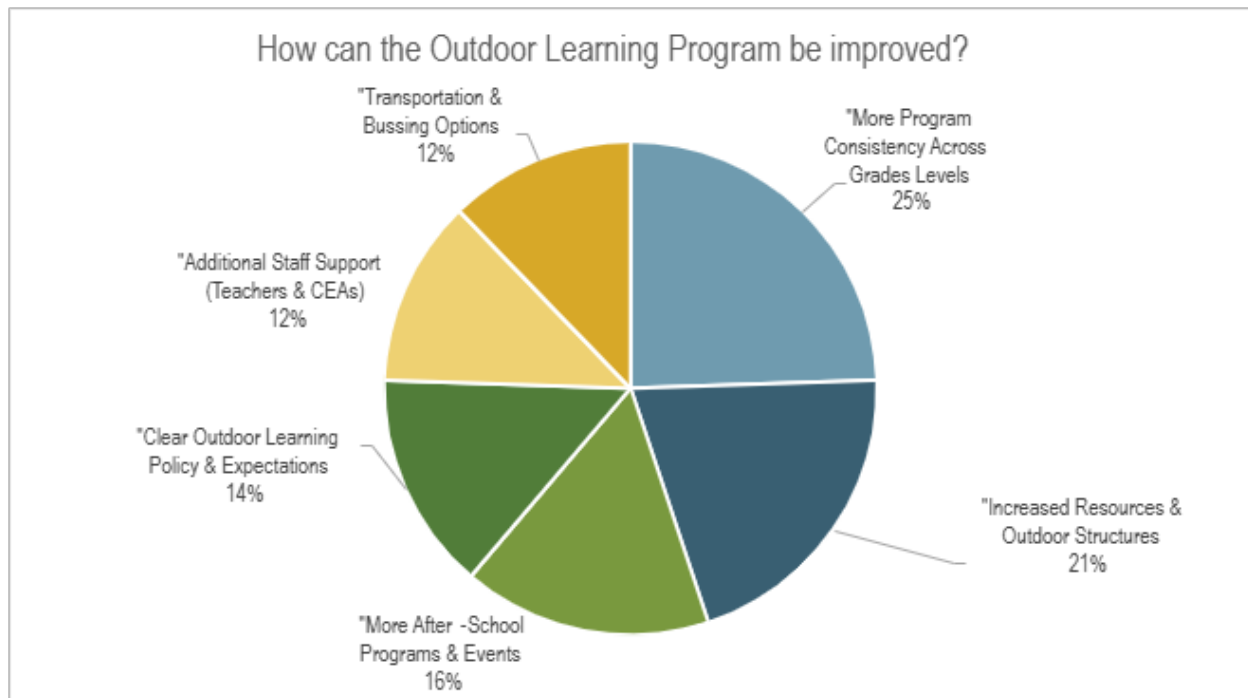
Parents expressed a strong desire for their children to leave the South Canoe Outdoor School with a well-rounded set of skills that include academic proficiency, social-emotional intelligence, and a deep connection to nature. Many emphasized the importance of reading, writing, and math while also valuing practical life skills such as gardening, cooking, and outdoor survival. Resilience, independence, problem-solving, and critical thinking were frequently mentioned as key traits they hope their children develop. A strong sense of community, empathy, and respect for both people and the environment were also highlighted as essential outcomes. Additionally, parents want their children to have a solid understanding of Indigenous knowledge, sustainability, and outdoor safety, ensuring they are well-prepared for future challenges both academically and in life.

How Do Parents Feel About the Amount of Time Spent Learning Outdoors?

● There is a good balance between outdoor and indoor learning.	40
● Too much time is spent learning indoors.	16
● Too much time is spent learning outdoors.	2
● Other	11

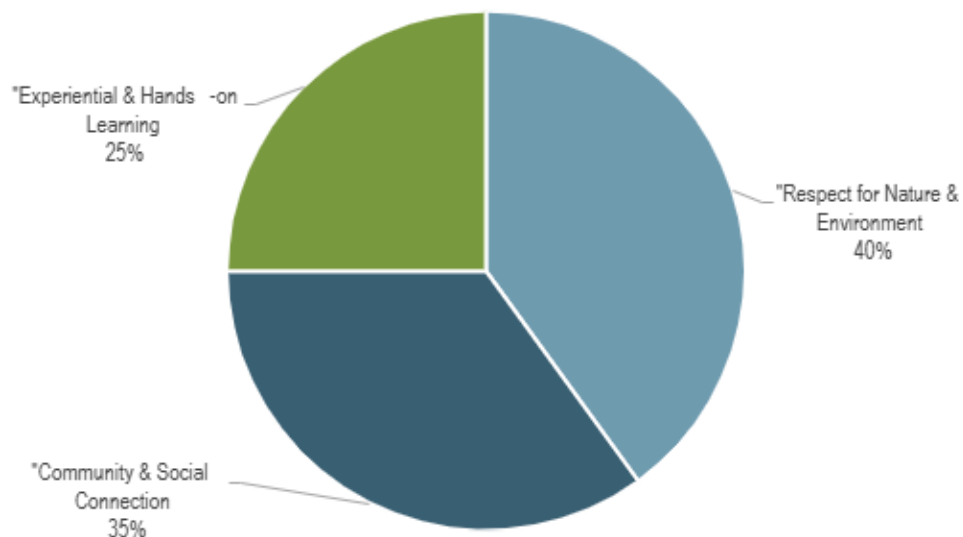


The majority of respondents feel that there is a good balance between outdoor and indoor learning at South Canoe Outdoor School. However, several noted that the amount of outdoor learning can vary depending on the teacher, with some classes spending more time outside than others. Some felt that compared to previous years, there has been a shift toward more indoor learning, while others believed the balance is improving based on weather conditions. A few respondents suggested that outdoor learning should be more consistent across all grades and classes, ensuring that all students benefit equally from the program. Overall, while most are satisfied with the balance, others feel that the school could better align with its outdoor focus.



