

Zoo School 2023-2024 Annual Report

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Coordinator
Wilder Institute/Calgary Zoo



Overview

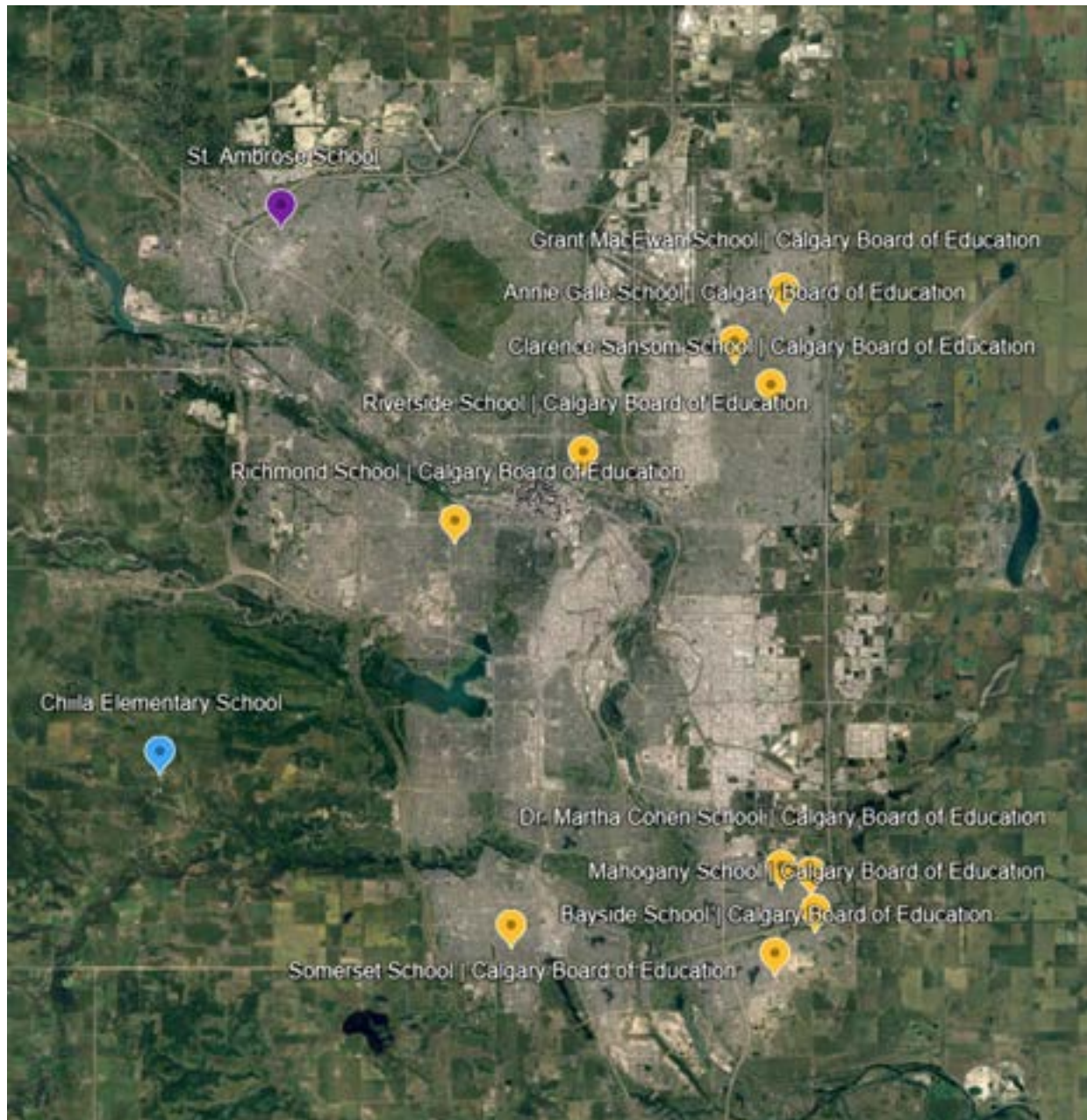
Zoo School is a part of the Campus Calgary/Open Minds learning network, a curriculum-based program comprised of eleven learning sites throughout the city of Calgary. This program, funded by the Chevron Corporation, immerses students from grades 1-12 in a week-long field study experience at the Wilder Institute/Calgary Zoo. Through hands-on activities, animal encounters, careful observation, and interactions with zoo experts, students are able to experience learning beyond the walls of their classroom. Each week is tailored to meet curriculum objectives, teacher needs, as well as a 'big picture' idea for the class. This experience is meant to encompass a year of learning, which helps to generate a lasting impact on students.

This program has never been more important and relevant than it is today. This is an opportunity for students to slow down, look closer, notice the details, ask questions, and take the time to make connections.

This year Chevron Open Minds Zoo School welcomed 618 students, 36 teachers, and 169 volunteers, for a total of 823 participants forming a lasting bond with nature which will hopefully result in the conservation stewards of our future.



This Year's Participating Schools

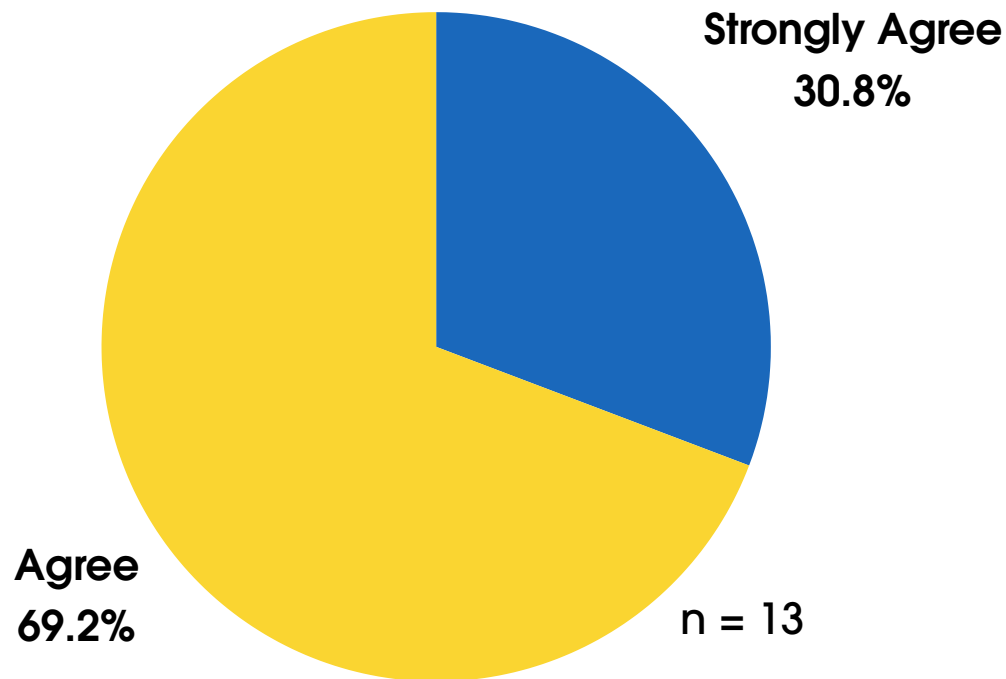


21 Classes from CBE
3 Classes from CCSD
2 Classes from Tsuut'ina
Nation Board of Education

2 Grade 1 Classes
5 Grade 2 Classes
6 Grade 3 Classes
4 Grade 4 Classes
4 Grade 6 Classes
5 Junior High Classes

Teacher Survey Results

Q. Because of my participation in Open Minds, I have a better understanding of my role in the inquiry process.



Comments

“A huge part of the inquiry process is encouraging students to be curious about the world around them and to ask questions to gain a deeper understanding.

My role throughout this inquiry was to listen, observe, capture and honour their questions and curiosities. By working alongside my students and our zoo school coordinator, learning opportunities and experiences were provided to explore answers to student questions which often led to further questions.”

“It was a good reminder that our role is less the holder of knowledge but instead the tour guide on the students’ path to learning.”

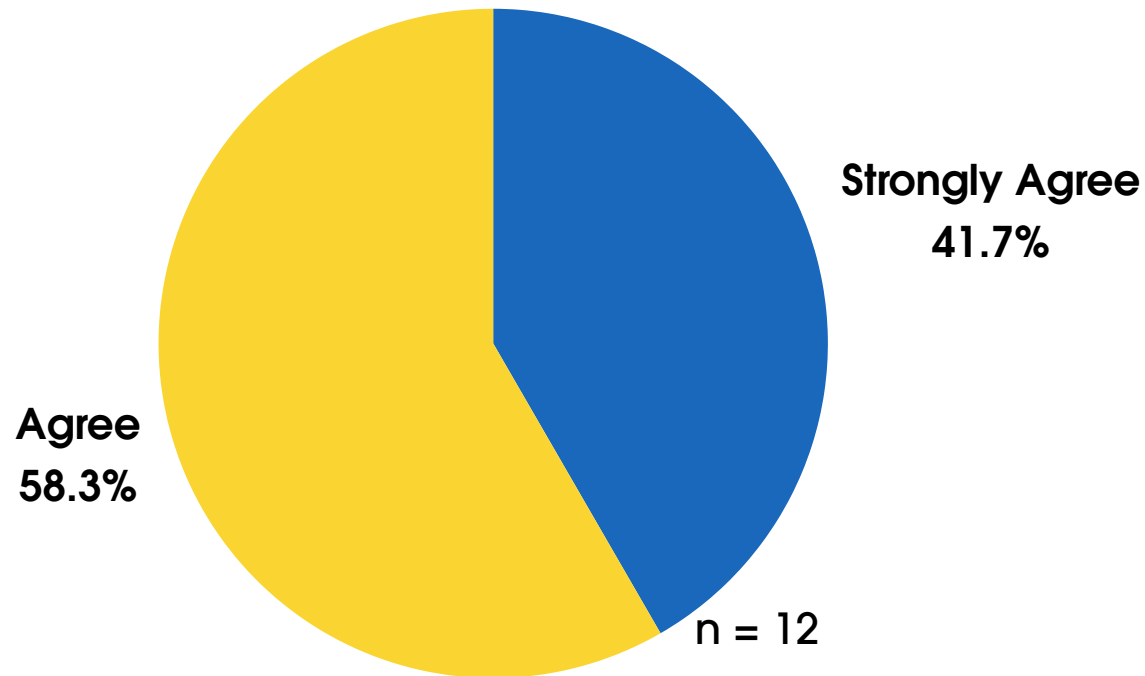
“I am a complex needs teacher for students with varying cognitive and physical abilities. Zoo School did a tremendous job in so many ways, most importantly provided me insight into how I can still engage my students in the inquiry process!”

“Open Minds has fundamentally shifted my practice. It challenges me to use the curriculum as a map that can take my students on endless possibilities and that curriculum lives everywhere in big ideas. Being part of the planning process with my teaching partner, the Open Minds staff, and coordinators led to intentional planning for how this journey would unfold with the students.”

