

healthy schools ALBERTA

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Supporting Healthy School Communities!



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**Fresh Air Fridays: An Adventure
in Active Learning**

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IN THIS ISSUE

As we're welcoming in a new year, we hope this issue will provide you with inspiration, tools and resources to help you prepare for the year ahead! We always welcome feedback at info@everactive.org.

~ The Ever Active Schools Team



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FEATURE STORY

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Cover photo: Students participating in Fresh Air Fridays at E.W. Coffin Elementary in Calgary, Alberta (from our feature story).

Cover photo credit: Margaux McWatt, Ever Active Schools.

ADVERTISING

Please contact
margaux@everactive.org for rates.

2015-16 PROFESSIONAL LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

Ever Active Schools is offering 11 unique professional learning opportunities. Check them out at: www.everactive.org/professional-learning-opportunities.



MEET OUR STAFF

We asked some of the Ever Active Schools staff the question, “What did you do over the holidays to stay healthy and active?” Read their answers below!



TOP TO BOTTOM, LEFT TO RIGHT:

BRIAN TORRANCE, Director

Tried to stay upright on my skis while teaching the kids.

RHONDA SCHILBERG, Administrative Assistant

Relaxed and enjoyed the holidays with my family.

CHESA CORSIATTO, Educational Assistant

Took some much needed time to wind down and re-charge before the new year! Yoga, the mountains and time with friends and family.



MARGAUX MCWATT, Communications Coordinator

Stayed active inside and outside. Time well spent with family and friends.

HAYLEY DEGAUST, Provincial Projects Coordinator

I travelled out of the city to enjoy some fresh mountain air with friends! Skiing, running and relaxing!

RYAN FAHEY, School Health Facilitator

Spent time working out, running the Edmonton trails and reading books by my Christmas tree!



KATELYNN THEAL, Provincial Projects Coordinator

Enjoyed friends and fresh air.

KERRI MURRAY, Director of Projects

Reflected on the year and felt grateful. Set some goals for the year ahead.

CHRIS FENLON-MACDONALD, Provincial Education Coordinator

Spent time in the mountains with family and friends. ■



WHAT'S HAPPENING

Ever Active Schools' Updates

Join Ever Active Schools in partnership with Sport for Life and Be Fit for Life for the 2nd annual **PHYSICAL LITERACY SUMMIT** on March 10-12, 2016, at WinSport in Calgary. The summit will bring together champions and leaders in education, health, sport and recreation for three days of keynote speakers, facilitated learning, multiple workshop streams and certification opportunities. Visit www.everactive.org/2nd-annual-physical-literacy-summit for more information.

Looking for a way to get your students active through the cold winter months? Join the **ALBERTA MEDICAL ASSOCIATION YOUTH RUN CLUB** for physical activity ideas all year round. The Alberta Medical Association Youth Run Club is a fun, free and flexible program and an excellent way to start a new run club or enhance one that already exists in your school community. Become a champion for your school today and register at www.everactive.org/alberta-medical-association-youth-run-club.

Ever Active Schools is hosting the 7th annual **SHAPING THE FUTURE CONFERENCE** in Kananaskis, Alberta, on January 28-30, 2016. Over 500 delegates from the education, health and recreation sectors will be participating over the three days. With exciting keynote speakers such as internationally recognized Dr. Mike Evans, the conference will be sure to empower and engage school communities across Alberta. To learn more, visit: www.everactive.org/shaping-the-future-2016.

Professional learning is an integral opportunity to reflect upon and learn about new pedagogies involved in the teaching practice and are key to benefiting student learning. **TEACHERS' CONVENTIONS** are the cornerstone to this learning. In addition to many great opportunities across Alberta, Ever Active Schools is excited to present a half-day symposium at the Calgary City Teachers' Convention focusing on the impacts that health has on student learning. Participate with us in keynote addresses and breakout sessions as we explore the relationship that social emotional learning, physical activity and healthy eating have on your students' success. Visit www.everactive.org/teachers-conventions-2016 for details.

Visit www.everactive.org to discover what else is new at Ever Active Schools. ■

UPCOMING EVENTS

OCTOBER - FEBRUARY 2016
Healthy Active School Symposia

JANUARY 27, 2016
Resilience as a Path to Healthy School Communities: Lessons Learned from Indigenous Teachings

JANUARY 28-30, 2016
Shaping the Future Conference

FEBRUARY - MARCH, 2016
Alberta Teachers' Conventions

MARCH 10-12, 2016
Physical Literacy Summit

MAY 12-14, 2016
Health and Physical Education Council (HPEC) Conference



Photo: Students participating in the 2015 Alberta Medical Association Youth Run Club Launch in Calgary, Alberta.

