



Report

Review and assessment of Ontario school board policies and procedures on outdoor education/excursions involving water-related activities

Executive summary

Background

'Achieving Excellence: Ontario's Renewed Vision for Education', is about supporting the whole learner – their cognitive, social, emotional, physical development, and the development of their sense of self/spirit – and creating the best possible teaching, learning and assessment experience so that all students succeed.

An important part of supporting well-being, as well as inspiring confidence in publicly funded education, involves working to ensure that Ontario's schools and learning environments are healthy and safe for all students.

While the Ministry of Education (the Ministry) does not currently mandate specific policies or procedures related to safety on outdoor education/excursions, it recognizes that learning in the outdoors is an invaluable opportunity for students to acquire valuable experiences and skills as part of their program of learning. However, the safety of students must be top of mind in all learning environments.

Context

In July 2017, a fifteen-year-old Toronto District School Board (TDSB) grade 9 student drowned during a board-sponsored canoe trip in Algonquin Park. As a result of this incident¹, the Ministry announced on August 17, 2017, a review of school boards'² policies and procedures, and implementation and monitoring practices related to outdoor education/excursions involving water-related activities. This review aimed to determine the extent to which safety concerns were sufficiently addressed.

This review defines outdoor education/excursions as board-sanctioned activities that occur off school grounds whether as part of a formal outdoor education program or a school field trip (including overnight and day trips).

Purpose

Through a competitive Request for Services process, the Ministry engaged Deloitte LLP (Deloitte) to conduct a review and assessment of Ontario school board policies and procedures on outdoor education/excursions (field trips) that specifically involve students participating in water-related activities.

This report is the result of that review and focuses on assessing the following:

- Whether board policies and procedures that meet the minimum standards for risk-management practices (Ophea's Ontario Physical Education Safety Guidelines - OSG), including swim test requirements, supervision ratios and instructor³ certification, are in place in each school board, and
- Whether the policies and procedures are consistently and systematically implemented board-wide and monitored for compliance

¹ **Incidents** include events that result in an injury to students and/or staff, as well as events that increase the risk of injury.

² **School boards** include all district school boards, school authorities, and the Provincial and Demonstration Schools Branch.

³ **Instructors** provide instruction on skills and possess the required certifications. This role could be fulfilled by a parent/guardian/volunteer or an employee of an outside provider.

The following questions guided the review:

1. What is the current state of school boards' policies and procedures on outdoor education/excursions involving students participating in water-related activities
2. To what degree do these policies and procedures meet the minimum standards for risk-management practices set out in Ophea's Ontario Physical Education Safety Guidelines (OSG), including swim tests requirements, supervision ratios and instructor certification
3. What are the monitoring practices in place to ensure that school board policies and procedures are consistently applied board-wide
4. What are the compliance measures in place (e.g., integrated into the approvals process) to ensure compliance with school board policies and procedures
5. What are the best practices for school board policies and procedures for water-related outdoor education/excursions

Report Methodology

From November 2017 to March 2018, Deloitte, working with representatives from the Ministry, collected data from Public, Catholic, English and French-language school boards from across Ontario, as well as from other Canadian and international jurisdictions, to inform a report outlining key findings and recommendations on school board policies and procedures on outdoor education/excursions.

Key data collection methods included:

- An online survey sent to all publicly-funded English and French-language school boards in Ontario⁴
- In-depth interviews with key stakeholders (i.e., school boards and third-party organizations⁵) in relation to outdoor education/excursions⁶
- Focus groups with school and school board representatives⁷
- A review and assessment of school boards' outdoor education/excursions policies and/or procedures⁸, and
- A jurisdictional scan of school board policies and procedures on outdoor education/excursions, across four Canadian and two international jurisdictions⁹ to identify relevant and applicable practices that could be considered for implementation in Ontario

Jurisdictional Scan Selection

Jurisdictions were selected based on their similarities with Ontario (e.g., geography, population, school board structure, etc.) to help ensure that any identified practices could be considered for implementation in Ontario. In particular, like Ontario, these jurisdictions represent a variety of settings (e.g., rural/urban; variable proximity to water), making their approach to outdoor education/excursions policies and programming of potential relevance for consideration in Ontario.