“Inquiry-based learning does not seem as scary as it once did because of Zoo School.”

Teacher Survey Results

Q. My ability to identify and create relevant and authentic connections among disciplines has increased and deepened after my participation in the Open Minds program.



Comments

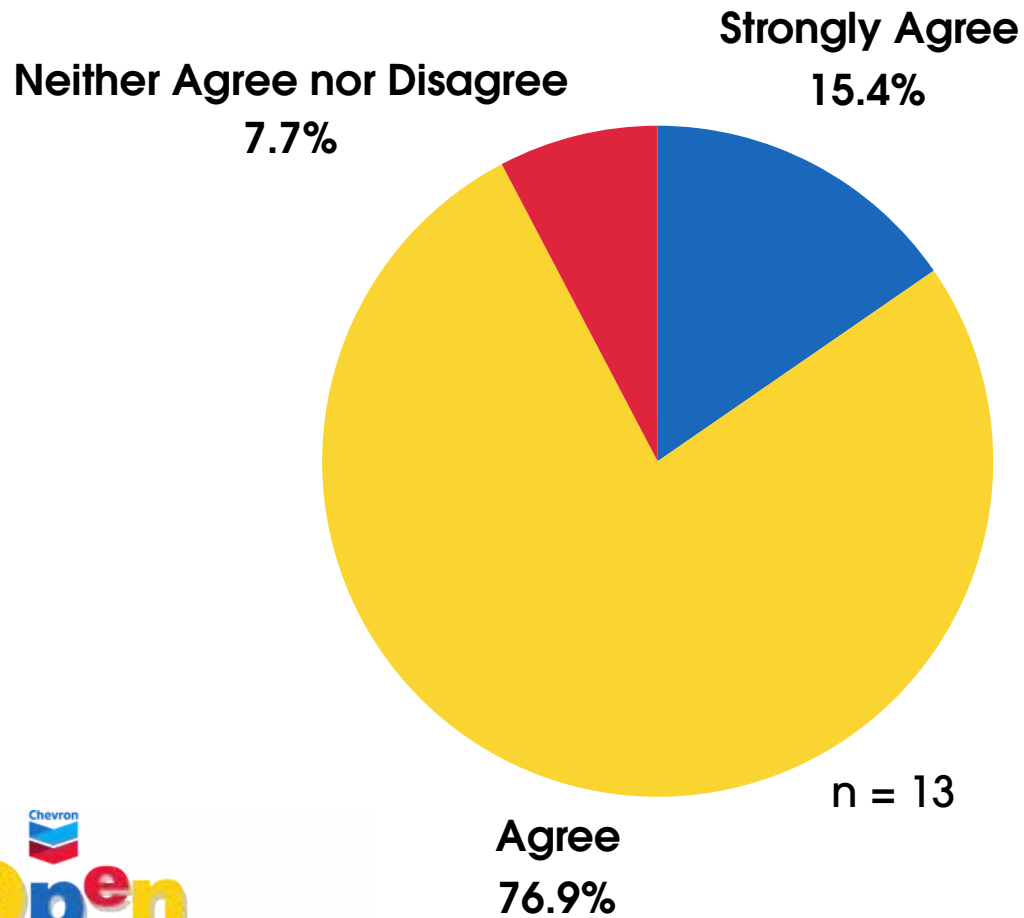
“Our year-long question and site has really helped shape a number of tasks being taken up in the classroom. For example, we have discussed the connections between living things through references to Zoo animals and have developed writing skills with our journalling. Looking forward, our conservation action project directly links to social studies curricular outcomes about developing citizenship. This opportunity really invites curriculum to be lived throughout all subject areas.”

“It is amazing to see how everything is so interconnected and that students begin to see those connections as well. Zoo School brought these curriculum connections to life.”

“As I participate in the program and through the teacher professional development, I am building my toolkit with ideas of how to actively engage the students with more exploratory experiences. How to focus their experience outside the classroom, developing their questions and prompting them to think deeper.”

Teacher Survey Results

Q. Personalizing learning comes from an awareness of students' strengths and needs. My ability to personalize learning has grown after my participation in the Open Minds program.



Comments

“The hands on, multi-sensory, authentic learning experiences provided to students at Open Minds ensured that all students could successfully learn and explore our big question in their own way.”

“Having zoo school so early in the school year really forced me to find multiple ways for students to represent their learning based on their abilities. It taught me that kids are really resilient and will rise to the challenge in front of them.”

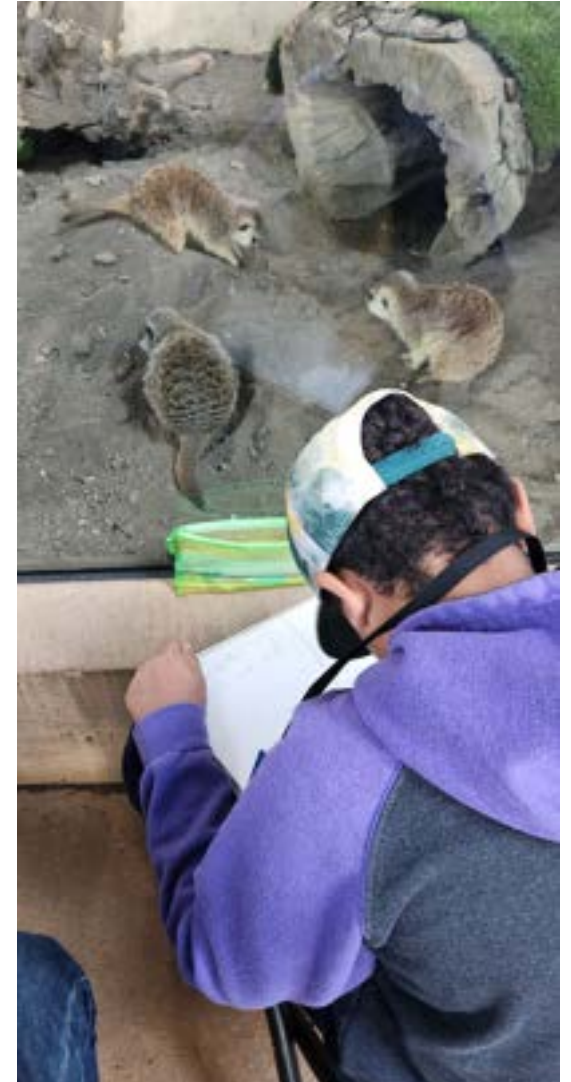
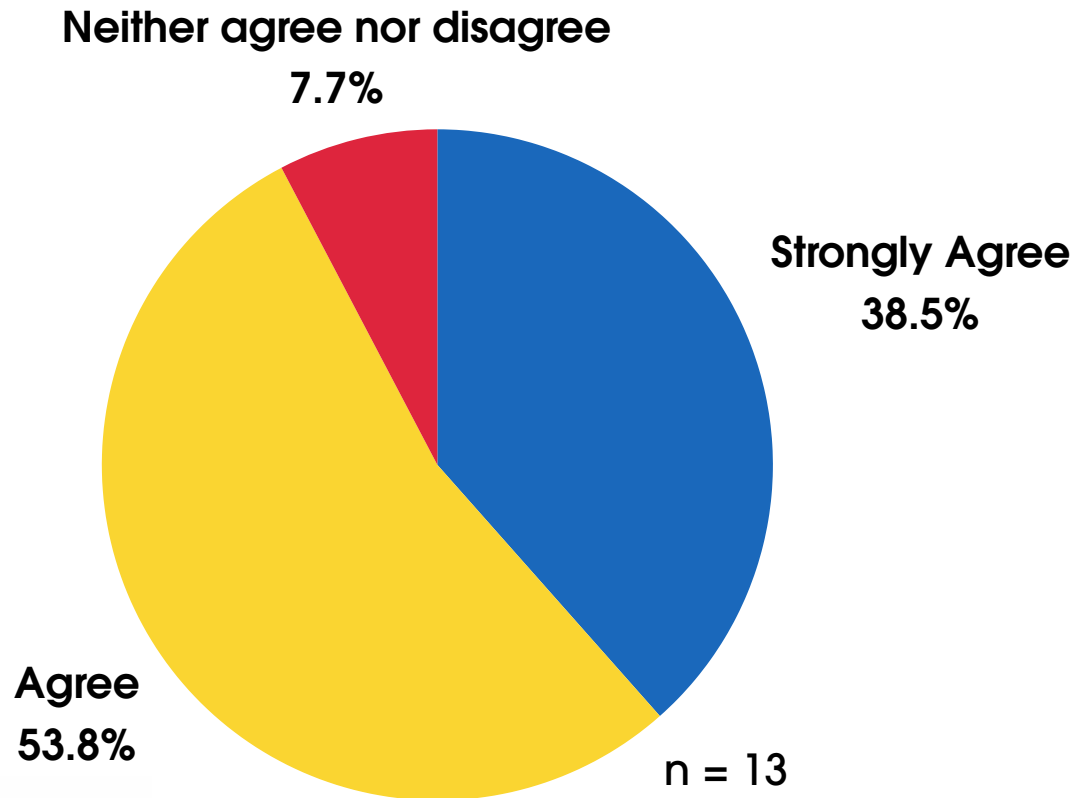
“The journalling strategies we have worked on with students has really opened ways to personalize learning for the students. This has been especially important to accommodate the wide range of writers in the classroom.”

“Before, I knew that a lot of my students loved to draw. Through this experience, I noticed that they were able to tailor their drawing skills to be relevant to their learning and they were more engaged in the process.”

Teacher Survey Results



My practice of listening to student voice through journals, conversation and experiences and responding with flexibility as we co-design learning tasks, has grown since my participation in the Open Minds program.



