



Kids Healthy Outdoors Challenge (KHOC)

2023-2024 School Year Report

July 2024

KHOC is funded by:



KHOC 2023-2024 School Year Report Table of Contents

<u>Section</u>	<u>Page</u>
I. Introduction and Summary of 2023-2024 KHOC Program	3
II. Educator Survey Results:	
1. Survey Respondents	8
2. New KHOC Processes	8
3. The KHOC Orientation.....	11
4. KHOC in the Classroom	12
5. KHOC Park Trips.....	17
6. KHOC Processes	20
7. KHOC in Future Years	22
III. Recommendations & Plans for the Future	24

Photos taken by KHOC teachers on their 2024 park trips.

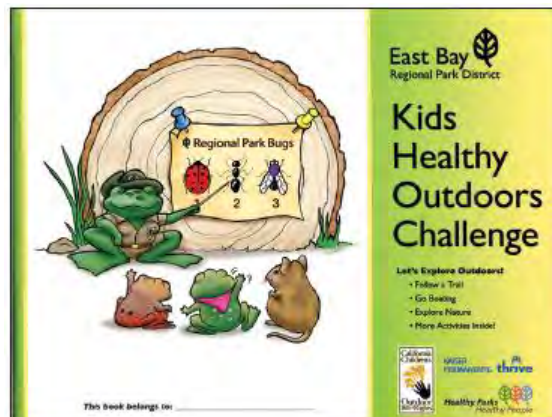


KHOC students enjoying the parks

I. Introduction and Summary of 2023-2024 KHOC Program

Purpose of the Project: The East Bay Regional Park District (EBRPD) started *Kids Healthy Outdoor Challenge (KHOC)* in 2012 to promote outdoor education while also supporting third grade curriculum content in Alameda and Contra Costa County school districts. KHOC is designed to support the teaching of required content *outdoors*.

KHOC includes a teacher guide and a student workbook, produced in English and Spanish. The workbook has ten sections aligned with the [California Children's Outdoor Bill Of Rights](#), which states that every child in California, by age 14, should have the opportunity to experience 10 key outdoors activities: e.g., Connect to the Past, Explore Nature, Follow a Trail, Plant a Seed, Ride a Bike, Learn to Swim.



Each participating teacher should complete three of the ten lessons (“challenges”) from the booklets and take a field trip to an EBRPD park of their choosing.¹ Anticipated **outcomes** include:

- Increasing teacher comfort and skills in teaching outdoors, and importantly, increasing the time third grade classrooms spend outdoors.
- Supporting teachers in meeting third grade curriculum content standards.
- Increased use of EBRPD resources to support learning.
- Increasing level of physical activity outdoors, promoting health and well-being, and life-long parks use, for teachers, diverse students, and their families.

KHOC Updates: School year 2023-2024 was the 11th full year of KHOC.² Because many teachers were not able to take a park trip due to weather the previous year, EBRPD invited back all 2022-23 schools who had participated or *tried* to participate in KHOC (e.g., they applied for a Naturalist program and/or transportation, successfully took their field trip, or were engaged throughout the program but may not have been successful in taking their field trip). To confirm that they wanted to participate in 2023-24, teachers had to submit an application in November.

EBRPD enacted another change this year, designed to deepen KHOC’s impact and relationship with all third grade teachers at a given school. We decided to accept cohorts of KHOC schools in *three year cycles*, meaning that the schools participating in 2023-24 were in their second year, and school year 2024-25 will be the third and final year of their cycle. The application cycle will not be competitive again until the 2025-26 school year.

To participate and get a no cost bus for a park trip, teachers needed to attend the KHOC orientation that occurred virtually. No in-person orientations were held this year, and for the first time, KHOC student booklets were shipped to participating schools.

¹ Teachers may also request an EBRPD Naturalist to help guide their field trip; however, having a Naturalist is not a formal part of KHOC, and KHOC teachers do not receive scheduling priority.

² KHOC was on hiatus in school year 2020-2021.

