**RE: The time for Outdoor Learning as a new normal in school is now!**

Dear Minister of Education (insert appropriate name and/or title here)

Outdoor learning needs to become a central feature of the Canadian education system. Implementation of outdoor learning would have a resounding positive impact on health and wellness, while addressing the immediate health concerns posed by COVID-19. Mental health, obesity, loneliness, screen addiction, climate emergency, and biodiversity collapse, to name a few crises, have now been amplified by the Coronavirus. Consistent and regular outdoor learning offers the perfect remedy to many of these issues and is an evidence-based solution to improving student focus and academic achievement.

Gathering in outdoor spaces has been identified as an important infection control strategy. However, most back to school plans do not include outdoor learning as a core concept and educators are not receiving support or directives to take their classroom outdoors.

I understand that implementation of an outdoor centred approach may appear daunting in contrast to our current desk-based model, but the arguments for prioritizing outdoor learning are compelling. The benefits of implementing outdoor learning nationally will positively impact individuals, society, and the environment.

Outdoor learning in schools also fosters greater equality in our communities. Public outdoor spaces are not necessarily available in all neighbourhoods, which means some young people can reap the benefits of outdoor time in nature while others cannot. Offering significant, frequent outdoor time at schools can help to address that inequity.

Spending regular time outdoors—simply being in nature or playing and learning near nature—is essential for healthy social, emotional, and physical childhood development. It has also been shown to lead to greater focus, higher cognitive function, and better learning outcomes across the board.

Regular outdoor time also increases physical activity and increases one’s confidence with outdoor activities, leading to a more active lifestyle in later years. It boosts mental health, lowers stress, boosts immunity, and connects us to the places we live and the environments we need to protect. Health experts also say it decreases the risk of COVID-19 infection compared to spending time in indoor environments as confined spaces create greater exposure risk. Physical distancing is simply much easier outside of four walls.

Implementation will require careful consideration and training, but there is a wealth of experience and knowledge in most educational communities. Many schools already have robust outdoor learning departments in place. Further, many educational organizations exist to fill any gaps by offering their expertise in outdoor learning where school staff may need extra support.

This is the time to implement new ways of teaching and learning to better serve our children, our communities, and the wider world. This is an opportunity to not only reduce the spread of Coronavirus but also to address the biggest health, wellness, inequality, and environmental crises of our time. By physically distancing students from four walls and a desk, we can offer our children and youth a liveable future.

I hope you will take serious consideration of these arguments and begin to pivot where and how learning takes place.

Thank you for your attention

*Sincerely,*

*(Your name here…)*

A close up of a sign

Description automatically generatedThis letter was crafted in collaboration with Take Me Outside.

*“We believe in a future in which spending time outside playing, exploring and learning is a regular and significant part of every student’s day.”*