Comments

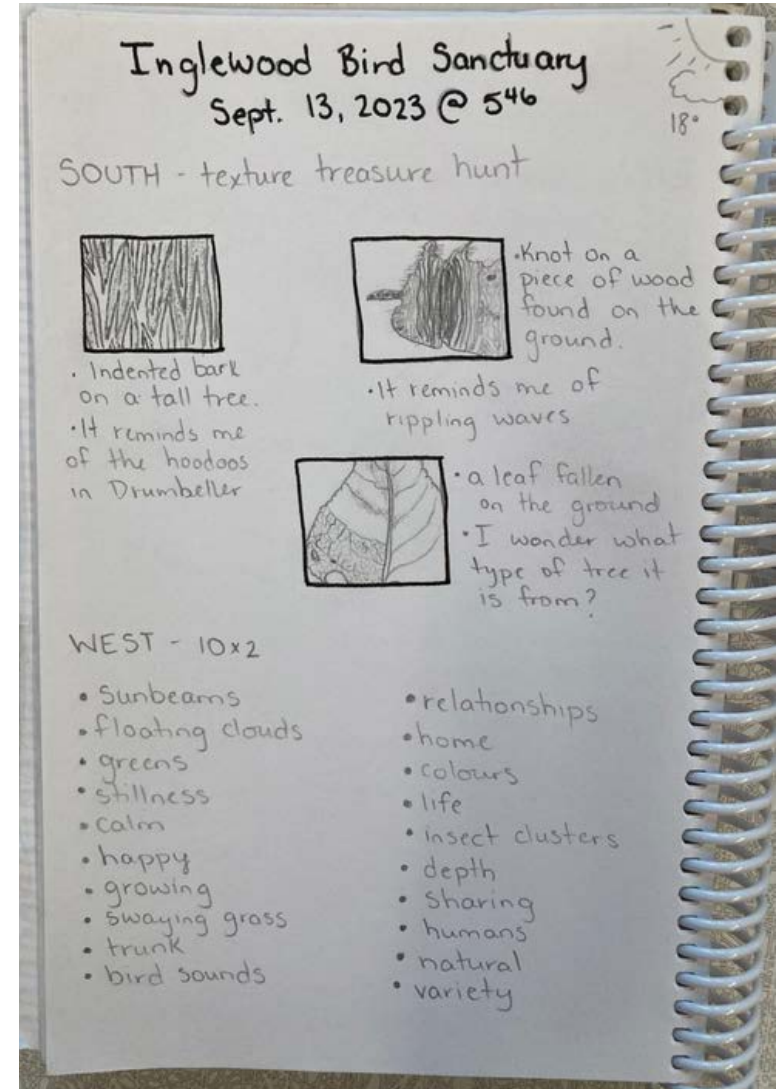
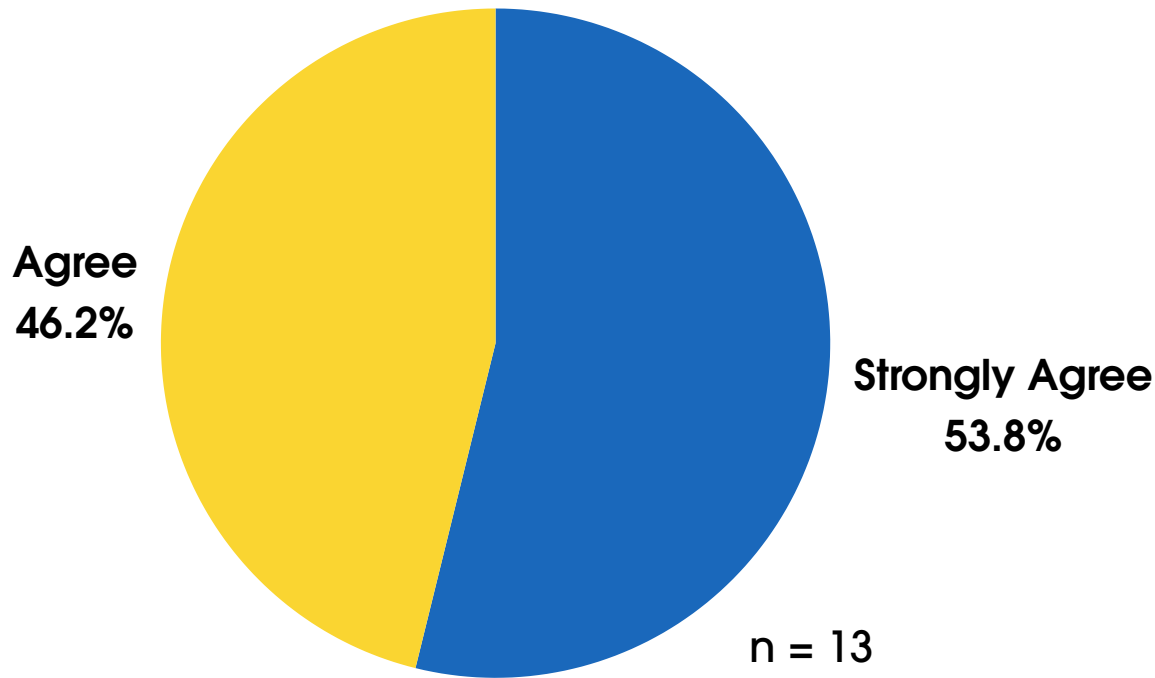
“All students were happy, enthusiastic, and engaged due to the high level of interest in the material, but also in the multitude of ways they were able to share their ideas and understanding. Several reluctant writers have gained confidence in their writing abilities specifically due to zoo school.”

“It was exciting to watch the week at Zoo School unravel and how the site coordinator would connect with me each day to determine the best learning experiences for the students. Even though there was an initial plan, student need, curiosity, and engagement determined the next steps in each learning experience. I have increased my understanding of the importance of observing, listening to and honoring student voice and choice when designing learning tasks.”

“I have definitely grown in my comfort with using a visual journal for active thinking and learning instead of for display purposes. I have often been handed these big visual journals with the assumption that I knew how to use them effectively and was previously following the example of my colleagues and just gluing in artwork or finished work on notes into them. This is the first year I have been able to help students feel effective and comfortable with using journals as a way to record their experiences and thinking in a particular moment.”

Teacher Survey Results

Q. The orientation, summer in-service, planning meeting and CC/OM workshops throughout the year have met my needs.



Comments



“It was so helpful to model journaling techniques, give us a sense of purpose, answer questions. Sessions were organized, well-thought out, and an important part of our successful week at zoo school.”

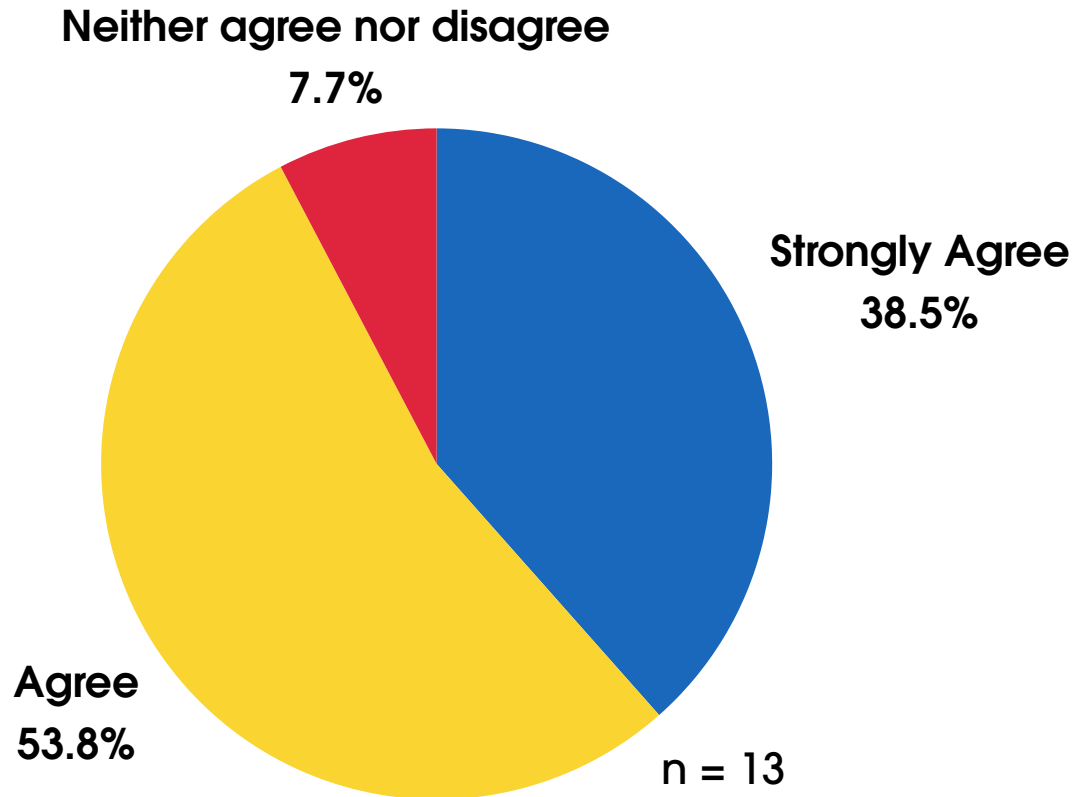
“I loved that after each workshop I felt like I could use a new technique or strategy in my classroom the following day.”

“All the additional PD connected to the Open Minds program went over and above my expectations and thoroughly prepared me for creating and carrying out a year-long inquiry around my big question. I appreciated all the community connections and resources that are provided to me through this program, and it shows me that there are lots of supports provided to me as a teacher to build meaningful, authentic, discipline-based inquiries.”

“The workshops were always thoughtfully planned out and really took into account teacher time. I always left with 'something' to try immediately with my class.”

