



REPORT TO

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND WELL BEING, CATHOLIC EDUCATION AND HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE

OPAL (OUTDOOR PLAY AND LEARNING) PROGRAM K – 8

"Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is such as these that the kingdom of God belongs."

Mark 10:14 (NRSVCE)

Created, Draft	First Tabling	Review
September 24, 2018	October 4, 2018	Click here to enter a date.
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<h3>RECOMMENDATION REPORT</h3>		

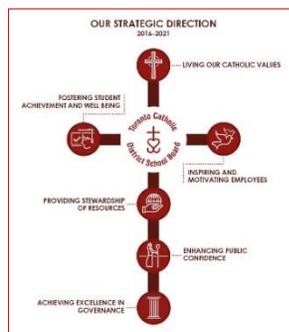
Vision:

At Toronto Catholic we transform the world through witness, faith, innovation and action.

Mission:

The Toronto Catholic District School Board is an inclusive learning community uniting home, parish and school and rooted in the love of Christ.

We educate students to grow in grace and knowledge to lead lives of faith, hope and charity.



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A. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report outlines a proposal for a 3-year pilot of the OPAL (Outdoor Play and Learning) program in five TCDSB schools. Through the OPAL program, children will engage in freely-chosen play with “loose parts” (tools, boxes, spare tires, fabric, etc.) to foster imaginative play, physicality, relationships and stewardship of the environment. The OPAL program can be initially implemented during outdoor recesses, and later, connected directly to the curriculum as part of the regular instructional day.

The OPAL program pilot aligns with the goal “to create welcoming, healthy and equitable learning environments for all students”, from the Board’s Multi-Year Strategic Plan: Fostering Student Achievement and Well-Being.

In the fall of 2018, 4 schools are being proposed by the TCDSB to participate in the OPAL program pilot. The schools selected are St. Augustine, Holy Family, St. Maria Goretti, and St. Marcellus. In addition, St. Bruno/St. Raymond site has been requested and will be funded by EarthDay Canada. The TCDSB will fund training costs and support, occasional teacher coverage and storage sheds for each site.

The cost of the OPAL program for the TCDSB is \$208,800. Funding will come from Student Success (\$138, 800), School Renewal Grant (\$40,000) and Early Years (\$30,000).

St. Augustine, Holy Family and St. Bruno/St. Raymond will be fully implemented in 2018/2019 (Year 1). The staff of St. Maria Goretti and St. Marcellus will be invited to participate in training in 2018/2019 with implementation the following year (Year 2). Year 3 is a consolidation year for all schools.

Once the success of the OPAL pilot has been evaluated, it will be determined whether or not to extend the program to other schools. If the pilot is deemed successful, and if funding is available, a matrix will be used to determine future expansion sites.

The cumulative staff time required to prepare this report was 40 hours.

B. PURPOSE

1. The purpose of this report is to propose a pilot project with OPAL.

C. BACKGROUND

1. At the invitation of the former Executive Superintendent of Facilities Services, staff was invited to attend the October 2017 OPAL symposium to learn about the OPAL program.
2. The former Executive Superintendent of Facilities Services invited EarthDay Canada to present to Education Council on February 26, 2018.
3. A committee was struck to consider the viability of piloting the OPAL program in TCDSB schools. The Committee consisted of representatives from Facilities, Curriculum Leadership and Innovation – Early Years, and the Evergreen Foundation.
4. Staff attended two OPAL information sessions and observed the play program at a school that had already implemented OPAL.
5. The TCDSB Early Years department created an OPAL pop-up (demo) open to the families of attendees at the Saturday, May 26, 2018 TCDSB 21Camp.
6. In the fall of 2018, it is proposed that TCDSB begin the pilot with 4 schools (one per geographical quadrant of north, south, east and west). In addition, the St. Bruno/St. Raymond site has been requested, and will be funded, by EarthDay Canada.
7. The cost of the OPAL program for the TCDSB is \$208,800. Funding will come from Student Success (\$138, 800), School Renewal Grant (\$40,000) and Early Years (\$30,000).
8. There is a requirement for storage in the playground for loose parts. Large storage sheds will be installed by the Operations and/or Renewal Departments, funded by the School Renewal Grant, at an estimated cost of \$40,000.

9. EarthDay Canada charges total \$140 000 to cover the cost of a full-time OPAL Mentor to provide on-site support, one EarthDay Canada additional staff member to support schools, a part-time Play Projects Coordinator, workshops, materials, research, programming, evaluation and reflection. This fee also covers EarthDay Canada transportation costs, administration and IT Support.
10. OPAL staff will adapt the program and reframe lessons to infuse Catholicity and the Ontario Catholic Schools Graduate Expectations.
11. A summary of all costs is shown below. The cost per school, beyond the initial one-time central costs is \$17,200.