The survey responses highlight several key areas for improving the Outdoor Learning Program. Many parents and guardians express a desire for greater consistency in outdoor learning time across grades and teachers, with clearer expectations on how much time students will spend outside. There is also a strong call for increased infrastructure, including outdoor shelters, more resources, and expanded playgrounds to support year-round outdoor learning. Some respondents emphasize the need for additional staff, CEAs, and teacher training to enhance the program's effectiveness. Transportation challenges, including the need for a bussing system, were frequently mentioned as barriers for some families. A sense of declining community involvement was noted, with suggestions for more parent engagement, school events, and after-school activities. Additionally, respondents advocate for more inclusivity, better support for children with learning differences, and a deeper integration of Indigenous knowledge and cultural awareness. Overall, while many appreciate the program's strengths, they seek structural improvements, clearer communication, and a more uniform approach to outdoor education.

Top 3 Priorities/Beliefs of the Outdoor Learning Program



The top priorities for an Outdoor Learning Program, as reflected in the survey responses, revolve around three key themes: respect, connection to community, and experiential learning. Many respondents emphasized the importance of respect—for nature, for one another, and for the community, fostering kindness, inclusion, and stewardship of the environment. A strong connection to nature was seen as essential, with a focus on sustainability, outdoor exploration, and learning resilience in various weather conditions. Lastly, experiential and hands-on learning was highlighted as a crucial component, integrating outdoor experiences with core academic subjects, real-world skills, and problem-solving. The overarching belief is that outdoor learning should balance academic excellence with life skills, environmental responsibility, and a strong sense of community.

The survey responses reflect a deep appreciation for the Outdoor Learning School, with many parents expressing gratitude for the program, the staff's dedication, and the unique opportunities it provides for students. However, several concerns emerged, particularly regarding the amount of outdoor learning time, with some parents noting a shift away from the original vision of primarily outdoor education. There is a strong desire for greater consistency and structure in implementing outdoor learning, clearer communication about expectations, and support for teachers to effectively deliver the curriculum in an outdoor setting. Some respondents also highlighted the need for an outdoor high school option to help students transition smoothly from this program. Additionally, there were suggestions for more community-building events, better outdoor infrastructure (such as shelters and work tables), and ensuring that staff are fully committed to the outdoor learning philosophy. Overall, the feedback underscores both the strengths of the program and areas where improvements could enhance its alignment with its foundational principles.

Key Findings from Parent Surveys

1. Positive Aspects:

- **Community and Staff:** Families value the strong sense of community, dedicated staff, and the collaborative spirit between staff and parents.
- **Outdoor Learning:** The opportunity for children to spend significant time outside, engaging in hands-on, nature-based education that fosters resilience, creativity, and well-being is highly appreciated.
- **Experiential Learning:** Integration of sustainability, stewardship, and real-world learning experiences such as field trips and nature walks enhances students' connection to their environment.

2. Challenges for Families:

- **Transportation:** Difficulty in coordinating daily drop-offs and pick-ups due to the lack of bus service is a common issue.
- **Outdoor Gear:** The cost and frequent loss of appropriate outdoor gear are financial and logistical barriers.
- **Weather Conditions:** Extreme weather, particularly in winter, poses occasional obstacles.
- **Consistency:** Inconsistencies in outdoor time depending on the teacher and the need for more structured support for children with learning differences were noted.

3. Suggestions for Improvement by Families:

- **Infrastructure:** Increased outdoor shelters, more resources, and expanded playgrounds to support year-round outdoor learning.
- **Staff and Training:** Additional staff support and teacher training to enhance the program's effectiveness.
- **Transportation:** Implementation of a bussing system to alleviate transportation challenges.
- **Community Engagement:** More parent engagement, school events, and after-school activities to strengthen community involvement.
- **Inclusivity:** Better support for children with learning differences and deeper integration of Indigenous knowledge and cultural awareness.

Conclusion

The South Canoe Outdoor Learning Program is highly valued by families for its unique outdoor learning opportunities and supportive environment. Addressing challenges related to transportation, outdoor gear, and consistency in outdoor learning time, along with incorporating family suggestions, will further enhance the program's effectiveness and family satisfaction.

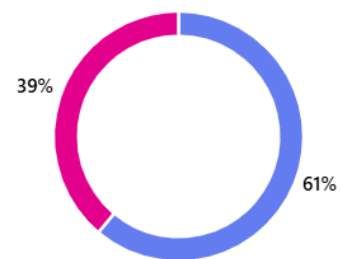
South Canoe Outdoor Learning Program Review

Staff Survey Feedback

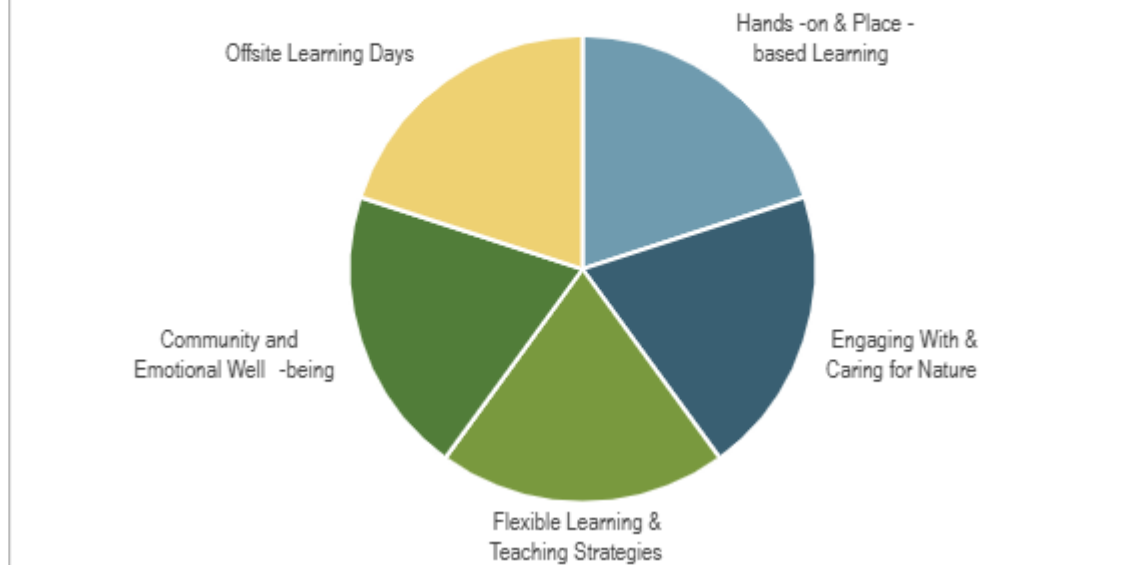
March 2025

All South Canoe School staff were invited to complete an online survey during the month of March 2025. This report is based on the 18 survey responses that were received and collated by Jennifer Findlay, Director of Instruction – Early Years & Elementary.

