



# Nature as Teacher:

Cultivating the Whole Child through Outdoor Learning

## Nature as Teacher



# Happy Earth Day!!!



For more info on these indigenous art pieces:  
[medicine wheel](#), [tree of life](#),  
[piikani blackfoot teaching](#)



## Nature as Teacher

# AHS Schools Healthier Together



Home Learn Take Action Find Support Get the Latest

En | Fr

## Take Action

These cards offer practical advice to take action on school wellness. Use them to spark your imagination, and adapt them to suit your school community. Align your actions with the comprehensive school health framework to improve student health and education outcomes.

Mental Health

**Amplify student voice**

Involve youth as full and equal partners →

**Build mental health literacy**

Make sense of mental health with training →

**Develop social emotional skills**

Build students' life skills in everyday ways →

**Embrace nature**

Make the outdoors into school experiences →

[schools.healthiertogether.ca](https://schools.healthiertogether.ca)



## Nature as Teacher – What's it about?

This strategy is about heading outdoors and making the best possible use of nature.

The benefits of getting students outside is supported by an abundance of research.



## Nature as Teacher – Let's Reflect





## Nature as Teacher



Awe (*n.*): an overwhelming feeling of reverence, admiration, fear, or wonder produced by that which is grand, sublime, extremely powerful, etc.



## Nature as Teacher

Multiple research studies show that exposure to nature can be an awe inducing experience, leading to:

- ↑ positive emotion
- ↑ prosocial behaviors
- ↑ generosity
- ↑ empathy





## Nature as Teacher - Overview

Let Learning  
Bloom

Learn from the  
Land

Go Wild &  
Free

Take a Fresh  
Look at School  
Practices

## Let Learning Bloom

Take stock of daily activities that typically happen indoors and try moving them outside.



## Let Learning Bloom

Enhance curriculum-based instruction with outdoor:

- Sharing circles\*
- Reading, story-telling, journaling
- Movement breaks
- Performing arts\*
- Indigenous teachings\*
- Mindfulness\*
- Scientific investigation
- Social studies research
- Service learning\*