Outstanding program. When we went to Ardenwood they asked how many have been before and out of our 60 students maybe 5 raised their hand. This was an experience that these students might not have ever had the chance to do if it were not for this program.
~A KHOC Teacher

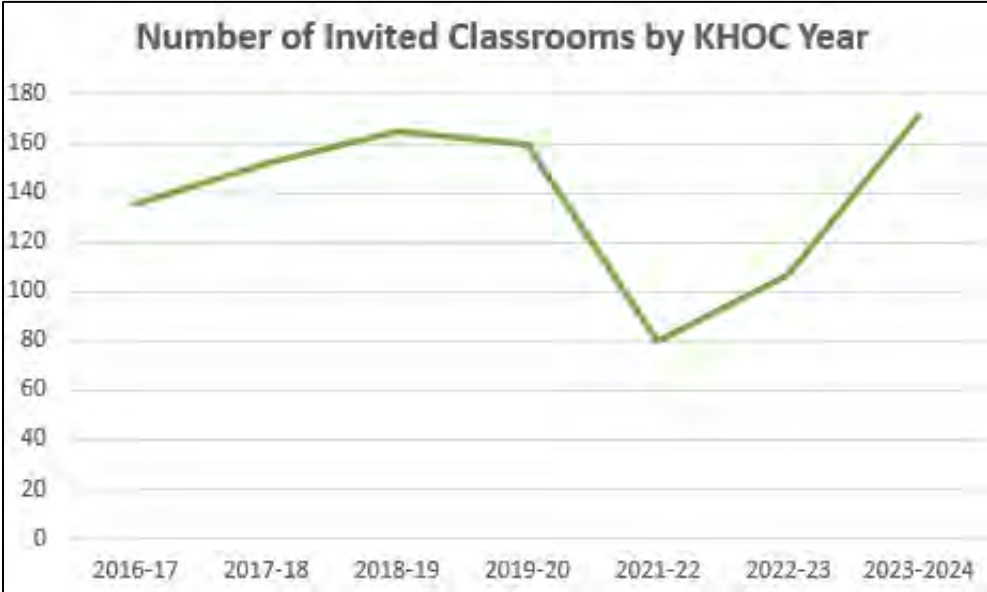
Despite the changes, some operational **challenges** continued.

Transportation: EBRPD still has a single application reservation system so teachers can request a Naturalist program and secure bus transportation simultaneously. After years of fierce competition for bus transportation, EBRPD has developed more contracts with bus companies to increase availability. But costs have increased (tied to rising salaries for drivers, gasoline, etc.) and a shortage of drivers still limit availability. Sometimes bus companies aren't responsive to our transportation department, and it can take a long time to book a bus, making it difficult for teachers to plan.

Weather: Although there were no park closures this year, there were heavy storms that complicated trip scheduling, as well as some program cancellations due to weather. Capacity to re-book depends on how busy each park is. EBRPD had to redirect some schools to other parks.

Limitations at popular parks: Some parks, like Coyote Hills, reach program capacity quickly; in some cases, we helped schools book trips at Garin instead. In addition, the mines at Black Diamond Mines closed starting March 1 through May 2024 due to a shortage of staff available to ensure tour safety. Some schools that had booked a mine tour were offered a program on the surface instead.

Teachers and Schools Invited to Participate: There were 57 schools from the 2022-23 cohort who were re-invited to participate in Fall 2023, with a total of 171 invited classrooms. (This number was higher than in the past because when EBRPD went to the school-based invite system, *all* the third grade classrooms at a school were invited regardless of whether they had participated before.)