Teacher Survey Results

Q. My participation in Open Minds has renewed my passion for teaching and learning.



Comments



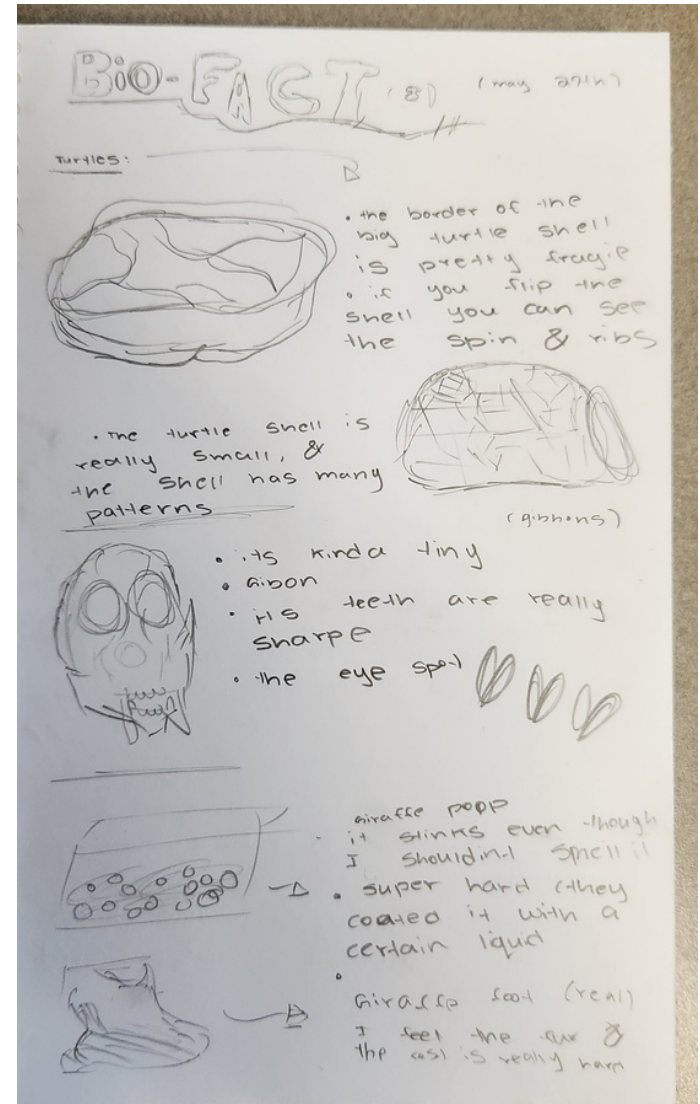
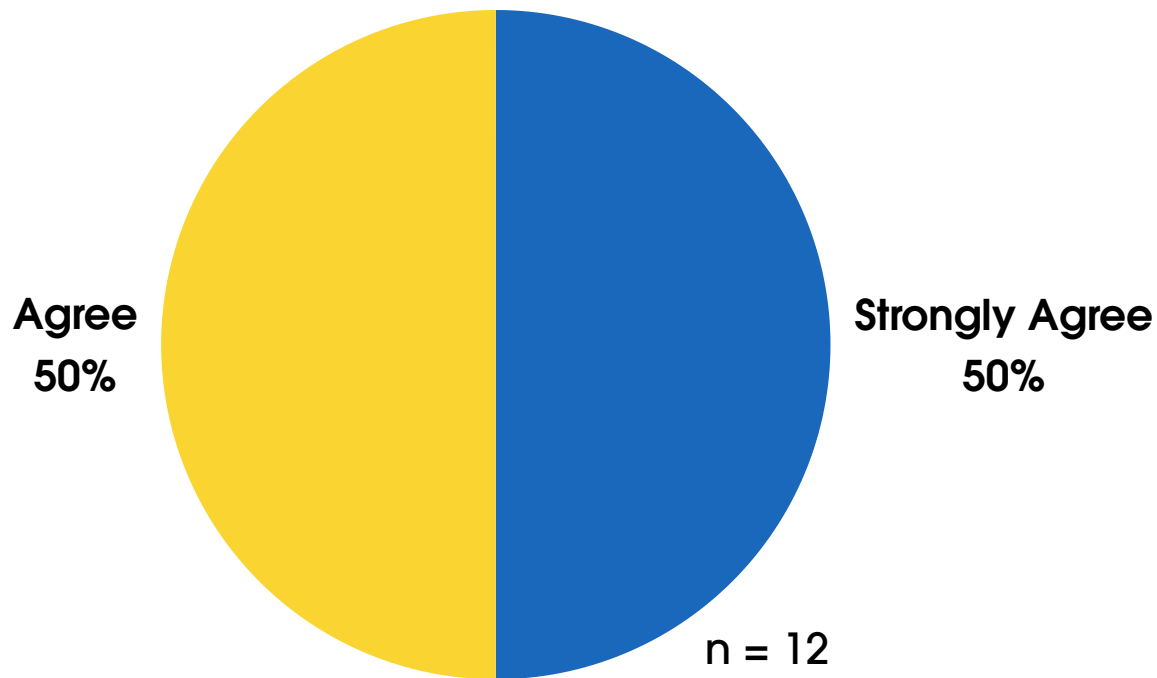
"This was my first time with Open Minds and I myself am excited, rejuvenated and eager and enthusiastic to continue with the techniques and strategies I took part in for zoo school. I have shared with colleagues and friends how amazing this experience was. I want to tell everyone, except then I'm worried too many people will apply next year and I won't get another opportunity."

"I have been teaching for 15 years now and this opportunity has reminded me of why I want to teach. It has allowed me to push my own thinking and look for creative ways to bring curriculum into this experience. Seeing how engaged the students were throughout the week was so inspiring."

"I wish I could do zoo school every year!"

Teacher Survey Results

Q. My students are likely to apply the knowledge and skills acquired across all academic disciplines since their participation in the Open Minds program.





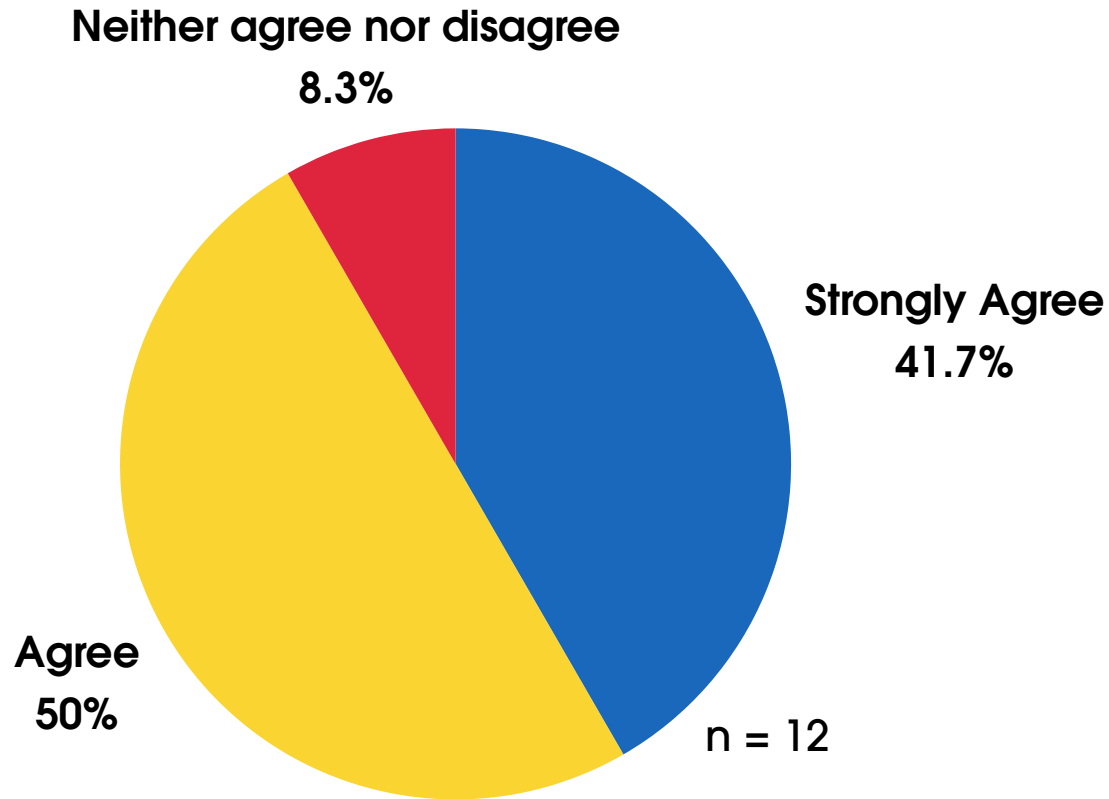
Comments

“Even though our week at Zoo School has ended, the learning and experiences from that week continue to drive the inquiry back in the classroom. The students and I are constantly making connections to their zoo school experience and the learning that is happening inside their classroom. Currently, we are researching a threatened species of fish and the students have taken what they have learned from a conservation expert at Zoo School to inspire their own conservation project.”

“I have seen many of my students connect the ideas learned at zoo school in so many places throughout our curriculum.”

Teacher Survey Results

Q. My students have gained confidence as learners since participation in the Open Minds program.



Comments

“My students were proud of their journaling, proud of what they learned about their animal and excited to share about their experience in their reflection journals, with family, friends and other classrooms.”

“The one thing my students have taken away from Open Minds is the idea that learning extends beyond the walls of the classroom.

Through these authentic learning experiences, students begin to understand their place in the world and come to believe that they are capable of making a difference in the world around them.”

“My students were very hesitant to ask questions, very quiet and afraid to put pencil to paper in their journals for fear of making a mistake prior to the program. Since participating in the program, they are more confident asking questions when they are unsure, looking up information and focusing on recording thoughts rather than making things pretty in their journals.”

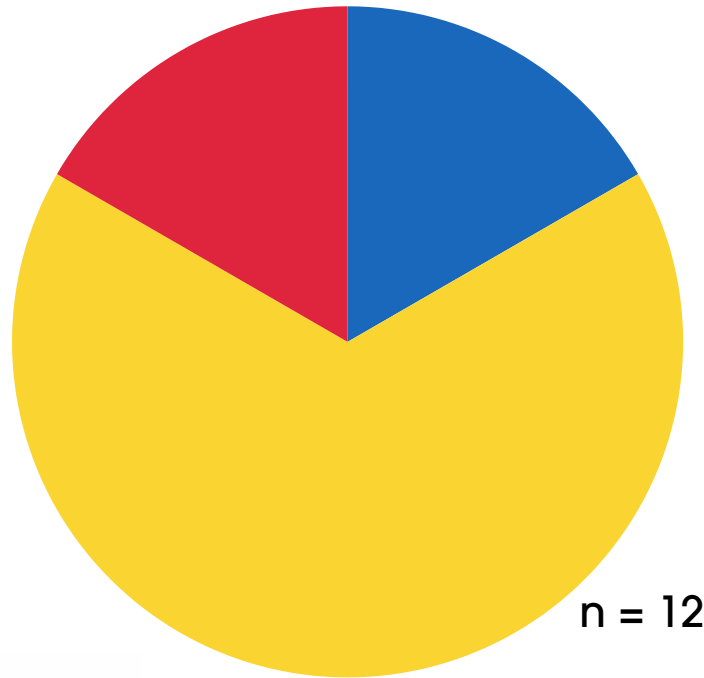
“Some reluctant writers have gained confidence in their abilities.

Some students who were more reserved or anxious have appeared more willing to take risks. As a group, we learned more about one another and bonded and the student-student and student-teacher rapports grew and developed so quickly.”

Teacher Survey Results

Q. My students are more engaged as demonstrated by taking responsibility for their own learning since their participation in the Open Minds program.

Neither agree nor disagree 16.7% Strongly Agree 16.7%



Comments



“Through the Open Minds program my students have learned that there are many ways to capture and demonstrate their learning. They have also learned that there are many people, resources and tools around them that can support them in their learning as well.”

“I do believe they have learned the importance of being on top of their own work and making sure it is completed, regardless if a teacher is directly supervising or not. All students were able to complete their animal observation journals, to different degrees, but they learned more accountability for having it done as they had strict timelines and didn't have their teacher directly present.”

Teacher Survey Results

Q. My students have gained a greater sense of environmental awareness and concern for the environment since their participation in the Open Minds Zoo School program.

Neither agree nor disagree

7.7%

Agree
38.5%

Strongly Agree
53.8%

n = 13



Comments

“A student at school the very next day after zoo school said he should wash his plastic spoon and reuse it for the rest of the year instead of getting a new spoon each day, as plastic is bad for the penguins!”