OUTDOOR PLAY AND LEARNING PROGRAM (OPAL) IMPLEMENTATION COSTS				
(4 School Pilot Study)				
One-time Central Costs	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	TOTAL
OPAL Training the Trainers	\$ 140,000	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 140,000
Subtotal - One-time Central Costs	\$ 140,000	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 140,000
School-based Implementation Costs				
Educator Release Time	\$ 13,500	\$ 11,475	\$ 3,825	\$ 28,800
Storage Shed	\$ 30,000	\$ 10,000	\$ -	\$ 40,000
Subtotal - School-based Costs	\$ 43,500	\$ 21,475	\$ 3,825	\$ 68,800
Total Implementation Cost	\$ 183,500	\$ 21,475	\$ 3,825	\$ 208,800
Average School-based Implementation Cost per School				\$ 17,200
Assumptions:				
(1) <i>Each School location requires a Storage Shed</i>				
(2) <i>Training and support beyond year 3 by TCDSB staff</i>				

12. To determine which schools would participate in the pilot, staff used the following criteria:
 - a. Demographic data were used. Demographic data includes 9 categories: government transfer payments, low family income, born outside of Canada, second language spoken at home, family mobility, parent unemployment housing (rent/own), parent education. Data is ranked in n-tiles from 1 (low) to 9 (high).
 - b. Early Development Instrument (EDI) data was used. The EDI data were collected in 2016 for all TCDSB schools and identify children's ability to meet age appropriate developmental expectations. From this data, TCDSB identified schools that needed most support as EDI focus schools.
 - c. The initial list of schools (37) was formulated by selecting:

- i. all EDI focus schools;
 - ii. all schools with more than 5 n-tiles from 1-3 out of the 9 categories in the demographic data; and
 - iii. all schools that had a low n-tile rank for parent income.
 - d. Schools were grouped into their geographic areas based on Superintendent areas (Areas 1&2 – West, Areas 3&4 – North, Areas 5&6 – South, Areas 7&8 – East). All data was then considered by comparing schools within the quadrant.
 - e. Any schools from the original 37 with low n-tile rank in Second Language (indicating many students from homes where English is a second language). Schools with higher rank were eliminated.
 - f. The Parent Unemployment data was used to eliminate additional schools – schools remaining had higher parent unemployment rates.
 - g. If a school already had an Early On program, it was eliminated.
 - h. Schools with lower Parent Education n-tile ranks, higher ranks were eliminated
 - i. Lastly school size was a factor, choosing larger schools from remaining list of schools.
13. The proposed schools are St. Augustine, Holy Family, St. Maria Goretti, St. Marcellus (see Appendix A for data that lead to the selection of these four schools). Principals have been consulted.
14. The replacement school for St. Bruno/St. Raymond has been designed to include built-in storage for loose parts opening to the playground so that after moving into the new site, the OPAL program can continue.
15. Once the success of the OPAL pilot has been evaluated, it will be determined whether or not to extend the program to other schools.

D. EVIDENCE/RESEARCH/ANALYSIS

1. Evidence in support of the OPAL philosophy:
 - a) Pope Francis on outdoor play and nature: “We have a responsibility to pass on the beauty of nature in its integrity to future generations, and an obligation to exercise a just stewardship of the gifts we have received.”

- For students, being outdoors in play develops a knowledge and love of nature.
- b) Ryerson University report on OPAL: TDSB schools found that there were positive changes in play behaviour and attitudes, increased playtime and physical activity, improved communication, negotiation and risk management skills. Interview findings show that outdoor play has become more engaging, inclusive and imaginative after the OPAL play intervention.
 - c) Canadian Council on Learning: “Play nourishes every aspect of children’s development. . . . play develops the foundation of intellectual, social, emotional, physical and emotional skills necessary for success in school and in the life. It paves the way for learning.”
 - d) ParticipACTION Position Statement on Active Outdoor Play: “Access to active play in nature and outdoors--with its risks--is essential for healthy child development. We recommend increasing children's opportunities for self-directed play outdoors in all settings--at home, at school, in child care, the community and nature.”
 - e) Why Loose Parts?: Loose parts play provides equity for all. Students of all capabilities can participate in play. “Loose parts are open-ended and are free of biases and stereotypes, all children can interact with them equally, without any preloaded ideas of how they ought to be used.” (Beloglovsky and Daly, 2014).
 - f) National Center on Early Childhood Development, Teaching and Learning: “STEAM learning happens naturally everyday as children explore, play, and try new things. When young children have the opportunity to investigate the world around them, they learn and experiment with new STEAM skills and theories. Research shows there is a positive relationship between early STEAM experiences and future success in school.”

E. ACTION PLAN

1. Early Years and Facilities will work with schools to develop an implementation plan.

2. Meet with Principals of selected schools to discuss implementation.
3. Develop a Communication Plan to announce the pilot and keep stakeholders up-to-date on the progress of the pilot.
4. TCDSB staff from the 5 pilot schools will attend the OPAL Symposium on Friday, November 2, 2018.
5. Working together with Research, staff will develop a survey to take baseline data and follow-up to measure student well-being and the effects of play.

F. STAFF RECOMMENDATION

That the TCDSB proceed with a 3-year pilot of the OPAL program in the following schools beginning in the fall of 2018: St. Augustine, Holy Family, St. Maria Goretti, St. Marcellus and at St. Bruno/St. Raymond (at the request of EarthDay Canada).