⁴ The survey was sent to Directors of Education, Secretary-Treasurers of School Authorities and the Executive Director of the Provincial and Demonstration Schools Branch. The survey had an overall participation rate of 85% across all school boards (84% rate of participation from English-language school boards, including school authorities and Provincial and Demonstration Schools Branch, and a 92% rate of participation from French-language school boards).

⁵ For the purposes of this report, third-party organizations are organizations that support schools and school boards and that specialize in risk management and/or outdoor education/excursions; specifically: the Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario, the Ontario Camps Association, the Ontario Recreational Canoeing and Kayaking Association, the Ontario School Board Insurance Exchange, Ophea, and the Outdoor Council of Canada.

⁶ Interviews were conducted with eight school boards and six third-party organizations. Each interview consisted of one to five representatives from the board or organization.

⁷ Two focus groups representing 12 English-language school boards and two focus groups representing six French-language school boards were organized.

⁸ 54 school boards' policies and/or procedures on outdoor education/excursions were collected for review through the online survey.

⁹ Selected Canadian jurisdictions are: British Columbia, Alberta, Quebec, and Prince Edward Island. Selected international jurisdictions are New South Wales, Australia, and Devon County, the United Kingdom.

Stakeholder Selection Process

School Board Participant Selection

While all publicly funded school boards in Ontario were invited to participate in the online survey, a representative sample of school boards was selected to participate in interviews and focus groups based on the following criteria: region, board size, rural/urban composition, and, type of publicly funded system (public, Catholic, French and English). Interview and focus group participants included board officials, outdoor education/excursions leaders, school principals, and staff/instructors of outdoor education/excursions.

Figure 1: School board representation

Consultation Format	School Board Regional Representation*
Interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Barrie (two school boards) • London (one school board) • Ottawa (one school board) • Sudbury-North Bay (one school board) • Thunder Bay (one school board) • Toronto Area (two school boards)
Focus Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Barrie (one school board) • London (three school boards) • Ottawa (five school boards) • Sudbury-North Bay (three school boards and one School Authority) • Thunder Bay (two school boards) • Toronto Area (three school boards)

* In both the interview and focus group sessions, each school board identified 1-5 individuals to participate on behalf of their board.

Third-party Organization Participant Selection

It was also important to consult with third-party organizations¹⁰ that specialize in outdoor education/excursions and/or risk management in the province to gain a deeper understanding of industry standards and accreditation requirements. Participants included organization presidents, program directors, risk management coordinators, board members and staff.

Limitations:

There are two key limitations of this review. First, the data collected from the survey, interviews and focus groups is self-reported. Second, not all boards participated in the surveys, focus groups and interviews. Report findings on board policy development, implementation, monitoring and compliance may not represent boards that did not participate in the data collection. To help mitigate this, Deloitte used multiple data collection methods (described above) to collect information from a broad range of stakeholders.

¹⁰ Third-party organizations interviewed: Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario, Ontario Camps Association, Ontario Recreational Canoeing and Kayaking Association, Ontario School Board Insurance Exchange, Ophea and the Outdoor Council of Canada.

Key Findings

1. The majority of school boards have policies and/or procedures on outdoor education/excursions

Overall, 97%¹¹ of school boards that responded to the online survey (*n=68) indicated that they have board-approved policies and/or procedures in place for outdoor education/excursions. Furthermore, survey results indicate that 61% of boards that responded to the online survey (n=67) review their policies and/or procedures every one to four years. However, policies and/or procedures vary significantly between boards (e.g., in terms of the level of detail, degree of specificity, structure, etc.). Focus group and interview participants indicated that this variability is related to limited provincial direction provided to boards to guide their policy development; differences in the internal capacity of boards to support policy development, and; regional contextual factors (e.g., approaches in response to the needs of the local student/community population, etc.).