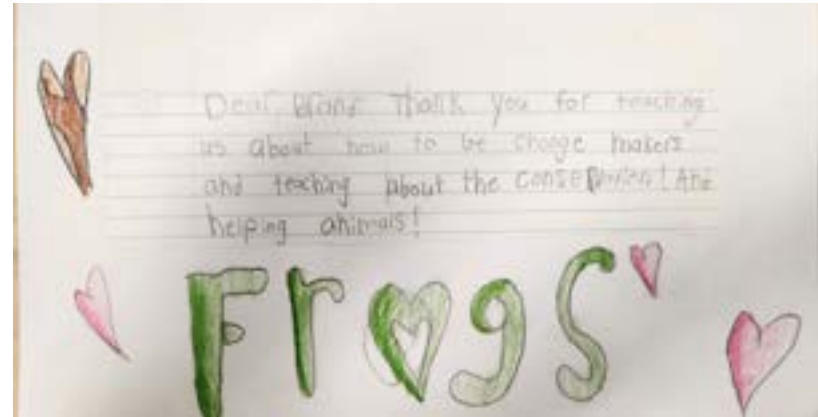
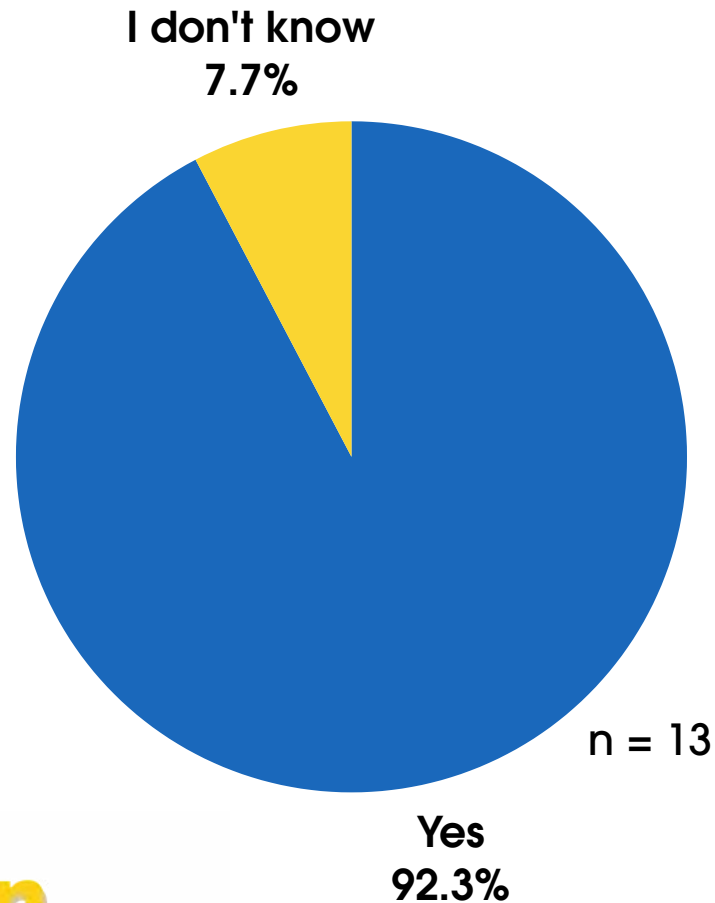
“We have had a number of passionate and thoughtful debates break out during discussions about conservation and they have become very thoughtful about balance and trying to find solutions that consider all stake holders and the long-term effects of our choices.”

“By having the students regularly observe, learn, and wonder about animals they built strong connections to wildlife. These daily animal observations have helped students build empathy, respect and admiration for all living things. Understanding their importance, students are inspired to protect these animals and the natural world around them.”

“I believe the talk about recycling cell phones and using our resources did go a long way because some of them recognized themselves in doing that and having the animals present helped make the connection of that impact. It became more real than just talking about it in a classroom or watching a video.”

Teacher Survey Results

Q. By participating in this program did you learn that you can take action for wildlife conservation (cell phone recycling, FSC, Oceanwise, RF alliance, protecting or providing wildlife habitat etc.)

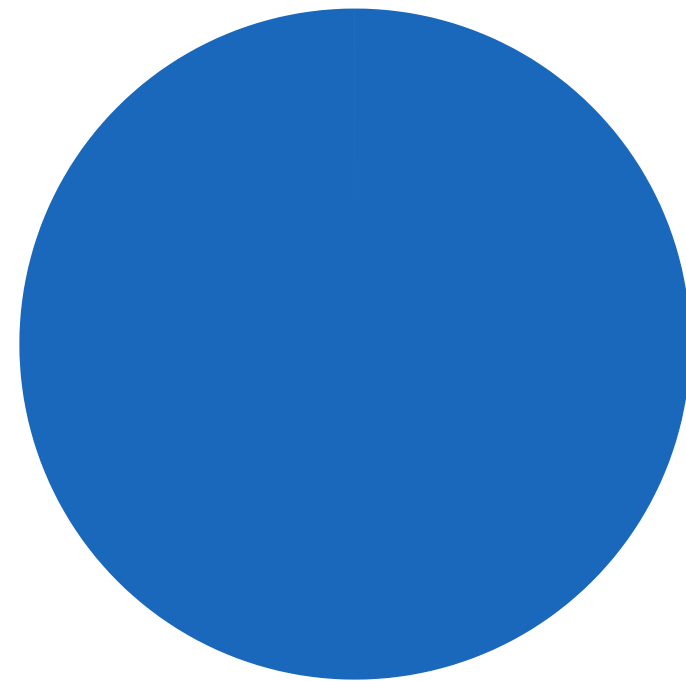


Teacher Survey Results

Q. Is supporting the Wilder Institute/Calgary Zoo a good way to support wildlife conservation?

Comment

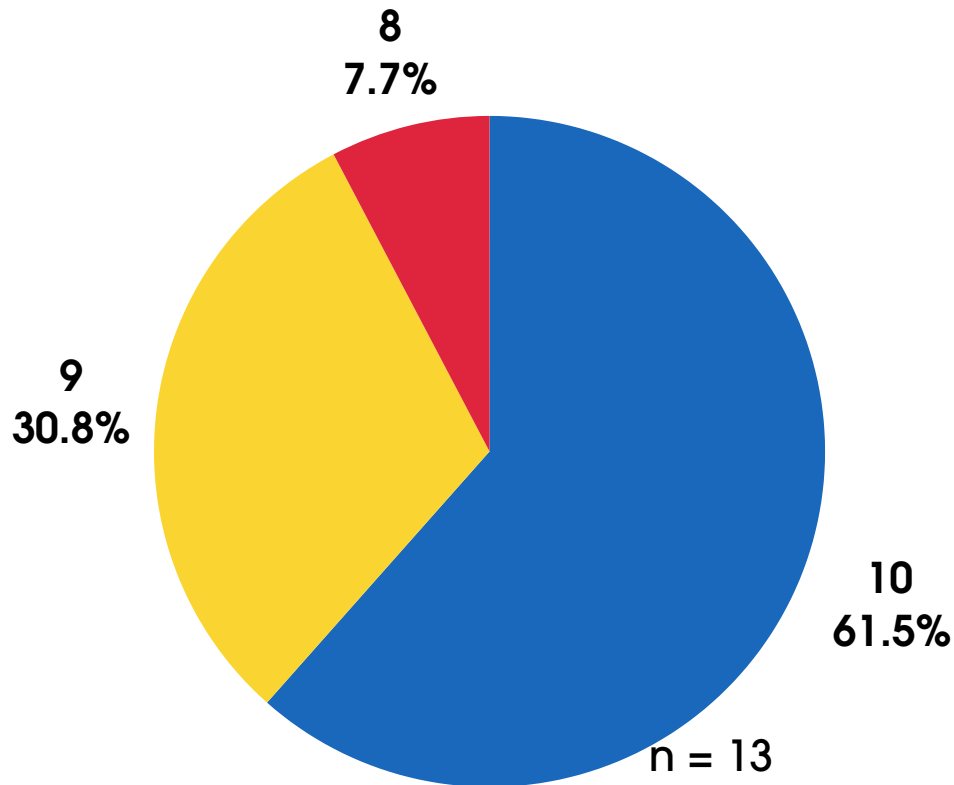
“If I'm being perfectly honest, zoos always made me uneasy. As a child I viewed zoos as horrible places that broke animals' spirits by keeping them in cages. Attending these workshops really changed my opinion of zoos and I appreciate their efforts to help animals through conservation and enrich their lives.”



Yes
100% n = 13

Teacher Survey Results

Q. How would you rate your overall satisfaction with this school program? (10 = Excellent / 1 = Poor)





Spotlight: Clarence Samson ALP Class

This year, we had two classes from Clarence Samson School attend Zoo School.

The Grade 7-9 students with complex needs came in late April and early May.

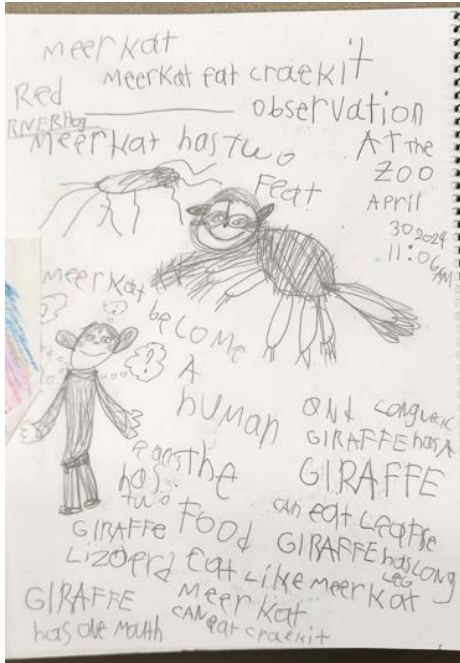
Leanne Penny is the teacher of the ALP (Adapted Learning Program) class.

Here is some of what she shared about her experience with Chevron Open Minds Zoo School this year.

“My students have very special needs. They all have moderate learning disabilities. Some are nonverbal, autistic, Down syndrome, etc. Although they are 12-16 years old, developmentally, they have the typical understanding of a 3-5 year old child. Many had never had the opportunity to visit a zoo. They delighted in seeing the animals and being around people. This program was an amazing experience for all of us.”



Spotlight: Clarence Samson ALP Class



“Prior to our involvement with Open Minds, journaling or writing was not a very fun or rewarding experience for any of us. Most of my students now ask me daily if they can journal and like to carry them around with them. Some only use pictures or crayons to express themselves, but others are trying to write words and sentences.”

“After our zoo trip, it was easier to guide students to making text to world connections. For example, while reading The Wizard of Oz, our current class novel study, I asked, “Who did the Wicked Witch call with her Golden Cap? Does that remind you of anything?” One student raised his hand and told me all about the Colobus monkeys and how they seemed to fly around their enclosure just like the flying monkeys. That connection would never have happened without this experience and may be one of the first times my students have ever made a text to world connection without guidance.”



Spotlight: Clarence Samson ALP Class

“My students remind me everyday to slow down and enjoy life. The zoo trip was a good reset for what is important in learning and that learning can't happen until their heart, body and spirit are taken care of.

We are often in such a race to educate the mind that we don't take care of the whole person.”



“They were so excited to share their learning with their other teachers and the students in the general population. They were so proud of the opportunity they had and were so excited to talk about all of the animals.”

“On a walk yesterday, we had to stop every few minutes to grab garbage/litter so that ‘the animals won't get sick.’”



Spotlight: Clarence Samson ALP Class

“My participation in Open Minds has made me remember what makes me happy, to appreciate my students for all the joy and wonder they have, to try new things, to never stop asking questions and being a student myself, and to see wonder in things.”