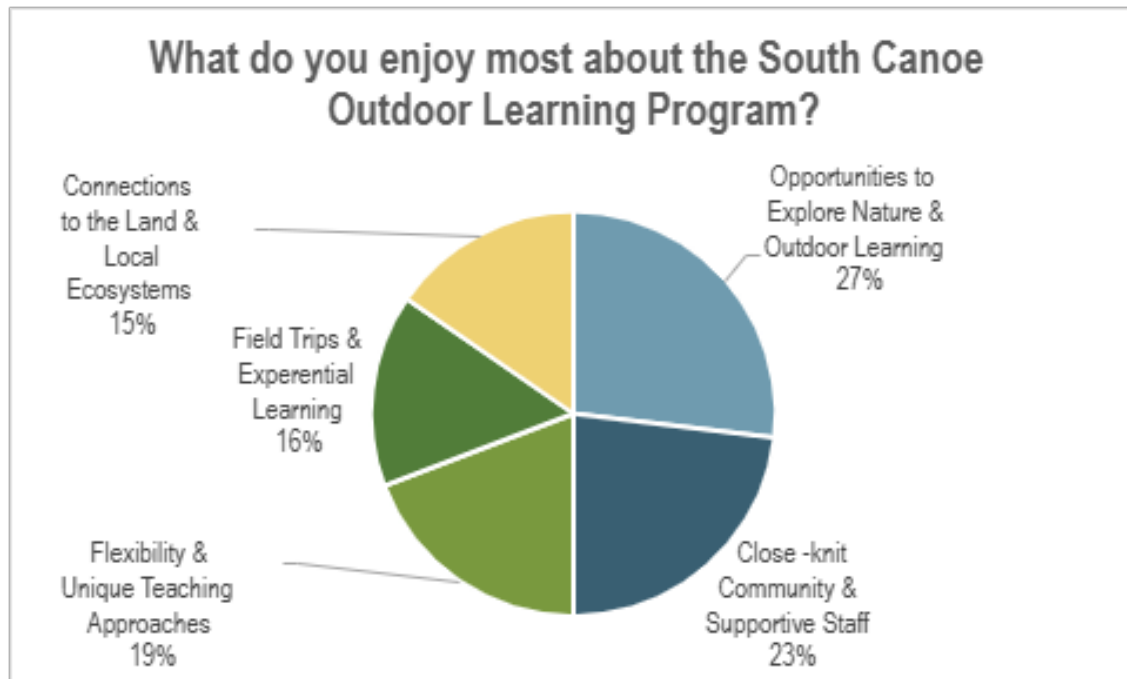
● Teacher/Principal	11
● Support Staff (CEA, ECE, IEW, Clerical, Custodial, etc.)	7



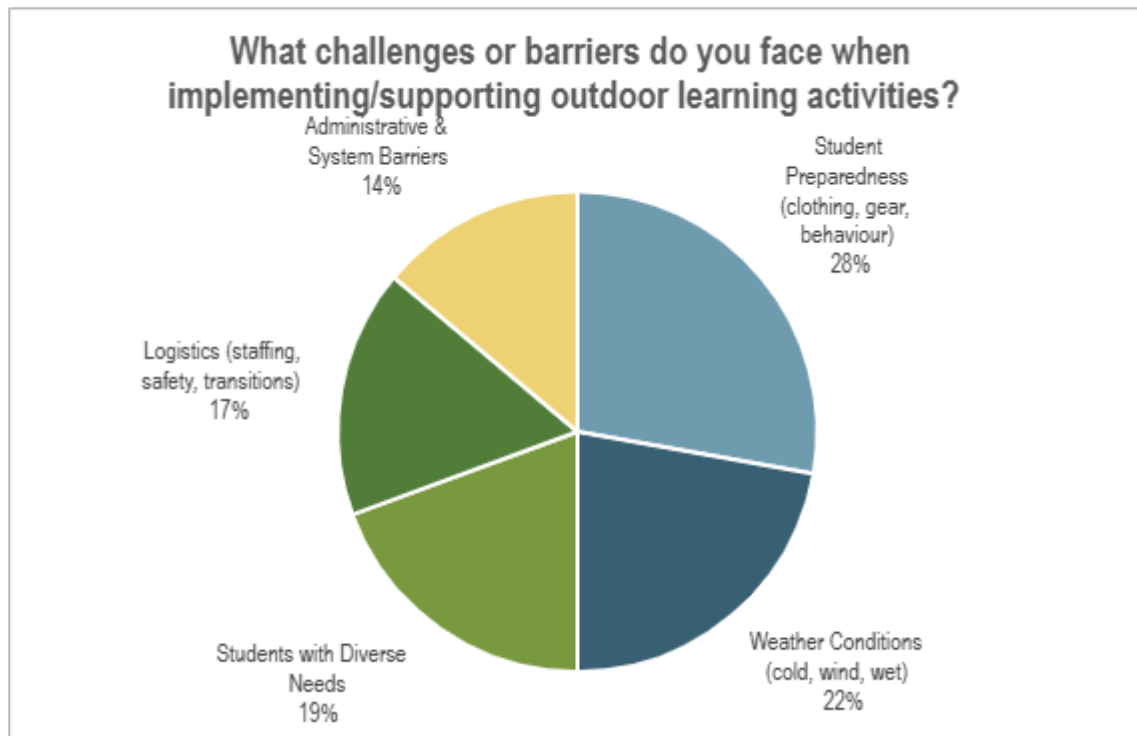
What aspects of the South Canoe Outdoor Learning Program do you feel are most successful or impactful?