IN THE COMMUNITY

Piloting Social Emotional Learning in Hanna Primary School

SUBMITTED BY ANDREA OLSEN, PROJECT REACH, AND SAMANTHA WILSON, HANNA PRIMARY SCHOOL

In 2014, Project REACH and Prairie Land Regional Division chose Hanna Primary School to be a Social Emotional Learning Pilot School.

Hanna Primary School staff agreed that if all students could learn tools and strategies to help them self-regulate and talk about their feelings, they would be able to learn and perform better at school.

Prior to becoming a Social Emotional Learning Pilot School, Hanna Primary School already had a lot of social emotional learning strategies in place, as well as a wellness worker, family resource worker and a keen administration and staff that understood the importance of social emotional learning for students in Grades K-3.

Hanna Primary School staff agreed that if all students could learn tools and strategies to help them self-regulate and talk about their feelings, they would be able to learn and perform better at

school. Providing social emotional learning lessons in class and making them part of the school's culture shows students and families that social emotional learning is not an add-on but an essential skill.

Today, the school is in the implementation and sharing phase. Some of the changes the school has seen include using a social emotional learning language with its students and having social emotional learning programming in class, during lunch and recess and also with families.

When asked what they've learned from the process, family resource worker Samantha Wilson and Project REACH wellness worker Andrea Olsen say, "Use what you already know and have. We already had things happening at the school, we just started being more intentional with them. Always coming back to why these things are important for our mental health and talking about why and when we need to use the tools we are practicing." They add, "Start with people who are also passionate about social emotional learning. The rest will eventually jump on board if you are passionate enough."

For schools interested in social emotional learning, Samantha and Andrea recommend this resource: www.promoteprevent.org/sites/www.promoteprevent.org/files/resources/leading_an_sel_school.pdf.

If you have any questions, please contact Andrea Olsen at andrea.olsen@plrd.ab.ca. ■



Photo: Students involved in the Yoga Association of Alberta's pilot project.

Yoga in Schools Residency Pilot Project

SUBMITTED BY DEBBIE SPENCE, YOGA ASSOCIATION OF ALBERTA

“When you come to yoga as an adult, you always wish you had it sooner,” says Krista Strayer, a Yoga Association of Alberta certified yoga teacher. “My passion is to get yoga to kids really young so it becomes ingrained in how they operate. [...]As they start to transition into the teen years and young adult years they have these tools to be able to help them make the right decisions in life and stay healthy.”

Krista was one of six certified yoga teachers doing yoga residencies in 11 urban and rural Alberta schools, as part of the Yoga Association of Alberta's pilot project. During the four-month project, yoga instructors taught yoga to 2,782 students, teachers and staff.

“We saw huge growth in our students’ perseverance and focus during yoga from start to finish,” says a vice principal from one of the participating schools. In survey feedback, students responded by saying, “I feel way more relaxed and calm,” “I love yoga!” and “It made me happier.”

Filmmaker Jason Gondziola created a five-minute video of the project: www.youtube.com/watch?v=-_rlhRLkt2g&feature=youtu.be.

The pilot project was made possible by a grant from the Government of Alberta's Healthy Active Living and Recreation Initiatives Funding Program. The project supports the government's role in building an Active Alberta as it applies to children and young adults. Project partners included Ever Active Schools, Be Fit for Life

and the school divisions of Parkland, Peace River, Aspen View and Rocky View, as well as the Calgary Board of Education.

Visit yoga.ca or contact yaa@yoga.ca for more information or to get in touch with certified yoga teachers.

RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS:

- Be Fit for Life's “Yoga Techniques for the Classroom” is a free resource available at https://provincialfitness.uaopencart-prod.srv.ualberta.ca/index.php?route=product/product&path=108&product_id=758.

The Yoga Association of Alberta joins its voice with the many children, parents and classroom teachers who expressed their sincere gratitude for the foresight of the Alberta Government in providing the funds for this innovative program. The Yoga Association of Alberta hopes to continue exploring similar projects throughout the province. ■

Bringing Mindfulness to the Classroom

BY KATE LOVE, ROBERT THIRSK HIGH SCHOOL

INHALE...GROWTH

"Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all." - Aristotle.