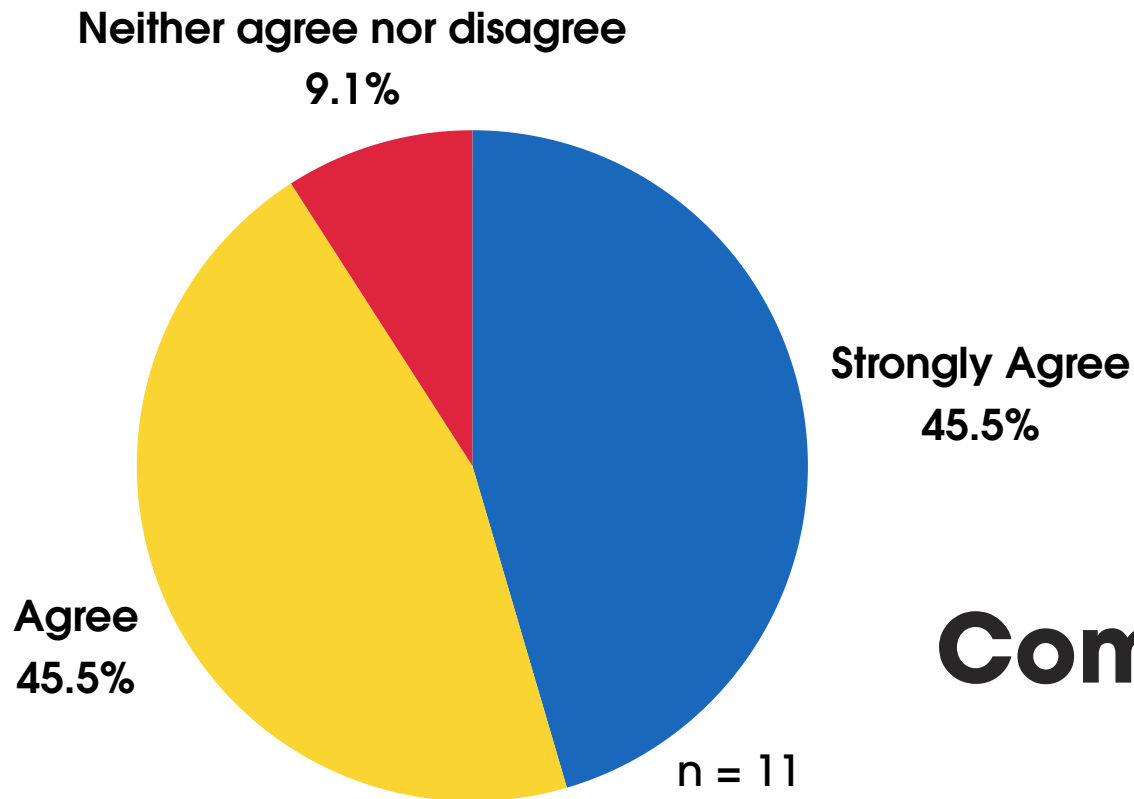


“The zoo experience was a great reminder that I need to meet my students where they are and help them on their own path of learning.”

“I can't express how much gratitude I have for the zoo and everyone at Open Minds/Chevron who made this experience possible. This is something these kids will remember for the rest of their lives. Thank you so much.”

Parent/Adult Volunteer Feedback

Q. I have an increased understanding of zoos and the role they play in wildlife conservation.



Comments

"It was enlightening to learn about how the animals are cared for and how their habitats are designed."

"It was interesting to learn about the northern leopard frog and the conservation efforts. I knew the zoo was involved in conservation but didn't actually see the work in action before."

Parent/Adult Volunteer Feedback

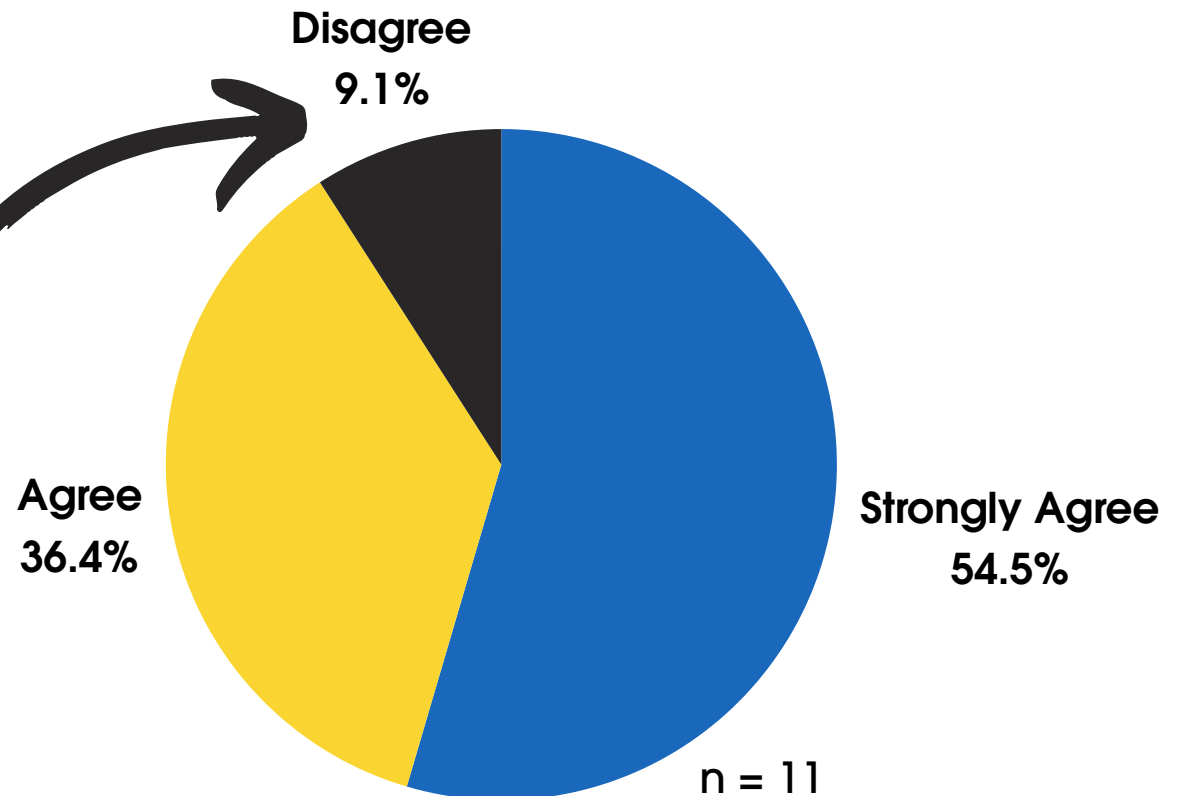
Q. Is supporting the Wilder Institute/Calgary Zoo a good way to support wildlife conservation?

Comments

“We already have zoo memberships and visit fairly regularly... although it was good to get a deeper look into the zoo, we probably will visit about as frequently as before.”

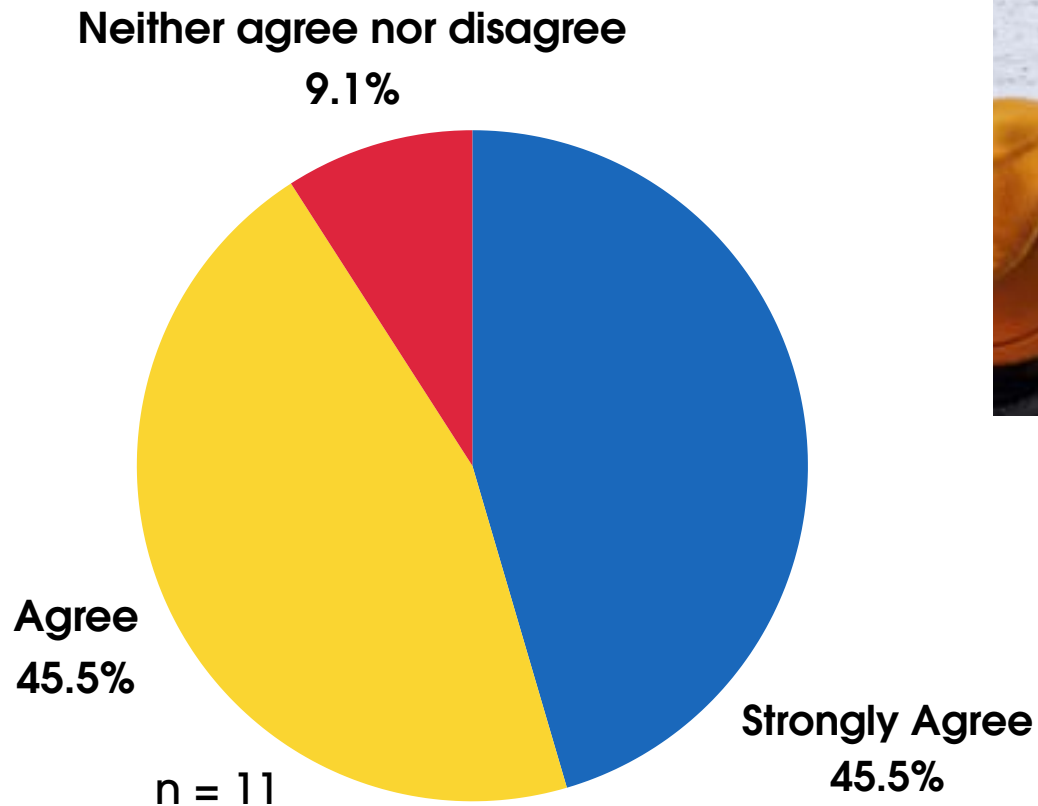
“Though our family regularly renews our annual passes, we enjoy our visits to the zoo and will be observing all of the animal habitats with a fresh perspective.”

“The teacher was amazing with the children. Very knowledgeable and my son enjoyed the whole week. He wants to take us to the zoo to teach us now!”



Parent/Adult Volunteer Feedback

Q. I have an increased knowledge of teaching and learning in the 21st century.



Comments

Our school (Riverside) uses a student-led inquiry model that meshes very, very well with the zoo's programming. It was impressive to watch the teacher and the zoo coordinator working in sync to lead the class through the day. I was impressed with both educators and how they led the class experience!

"I am in favor of the up-close and hands on learning methodology that is more common now than when I was in school."