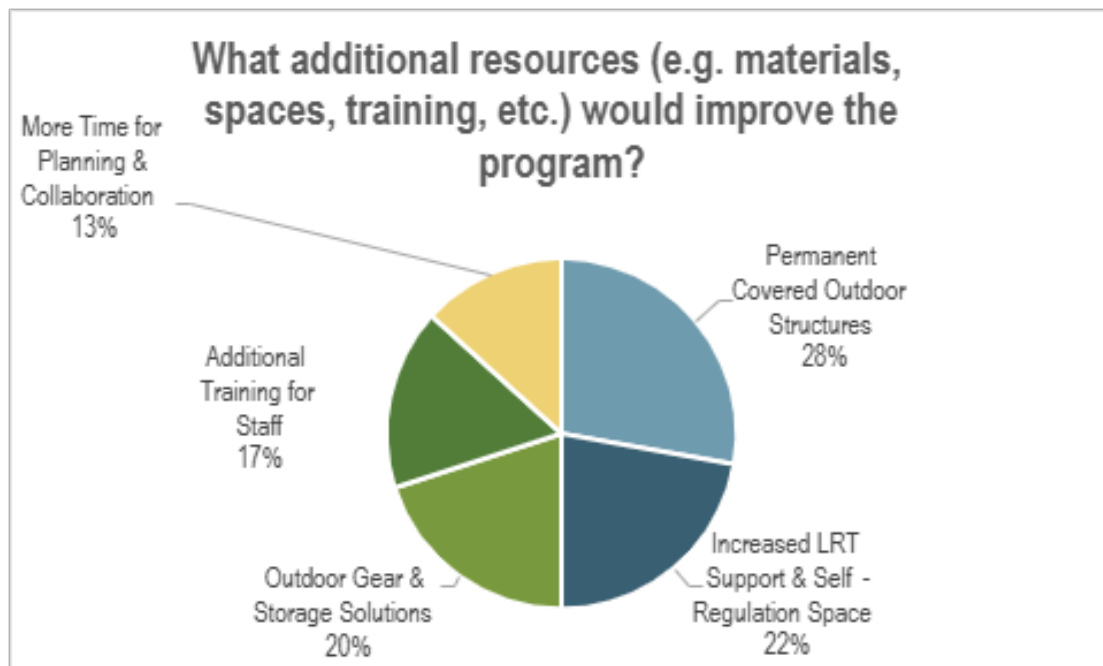
The South Canoe Outdoor Learning Program is highly valued for its ability to inspire students to engage with and appreciate the natural world while fostering a sense of environmental responsibility. Many respondents highlighted the benefits of outdoor learning in regulating children's well-being and allowing for flexible, student-centered approaches such as independent and project-based learning. The strong sense of community within the school was also emphasized, with many appreciating the supportive environment that helps students feel safe and connected. Off-site learning opportunities and access to diverse natural environments were frequently noted as impactful, providing hands-on experiences that enrich students' understanding of the world around them. Overall, the program is praised for its unique and immersive approach to education, which blends academic learning with real-world exploration and environmental stewardship.



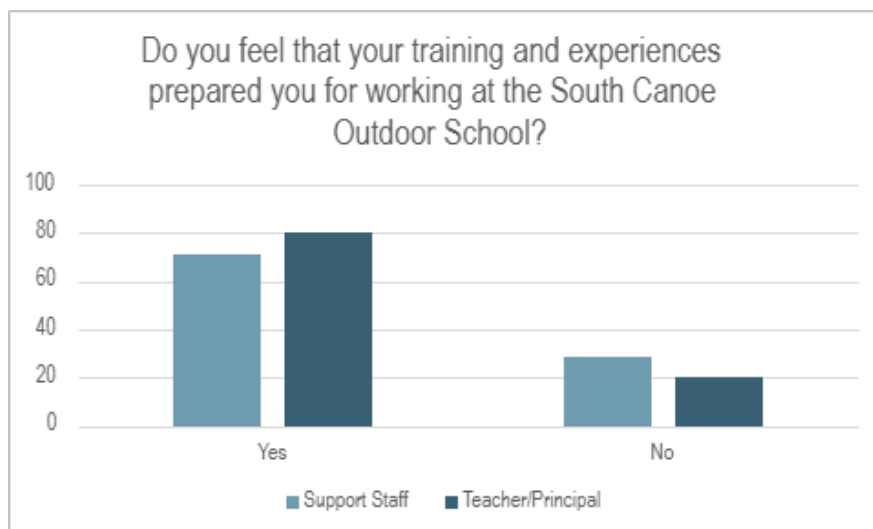
The most enjoyable aspects of the South Canoe Outdoor Learning Program, as highlighted by staff, include the strong sense of community and the deep connections formed between staff, students, and nature. Many appreciate the opportunities for outdoor exploration, hands-on learning, and field trips that immerse students in the natural world. The flexibility of the program allows for experiential and inquiry-based teaching, fostering critical thinking and a respect for the environment. Staff and families value the program's unique approach to education, which encourages creativity, resilience, and a love for learning. The supportive and passionate staff, along with the inspiring outdoor setting, contribute to a positive and fulfilling learning environment.



The primary challenges faced in implementing and supporting outdoor learning activities revolve around student preparedness, logistical constraints, and environmental factors. Many educators struggle with students arriving without proper outdoor gear, making it difficult for them to engage in learning, particularly in unpredictable weather conditions. Additionally, a high number of students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and diverse needs require additional support, which some staff feel is often limited due to staffing constraints. Logistical barriers, such as transitioning between indoor and outdoor spaces, lack of adequate facilities outdoors like washrooms, and increased planning demands, add to the complexity of outdoor learning. Some educators also feel restricted by administrative and systemic regulations, which can make it difficult to implement unique learning opportunities. Despite these obstacles, many staff remain committed to outdoor learning, finding creative ways to adapt and advocate for better support.



Staff identified several key resources that would enhance the outdoor learning program. The most common request was for permanent outdoor structures to provide shelter from rain, snow, and sun, allowing for more consistent learning experiences in all weather conditions. Many also emphasized the need for additional Learning Resource Teacher (LRT) support and a dedicated space for students who need to self-regulate. Improved access to outdoor gear, including spare clothing for students, was another priority to ensure all students are properly equipped. Respondents also highlighted the need for specialized training in outdoor learning, how to incorporate the BC curriculum in an outdoor learning environment, and strategies for supporting neurodiverse students. Lastly, increased funding for materials, bussing, and outdoor learning tools, such as portable desks and waterproof storage, was seen as essential for improving the program's effectiveness.



What supports, professional development, or resources would help you in the following areas?