Only 50% of boards that responded to the survey (n=68) indicated that their outdoor education/excursions policies and/or procedures include considerations related to the diversity of the board's student population.¹² Further, only 30% of boards that responded to the survey (n=68) indicated that they translate information regarding outdoor education/excursions into additional languages to ensure it is communicated to parents/guardians.

While survey results indicated more limited inclusion of diversity-related considerations within board policies and/or procedures, the interviews and focus groups with representatives from schools and school boards across the province highlighted the strong commitment to ensuring equitable access to high-quality and safe outdoor education/excursions opportunities for all students. For example, some school boards indicated that they provide financial support to ensure that cost is not a barrier to participation in outdoor education/excursions, while several urban school boards referenced the use of multicultural liaison officers to support the growing number of new Canadians in their board. Many school boards also work with local community agencies for translation/interpretation services to facilitate communication with parents/guardians.

2. School board policies and/or procedures on outdoor education/excursions are generally aligned with Opeha's Ontario Physical Education Safety Guidelines (OSG)

In total, 94%¹³ of school boards that responded to the survey (n=68) use the OSG as the minimum standard for risk management of outdoor education/excursions. School boards also expressed broad satisfaction with the OSG.¹⁴ Furthermore, 81% of boards that responded to the survey (n=67) indicated that they have policies and/or procedures on outdoor education/excursion policies and/or procedures that meet or exceed the minimum standards outlined in the OSG.¹⁵

*For the survey data, 'n' is the total number of boards that responded to the specific survey question (the denominator for the percentage).

¹¹ 43% of boards that responded to the survey indicated they have board approved policies and/or procedures and supporting administrative procedures for outdoor education/excursions; 29% indicated they have board approved policies and/or procedures for outdoor education/excursions; 7% indicated that they have administrative procedures; while 18% indicated they have 'other' outdoor education/excursions policies and/or procedures.

¹² Diversity considerations refer to, for example, acknowledging the need to attend to the different circumstances and needs of different parts of the student population (e.g., newcomers, including refugees; racialized groups; Indigenous students; students of lower socio-economic status).

¹³ 94% of boards that responded to the survey 'agree' or 'strongly agree' that their board uses the OSG as the minimum standard for risk management for physical activity, including for outdoor education/excursions involving water-related activities.

¹⁴ 98.5% of boards that responded to the survey are 'somewhat satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with the OSG.

¹⁵ 81% of school boards that responded to the survey indicate they have outdoor education/excursion policies and/or procedures that meet or exceed the minimum standards outlined in the OSG, and 17% indicated that they do not know.

However, the degree to which boards explicitly align with the OSG in their board policies and/or procedures varies (e.g., pointing to the OSG as a reference vs. directly incorporating sections of the OSG). Interview and focus group participants suggested this variability stems from a lack of direction on a standardized approach to incorporating the OSG into board policies and/or procedures to support implementation.

3. Schools and school boards expressed an interest in additional support to interpret and implement board policies and/or procedures

While boards are consistently providing schools with mandatory forms/templates¹⁶ to support the implementation of their outdoor education/excursion policies and/or procedures, 49% of school boards that responded to the survey (n=68) indicated that they provide mandatory and/or optional training and professional development related to safety in outdoor education for relevant school staff.¹⁷ Some focus group and interview participants suggested that ensuring consistent interpretation and implementation of board policies and/or procedures poses a challenge at both the school and board level.

Focus group and interview participants expressed an interest in additional learning opportunities based on their local context to support policy and/or procedure implementation. For example, e-learning opportunities may be particularly relevant for rural and remote boards that do not have the same level of access to training opportunities delivered by third-party organizations located in urban settings. In addition, some rural and remote boards rely more heavily on volunteers who may require specially-developed training on outdoor education/excursions. Some focus group and interview participants also expressed an interest in sharing information with one another about successes and challenges related to the implementation of board policies and/or procedures (e.g., developing a network of outdoor education leads to share best practices).