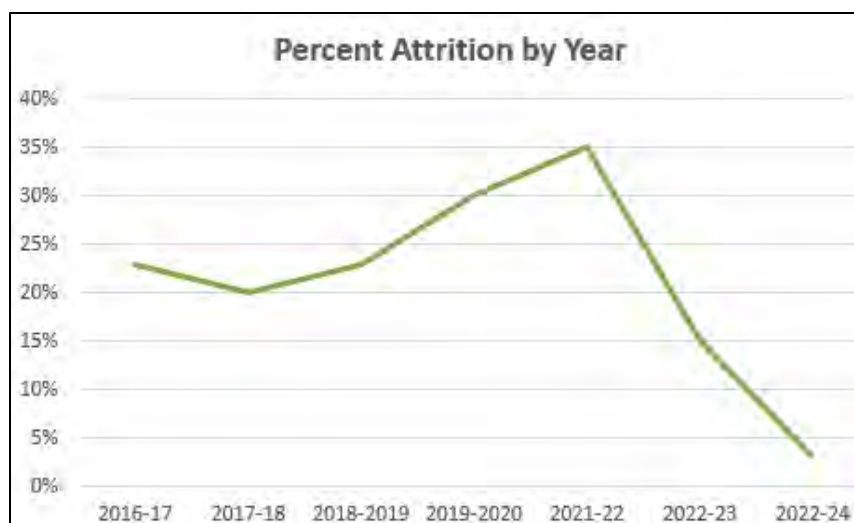


Of invited classrooms, 58% came from Alameda County schools, and 42% were from Contra Costa County schools. Sixty percent (60%) of schools were in suburban areas; 35% were from metropolitan areas, and the remainder, 5%, were rural.

Invited schools that opted in to KHOC by submitting an application were required to send at least one teacher to a mandatory virtual orientation in December 2023 in order to be counted as a participant and receive free buses. All teachers were *encouraged* to attend, but one teacher per school was the minimum requirement. (Note: EBRPD understands teachers prefer orientations earlier in the year, however, the KHOC application was delayed during the fall.)

Only **35** schools submitted applications, with a total of **118** teachers/classrooms.

Ultimately, **115** of these teachers (**97%**) attended the orientation and participated in KHOC. This attrition rate of 3% was markedly lower than in recent years, perhaps because teachers who were invited self-selected “in” by submitting an application.



KHOC Participants: The 115 teachers participating in KHOC represented 34 schools and 16 school districts: 35% came from Contra Costa, and 65% came from Alameda County. The schools were 53% metropolitan, 44% suburban, and 3% rural.

The 115 participating classrooms had approximately **2,975 students**; average class size was 26.

Among students, there was wide variation in socio-economic status, with low-income status measured by eligibility for Free and Reduced Price Meals (FRPM). On average, **54% of students were eligible for FRPM** (up from 46% last year). Many were also English Language Learners:

	Average	Range
% students eligible for FRPM	54%	[5%, 100%]
% English Language Learners	35%	[5%, 96%] Spanish, Cantonese, Mandarin, Vietnamese, Russian, Hindi, and Arabic commonly spoken

The diverse students were *approximately* 48% Latinx, 9% African American, 13% White, 17% Asian, 3% Pacific Islander, <1% Native American, and 9% More than One Race or Unknown.

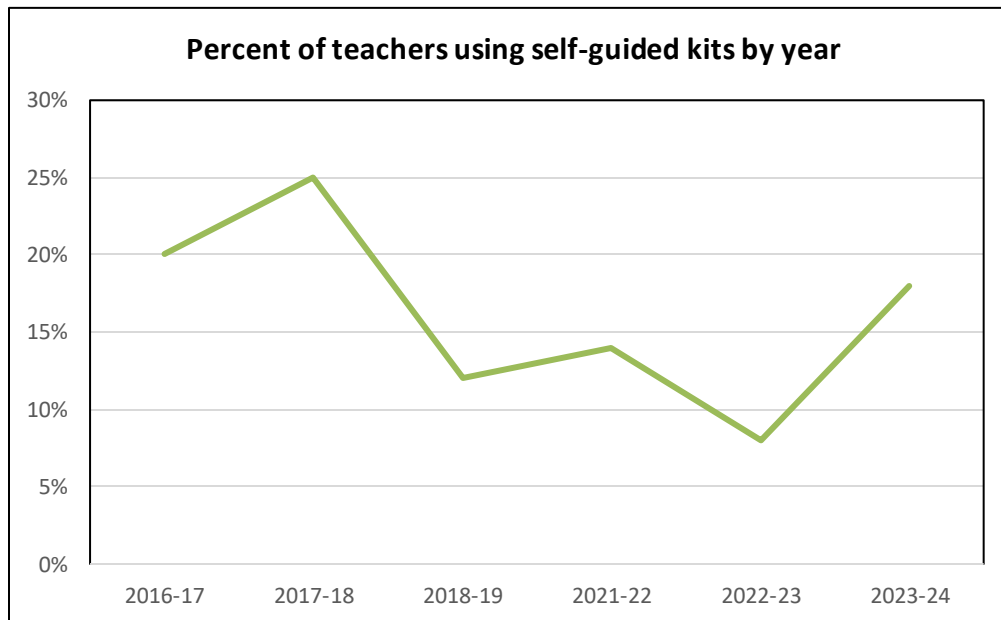
Park Trips: There were **106** KHOC park trips taken during the year (compared to 75 last year, when many were cancelled due to weather and park closures). There were **3,088 students and other passengers** (e.g., teachers, chaperones) attending these trips.