Leading Outdoor Learning Activities

Supports	Professional Development	Resources
In-class support from an outdoor learning expert (e.g. beginning-of-year Pro-D, follow-up sessions)	Having outdoor learning facilitators like Megan Zeni lead ProD sessions	Field equipment (magnifiers, clipboards, binoculars)
Support for students with diverse needs in an outdoor learning environment	Age-appropriate ProD for colder month activities	Online lessons, units, and activity ideas; animal safety
Support with managing group behavior/distractions outdoors	SFU GDP program and OCC Instructor course options for interested staff	Resources for outdoor art: watercolour, sketching, natural dyes
	Training to support school-wide ecoliteracy and daily nature routines (Coyote Mentoring)	Outdoor shelters; waterproof & reusable supplies

Teaching Foundational Skills (Literacy & Numeracy)

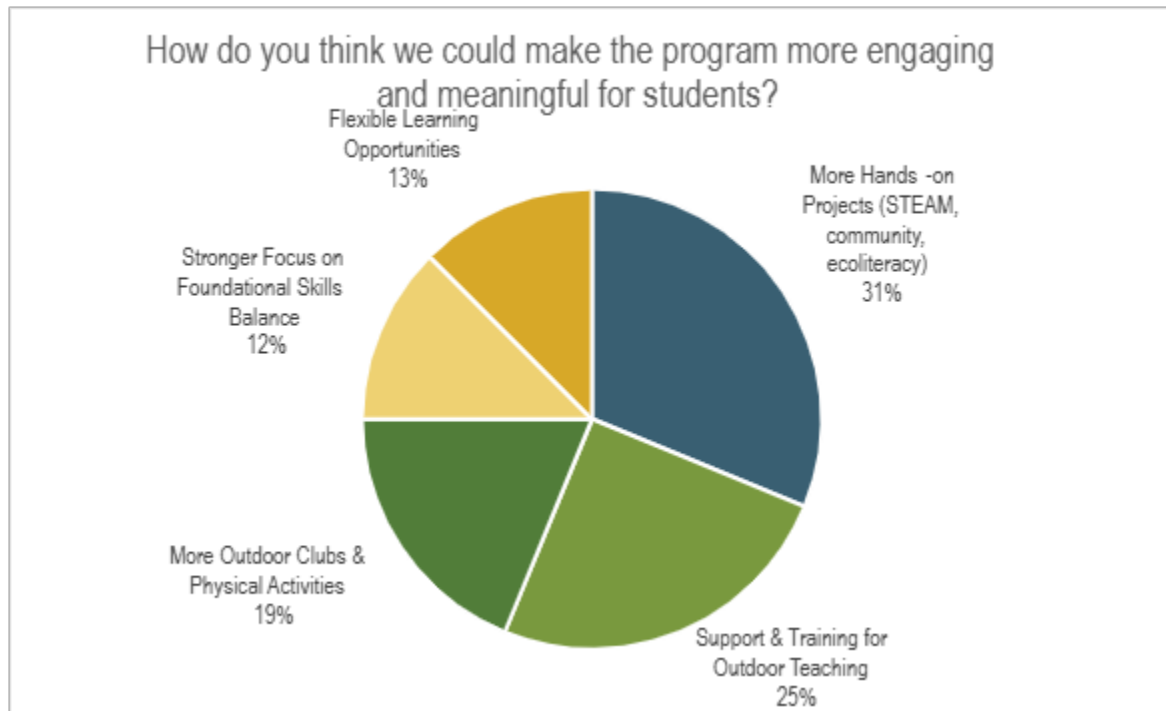
Supports	Professional Development	Resources
Support to assist diverse learners with literacy and numeracy	UFLI training, interest in learning about SD83 literacy programs	Grab-and-go materials for indoor/outdoor use
Time to collaborate with teachers and plan lessons/inquiry projects	Learning from other outdoor programs around the province	Rainproof and winter-resistant outdoor materials (chalkboards, manipulatives, warming stations)
Co-create and share yearly curricular overviews with primary & intermediate teams	Pro-D on how to teach literacy/numeracy outdoors across all grades	Numeracy critical concepts and weekly shared resources; SD83 Early Literacy Framework

Supporting Social & Emotional Skill Development

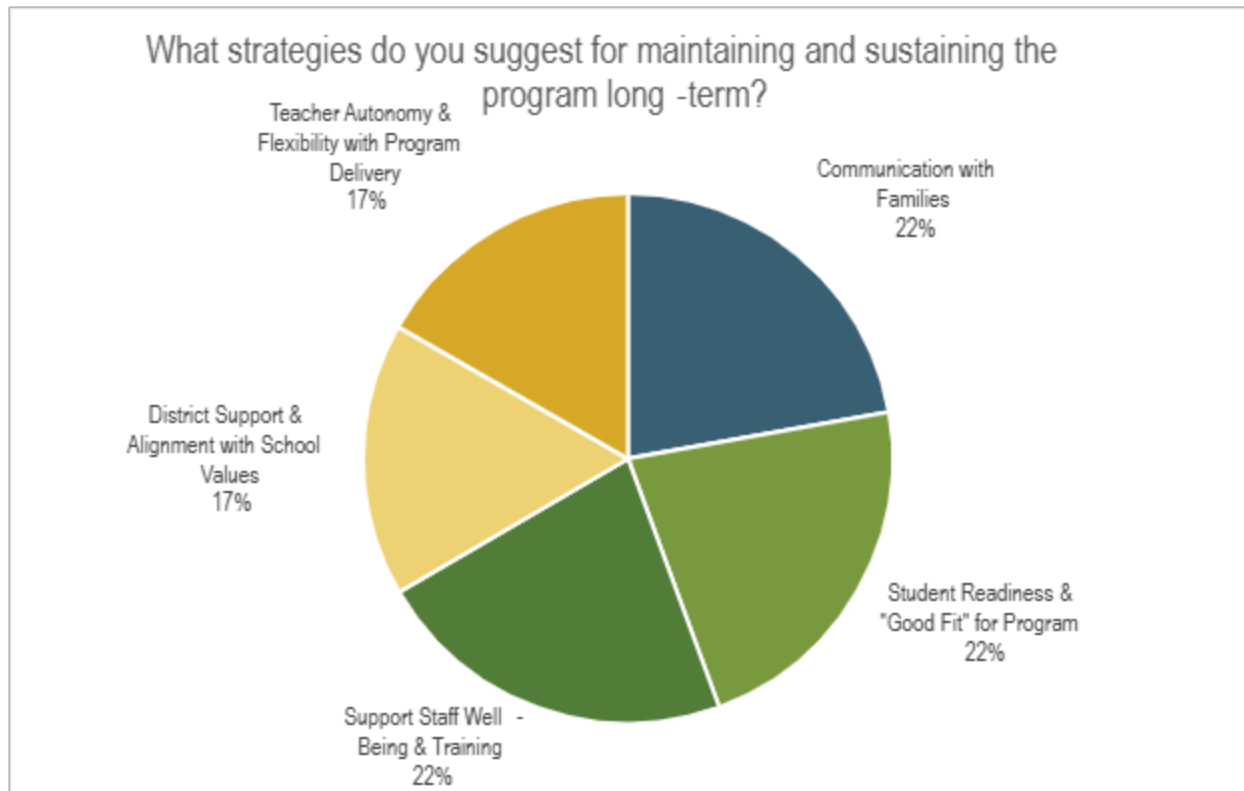
Supports	Professional Development	Resources
More CEA support in classrooms	Workshops and training to support CEAs	Second Step program
Regular or increased access to school counsellor	Inservice on ASD, ADHD, Mental Health	Social Skills library: books, videos, social stories
More adult/staff support during outdoor learning and field trips	Staff learning sessions/lunch chats led by LRT	Behaviour nature guides, outdoor therapy books
Space for students to decompress (e.g., LRT Room or reset spaces)	Follow-up sessions on Behaviour Code training	Resources for teaching SEL in place-based/outdoor settings
More meaningful collaboration time between support staff and teachers	Learning from DESC support staff and on-the-ground experience	Visual tools and SEL materials for use with students with diverse needs
Principal-led initiatives (e.g., teaching SEL directly)		SEL programs suitable for intermediate and middle years