# Let Learning Bloom



Recess Leader Peer Mentorship





# Let Learning Bloom





# Let Learning Bloom





# Let Learning Bloom





# Let Learning Bloom





# Let Learning Bloom







Let Learning Bloom- Let's Reflect

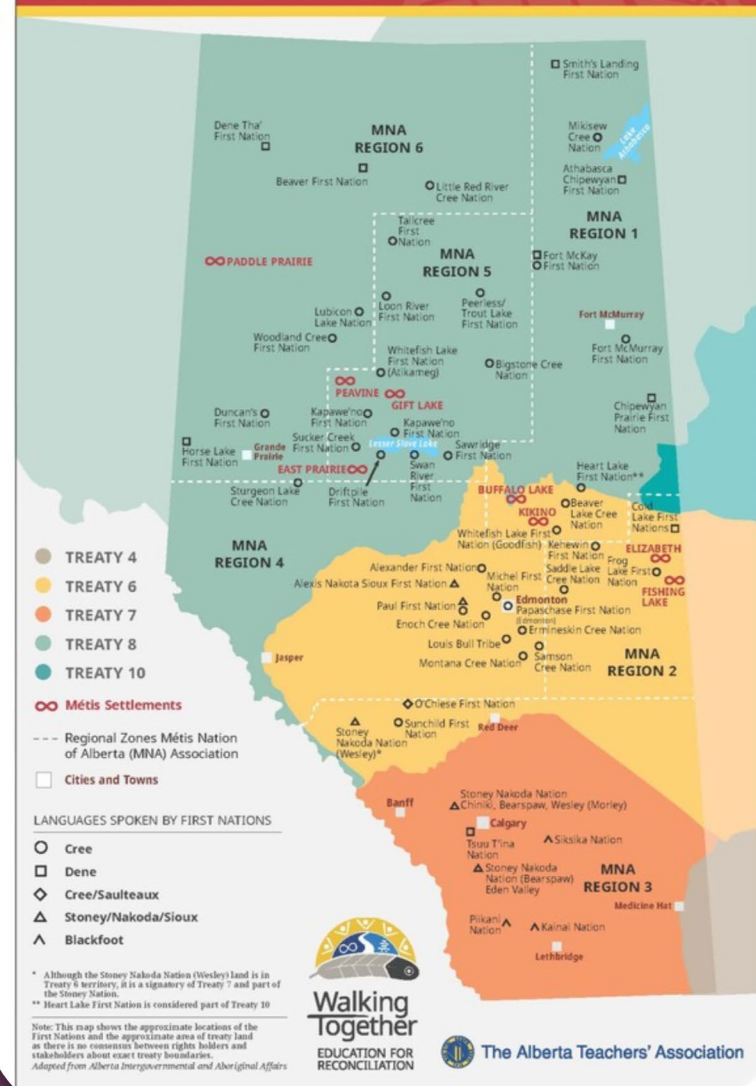


What learning activities  
that normally take place  
in the classroom have  
been tried outside at  
your school(s)?

# Land Based Learning

The land is central to many Indigenous communities in Alberta. Land-based learning is an important aspect of reconciliation, and outdoor natural spaces provide unique venues for learning together.

## ACKNOWLEDGING LAND AND PEOPLE



## Land Based Learning

Indigenous people lean into the land to promote physical, emotional, mental and spiritual wellness.





## Land Based Learning

Look for leadership and support from Indigenous Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and families to help ensure that activities are respectful, authentic, and appropriate.



## Land Based Learning

### Connecting Land to Teaching Pedagogy: A Land Based Learning Experience at Writing on Stone



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t7lhDg85yVM>

## Land Based Learning

Keep it simple if you aren't located near Indigenous communities or don't have connections to Indigenous Elders or Knowledge Keepers

Rock in the Fist- A game of chance, intuition, and observation. Materials needed: a rock and 3 small sticks





## Land Based Learning





## Land Based Learning

# Traditional Herbs and Plants Scavenger Hunt



### FIRST NATIONS TRADITIONAL PLANTS AND USES

#### Planning your learning journey

*What are traditional plants, and how do many First Nations people use them?*



JULIA MCDONALD, 2016.

*An eagle feather, abalone shell, sweetgrass braid, and Métis sash.*

#### FIRST STEPS

»»»»

Many Indigenous Peoples share a holistic world view<sup>1</sup> that has humans living in a universe made by the Creator and needing to live in harmony with nature, one another and with oneself. This world view has an interconnectedness and interrelatedness to all aspects of living on this earth. Each Indigenous culture expresses this world view in a different way and with different practices, stories and cultural items.<sup>2</sup> First Nations ceremonies and cultural practices including powwows, sweat lodges, smudging, singing and dancing are expressions of spirituality within this holistic, balanced and harmonious world view.<sup>3</sup>

The traditional ceremonies<sup>4</sup> and medicine wheel<sup>5</sup> teachings common to many plains and western First Nations<sup>6</sup> have been passed down from generation to generation. The medicine wheel provides a teaching and learning tool for maintaining balance and harmony in all aspects of a person's well-being including the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual dimensions.<sup>7</sup> Some sources describe the medicine wheel with its four directions and four corresponding sacred medicines: sweetgrass in the north, tobacco in the east, cedar in the south and sage in the west.<sup>8</sup>

It is important to note that medicine wheel teachings can vary, and those wishing to learn more should consult with local Indigenous Elders, Knowledge Keepers and Cultural Advisors.



Walking  
Together

EDUCATION FOR  
RECONCILIATION



The Alberta Teachers' Association



## Land Based Learning - Let's Reflect



What opportunities are currently available in your school community for staff and students to engage in learning from the land?



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## Land Based Learning - Let's Reflect



How can school councils play a role in weaving Indigenous land based learning into current practices within your school community?



How can school councils play a role in weaving  
Indigenous land based learning opportunities into  
current practices within your school community?



## Go Wild & Free

Consider free time during:

- breaks
- before & after school activities
- within instructional time

Resist the temptation to organize activities!

Offer freedom, space, and opportunity.



## Go Wild & Free

Unstructured play time in nature promotes:

- Self-regulation
- Social competence
- Communication skills
- Problem-solving abilities
- Resilience
- Stress-management





## Go Wild & Free



## Go Wild & Free





## Go Wild & Free

Take a step back and let children play!