Parent/Adult Volunteer Feedback

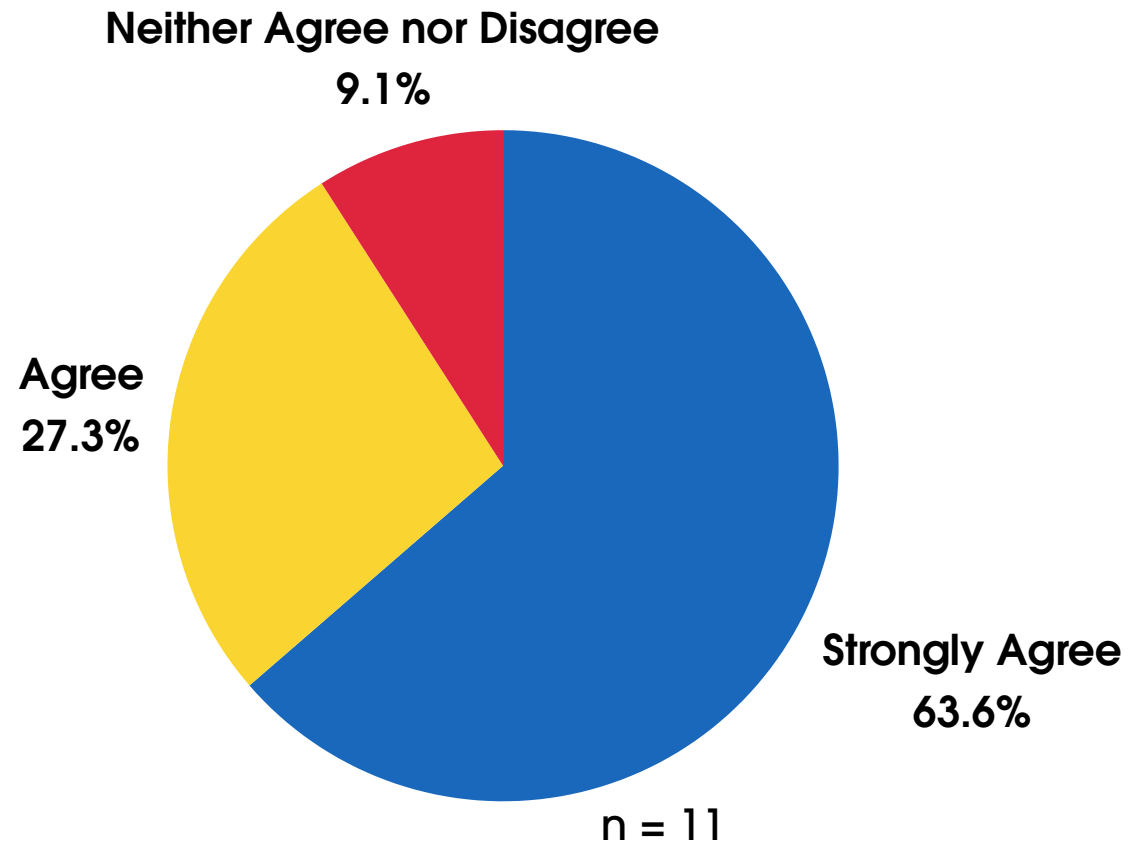
Q. I see my child exploring learning in new ways.



Comments

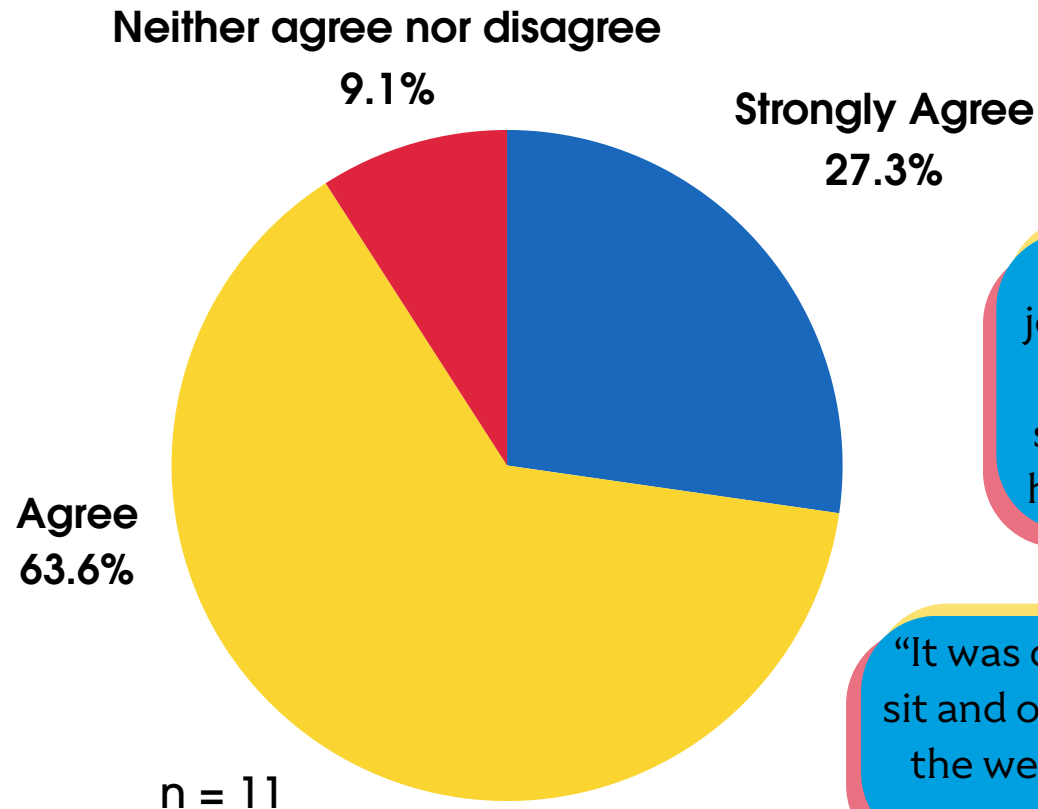
“The process of planning, observing, and journaling seems to keep the kids engaged, generating new ideas, and exploring the topics at the zoo school.”

“During the animal observations it was nice to see them asking questions about the animals. Oftentimes when teaching it is more of an exercise in feeding them information and then you asking questions to see if they understood.”



Parent/Adult Volunteer Feedback

Q. I have new strategies to support my child's learning.



Comments

“Learning the different methods of journaling reminded me how important it is to take the time to observe our surroundings. I will use this in the future to help my child discover more around them.”

“It was definitely a nice experience being able to sit and observe the animals. A normal zoo visit on the weekend doesn’t allow that as you have to move along to let others observe.”

“The educators spent a lot of time involving the class in suggesting the rules, expected behaviour, and ‘how to do things’ whenever possible. That approach seems like it will be useful in other areas too.”

Parent/Adult Volunteer Feedback

Q. This experience positively impacted my relationship with my child.

Comments

“We had fun exploring and observing together!”

“Sharing the experience of getting up close and personal with the giraffes definitely gave us something additional to bond over.”

Neither Agree nor Disagree
9.1%

Agree
27.3%

Strongly Agree
63.6%

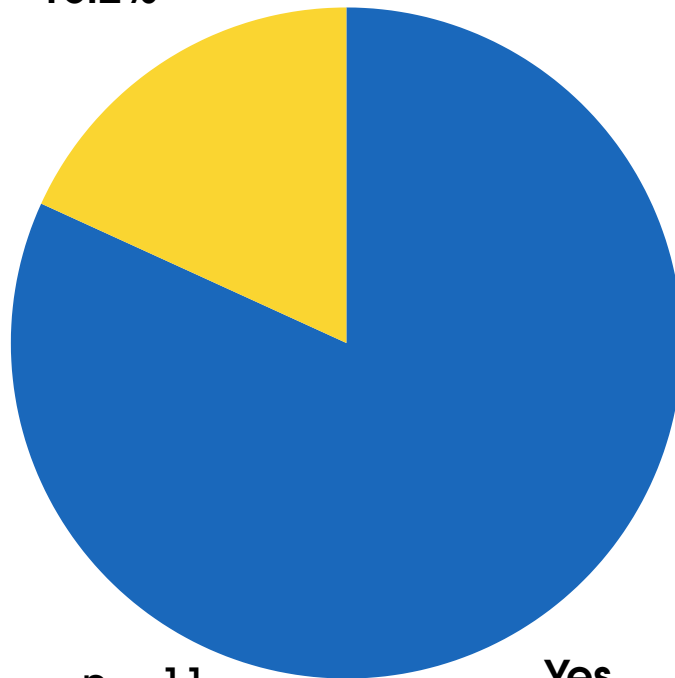
n = 11



Parent/Adult Volunteer Feedback

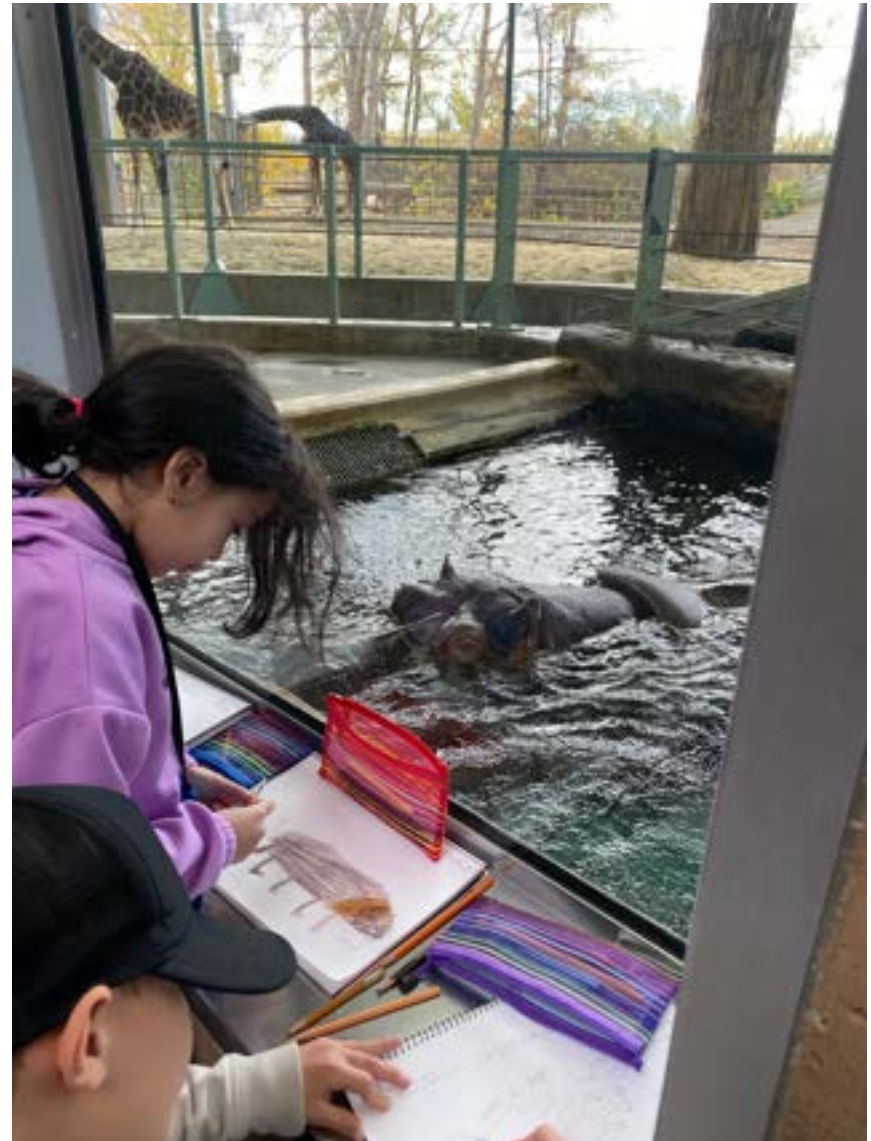
Q. Is supporting the Wilder Institute/Calgary Zoo a good way to support wildlife conservation?