The **most popular destinations** this year were Tilden Nature Area, Black Diamond Mines,³ and Coyote Hills:

2024 EBRPD Parks Visited by Percent of Trips

Tilden Nature Area	27%	Big Break	4%
Black Diamond Mines	23%	Redwood	4%
Coyote Hills	16%	Martinez Shoreline	4%
Crab Cove	9%	Garin	3%
Sunol	5%	Ardenwood	2%
Crown Memorial	4%		

Most teachers (**82%**) chose to have a Naturalist guide their park trip, but **18% of KHOC teachers opted for a self-guided trip** using a Teacher Kit designed for use at four park locations.⁴ This was an improvement from the low point of kit usage last year.



³ The mines themselves were closed during the spring due to lack of staff capacity.

⁴ Reinhardt Redwood Regional Park in Oakland, Garin Regional Park in Hayward, Radke-Martinez Regional Shoreline in Martinez and Shadow Cliffs Regional Recreation Area in Pleasanton.

Summary of KHOC Survey & Findings: In May of each school year, EBRPD conducts a survey of participating teachers to learn about their experience, gain input, and determine the **impact** KHOC had during the year. This year, 63 of 115 participating teachers (55%) took the survey.

This is my first year participating and I think it's a fabulous program to help get kids outside and make them aware of all the regional parks we have around us. I don't think people realize there are so many to choose from.

~A KHOC Teacher

Notable findings included:

- **97%** Agreed or Strongly Agreed that in the future, they **intended to continue teaching lessons to get kids active outdoors.**
- **63%** of survey respondents Agreed or Strongly Agreed that **participating in KHOC has increased the amount of time I spend teaching outdoors**, with **88%** spending at **least an hour per month outdoors** with their class this school year.
- The rate of respondents saying they were **Comfortable or Very Comfortable teaching outdoors** increased from **36%** “before KHOC” to **79%** “Today” (in May 2024).
- **90%** Agreed or Strongly Agreed that **KHOC activities were engaging and fun for students.**
- **92%** Agreed or Strongly Agreed that participating in KHOC **made their class want to spend more time being active outdoors.**
- **All (100%)** respondents said their students **wanted to return to EBRPD parks in the future, or with their families.**
- **98%** Agreed or Strongly Agreed that they would **return to EBRPD parks with their class next school year.**
- **98%** planned to **participate in KHOC next year.**

As KHOC ends its **11th program year**, this report celebrates EBRPD successes, and details suggestions to improve and continue to grow the program.

