DSBN
OUTDOOR EDUCATION
ANNUAL REPORT
2025 - 2026










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A Year in Outdoor Education

Outdoor education continues to play an important role in supporting student achievement, well-being, and belonging across the District School Board of Niagara during the 2025–2026 school year. Through experiences at the Adventure Campus, Living Campus, conservation areas across Niagara, school grounds, and community spaces, thousands of students connected classroom learning to real-world experiences while developing confidence, resilience, leadership, and a deeper appreciation for the natural world.

This year, DSBN Outdoor Education programs reached more students than ever before. From Kindergarten students exploring habitats for the first time to secondary students earning SHSM certifications and participating in community-building experiences, outdoor education created opportunities for students to learn, grow, and discover strengths that are not always visible in a traditional classroom.

Year at a Glance

- **12,605** students participated in programs at the DSBN Adventure Campus and Living Campus
- **7,117** students participated in DSBN-organized outdoor education programs delivered with community partners
- **23,000** students and educators participated in Take Me Outside outdoor learning initiatives
- **218** students earned SHSM certifications



Outdoor Education Campuses

The Adventure Campus and Living Campus hosted 12,605 students during the 2025–2026 school year. Through hands-on, curriculum-connected programming, students explored habitats, biodiversity, environmental stewardship, navigation, survival skills, leadership, and teamwork while spending meaningful time outdoors.

Programs were intentionally designed to support curriculum expectations across science, geography, physical education, environmental education, and social-emotional development. They provided opportunities for students to apply learning in authentic ways and develop skills that extend far beyond the classroom.

For many students, the campuses offered experiences they may not otherwise have access to.

> "Our students live a very city-centred life and don't often get the chance to just be in nature. It was a true gift for them to spend the day outside with each other and build relationships." *– DSBN Teacher*

Teachers frequently shared that outdoor learning revealed strengths that are not always visible in traditional learning environments.

> *"Students that don't necessarily excel in academics in the classroom often shine at the Adventure Campus." – DSBN Teacher*

Others described the powerful impact that spending time outdoors had on student confidence and engagement.

> *"Several of our multilingual learners were especially engaged. They are very quiet in class and often struggle to share their ideas. Experiences like this reinforce how powerful outdoor learning can be in deepening understanding, fostering confidence, and building connections in our students." – DSBN Teacher*



Specialized Student Programming

Secondary English Language Learner Days

The school year began with Secondary English Language Learner Days at the Living Campus, welcoming students from four DSBN secondary schools. These outdoor learning experiences provided opportunities for students who are new to Canada to connect with classmates, practice communication skills in authentic settings, and experience a day in a new and unique natural environment.

Through campfires, team-building activities, nature exploration, and cooperative challenges, students strengthened language skills while building friendships and confidence in a welcoming outdoor environment.

One teacher reflected:

> *"Most of the ESL students had never roasted a marshmallow. They enjoyed the Canadian experience."*



Another highlighted the importance of creating opportunities for students to build relationships while participating in experiences they may not otherwise have access to.

> *"Students new to our school engaged in fun activities and learning alongside peers, allowing strong relationships to build. This gave them valuable life experiences."*

By beginning the school year outdoors, students were able to connect with peers, staff, and their new school communities in a relaxed and supportive environment.

Secondary Special Education Days

New this year, the Living Campus hosted four Secondary Special Education Days designed specifically to meet the diverse needs of students while providing meaningful opportunities for outdoor learning, exploration, and connection.

Programs were carefully adapted to ensure all students could participate successfully and experience a sense of accomplishment. Through nature exploration, campfire experiences, hands-on environmental activities, and collaborative challenges, students were encouraged to engage at their own pace while building confidence and developing relationships with peers.

The impact was evident in both student participation and teacher feedback.

> "Our students enjoyed the day so much! Students who never attend school trips signed up for this one!" – *DSBN Teacher*

Another teacher shared:

> *"The students appreciated an opportunity to spend time outdoors together and see themselves as people who can enjoy being in nature."*

For many students, these days created opportunities to experience success, build relationships, and develop a stronger sense of belonging.



SHSM Certification Days

The Adventure Campus continued to support Specialist High Skills Major (SHSM) programming by offering industry-recognized certifications in Maps, Orienteering and GPS and Team Building and Leadership.