I don't know
18.2%



n = 11

Yes
81.8%

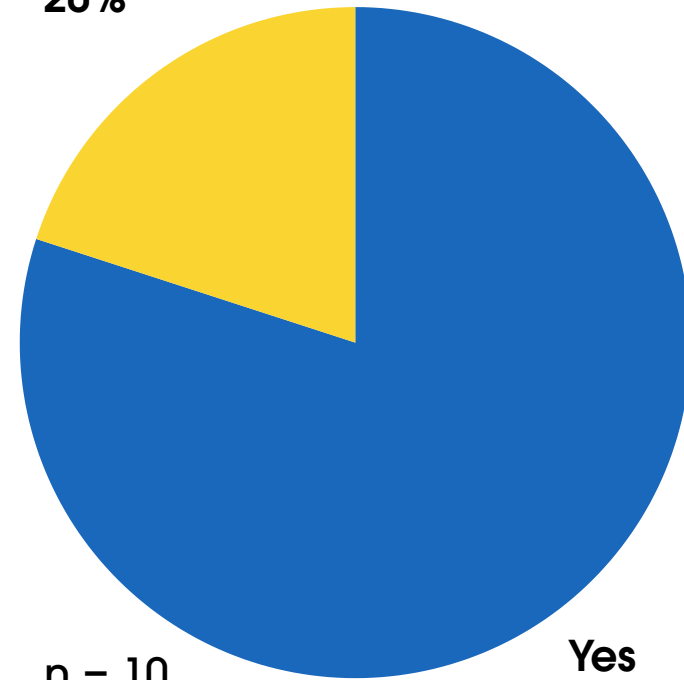


Parent/Adult Volunteer Feedback

Q. By attending this program, did your child learn that they can take action for wildlife conservation? (For example, cell phone recycling, sustainable shopping choices - FSC, Rainforest alliance, habitat protection and creation etc.)



I don't know
20%



n = 10

Yes
80%

Parent/Adult Volunteer Feedback

“Dan has blown my mind. He’s respectful of the kids and all their questions. He’s given them so much information. Made them excited about their favourite animals.”



Parent/Adult Volunteer Feedback



"I really had a great day volunteering. The classroom was great, the program really interesting, and the best part were the amazing volunteers and the Zoo school Coordinator, Dan!!"



Student Feedback

Before and after their visit to the zoo, students are given a short survey to gauge how much they know about and care about wildlife and wild places. One question asks them “Something I can do to help wildlife and/or wild places is...”

Here are some of their responses (with a few translations where necessary).

Save the berring owl by
donating to the zoo

Save the burrowing owl by
donating to the zoo

when you are camping do not
leave your food outside

quit buying more phones
every year

Rethink, refuse, reduce,
Recycle, Repurpose

Rethink, refuse, reduce,
recycle, repurpose

Student Feedback

not littering so the animals
habitats won't have garbage
everywhere. Also not throwing
Thank you for your thoughts.

flip
over →

garbage in the water so the
animals that live in the water
don't have garbage in there hab-
itat so they don't die.

I can fundraise some money
for the conservation.

- less food wast
- volunteering
- donating

Use less water when I
have a bath.

Use less water when I
have a bath.

places is... (conservation)
Use less Plastic.

Student Feedback

places is... (conservation action)
I f you see a hurt
animal, call a vet! You
never know if they are
really hurt! (Be CAREFUL)
Thank you for your thoughts.

spread the word about
environmental problems

You can use less electricity.
Pick up garbage! Don't take
animals from the wilderness.

places is... (conservation action)
you can use less electricity
pick up Garbage! dont take
animals from the wilderness.

I can reuse paper, not littering, planting new
plants like trees, not polluting, and using the
compost and recycling more than the garbage bin.

Student Feedback

Not waste food

to try to reduce pollution by walking instead of using car.

DO NOT keep the lights
on all night DO NOT
keep the water running

Do not keep the lights
on all night. Do not
keep the water running.

Do not take animals from
the wild. Use less water.

do not take animals from
the wild or use less water.

To tell other people, About the
Endangered animals, and pass
the news on.

Highlights of 2023-2024



Piloting the Indigenous Education Program based on Blackfoot Phenology

With the help of Clarence Wolfleg, six classes took part in lessons that blend together Indigenous teachings and artifacts, the zoo's animal biofacts, and the natural flora on St. Patrick's Island. The teachers who took part were extremely grateful to have this opportunity, and we hope to expand our offering in 2024-2025.



Highlights of 2023-2024

Showcasing our accessibility and flexibility with the ACCESS and ALP classes from Clarence Samson

From working with giraffes nervous of electric wheelchairs to finding unique ways to “journal,” we made the weeks that Clarence Samson visited the zoo two of the most memorable weeks of the year.

“It was incredibly heart warming to watch my students gain confidence, grow their skills and engage in learning tasks at the zoo. There are so few field trips and programs that offer authentic learning experiences while accommodating for the varying needs of students with complexities!”

“I can't speak enough of our experience at Zoo School! Dan and the team brought in varying artifacts and created learning tasks that engaged all types of learners.”



Highlights of 2023-2024



The incredible support of the various zoo departments, in particular the experts who took the time to speak with the students.

Students heard from experts in horticulture, exhibit design, veterinary care, conservation research, and animal care. We had the Associate Director of Conservation Science and Research for a group of grade 4s wanting to know more about burrowing owls. We had the Manager of Zoological Records and Animal Relocation for grade 9s learning about the SSP and animal genetics. The experts took the time to answer lots of great student questions.



Highlights of 2023-2024

Zoo School classes at Conservation Champions Festival

12 of our Zoo School classes took part in Conservation Champions Festival this year. Teachers put in a ton of extra time to work with their students in support of wildlife conservation. Campaigns included collecting cell phones to help gorilla habitat, learning about and raising funds for the Wilder Institute's Burrowing Owl program, planting a school pollinator garden for native bees, hosting a Conservation through Art fundraiser, and more.



Looking Ahead to 2024-2025

In the coming year, we are welcoming 25 classes to Zoo School. The majority of the teachers involved are first time CC/OM participants. Some classes of note:

- multiple junior and senior high classes (two grade 8, two grade 9, and two grade 10 classes)
- a grade 10-12 LEAD (literacy, English, and academic development) class composed of newcomer students from all over the world
- a PLP (paced learning program) class that will get to conclude a three-year zoo-focused program with a week at Zoo School!

With Calgary hosting this year's AZA conference, we have an opportunity share some Zoo School experiences with attendees from accredited zoos across the world. Through some animal observation journalling stations, participants will see one aspect of our program. With the help of zoo volunteers who assist with Zoo School, we will also be able to share more about what the program offers.

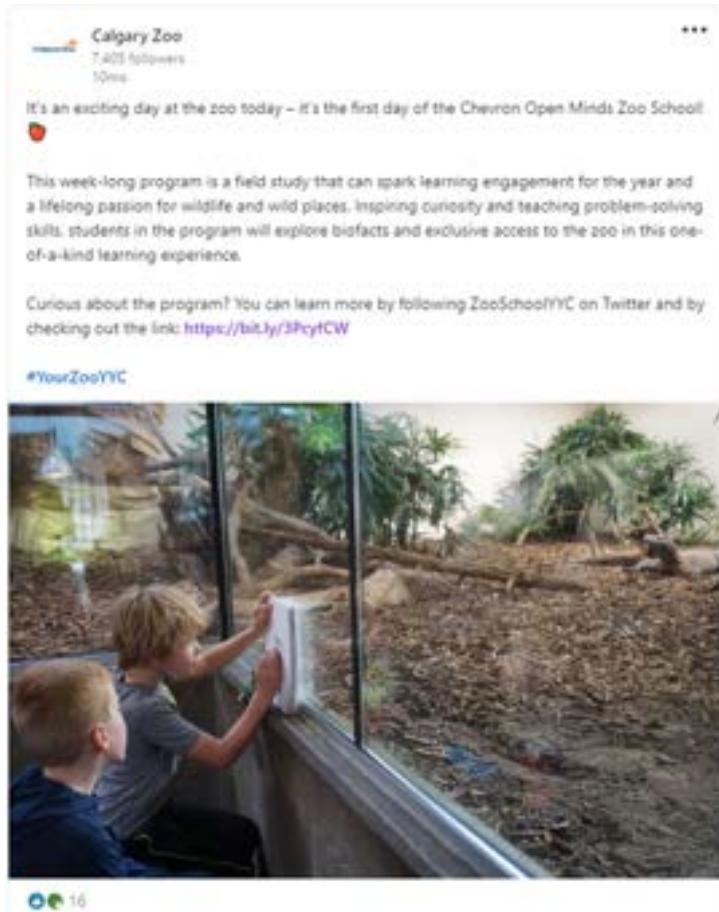


Looking Ahead to 2024-2025

We hope to continue building and expanding our Blackfoot Phenology Indigenous Educational Program. Here are just some of the initiatives we are hoping to implement:

- qualitative evaluations with teachers (done in person or virtually after the completion of their weeks to ensure all teachers share their feedback, and so the feedback can be more meaningful)
- an increased role in the training and mentoring of practicum students becoming teachers
- more opportunities for professional learning, with focuses on empathy, climate science, and other topics that teachers are looking for assistance in
- more in-school work with classes and teachers (e.g., Read-In Week, help with Conservation Projects, attend events like Riverside School's Art Night)
- more time to help plan and host CC/OM meetings, and potentially offer some professional development opportunities for other CC/OM site coordinators
- more time for program development and customization (e.g., incorporating more math and arts, more connections to the new curricula, developing more activities for junior and senior high classes, more planning time for special needs groups)
- opportunity for community outreach, such as working with classes in their neighbourhoods
- help/coach teachers who are applying for CC/OM, especially first-time teachers
- an increased role at teachers' conventions (helping both CC/OM and the zoo)
- more time to take photos and document each week, for teachers and for our own uses

Social Media Presence



Facebook:
Impressions: 9,776
Engagement: 220



Instagram
Impressions: 9,258
Engagement: 280

Linked In
Impressions: 1204

Stories from Chevron Open Minds Zoo School were shared on multiple platforms from a number of sources. Our own X (formerly Twitter) account, the Calgary Zoo's official account, and the Campus Calgary Open Minds account.



Social Media Presence



In July, we were also featured on the social media platforms of the IZE - International Zoo Educators Association.

Thank you, Chevron!

Your continued commitment and contributions to this unique and influential program has literally changed the lives of hundreds of teachers and thousands of students.

As the program continues to grow and evolve, we are excited for the future and are grateful for this enriching partnership.