Supporting Diverse Learners

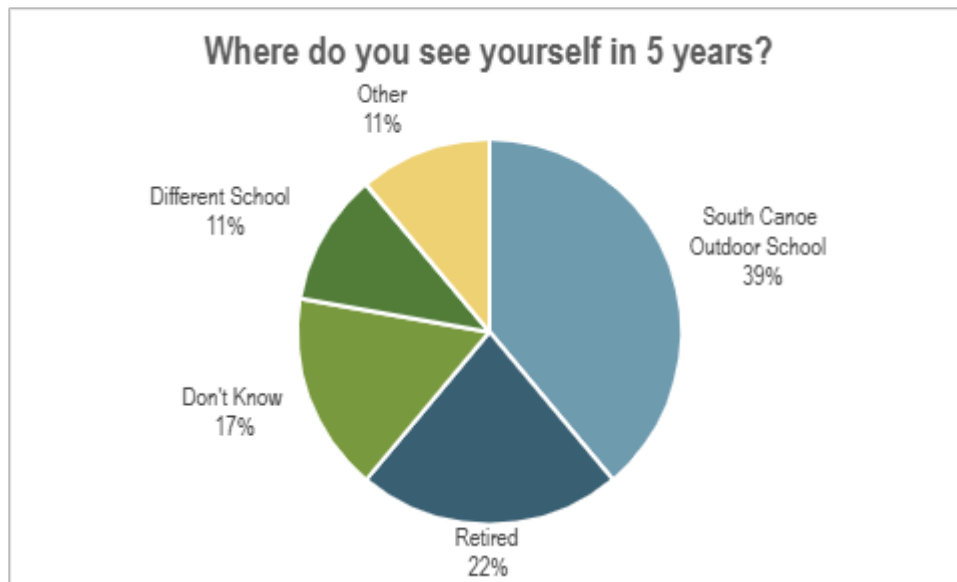
Supports	Professional Development	Resources
More CEA support in classrooms	Workshops and training to support CEAs	SEL and special education resources related to outdoor learning
Regular expert visits or guest speakers (e.g. on SOGI topics)	PD on engaging diverse learners across the curriculum	Behaviour Code book club revisit
Dedicated quiet spaces or LRT rooms for student regulation	Training from experts in diverse learning (e.g. Jennifer Katz)	Tools like wiggle seats, standing desks, fidgets
More time for support staff to connect with staff and students (relationship-building focus)	ProD on literacy and numeracy for diverse learners, especially in outdoor contexts	Computer programs for non-writers
	Collaborative sessions to share strategies and communicate student needs	



Responses to the question about how to make the program more engaging and meaningful for students reflected a wide range of thoughtful suggestions. A common theme was the desire for more hands-on, community-connected, and project-based learning opportunities, including STEAM and environmental initiatives. Many respondents emphasized balancing outdoor learning with core academic priorities like literacy and numeracy and called for intentional scheduling of outdoor time. There were also suggestions to support teacher confidence and flexibility in delivering creative outdoor lessons, alongside requests for more extracurricular options, such as outdoor sports and clubs. Some respondents highlighted the importance of multi-age activities, team-building, and maintaining strong relationships. Finally, several noted that student choice and readiness for outdoor learning significantly impact engagement, suggesting clearer communication with families when enrolling their child at the school.

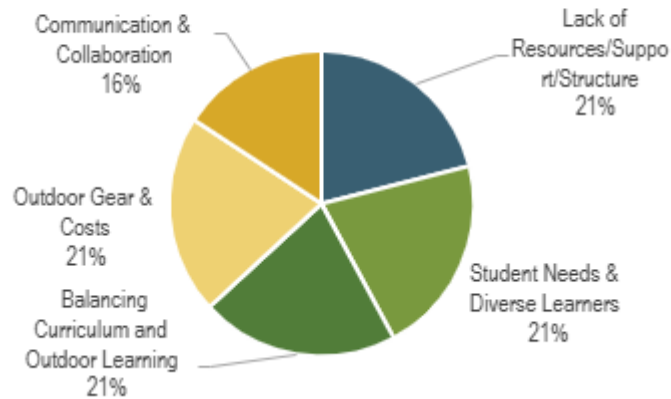


Survey responses regarding strategies for sustaining the program long-term highlight several key themes. Many respondents emphasized the importance of clear communication with families about the nature and expectations of the outdoor learning program. Ensuring students are a good fit for the program—both in interest and safety readiness—was repeatedly noted, with suggestions for interview processes and better preparation for outdoor learning (e.g., appropriate gear). Staff well-being and autonomy were also major concerns, with calls for increased support, reduced judgment over teaching approaches, and recognition of the challenges in balancing diverse student needs. Several responses urged for stronger backing from the district, better alignment with school values, and professional development to build and sustain outdoor teaching capacity. Building community, fostering relationships, and engaging in school-wide, age-appropriate inquiries were also seen as vital for long-term program success.