A total of 218 students earned certifications through hands-on learning experiences that developed leadership, communication, navigation, and problem-solving skills. Students applied technology and critical thinking while working collaboratively in outdoor settings.

One teacher noted:

> *"This is a great program for teaching orientation, GPS use and technology. It also gave students a chance to work in groups, team-build and communicate."*



These certifications continue to support student pathways while helping learners develop practical skills that are transferable to future education, employment, and community involvement.

Eco Days

During Spring 2026, the Living Campus hosted our Eco Days program, providing students with hands-on opportunities to explore environmental stewardship, sustainability, and their role in caring for the natural world.

Through interactive activities focused on biodiversity, habitats, recycling, composting, and ecological reciprocation, students connected classroom learning to real-world environmental issues. The program supported curriculum expectations in science, environmental education, and citizenship while encouraging students to consider how their everyday actions can positively impact their communities.

More importantly, Eco Days inspired students to see themselves as environmental stewards. Through exploration, discussion, and hands-on learning, students developed a deeper appreciation for nature and a stronger understanding of their responsibility to care for it.

One teacher shared:

> *"I heard a couple students say this was the BEST trip ever!"*



Another reflected on the impact of connecting environmental learning with Earth Day:

> *"It was a great way to teach kids to respect the environment and doing the trip on Earth Day was a wonderful way to talk about and explore nature, recycling, habitats, etc."*

The success of the Eco Days program continues to demonstrate the value of providing students with meaningful opportunities to learn about environmental sustainability while experiencing nature firsthand.

Earth Month Water Bottle Drive

As part of Earth Month initiatives, DSBN Outdoor Education launched its first Water Bottle Drive, engaging 12 schools and approximately 3,500 students.



The initiative encouraged students and families to donate gently used reusable water bottles that could be redistributed within schools to students who may not have access to one or who occasionally forget theirs at home. In total, 254 reusable water bottles were collected.

Beyond the environmental impact, the project provided meaningful opportunities for student leadership and curriculum-connected learning. Schools incorporated mathematics and data management by surveying students, graphing results, and sharing findings through school announcements. Student councils played an important role in promoting and organizing collections within their school communities.

Teachers highlighted the educational value of the initiative and the important conversations it generated around waste reduction and environmental responsibility.

> *"Our students were excited to receive their reusable water bottles, and it's sparked great conversations about sustainability. It's wonderful to see environmental stewardship being reinforced through everyday actions."*

Another school shared:

> *"Students who forget their water bottles or don't have one now have access to one as we collected a lot. Washed and stored in the staff room for students who forget their water bottle at home and/or given to students who don't have one of their own."*

The Water Bottle Drive demonstrated how small actions can have a meaningful impact while empowering students to take an active role in creating more sustainable school communities.

Archery

The Grade 7 and 8 Archery Program at the Living Campus continued to be one of the most popular offerings of the year.

For many students, archery provided an opportunity to try something completely new while developing focus, perseverance, self-regulation, and confidence. Under the guidance of our certified outdoor guides, students learned proper archery techniques in a safe, supportive, and encouraging environment.

The program aligns with curriculum expectations in Health and Physical Education while also fostering important transferable skills such as goal setting, concentration, resilience, and personal responsibility.

Teachers consistently commented on the confidence students gained throughout the experience.

> *"Many students in our school would never get the chance to do an activity like this because of access to specialized programs and affordability. Doing this program allowed them to build confidence in a sport they have never tried."*

Another teacher observed:

> "There were a couple of students who stood taller, smiled more and exuded confidence when their arrow hit the target."

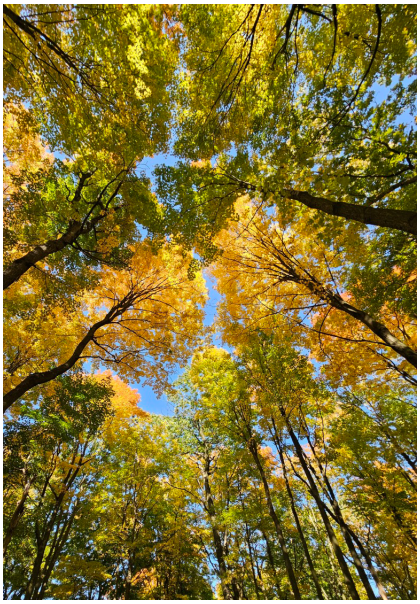
The supportive approach of the instructors was frequently highlighted as a key factor in student success.

