



Marit Stiles
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Hon. Stephen Lecce
Minister of Education
5th Flr, 438 University Ave
Toronto, ON M7A 2A5

VIA Email

June 28, 2019

RE: Support for Outdoor Education Centres

Honourable Minister,

Ontario's diverse landscape and natural beauty, along with the work of committed educators supported by public funding, have helped make our province a leader in outdoor education.

More than just a subject area, outdoor education encompasses a whole philosophy of learning that helps students develop respect for the land and the ecosystems we inhabit. Throughout the province, outdoor education centres and programs are giving kids the opportunity for hands-on learning in biology, ecology and science, while at the same time helping connect some of our most vulnerable kids with new skills and opportunities.

But these incredibly important programs are at risk because of your government's cuts to education, and the squeeze those cuts have put on local school boards.

Programs like the Bronte Creek Project, which has provided environmental education and leadership opportunities for over 35 years in the Halton District School Board, but is slated for termination in the face of mounting budget pressures.

The Toronto District School Board is closing 2 outdoor education centres, including the Etobicoke Field Studies Centre and the Etobicoke Outdoor Education Centre, and will make staffing cuts, as it works to absorb the \$42 million dollar cut in provincial funding.

As my colleagues and I have tried to make clear since the introduction of your government's plan, these cuts are having a compound effect on students across the province. Not only will they deal with less one-on-one support as they are moved into larger classes, but course offerings will also be hard hit. For kids growing up in the urban core, the outdoor education centres are sometimes their first and only experience with nature and it can be life-changing for kids experiencing mental health concerns.

At this moment in human history, programs in outdoor education should be expanded, not cut. We should be looking at more ways to enhance an understanding of our environment for the next generation as they adapt and address the very real challenges we face in a warming climate.

I am writing to ask you to recognize the value of outdoor education programs and commit to supporting them in a tangible way. That work starts by reversing your government's cuts to education.

I look forward to your response.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Marit Stiles". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "M" and "S".

Marit Stiles, MPP
Davenport
Official Opposition Critic for Education