## Go Wild & Free

Short on natural outdoor space?

Engage the  
**STUDENT VOICE** to  
get the best buy-in!



**Go Wild & Free- Let's Reflect**



What are some ways you can influence or enhance unstructured outside time for your school?

## Go Wild & Free- Let's Reflect



How can schools capture student voice about what they'd like to see when it comes to outdoor unstructured free play?



## Take a Fresh Look at School Practices

Sometimes long-standing school practices can make it tough to get students outside.



# Take a Fresh Look at School Practices

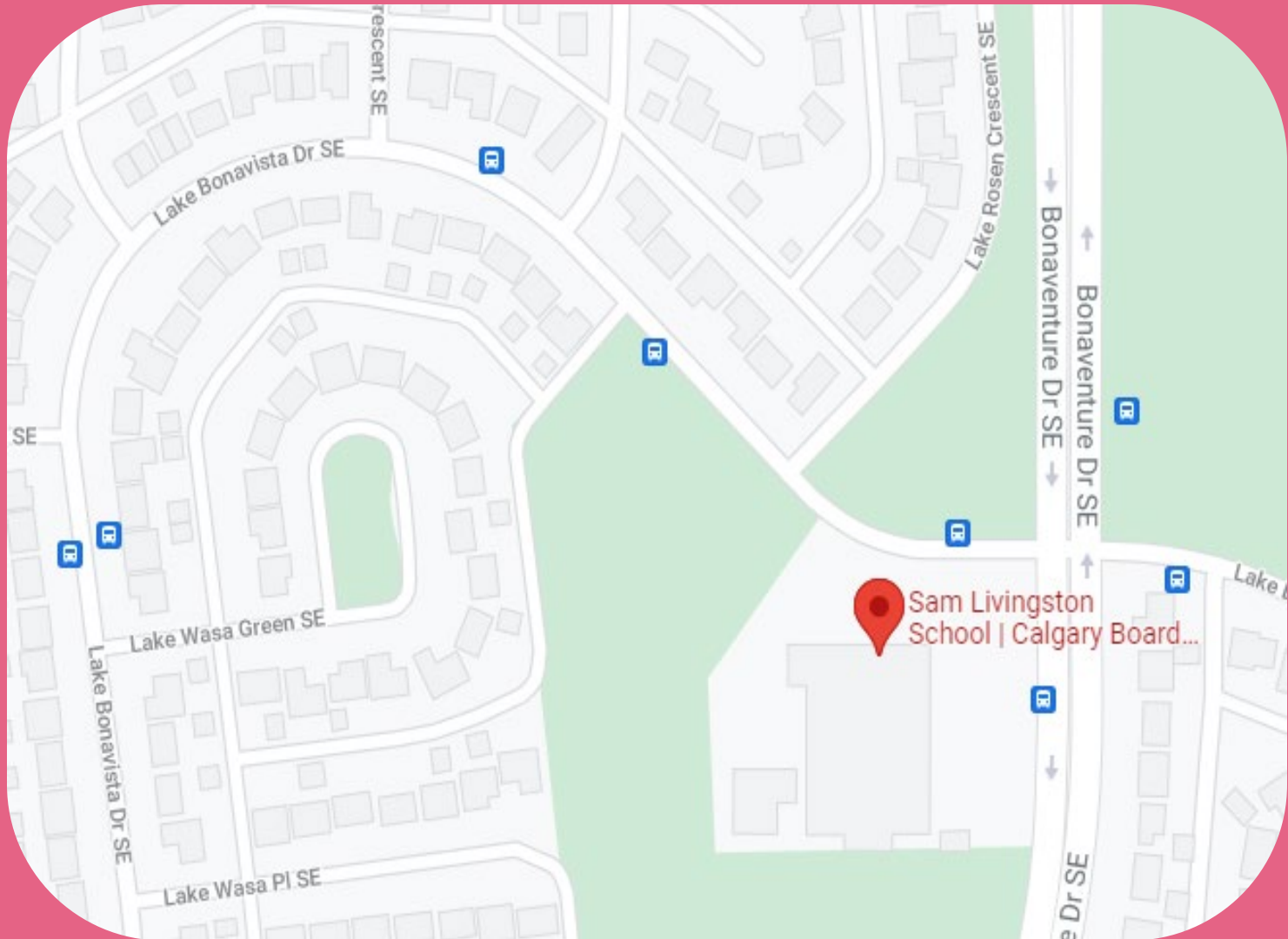
## All Weather Adventure Play School The Recess Rethink Project