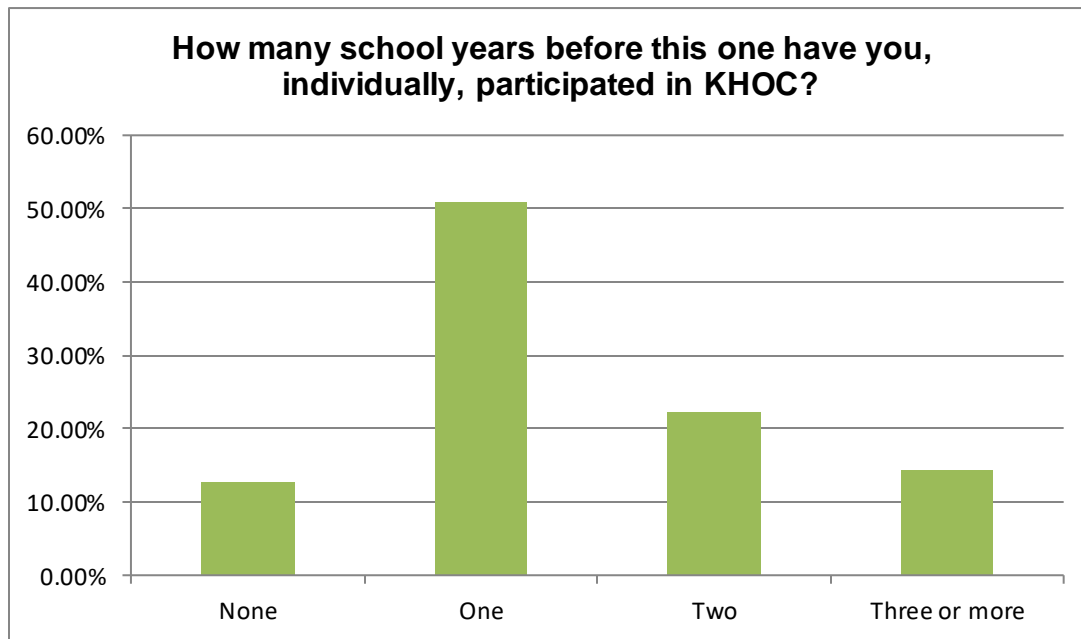


KHOC students play at a regional park.

II. Educator Survey Results

I. Survey Respondents: Every year, EBRPD improves KHOC based on teacher feedback from a year-end survey, and through communications with teachers during the year. The 2024 Educator Survey was conducted on SurveyMonkey from May 22 through June 3. In all, **63** complete or partial responses were received, a response rate of **55%** (similar to last year).

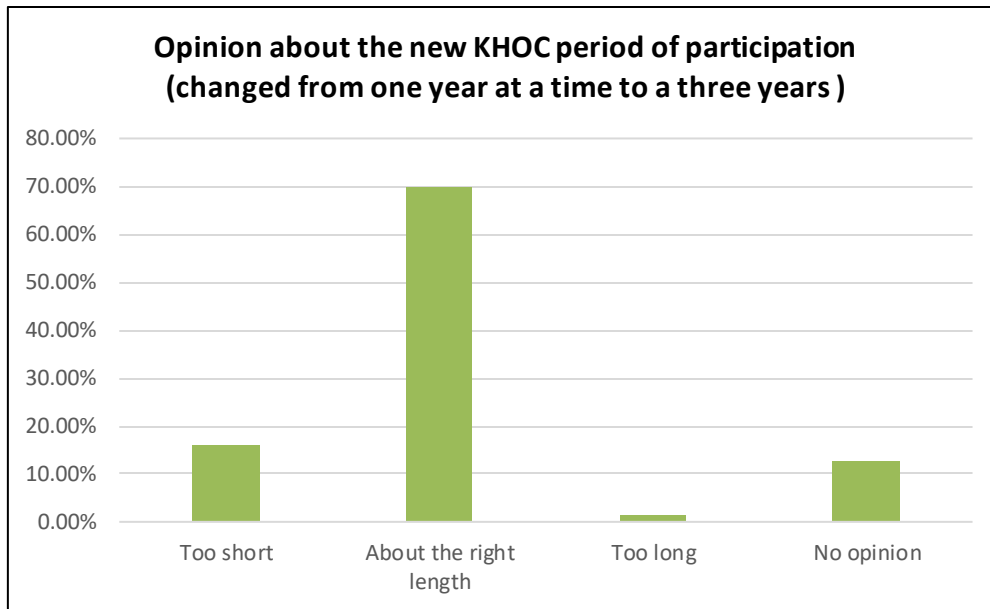
All schools had been re-invited to re-apply from the 2022-23 school year, so there were relatively few survey respondents who indicated they had *not* participated in KHOC before, about 13%. These were most likely teachers who were new to that school. Half of respondents (50%) had participated just once before, most likely in the 2022-23 school year.



2. New KHOC Processes: This year, EBRPD surveyed teachers about new program processes, including accepting cohorts of KHOC schools in *three year cycles*, and mailing KHOC booklets to schools instead of having teachers pick them up at an EBRPD location (last year some teachers were not able to do this and so went without class booklets).

We surveyed teachers about how they felt about these changes.

Regarding the new three-year cycle per school, we asked if teachers felt that length of time was too short, about the right length, or too long. The majority (**70%**) thought it was the right length.