4. Schools and school boards are interested in additional support to monitor adherence to requirements of board policies and ensure compliance is achieved

The majority of boards that responded to the survey indicated that they have processes in place to review/monitor schools' implementation practices in relation to board policies and/or procedures¹⁸ as well as clear frameworks for the approval of outdoor education/excursions.¹⁹

Based on the boards that responded to the survey, monitoring adherence to the specific requirements of board policies and/or procedures (e.g., swim test results, certifications required of teachers/instructors in the OSG) often occurs at the school level with the principal and/or teacher or outdoor educator²⁰. However, only 37% of boards that responded to the survey (n=68) conduct audits to ensure compliance.²¹

¹⁶ 96% of boards that responded to the survey provide mandatory forms/templates to be used by staff to support implementation of board policies and/or procedures.

¹⁷ 25% of boards that responded to the survey indicated that their board provides mandatory training and professional development for relevant school staff, 17% indicated that their board provides optional training and professional development for relevant school staff, and 7% indicated that their board provides both mandatory and optional training and professional development for relevant school staff.

¹⁸ 75% of boards that responded to the survey 'agree' or 'strongly agree' that their board has processes in place to review/monitor schools' implementation practices in relation to board policies.

¹⁹ 93% of boards that responded to the survey have clear delegation of authority framework to provide approvals for outdoor education/excursions.

²⁰ Parental/guardian permissions required for children to participate in outdoor education/excursions are tracked by the school principal (96% of boards that responded to the survey) and/or teacher/outdoor educator (77% of boards that responded to the survey of boards that responded to the survey). Results of swim test requirements are recorded by the school principal (58% of boards that responded to the survey) and/or teacher/outdoor educator (74% of boards that responded to the survey). The results of other (non-swim test) pre-excursion requirements are recorded by the school principal (64% of boards that responded to the survey) and/or teacher/outdoor educator (83% of boards that responded to the survey). Certifications required of teachers/instructors in the OSG or the board's safety standards are tracked by the school principal (76% of boards that responded to the survey) and/or teacher/outdoor educator (45% of boards that responded to the survey).

²¹ 37% of boards that responded to the survey 'agree' or 'strongly agree' that their board conducts audits of the implementation of outdoor education/excursion policies and/or procedures in schools, while 52% 'disagree'.

Board-level interview and focus group participants described a variety of informal methods used to ensure compliance across schools in their board (e.g., as an agenda item during recurring meetings between principals and school board administrators, etc.). Similarly, school-level interviewees and focus group participants described a variety of informal tools and templates to monitor adherence to board policies and/or procedures (e.g., excel tracking documents, hard copy forms, etc.).

Interview and focus group participants expressed an interest in standardized tools and templates to enhance current practices for oversight of both school-level monitoring of requirements and board-level assessment of compliance with policies and/or procedures on outdoor education/excursions.

Recommendations:

The following recommendations have been developed in response to key findings. The recommendations intend to support boards by enhancing existing outdoor education/excursions policies and/or procedures.

1. Develop a set of guiding parameters for the monitoring and assessment of school compliance with board policies and procedures

Rationale for the recommendation:

There is an opportunity to strengthen monitoring and assessment of school compliance with board policies and/or procedures. This recommendation aims to address the following:

- a. Survey, interview, and focus group participants expressed an interest in additional standardized tools and templates to support schools with monitoring adherence to board policy and/or procedure requirements, and
- b. Survey, interview, and focus group participants expressed an interest in standardized tools to enhance mechanisms used by boards to ensure compliance with policies and procedures across schools

Overview of recommendation:

It is important for school boards to ensure they have an approach that supports the standardized monitoring (i.e., tracking of key requirements by schools) and assessment (i.e., regular review and audit by school boards) of compliance with board policies and/or procedures. The monitoring and assessment approach should include: school-based monitoring of requirements in board policies and board-level assessment of compliance with board policies.