snowing and even when it gets a little colder outside. There are many advantages for children who get outside to experience opportunities for outside adventure, developing physical literacy skills, outdoor play, developing communication and relationship skills and getting fresh air. Some of the researched advantages of getting outside include:

- Building physically healthier children
- Contributes to cognitive and social/emotional development
- Improves sensory skills
- Increases attentions spans
- Happiness and better immunity

Winter is once again upon us and we want to make sure that we are well-prepared to go outside as often as possible to reduce the number of indoor recesses that our students experience over the winter. As such, we will **NOT** be implementing a school policy that limits our ability to go outside due to defined temperature ranges. Instead, **we will plan to go outside for all recesses in the winter** if there is not a weather advisory and if we judge it is safe to do so in exercising our reasoned judgment. When temperatures get colder, we may use our discretion to shorten recess, allowing students to get outside

## Take a Fresh Look at School Practices





## Take a Fresh Look at School Practices

Use nature as a setting for ALL curriculum implementation



# Take a Fresh Look at School Practices

## Outdoor classroom





## Take a Fresh Look at School Practices





## Take a Fresh Look at School Practices

The right people, partnerships and passion benefits the entire community



# Take a Fresh Look at School Practices



Take a Fresh Look at School Practices- Let's Reflect



“It’s always  
been done  
this way.”