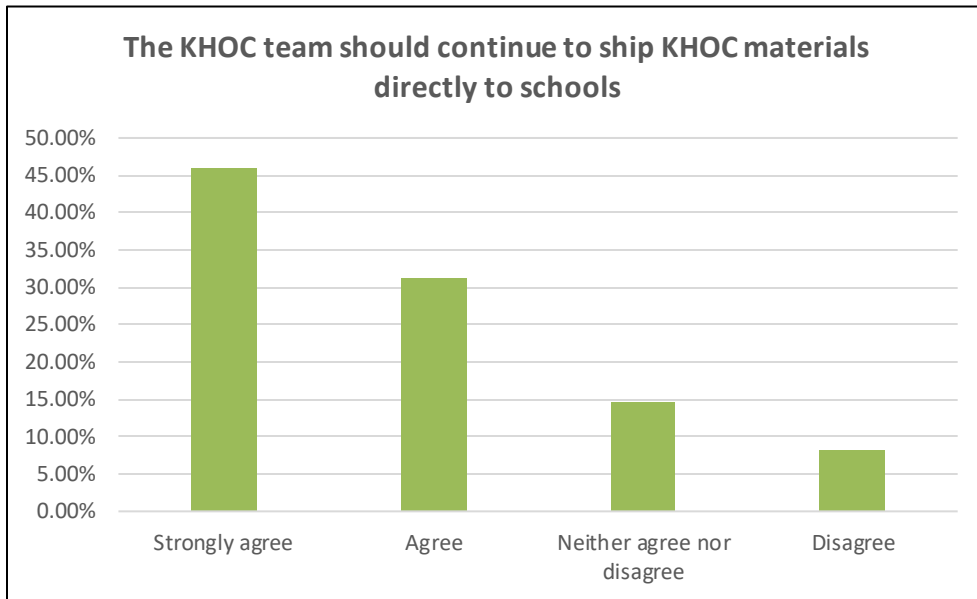
Some teachers appreciated the fact that their KHOC participation was assured this year: *It was so awesome to be able to count on our acceptance this year! It makes our lives much easier!*

Other comments about this change included:

- *I know you can't possibly accommodate all 3rd grade classes in the area on this trip, but I would be disappointed if I couldn't attend this trip every year. I had one newcomer student who is our country and had never been on a field trip before. He didn't want to go because he was nervous, but his family told him that I wanted him to go. He came and had such an amazing time digging in the sand at low tide and exploring. He's been on every field trip since visiting the shoreline. I would love to be able to bring students to the shoreline every year and watch them bloom. :)*
- *I love this program!!! Knowing I should have this program available is an asset I do not have to worry too much about. So many of our students would not have the opportunity to visit these sites on their own. This is very much appreciated!*
- *I enjoyed being able to take our students on another field trip to an East Bay Park this year! Since I went last year, I feel like my students gained more from it because we talked about the parks leading up to the field trip and as a teacher I knew what to expect.*
- *I think that because the 22-23 school year, I was forgotten. I felt really sad about that. This year 23-24 school year was better because only one teacher was the main contact and only one field trip was scheduled to one place and that seemed easier for KHOC and the teachers. It was nice before when we could each participate and each get a trip that we were able to share with each other. I realize that now with the cost of busses and the amount of effort that it takes to coordinate the trips that this year's system was much better.*
- *I think this is great. It is wonderful to have the opportunity to have the entire grade level participate.*
- *I am not sure I really understand the changes. Since we went last year and this year, does that mean we only get to go one more year?*

This year, **80%** of survey respondents received booklets for their class, only slightly up from 77% in 2022-23. Eighteen percent (18% or 11 teachers) indicated they had *not* received booklets this year. This is consistent with the roughly 20% of schools that did not complete a short survey to order the correct number of booklets and provide a shipping address. This survey was sent to lead teachers repeatedly, but approximately 20% of schools never ordered their booklets.