School-based monitoring of requirements in board policies:

School boards should provide clear parameters for the consistent monitoring of requirements for outdoor education/excursions by schools within their board. The monitoring process should be supported by board-wide standardized tools and templates, checklists, and associated protocols to enable schools to monitor and report on their results and adherence to the board policies and/or procedures. This could be supported by the following tools:

A. Monitoring report:

- The jurisdictional scan suggested that a useful mechanism to support monitoring at the school level is a 'monitoring report' template. While numerous boards in Ontario and other jurisdictions have a variety of monitoring and reporting templates, a standardized provincial template (e.g., including key definitions and checklists) could be developed and made available to all school boards. These templates may identify key quantitative (e.g., supervision ratios, swim test results) and qualitative (e.g., inclusion of equity considerations) standards that schools should monitor and document for each outdoor education/excursion.
- The monitoring report would enable school administrators (those delegated with oversight of outdoor education/excursions) to gauge their schools' adherence to the requirements of their board policies.

B. Post-excursion reflection exercise:

- The post-excursion reflection exercise is an opportunity for those involved with an outdoor education/excursion at the school level to collect feedback on successes, challenges and lessons learned. This could include a discussion between principals, outdoor education/excursion leads, volunteers, parents/guardians, students and/or third-party organizations.
- Based on interviews and focus groups, some schools indicated that they have implemented a post-excursion reflection exercise, finding it to be a helpful form of continuous improvement.

Board-level assessment of compliance with board policies:

Boards could compile and review monitoring reports to assess schools' overall compliance with board policies and/or procedures. The board assessment process should include:

- A process for schools to submit their monitoring reports to the school board at a pre-determined frequency (i.e., monthly or quarterly reports), and
- A process for action when the requirements of board policies and/or procedures are not met. For example, the board could work with the school to develop an action plan to:
 - a. Understand why minimum standards were not achieved; and,
 - b. Ensure the current approval framework addresses and prevents the issue from recurring prior to the next outdoor education/excursion.

Considerations for Implementation:

Guiding parameters for the monitoring and assessment of school compliance with board policies and/or procedures and associated tools and templates (i.e., monitoring reports) could be provided to school boards. However, boards should retain the flexibility to adapt the approach and/or resources to meet their unique needs.

Examples of practices from other jurisdictions:

This recommendation draws on practices identified in Devon County in the United Kingdom, led by the Outdoor Education Advisers' Panel (OEAP)²² and in New South Wales, Australia, led by the School Sports Unit (SSU).

In Devon County, the OEAP exists to ensure effective leadership and management of high quality outdoor education/excursions across schools. Members represent local authorities and other academy trusts and independent schools. A key output of this group is the 'National Guidance on Outdoor Education'. This document aims to reduce the burden on schools through the provision of standardized requirements that may be incorporated into school policies and procedures. As some of the standardized requirements pertain to monitoring compliance, the document includes standardized tools and templates (e.g., self-evaluation frameworks with tools for measuring the impact of the outdoor education/excursion on the learning and personal development of students).

²² OEAP National Guidance. (2017). 'Model Forms, Mind maps and Checklists'. Retrieved March 10, 2018, from: <https://oeapng.info/downloads/model-forms-mind-maps-and-checklists/>.

In New South Wales, the SSU provides schools with open-ended guiding questions to assess compliance with New South Wales's policies and guidelines on outdoor education/excursions. Instructions and suggested documents accompany each question. The designated school contact (normally the principal) works with the SSU regional officer to discuss responses to guiding questions and ensure all requirements are met. The guiding questions used are:²³

- a. How is the policy being implemented to meet student, staff and community needs in your school context?
- b. What is your evidence that the school has consistently observed and applied all policy requirements?
- c. What processes are in place to review the school's implementation in relation to this policy?