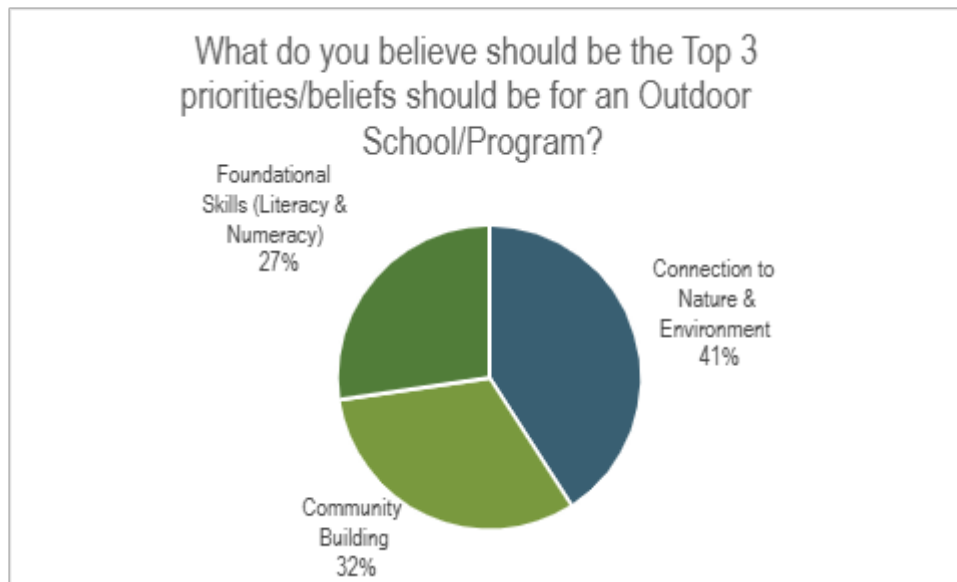


Responses to the question "Where do you see yourself in 5 years?" show that a significant number of staff (7 respondents) envision themselves still working at the South Canoe Outdoor School, indicating a strong commitment to the program. However, several responses reflect uncertainty or transitional plans, with 3 individuals expecting to be retired, 2 anticipating work at a different school, and others unsure or considering major life changes such as living in a different country or moving into a different role. Overall, while many see a future at South Canoe, others are uncertain or planning for change.

What are the unique challenges of being a staff member in your role at the South Canoe Outdoor School?



Staff at South Canoe Outdoor School identified a range of unique challenges tied to their roles in an outdoor-focused learning environment. A common concern was the personal financial burden of purchasing appropriate gear and supplies for year-round outdoor instruction, often without school- or district-provided support. Many also cited the physical demands of the role—frequent transitions between indoor and outdoor settings, exposure to the elements, and general exhaustion from being on their feet all day. Others highlighted the difficulty of balancing diverse student needs, particularly those with complex behaviour or mental health challenges, while maintaining engaging outdoor learning opportunities. Communication gaps among staff, a lack of cohesive program expectations, and varying philosophies on outdoor versus academic priorities were also noted.



The responses to the question about the top priorities or beliefs for South Canoe Outdoor School highlight a strong, shared vision centered around three core themes. First and foremost, fostering a deep connection to nature and the land is considered vital—encouraging outdoor learning, environmental stewardship, and a sense of ecological responsibility. Secondly, building a strong sense of community, both within the school and with the wider world, is seen as essential for student belonging, support, and holistic growth. Lastly, many responses emphasize the importance of balancing outdoor experiences with academic excellence, especially in literacy and numeracy, while also nurturing students' social-emotional development. Overall, the staff envision a program that is inclusive, curiosity-driven, and rooted in both the natural world and meaningful relationships.

The responses to the question about additional comments and suggestions reflect a deep appreciation for the South Canoe Outdoor School and its community, alongside thoughtful reflections on areas for growth. Many staff expressed gratitude for the program's outdoor focus and the supportive team environment. However, several also raised concerns around systemic and logistical challenges that are impacting morale and sustainability. These included the strain of working with high numbers of students with complex needs, a lack of adequate indoor and outdoor learning spaces, and inequities in resource allocation—particularly in learning support. Some staff advocated for the school to be recognized as a unique program with distinct needs that require tailored approaches. There is also a strong desire for continued dialogue, collaboration, and leadership that honors the school's vision while empowering staff to teach in innovative and inclusive ways.

Key Findings from Staff Surveys

1. Positive Aspects:

- **Community and Staff:** The strong sense of community and deep connections between staff, students, and nature are highly valued. The supportive environment helps students feel safe and connected.
- **Outdoor Learning:** Opportunities for outdoor exploration, hands-on learning, and field trips are appreciated for their ability to immerse students in the natural world and foster critical thinking and environmental stewardship.
- **Flexible Teaching:** The program's flexibility allows for experiential and inquiry-based teaching, encouraging creativity, resilience, and a love for learning.

2. Challenges for Staff:

- **Student Preparedness & Engagement:** Many students arrive without proper outdoor gear, making it difficult to engage in learning, especially in unpredictable weather conditions. Staff have observed that some students regularly express reluctance towards participating in outdoor learning activities.
- **Support for Diverse Needs:** A high number of students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and diverse needs require additional support.
- **Logistical Barriers:** Transitioning between indoor and outdoor spaces, lack of adequate outdoor facilities like washrooms, and increased planning demands add complexity to outdoor learning.
- **Curriculum:** Some staff feel there should be a more intentional focus on incorporating the BC curriculum within an outdoor learning environment.
- **Administrative Constraints:** Some educators feel restricted by administrative and systemic regulations, which can hinder the implementation of unique learning opportunities.