As teachers, we must learn and grow to enable our students to do the same.

EXHALE...OPEN-MINDEDNESS

Mindfulness, or "paying attention, on purpose, to the present moment without judgment," as defined by Jon Kabat-Zinn, is a helpful tool in education. The practice of mindfulness supports a personalized and purposeful awareness. Used as the basis of a strong, integrated wellness strategy in school communities, this practice primes students for better learning, creates meaningful relationships and helps build a culture of care.

INHALE...THE PRESENT MOMENT

To make an external impact, we must first look inward. Teacher wellness is extremely important. When we are fully present with our students, we reflect this presence in their experience as learners. Students can tell when we are happy and healthy in our work and in our lives, which influences the connections we make and the learning environments we create.

EXHALE...AN AUTHENTIC RESPONSE

The relevance of mindfulness in education is growing with the understanding of our students' needs and of the importance of wellness as educators. Mindfulness creates a common wellness practice revealing opportunities for trans-disciplinary collaboration. We don't need a common subject area, just a common intentionality to support our students' individual strengths and opportunities for growth.

INHALE...LIFE-LONG LEARNING

Mindfulness helps us cultivate meaningful connections and collaboration, informs our task design, assessment and self-regulation



Photo: Kate Love practicing yoga.

Used as the basis of a strong, integrated wellness strategy in school communities, mindfulness primes students for better learning, creates meaningful relationships and helps build a culture of care.

strategies within our school community.

At Robert Thirsk High School, my principal has provided the opportunity to start staff meetings and professional development with a moment of mindfulness. This has helped set a precedent for a culture of wellness in our school community. In response to our TELL Them FROM Me results and listening to student voice, we launched the Mindfulness Assessment Preparation initiative, which introduces student-led mindfulness techniques to combat exam anxiety.

We offer introductory mindfulness for students involved in a range of programs from English Language Arts to Paced Learning Program/Adapted Learning Program students. I've focused attention on mindfulness for performance and competition with students involved with our band, choir and athletics department. The science community has benefited with walking practices for our natural science classes, collaborating with biology students in measuring the effect of formal mindfulness on blood pressure and fostering interdisciplinary opportunities with psychology students.

The culture of wellness we have created through mindfulness at Robert Thirsk High School has expanded its reach with strong community partnerships through our success center including the Canadian Mental Health Association and charitable initiatives

supporting people and causes in our community with partners like the Calgary Food Bank and the Jacket Racket with mindfulness as the vehicle to help raise awareness.

EXHALE...OUR OWN REFLECTION

John Hattie says, "The biggest effects on student learning occur when the teachers become learners of their own teaching, and when students become their own teachers."

When we are attentive to the present moment, we have the capacity to learn instead of acting from conditioned patterns of reactivity.

So, how do we practically implement these practices when teaching today's learners?

JUST BREATHE!


Kate Love is a mother to two inspiring kids, a yogini and has been a teacher with the Calgary Board of Education since 2005. She specializes in Yoga, English Language Arts and the Performing Arts. Kate's certifications and experience as a yoga instructor have informed her teaching in the classroom. She's passionate about the alignment of

mind, body and heart in innovative ways and contributing to teacher, student and school wellness. Her studies have led her to San Francisco, New York and the University of Massachusetts' Centre for Mindfulness to pursue the teaching path in Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction. Her practice informs her teaching, parenting and perspective. Her intention as a teacher is to be #evermindful. Connect with Kate on Twitter @kateloveyoga or on Facebook @Evermindful.

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Kabat-Zinn, Jon. "Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness." New York, N.Y.: Pub. by Dell Pub., a Division of Bantam Doubleday Dell Pub. Group, 1991. Print.

Hattie, John. "The Argument Visible Teaching and Learning." Visible Learning A Synthesis of over 800 Meta-Analyses Relating to Achievement. New York: Routledge, 2009. 22. Print. ■



KidSport Alberta wants kids to experience ALL the benefits of sport – from physical fitness to self-confidence and teamwork. This is an opportunity for your school to spice up your 'track & field' or 'fun day' with KidSport's help!