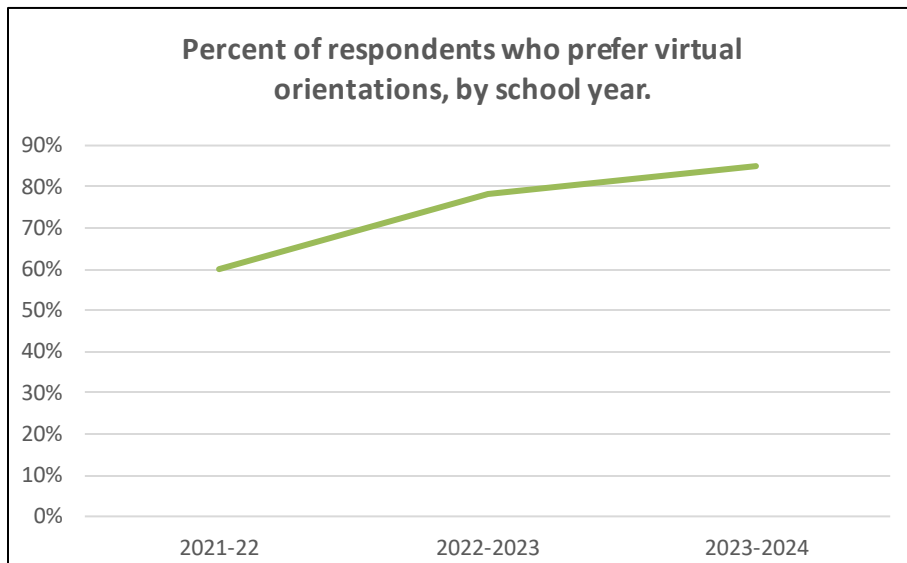
Nonetheless, 77% of teachers Agreed or Strongly agreed that EBRPD should continue to ship KHOC materials directly to schools.



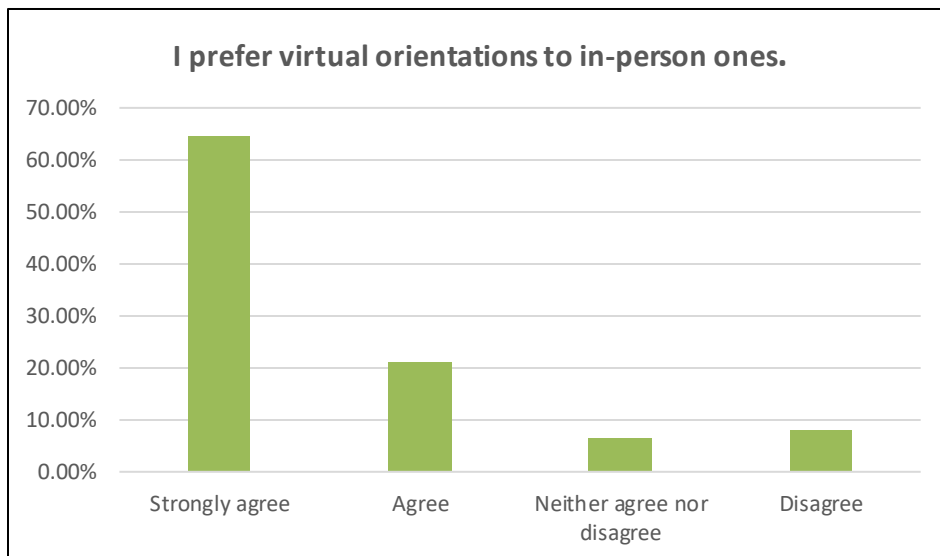
KHOC students experimenting at Ardenwood

3. The KHOC Orientation: EBRPD requires at least one teacher per school to attend an orientation to participate in KHOC. Important topics include reserving buses and Naturalists (and using the online application reservation system), as well as exposing teachers to self-guided trip activity kits. In December 2023, the mandatory orientations occurred **virtually**, on Zoom. Our survey asked teacher for feedback on teacher orientations.

First, we asked how teachers felt about **virtual vs. in-person orientations**. School year 2021-22, during the COVID-19 pandemic, was the first year Zoom orientations were held. Since then, the percent of teachers Agreeing or Strongly Agreeing they **prefer online, virtual orientations** has increased each school year:



This year, **85%** of respondents Agreed or Strongly Agreed they preferred virtual orientations.



Moreover, **89%** of respondents Agreed or Strongly Agreed that the virtual teacher orientation **provided me the information and resources to successfully participate in KHOC**. Only 2% disagreed.