> *"My students are reluctant to try new things, but the instructors were so encouraging that the kids kept trying and really loved the experience."*

For many students, the day was about much more than learning to shoot arrows—it was about stepping outside their comfort zone, discovering new strengths, and experiencing success.



Animation in Nature



Thanks to support from the Ontario Arts Council, artist educator Mike Cope, and DSBN Outdoor Education, 461 students participated in Drawn to Life: Animation in Nature during the 2025–2026 school year.

This unique visual arts retreat combines outdoor learning, environmental exploration, and digital creativity. Students used nature as inspiration while learning animation techniques from professional cartoonist and artist educator Mike Cope. Through a series of engaging, hands-on activities, students explored storytelling, artistic expression, and stop-motion animation before bringing their own nature-inspired creations to life.

The program supported curriculum expectations in Visual Arts, Media Literacy, and Science while providing students with opportunities to develop creativity, communication skills, confidence, and self-expression.

Teachers consistently highlighted the positive impact the program had on student engagement and participation.

> *"Students loved seeing their animations come to life right in front of them."*

Many educators also noted the program's ability to reach students who do not always see themselves as artists or who may struggle in traditional classroom settings.

> "My artists who are naturally timid, FLOURISHED!" – *DSBN Teacher*

Another teacher shared:

> *"A student who struggles with ADHD lit right up—it was such a positive experience."*

One of the program's greatest strengths is its accessibility. Every student is able to participate successfully, regardless of artistic experience or skill level.

> *"All students were able to create an animated clip regardless of skill level." – DSBN Teacher*

By combining creativity, technology, nature, and outdoor learning, Animation in Nature continues to provide students with an unforgettable learning experience that celebrates imagination, curiosity, and confidence.

Community Partnerships



Strong community partnerships continue to expand opportunities for DSBN students to experience high-quality outdoor learning beyond the classroom. Through collaborations with the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority (NPCA), the Ontario Arts Council, local artists, and community organizations, students were able to participate in unique programs that complemented and enhanced the learning opportunities available at the Adventure Campus and Living Campus.

Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority (NPCA)

DSBN Outdoor Education and the NPCA continued to work together to provide a wide range of outdoor learning experiences for students across Niagara. During the 2025–2026 school year, 7,117 students participated in DSBN-organized outdoor education programs delivered in partnership with the NPCA.

These experiences included Grade 9 Community Connections Days, team-building programs for Grades 7 and 8, fishing and forest exploration at St. John's Conservation Area, day programs at Ball's Falls, Stevensville, and Chippawa Creek Conservation Areas, and overnight camping experiences for intermediate students.

Grade 9 Community Connections Days

A total of 2,278 Grade 9 students from 11 secondary schools participated in Grade 9 Community Connections Days at Ball's Falls Conservation Area. Designed to support the transition into secondary school, these experiences focused on relationship building, teamwork, leadership, and creating a sense of belonging within new school communities.

Through activities such as orienteering, team challenges, scavenger hunts, and the popular Amazing Race, students worked collaboratively, met new classmates, and connected with senior student leaders and staff.

One teacher shared:

> *"The day is a wonderful way to start things off and support transitions for students coming into Grade 9. It allows our senior leadership and council students to make connections with our junior students, and everything comes together to support our creation of a community."*

For many schools, these experiences have become an important part of helping students build confidence and connections during one of the most significant transitions in their educational journey.

Fishing and Forest Exploration – St. John's Conservation Area



In partnership with the NPCA students in Grades 4–6 continue to enjoy one of our most unique outdoor learning experiences at St. John's Conservation Area. The program introduces students to the lifelong skill of fishing while fostering an appreciation for local ecosystems, environmental stewardship, and responsible outdoor recreation. For many students, it is their first opportunity to fish and to experience the excitement of catching a fish in a safe, supportive environment.

The day extends well beyond fishing. Students hike through the conservation area, learn the fundamentals of fly casting, create their own fishing flies, and discover how healthy watersheds support thriving aquatic ecosystems. Through these authentic outdoor experiences, students make meaningful connections to the Science curriculum while developing environmental stewardship, problem-solving skills, and a deeper appreciation for Niagara's natural spaces.