GET YOUR STUDENTS READY FOR SUMMER

Registration kits include ribbons, tattoos and other fun items to enhance your day for **FREE**. The 2015/2016 school year theme will be Celebrating the Olympics Across Alberta. For more information on how you can get your school involved in KidSport Sports Day Contact info@KidSport.ab.ca or phone 888-914 KIDS(5437)

Registration will begin online January 30 at KidSport.ab.ca.



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- **Multi-Graded Classroom Resources** - teacher support for those in front of a multi-graded classroom on or off a Hutterite colony. Lesson plans include teacher-lead materials and independent work for students.

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ALBERTA'S CHOICE SINCE 1923



GET
ACTIVE

Photos: (Left) Tribe flags created by Collin Dillon's students. (Right) Grade 10 physical education students participating in the survivor unit.

Co-operation and Team-building in Physical Education

SUBMITTED BY COLLIN DILLON, ST. JOSEPH CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL

I find that Alberta Education's physical education curriculum is really complementary to team-building activities. All 21st century learners are expected to demonstrate an element of social well-being, communication and collaboration. I created a survivor unit for my physical education classes that caters to those skills in a positive way, while still promoting physical activity.

I modified the resources available from www.thephysicaleducator.com, Alberta Education and www.pegames.org to accommodate my students and my environment. Each of the activities in my lesson plan gives students a chance to reflect on the question of the day, which, for day one, focused on co-operating with others and improving communication skills.

Having this lesson plan helps me not only implement the lesson, it also allows me to look back and seek ways to improve so that I can continue to offer the best program for my students. I continually strive to support learning through a positive physical activity lens.

I encourage you to try out this lesson and, if you like it, experiment by creating a survivor unit like I did.

Survivor Lesson Plan, Day One

**IDEAL FOR ≈20
STUDENTS IN
GRADES 7-12**

DAILY THEMES:

- Co-operative - Students work together to achieve a common goal in each activity
- Physical - Students participate in activities that will challenge their physical abilities
- Intellectual - Students work together in a group to challenge their problem solving skills.

ALBERTA CURRICULUM (GRADES 10-12):

- Develop and apply practices that contribute to teamwork
- Demonstrate an understanding of behaviour appropriate to positive active living role modelling
- Analyze, evaluate and modify performance of locomotor skills and concepts—effort, space and relationships—to perform and create a variety of activities to improve personal performance
- Analyze, evaluate and modify performance of non-locomotor skills and concepts—effort, space and relationships—to perform and create a variety of activities to improve personal performance
- Develop and refine activity-specific skills in a variety of games.

EQUIPMENT:

Poster paper, markers, hula hoops, a variety of sports balls and a puzzle for each team to solve. ➤



Learning Experiences

Introduction and Warm Up

Have each team brainstorm a tribe name and create a tribe 'flag' using the poster paper and markers. Students should also come up with team values and a chant.

Modifications and Teaching Points

If students are stuck, try giving them a theme to use in developing their name and chant.

Learning Activities

River Cross – Each tribe has two hula hoops and they must travel from a start point to end point by only stepping into the hula hoops. No player is permitted to step outside of the hoops.

Object Move – Each tribe must transport the following objects while only using the designated body part:

- Basketball – Back
- Volleyball – Elbows
- Mat – Hands
- Dodgeball – Head.

Plank Hold – Each person will perform a plank hold. The last person to hold a proper technique with less than two corrections will award their tribe a victory.

Team Puzzle – Each tribe will have a puzzle at the other end of the gym. On go, each tribe travels to half and performs five burpees, then approaches the puzzle. Once solved they go to half, perform five burpees and finish the challenge.

Stork Stand – Similar to plank hold except each player holds a stork stand as long as they can. The person who lasts the longest with fewer than two corrections wins the challenge for their tribe.

Modifications and Teaching Points

Throughout all activities, be sure to promote positive communication among teams. Participants should work together to achieve a common goal or strategy and have fun!

If you need more activities, try adding in mine field, pinnie tag or blind soccer.

You can find additional games at:

- pegames.org
- www.thephysicaleducator.com/resources/games/
- <https://education.alberta.ca/physicaleducationonline/teacherresources/>.

Closure and Cool Down

Daily iPad Question - At some point, each participant will head to the iPad to record a response to the given question. For example, "How did you feel about working with a random group of people and how can you make the best of that situation?"