3. Suggestions for Improvement by Staff:

- **Infrastructure:** Permanent outdoor structures to provide shelter from rain, snow, and sun, allowing for more consistent learning experiences in all weather conditions.
- **Additional Support:** Increased Learning Resource Teacher (LRT) support and dedicated spaces for students who need to self-regulate.
- **Outdoor Gear & Engagement:** Improved access to outdoor gear, including spare clothing for students. A process to address the needs of students who regularly do not want to participate in outdoor learning opportunities.

- **Professional Learning & Training:** Specialized training in outdoor learning, more intentional focus on the foundational skills in an outdoor setting, and strategies for supporting students with diverse abilities.
- **Funding:** Increased funding for materials, bussing, and outdoor learning tools such as portable desks and waterproof storage.

Conclusion

The South Canoe Outdoor Learning Program is highly valued by staff for its unique outdoor learning opportunities and supportive environment. Addressing challenges related to student preparedness, foundational skills, support for diverse needs, and logistical barriers, along with incorporating staff suggestions, will further enhance the program's effectiveness and staff satisfaction.

South Canoe Outdoor Program Review Report 2025

Comparison Report (Student, Family, & Staff Survey Results)

Program Review Recommendations

Overview

The South Canoe Outdoor School, established in 2018, offers a unique outdoor learning experience within School District 83. Located on a 5.1-acre site in Salmon Arm, the school serves approximately 150 students across seven divisions (K-8). The program emphasizes hands-on learning and nature connection, aiming to enhance student engagement and skill development in an outdoor setting. A comprehensive review was conducted in February and March 2025, gathering feedback from students, staff, and families to assess the program's strengths, identify areas for improvement, and explore new opportunities for growth.

This report was completed by Jennifer Findlay, Director of Instruction – Early Years & Elementary in April 2025. *This report acknowledges the collaborative efforts of AI technologies, specifically ChatGPT and Copilot, alongside human expertise in efficiently collating data and generating contextually relevant content.*

COMPARISON REPORT

Strengths	Students	Families	Staff
Community and Staff	Value supportive teachers and CEAs	Highlight the dedicated staff and collaborative spirit between staff and parents	Appreciate the strong sense of community and deep connections with students and nature
Outdoor Learning	Enjoy spending time outside, participating in activities, and exploring nature	Appreciate the nature-based education that fosters resilience, creativity, and well-being.	Value opportunities for outdoor exploration, hands-on learning, and field trips
Experiential Learning	Field trips are memorable and provide unique learning experiences	Integration of sustainability, stewardship, and real-world learning experiences enhances students' connection to their environment	Inquiry-based teaching, off-site learning opportunities, and access to diverse natural environments

Challenges	Students	Families	Staff
Extreme Weather	Discomfort during cold, rainy, or snowy conditions, especially when writing outside	Weather challenges, particularly in winter, pose occasional obstacles	Struggle with students arriving without proper outdoor gear, making it difficult to engage in learning
Student Preparedness & Engagement	Issues with playground size (especially the basketball area) and lack of swings	Cost and frequent loss of appropriate outdoor gear are financial and logistical barriers	Reluctance of some students to participate in outdoor learning opportunities
Logistical Barriers	Concerns about certain school rules, especially related to soccer	Difficulty in coordinating daily drop-offs and pick-ups due to the lack of bus service	Transitioning between indoor and outdoor spaces, lack of adequate outdoor facilities like washrooms, and increased planning and administrative demands

Suggestions for Improvement	Students	Families	Staff
Infrastructure	Adding swing sets and expanding the outdoor basketball court	Increased outdoor shelters, more resources, and expanded playgrounds	Permanent outdoor structures to provide shelter from rain, snow, and sun
Additional Supports	More recess time, sledding opportunities, and clubs beyond basketball and the library club; provide quiet workspaces	Additional staff support and teacher training to enhance the program's effectiveness; clear guidelines around time spent outdoors	Increased support for students with diverse abilities and dedicated spaces for students who need to self-regulate; process to address needs of students who regularly do not want to participate outside or who do not have proper outdoor gear
Professional Learning & Funding	More variety in field trips, including indoor options like climbing gyms and movie theaters	Implementation of a bussing system to alleviate transportation challenges; increased support for students with diverse needs	Specialized training in outdoor learning, foundational skills, and strategies for supporting students with diverse abilities; increased funding for materials, field trip bussing, and outdoor learning tools

PROGRAM REVIEW RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Clarify Program Vision and Language

- **Action: Develop a shared understanding of the outdoor learning program's guidelines, beliefs, values, and expectations.**
 - **Focus Areas:**
 - Importance of appropriate gear
 - Student readiness for outdoor activities
 - Distinction between outdoor education and outdoor learning
 - Time expectations for outdoor learning
-

2. Enhance Outdoor Learning Infrastructure

- **Action: Explore permanent outdoor structures for shelter in all weather.**
 - **Next Steps:**
 - Work with the SD83 Operations Department to clarify ALR zoning
 - Create a wish list of materials and tools to support outdoor instruction.
-

3. Improve Outdoor Play Spaces

- **Action: Expand and enhance the playground area.**
 - **Ideas:**
 - Add swing sets
 - Expand the basketball area
 - Provide more fort building supplies and sports equipment
-

4. Ensure Equitable Access to Gear

- **Action: Implement a system for spare clothing and equipment.**
 - **Additional Goal:** Reduce gear loss through a tracking and management system.
-

5. Support Diverse Learners

- **Action: Advocate for staffing and professional learning to support students with diverse abilities.**
-

6. Invest in Professional Learning

- **Action: Collaborate with district staff and the school ProD Committee to offer training in:**
 - Outdoor learning pedagogy
 - Teaching foundational skills outdoors
 - Social-emotional learning (SEL)
 - Inclusive strategies for diverse learners
-

7. Foster Staff Collaboration

- **Action: Create opportunities for co-planning across grade levels.**
 - **Goal:** Develop a continuum of outdoor learning experiences and curricular alignment.
-

8. Streamline Administrative Processes

- **Action: Improve systems for permission forms, volunteer coordination, and other logistics to reduce barriers.**
-

9. Boost Engagement

- **Action: Increase:**
 - Parent engagement through school-community events
 - Student engagement through extracurricular activities
-

10. Prioritize Staff Wellness

- **Action: Develop initiatives that support staff well-being and foster team connection.**