2. Identify training needs and build capacity

Rationale for recommendation:

Providing additional training and capacity building opportunities (e.g., e-learning opportunities, conferences, etc.) at the board and school level could address the following findings:

- a. Varying degrees of outdoor education/excursions expertise and administrative capacity across boards in the province, and
- b. Limited outdoor education/excursion training and development available to all staff (i.e., board-level administrators and teachers) on:
 - i. Interpretation and implementation, and
 - ii. Monitoring and compliance

Overview of recommendation:

The following provides an illustrative list of the types of training needs identified by school board and school staff in the survey, focus groups, and interviews. Specifically, training and capacity building should be designed to:

- Support the inclusion of equity-related considerations in outdoor education/excursions policies and/or procedures (e.g., through training on applying an equity lens to policy and/or procedure development).
- Ensure a broad awareness and shared understanding of any centrally developed tools and templates (e.g., monitoring report) amongst schools and school boards;
- Support board-specific policy and/or procedure development (e.g., how to incorporate OSG requirements into board policies, how to tailor policies to meet the specific needs of schools within boards, etc.);
- Facilitate consistent interpretation and application across schools and school boards of the OSG requirements (e.g., support understanding key sections of the OSG);
- Establish role-based competencies and training related to the planning, implementation and/or monitoring of compliance with outdoor education/excursions (e.g., for board policy leads, school administrators, outdoor education/excursion leads, volunteers, etc.). These could address:
 - Requirements for the planning and approval of outdoor education/excursions involving water-related activities (i.e., understanding all considerations involved in the approval process);
 - Risk management and liability practices for outdoor education/excursions involving water-related activities (i.e., understanding relevant risk management practices);
 - Effective implementation-related considerations for outdoor education/excursions involving water-related activities (e.g., providing further details on required swim test documentation); and,

²³ NSW Department of Education. (2017). 'Evidence of Policy Implementation Guidelines'. Retrieved February 27, 2018, from: <https://app.education.nsw.gov.au/sport/page/384>.

- Monitoring compliance with outdoor education/excursions policies and/or procedures involving water-related activities (e.g., leading practices in tracking required documentation and approvals).

Training could be delivered through:

- **Virtual learning:** to reach the broadest audience while ensuring standardized training and delivery across the province in a fair and equitable manner. This approach also allows school boards to provide self-directed learning to match the pace and requirements of the participants.
- **In-person learning:** to provide opportunities for those who may not have high-speed internet and allow for more engagement with the instructor.

Considerations for implementation:

The training content could be developed and delivered by:

- The Ministry (i.e., leveraging internal expertise and capabilities)
- Third party providers (i.e., using competitive procurement for the development and/or hosting of a training program), or
- Hybrid model incorporating the first two approaches (i.e., leveraging Ministry capabilities while outsourcing the development and/or hosting of training modules)

Examples of practices from other jurisdictions:

This recommendation draws from practices identified in the jurisdictional scan from Alberta, Canada, and New South Wales, Australia. In Alberta, the Canadian Rockies Public School Board, in conjunction with the Outdoor Council of Canada (OCC) developed:

- Teacher-specific training on the core principles of outdoor leadership, including implementation and post reflection procedures, and
- Administrator-specific training to develop effective oversight for outdoor programming.

The New South Wales government, through the School Sports Unit (SSU), provides an awareness presentation for school staff to support the interpretation of New South Wales's policies and safety guidelines for outdoor education/excursions²⁴. This awareness presentation is available online with accompanying instructions for school administrators to conduct the presentation. This presentation provides school staff with a walkthrough of the core components of the policies and guidelines and outlines the implications of key decisions associated with specific activities as well as related risk management strategies.

²⁴ For an example, consult the NSW Department of Education. (2017). Sport and Physical Activity Policy. Retrieved March 29, 2018, from <https://app.education.nsw.gov.au/sport/page/1042>.

3. Establish a centralized policy implementation support centre

Rationale for recommendation:

A centralized policy implementation support centre would assist both schools and school boards to address the following:

- A. School board and school representatives expressed an interest in additional Ministry direction and standardized tools in one location to support:
 - i. Policy and/or procedure development and interpretation (e.g., knowing how best to incorporate the OSG into board policies and/or procedures)
 - ii. Monitoring requirements and assessing compliance (i.e., providing support to effectively use centrally-developed tools and templates, such as a monitoring report, to monitor and assess compliance)
- Variable outdoor education/excursion expertise and administrative capacity, across boards, and
- School board and school representatives expressed an interest in the development of a Community of Practice with board and school staff as well as third-party organizations in order to share best practices in outdoor education/excursions