References:

"Games." *The Physical Educator*. <www.thephysicaleducator.com/resources/games/>

PE Games. <pegames.org>

Alberta Education. <<https://education.alberta.ca/physicaleducationonline/teacherresources/>>. ■



Appetite for Change

SUBMITTED BY KATELYNN THEAL, EVER ACTIVE SCHOOLS

Appetite for Change is a coalition of athletes, coaches, parents and event hosts united by an ambition to ensure that nutritious choices are served at championship athletic events—healthy choices that reflect the qualities and virtues of athleticism.

Learn more about Appetite for Change by exploring Ever Active Schools' toolkit at www.everactive.org/toolkit, where you will find out more about the policy and discover exciting new resources like "Serve This, Not That."

Appetite for Change resulted from a partnership between Alberta Schools' Athletic Association and Ever Active Schools, through the support of a grant from the Alberta Healthy School Community Wellness Fund.

In 2014, the partnering organizations formed a committee to find a way to positively influence the nutritional offerings at Alberta Schools' Athletic Association events. Alberta Schools' Athletic Association passed the committee's following recommendation, for implementation in 2015-16:

All food offered at Alberta Schools' Athletic Association provincial championship events, hosted in school facilities, must fit within the Choose Most Often and Choose Sometimes categories of the Alberta Nutritional Guidelines for Children and Youth.

Appetite for Change offers support and services to help transform school concessions into a healthy environment for the athletes of tomorrow.

We hope that you, too, share an Appetite for Change, and will access the toolkit to make over the food environments in your school!

Contact Katelynn at katelynn@everactive.org for more information on the project and visit the toolkit at www.everactive.org/toolkit. ■



Photos: (Above) An excerpt of the new "Serve This, Not That" resource, available at www.everactive.org/toolkit. (Right) An image of the Appetite for Change manifesto.



**WE ARE THE ATHLETES. WE ARE THE COACHES.
WE ARE THE PARENTS. AND WE ARE THE EVENT HOSTS.**

Arm-in-arm, we are the agents of change, on the frontline in the fight for serving food products at Championship Sporting Events that reflect the very qualities and virtues of athleticism itself.

TOGETHER WE ARE DEMANDING BETTER.

We want food served at events that is athlete approved and fuels their performance.

We want a healthier attitude toward nutrition that makes health conscious athletes and their guardians feel welcome at sponsored events.

And we want our partner vendors to recognize that making the change is as sound a business decision as it is, a morally responsible one.

Collectively we form an alliance of good food activists who are campaigning for what we believe is the greater good of our sporting communities.

We are the concerned constituents of Championship Sporting Events and we represent, [Appetite For Change](#).



The development of this toolkit was made possible by funding provided by the Alberta Healthy School Community Wellness Fund.



GET
INSPIRED

Photo: Athabasca Delta Community School students.

Building Relationships through Experiential Learning

SUBMITTED BY LISA MURPHY, ATHABASCA DELTA COMMUNITY SCHOOL, WITH HELP FROM MIKE MERCREDI, LAKE ATHABASCA YOUTH COUNCIL

My name is Lisa Murphy. Originally from Labrador City, Newfoundland, I have been teaching at Athabasca Delta Community School in Fort Chipewyan, Alberta, for the past two years. Fort Chipewyan is a community in Northern Alberta that is home to Mikisew Cree First Nation, Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation and Métis peoples.

During my time at Athabasca Delta Community School, I have been able to focus on engaging my students using outdoor, experiential and cultural activities. Our program involves community mentorships with local hunters and community members. We are supported through a partnership with Mike Mercredi, the experiential learning initiative coordinator with the Lake Athabasca Youth Council. Mike and I work closely together using the First Nations' Seasonal Learning Wheel to break down hunting, fishing, trapping and cultural activities into the four seasons to guide us.

Last year I taught a Grade 7/8/9 split class, mostly made up of boys. I used experiential education to help build relationships with the students, motivate them to come to school and give them hands-on experience while learning the curriculum.

We started the year off making our own canoe paddles, which we used for our canoe trip. Later we went on a week-long Moose Camp, taking a float plane to a local Elder's trap line, setting up camp, making moose callers, calling moose, hunting fowl, setting nets and learning how to co-operate and work as a team.

When the cold months came, we organized winter camps that brought us to a local hunter's trap line. We left on skidoos and spent our time learning winter camp routines, as well as how to set traps for pine marten. The camps lasted three or four days and the students did it all—they started the fire in the stove, cooked moose meat and journaled to reflect on their experiences. Throughout the winter we went cross-country skiing, snowshoeing and learned to build winter fires and quinzhees.