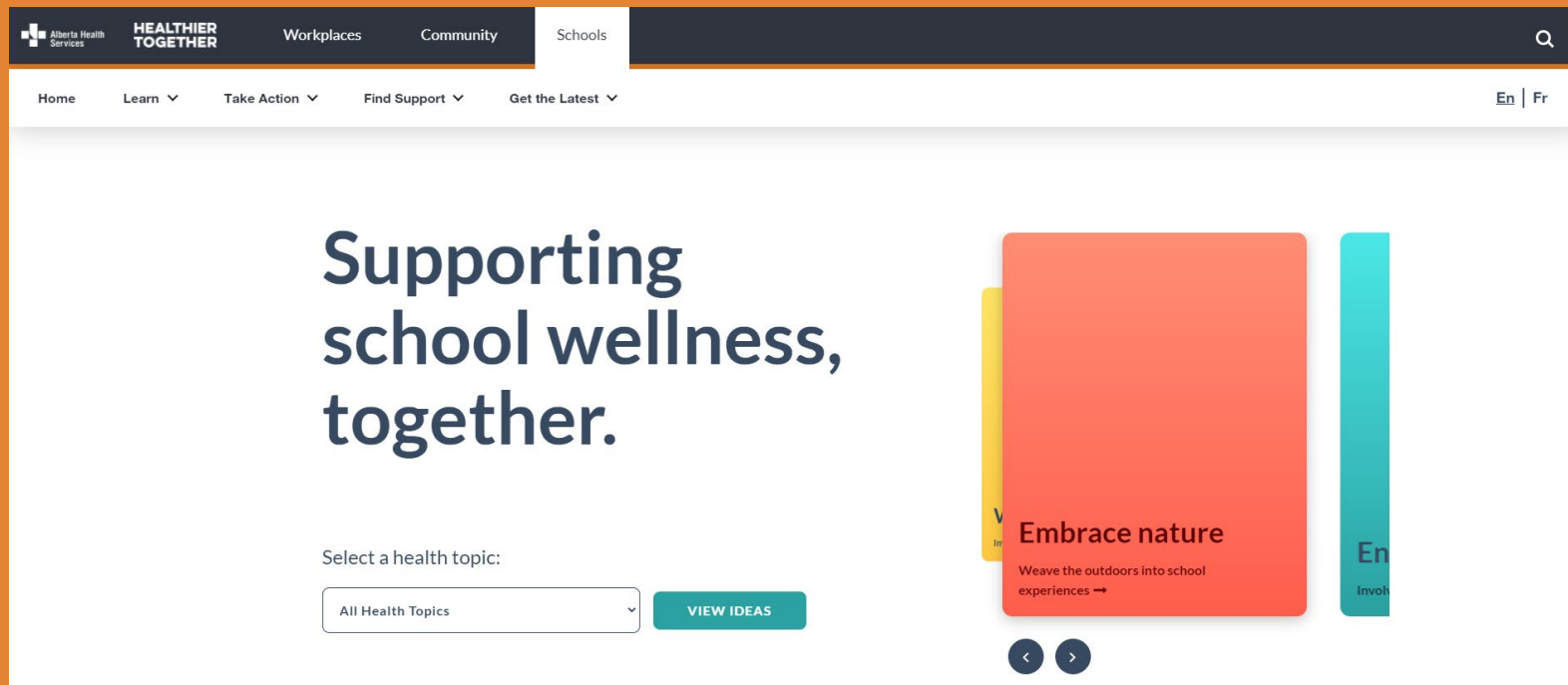
## Nature as Teacher – How it connects

Exposure to nature can increase play, physical activity, and help build social competence in students of all ages.



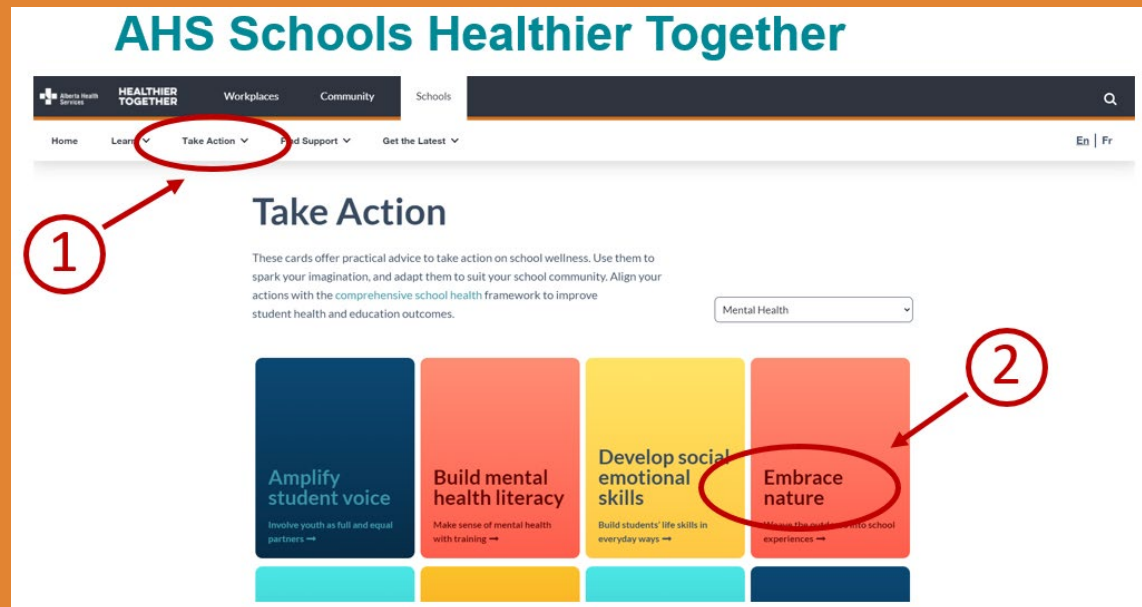
# Schools Healthier Together Website:

<https://schools.healthiertogether.ca>



# Take Action: Embrace Nature

<https://schools.healthiertogether.ca/en/take-action/get-ideas-that-work/embrace-nature/>







## Nature as Teacher

# We can help!

## Contact us\*:

\*To learn more about any of the stories, photos or data referenced today, please reach out to us directly.

Please  
Complete  
Our  
Evaluation!

Scan this QR code with  
your phone's camera →

OR

type the URL in your  
browser →



**<https://qr-open.it/g/3l6nJxce0Ar>**