Overview of recommendation:

A policy implementation support centre would address the above by ensuring all schools and school boards have equal access to standardized information through centrally available resources. The development of a policy implementation centre could involve²⁵:

- A. Building a support system with:
 - i. Centrally available tools, templates and guidance to both complement or enhance existing school board policies and/or procedures
 - ii. Supporting resources to accompany standardized tools and templates (e.g., instruction resources, case examples, detailed definitions, etc.), and
 - iii. Policy advice, interpretation and guidance (this could include in-person training and/or telephone and online support to answer questions)
- B. Supporting awareness and information sharing across the province by:
 - i. Developing awareness tools and templates (e.g., awareness presentation templates for school boards to use at schools in their district, etc.)
 - ii. Establishing a Community of Practice (e.g., in person or online) available to school boards and their schools to interact with each other and share practices, and
 - iii. Sharing important updates and new resources (e.g., updates to the OSG, new resources available, important information, etc.) across the province.

²⁵ A detailed illustrative list of potential services that could be offered by the policy implementation support centre is provided in Appendix C in the full-length report.

All supporting resources should be developed to allow flexibility in consideration of the unique needs of schools and should employ an equity lens in their development.

Considerations for implementation:

Three approaches to implementation should be reviewed for consideration:

- Internal hosting by the Ministry (leveraging internal resources and capabilities)
- Third-party organizations (i.e., competitive procurement for the development of the supporting resources and/or hosting/maintaining the services), or
- Hybrid model incorporating aspects of the first two approaches

Examples of practices from other jurisdictions:

This recommendation draws from a similar support centre established by the New South Wales state Government in Australia through their School Sports Unit (SSU). Major functions of the SSU include hosting and maintaining centralized policies, supporting tools and templates, and providing advice and guidance to schools.²⁶ The SSU aims to increase engagement amongst schools, build consistency in the implementation of policies and procedures, and ultimately lead to greater compliance with centralized policies and guidelines.

These services are comparable to online supports offered by the Outdoor Education Advisers' Panel (OEAP) in Devon County in the United Kingdom.²⁷ OEAP's website system hosts centralized tools and templates and uses an online forum of regional advisers to share information and drive consistency in the development and implementation of board policies and procedures.

Within Ontario, one school board developed an awareness presentation for high-care activities involving water for superintendents, principals, vice-principals and school staff. The presentation aims to develop a shared understanding of the excursion process and ensure student safety by providing an overview of: key definitions, key resources, roles and responsibilities, relevant forms and templates, and approval requirements. The school board has received feedback from schools in their board that the presentation clarified processes and increased consistency in the interpretation and application of outdoor education policies and procedures.

Summary and Conclusion:

School boards across Ontario are passionate about providing safe and enriching outdoor education/excursion opportunities to all of their students. School boards are also committed to developing and maintaining effective outdoor education/excursion policies and/or procedures.

However, while the vast majority of school boards indicate they have outdoor education/excursions policies and/or procedures in place and use the OSG as the minimum standards for risk management, the interviews, focus groups, and qualitative survey results suggest that there is interest in, and a need for, additional support. One of the common themes surfaced in the surveys, interviews, and focus groups was the need for additional opportunities for information-sharing across boards as well as between boards and third-party organizations. Focus group and interview participants expressed an interest in having additional opportunities to share best practices, leverage existing knowledge, and obtaining additional training.

This report provides a set of recommendations for the Ministry and school boards' consideration based on these findings. The emphasis on supporting and enabling school boards ensures that they have the flexibility to address the needs of their students and local communities while meeting safety requirements outlined in the OSG.

²⁶ NSW Department of Education. (2017). Sport and Physical Activity Policy. Retrieved March 29, 2018, from https://app.education.nsw.gov.au/sport/Home/PolicyAndGuidelines?cache_id=ac1a2.

²⁷ OEAP. (2017). OEAP Guidance Documents. Retrieved March 29, 2018, from <https://oeapng.info/guidance-documents/>.

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