By giving the students these hands-on experiences, it motivated them to come to school, taught them skills about their culture they might not normally be exposed to at home and generally helped with behaviour throughout the year. This year at Athabasca Delta Community School, I have seen the results of those experiential activities in the relationships that I have with the students. Besides the academic things that they learned, they also became co-operative and motivated leaders at the school. The experiential program has had lasting positive effects for the students and myself that we will value for years to come. ■

Naturalized Play Spaces

SUBMITTED BY DANIELLA CLONFERO, EVER ACTIVE SCHOOLS

This year, ParticipACTION is emphasizing that the biggest risk to children is keeping them indoors. With increasing evidence that children need to get outside and play more in nature, Stettler Elementary School took a unique approach to building a new school play space.

When Stettler Elementary School discovered that their playground equipment had to be taken down because it no longer met safety codes, the community saw it as an opportunity to create a non-traditional play space. According to the David Suzuki Foundation, "Studies have shown that spending time in nature helps with recall and memory, problem solving and creativity. Children (and adults) who spend more time outside are also physically healthier." Paving the path for naturalized play spaces in Alberta seemed like a step in the right direction for the elementary school.

The project received grants from Agrium Community Green Space, the school council, private citizens and members of the local business community. Over 20 local businesses donated resources, equipment and time to the project. Planning of the play space involved students at the school who requested

trees, rocks and paths. Key partners in the planning and building included the school council, parents, school staff, Alberta Health Services, Clearview Public Schools and the Town of Stettler. To thank those who helped, a recognition sign acknowledging donors of time and resources was placed in the park.

The space is not only an area for children to play freely, but is also a fun gathering place where children are encouraged to test boundaries, learn new things and use their imagination. The final product includes a triple slide, horizontal climbing wall, walking path, tick-tack-toe, moveable hop scotch, a log fort, spinners and an obstacle course. Logs were put in the ground to resemble seats and a table, but can also be walked on and hopped across. Children can enjoy aspects of nature such as perennials, tree beds, mulch, pea gravel and other loose parts for exploratory play.

For more information, please contact Stacie Pederson at stacie.pederson@albertahealthservices.ca.

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Prezi. "A Naturalized Play Space- Planning Beyond Traditional Ideas. Stettler Naturalized Playground." 2015. <<https://prezi.com/39unomraxour/a-naturalized-play-space-planning-beyond-traditional-ideas/>>. ■



Get Active After School

Active After School is an online resource that makes it easy to find fun, safe activities, snack ideas, tools and resources to enhance your after school program. Active After School Alberta is developing and populating its own page, where stories are being collected from around the province, as well as featuring free resources to support your program. Find activities, planning resources, training resources, safety guidelines, manuals and information on staffing, safety and inclusion at <http://activeafterschool.ca>.

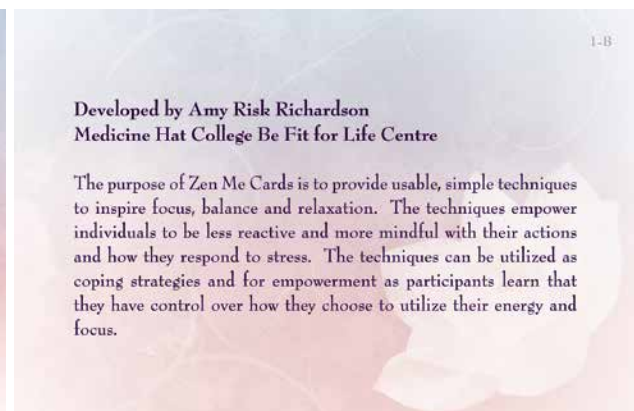
Lucky 7's Resource

Ever Active Schools has teamed up with the Alberta Medical Association Youth Run Club and Be Fit for Life to create a new resource. The Lucky 7's card game includes seven different game ideas using four suits sure to get you and your group moving. Develop physical literacy through fun activities with this new resource that supports the development of Fundamental Movement Skills. The resource is ideal for medium to large groups and includes variations suitable for students K-12. Available for purchase at <http://www.everactive.org/online-store>.