Overnight Camping Experiences

Outdoor Education and the NPCA also partnered to provide 16 overnight camping trips for 761 students during the spring of 2026.

For many students, this was their first camping experience. Over two days and one night, students learned how to set up tents, cook outdoors, participate in hiking, fishing, orienteering, astronomy, and leadership activities, and spend meaningful time away from screens and technology.

Teachers consistently highlighted the lasting impact these experiences had on students.

> *"A lot of kids had never camped before. Having this opportunity was priceless for them. It was brilliant to see the kids have tech-free free time and enjoy each other's company in the outdoors."*

Another teacher reflected:

> "For many of our students this might be the only opportunity they ever have to experience nature in such close proximity. The wonder and awe that many of them felt gave me goosebumps."

Students left with new skills, stronger friendships, increased confidence, and memories that will remain with them long after the school year has ended.



Take Me Outside and Outdoor Learning Across the DSBN

Outdoor learning continued to grow across the DSBN through participation in Take Me Outside initiatives.



This year more than 20,490 students and educators took their learning outdoors during Take Me Outside Week.

The challenge welcomed 80 educators participating for the first time, while 236 educators committed to the Take Me Outside Learning Challenge, pledging to teach outdoors at least once each week throughout the school year.

Educators shared countless examples of creativity and innovation as they transformed school grounds into learning spaces for literacy, mathematics, science, physical education, French, and environmental learning.

One teacher shared:

> *"I took my Grade 7 and 8 French classes outside to complete an adjective scavenger hunt and play cooperative games. They all had a blast!"*

Another commented:

> "Thanks so much! The kiddos have asked to do this weekly now!"

The continued growth of Take Me Outside demonstrates a growing recognition that meaningful learning can happen anywhere and that outdoor environments can support student engagement, well-being, achievement, and connection.

Take Me Outside Winter Challenge

New this year, DSBN Outdoor Education launched its first Take Me Outside Winter Challenge.

A total of 103 educators and 3,245 students from Kindergarten to Grade 12 participated in outdoor learning experiences throughout February, embracing winter as an opportunity rather than a barrier to learning.

Students explored mathematics, science, physical education, environmental learning, and creative play outdoors while experiencing the benefits of spending time outside during the winter months.

One educator shared:

> *"This challenge has given me the opportunity to think outside the box and how to utilize simple materials to create in-depth hands-on lessons outside."*



Another reflected:

> *"My students loved the winter challenge. We spent our mornings outside and have continued doing that now that the weather is warmer. We created fraction snow brownies and divided them using a mixture of Jello powder and water to keep it safe. So, thank you again for creating these fun opportunities that push us as educators but also provide rich environments for our students."*

The success of the Winter Challenge reinforced an important message for students and educators alike: meaningful outdoor learning can happen in every season.

Our Team



The success of DSBN Outdoor Education is made possible by an exceptional team of Outdoor Education Guides whose passion, expertise, and commitment create meaningful learning experiences for students every day.

While many students and educators know our team through their work at the Adventure Campus and Living Campus, their impact extends far beyond our campuses. Throughout the year, Outdoor Education Guides supported Take Me Outside initiatives, facilitated SHSM certifications, delivered specialized programming, partnered with community organizations, supported Earth Month initiatives, and helped develop and deliver outdoor learning opportunities for thousands of students across Niagara.

Teacher feedback consistently highlighted the positive impact our staff have on student engagement, confidence, and success.

> "The facilitators were knowledgeable, friendly, and excellent with the kids. Their enthusiasm for outdoor education was evident and infectious."

Another teacher shared:

> *"Your staff was incredibly helpful and intuitive with student needs. They all have a passion and do amazing work for our students."*



Perhaps the most common theme throughout hundreds of survey responses was the ability of our team to create welcoming, inclusive environments where students feel safe to take risks, try new things, and discover strengths they may not have known they possessed.

As we reflect on another successful year, we are grateful for the dedication of our Outdoor Education team, DSBN trustees, senior leadership team, administrators, school staff, and community partners who continue to make outdoor learning opportunities possible for DSBN students.

Together, we are helping students build confidence, develop skills, strengthen relationships, connect with nature, and deepen their understanding of curriculum through meaningful, hands-on learning experiences. These opportunities inspire curiosity, foster a sense of belonging, and create memories that will last a lifetime.