Zen Me Cards

Zen Me cards are a new tool created by Be Fit for Life for wellness leaders that include self-coping strategies to manage stress, emotions, attention and energy levels. The deck includes sections to address multiple needs related to relaxation and stress management. Each section includes a journal prompt card. Try practicing a technique and reflecting on a journal or discussion topic listed or create your own journal prompt. The deck includes energizer ideas that assist participants in preparing the mind and body for Zen Me techniques. The energizer activities also promote physical literacy. Several techniques provide an opportunity to work with a partner or group, developing connectedness to others. Purchase your set at www.provincialfitnessunit.ca/zen-me/.





FEATURE STORY

Photos: E.W. Coffin Elementary students during Fresh Air Fridays.

Fresh Air Fridays: An Adventure in Active Learning

SUBMITTED BY MARGAUX MCWATT, EVER ACTIVE SCHOOLS

“Instead of just being cooped up inside, we get to go outside, have fun, learn, hike and explore!” explained Rebecca Higgins, a Grade 6 student at E.W. Coffin Elementary in Calgary, Alberta. She was referring to her experience with Fresh Air Fridays, a new initiative exploring inquiry-based environmental learning every Friday morning.

Launched on September 4th, 2015, Fresh Air Fridays is the conception of E.W. Coffin staff, and the idea sparked with early-dismissal Fridays: How can a shortened day be optimized and compensate for lost active time? Not only do the students actively make up for lost time, they are able to engage in a natural environment and build scientific analysis skills to support inquiry-based learning, explained Cathy Polski, principal at E.W. Coffin.

“It’s so important to prepare kids for a different way of learning,” said Cathy. She explained how imperative outdoor experiences are in extending education and creating awareness about the learning opportunities that are awaiting students.

Dr. Alan Warner, professor of community development at Acadia University in Nova Scotia, who specializes in environmental and sustainability education, has a similar view.

“It’s absolutely essential; we all know people learn best through experience. Hands-

on experiential learning is critical,” Alan said. Learning through outdoor exploration gives K-6 students problem solving skills and simply a positive experience playing in nature, he added.

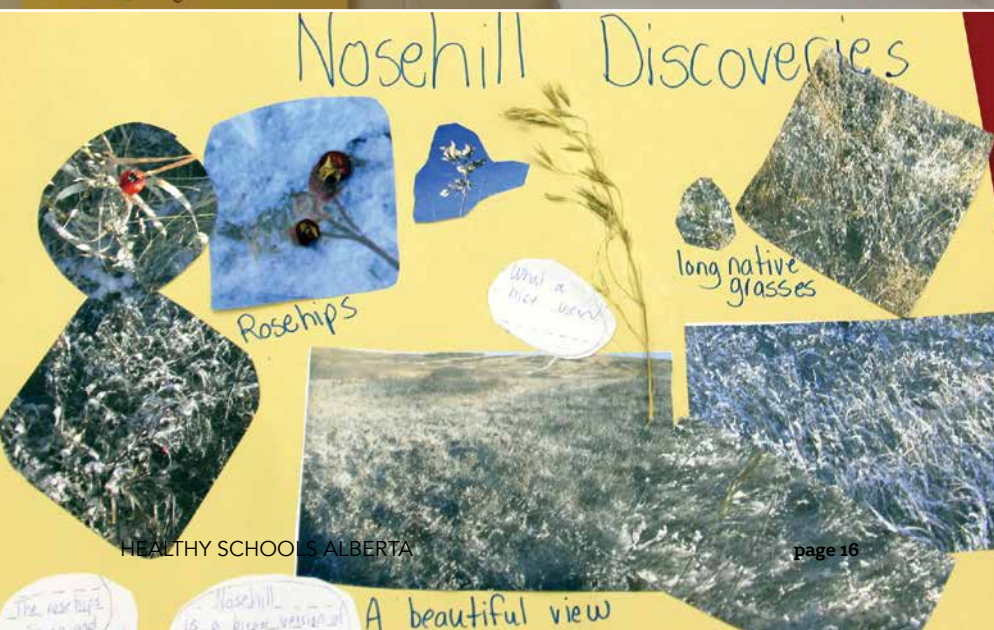
Apart from hands-on experience, Alan explained there is a wide range of research supporting the benefits of outdoor learning including physical activity as a way of maintaining a healthy weight, as well as shaping future generations to live in harmony with and to appreciate nature.

“Becoming an environmentally sensitive adult depends on whether you had experience in nature as a child. Experience in the natural world is critical for our whole-world view as we grow up,” said Alan.

Meredith Boyer, Grade 1/2 split teacher at E.W. Coffin and one of the original creators of this initiative, has seen evidence of an environmental sensitivity starting to grow in her students. The work done outside is transferring to other parts of her students’ >

“Becoming an environmentally sensitive adult depends on whether you had experience in nature as a child. Experience in the natural world is critical for our whole-world view as we grow up.”

Photos: (Top) Students exploring the outdoors during Fresh Air Fridays. (Middle) A display case inside E.W. Coffin School. (Bottom) A poster displaying student discoveries.



lives and is bringing out a stewardship and a sense of responsibility over the natural spaces around them, she explained.

“One of my students, Jason, came in one day just beside himself because he went out on the weekend and found so much Canadian Thistle. He knew from one of our Fresh Air Fridays that it was an invasive species, so he exclaimed, ‘We have to wage war on the Canadian thistle!’” she said, laughing.

While environmental awareness is imperative, Alan explained that outdoor education for a young age group should be positive, restorative and focused on plants and animals; things kids generally feel good about.

“That doesn’t mean we can’t do things to address all the problems, but kids need to have positive messaging on why we plant trees, not why the world is going to flood due to climate change,” he said.

Meredith spoke in the same vein, and explained that this initiative is starting gently, with a positive approach. When her students went outside, all they wanted to do was run, she explained. She let them have that time, but asked them a very important question afterwards: “When you run past everything, are you really noticing the things around you?” That question, she described, was a spark.

Along with this growing sensitivity in the students is a growing sense of curiosity. “I’m noticing that they’re noticing. Our exploration has brought up a lot of questions,” she said. While developing a new found appreciation for nature, students are encouraged to explore, sketch and observe with their five senses and record their findings.

Students are able to mimic and role-play as discipline experts, acting like anthropologists, geologists and zoologists, engaging their senses with a sense of authority through the lens of an expert. Upon return to the classroom, students discuss those observations and are prompted to share what they have learned and how they went about learning it, which is all recorded in a blog by each teacher.

Alan described a similar technique that he uses in his outdoor education programs, where students take on roles such as detectives or treasure hunters, solving a problem or creating a design, and as a result they become makeshift experts in a certain field. Within these roles, a newfound confidence is built; they’re not just students anymore. Alan asked his students if they’d rather participate as ‘experts’ or as themselves. They all chose the former. >

"I asked them why and they said, 'because it's more real,'" Alan said, and explained that the students' point of view is the opposite of an adult's rationality.

Seeing through the lens of a child is something that is greatly treasured by one E.W. Coffin parent, who explained that her daughter shows such excitement and anticipation while they're planning for Fridays at home. "It encourages the natural curiosity found in a child that we lose as adults," said Jody Rach.

Stacey Hamel, another parent of an E.W. Coffin student, explained that perhaps a classroom is not necessarily the only place a student can shine, and that Fridays will appeal to a broad range of learners, allowing them to excel. "Fridays here are a valuable asset to extend the curriculum. The students have great recall and they're engaged across the board," she said.

Despite the fact that this hands-on experiential learning builds confidence, encourages curiosity and nurtures environmentally sensitive children, Dr. Alan Warner shared the fact that there isn't enough outdoor education in today's curriculums. "Current education doesn't teach teachers how to be with kids in the outdoors and that's a problem. It needs to change and hopefully it will," he said.

A lack of knowledge and confidence on the teachers' part is a large hurdle, he explained. One of the obstacles in outdoor education is a constant worry about managing students outdoors and being away from the familiarity of the classroom. "Getting people out and getting them started is what's important. It's not that scary," he said.

Meredith spoke about different obstacles for outdoor education to advance. "It's a

school-specific thing in some ways because we're so lucky to have six natural spaces in our backyard, and such great support from teachers and parents. It's not fair to say every school should be doing this," she said. Although there might be obstacles for other schools, she explained that this initiative is brand new to her as well, and the best thing schools can do is to start slowly and try to build support in the their communities. "We're still in the beginning stages; it's an adventure and that's what makes it fun," she said.

A special thanks to the students, staff and community of E.W. Coffin. Dr. Alan Warner will be presenting at the Shaping the Future Conference, January 28th - 30th in Kananaskis, Alberta.



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Photo: E.W. Coffin Elementary students during Fresh Air Fridays.

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