It appears that the popularity of virtual meetings continues to increase in the wake of the COVID-19. Suggestions for improving the virtual orientation included:

- *I feel like some of the info could be given in a written or video format and then maybe people could do this at their own convenience and take a test or something and then have a quicker in person orientation?*
- *Offering it at more times...As a parent of small kids and a teacher, evening times are really hard, but I also understand the limited availability.*
- *If there was a document or a form that has the information for the parks that offer equipment for classroom exploration would be helpful.*
- *Have two separate ones. One for teachers completely new to KHOC and one for teachers who have previously participated in KHOC. Another idea is best practices for teaching outside. Perhaps a website to share teacher made materials or ideas for teaching outside.*
- *I prefer the in -person meetings. It helped having someone maybe neighbors even, to interact with other educators interested in outdoor education opportunities. Would also live some teachers modeling the lesson in the books.*

Students loved the opportunity to explore and see the animals in nature. Some were excited because they saw wild turkeys for the first time.

~A KHOC teacher

There were multiple comments (n=6) saying teachers repeating KHOC should not have to take the orientation, however EBRPD has shortened the orientation to one hour, and has determined it is important to communicate program changes each year so teachers don't miss information they need. In addition, only one teacher per school is required to attend; unfortunately, this requires the attending teacher to communicate important information, which sometimes does not occur.

Overall, **93%** of respondents said they **received adequate resources and guidance to successfully participate in this program**. Those (n=4) who did not, were asked *What additional resources or guidance would have helped you successfully participate in the program?* They told us:

- *I had no idea what to do when I got to Tilden. I had to go separately with my family to make an itinerary on what to do before my self guided trip. You should create itinerary's for teachers. I also never received a "backpack."*
- *One person should be in charge of managing the trips.*
- *Teacher book needs more information/help to guide lessons.*
- *At our school, there is a leadership person who is in charge, but it would be nice if everybody in the third grade would've been included and we could've had discussions over all aspects of the information given. So next time say what team is coming and then get all of our Emails so we can have group discussion it would be great*

4. KHOC in the Classroom: KHOC includes a teacher guide and student workbook (in both English and Spanish) that includes interactive, engaging activities that students can complete either in the classroom or on their park trip.

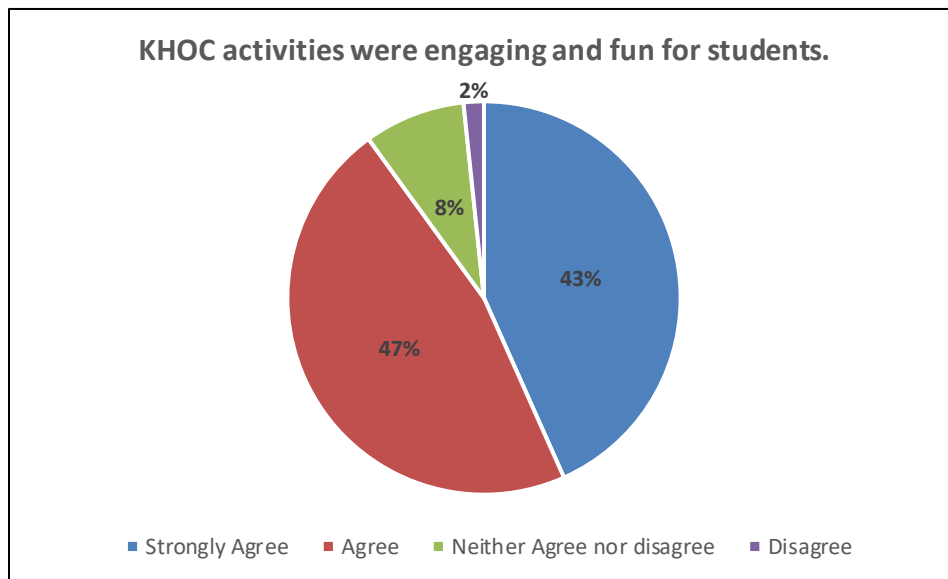
As noted in section 2 above, **80%** of survey respondents **obtained KHOC booklets and lesson materials**. In addition, this **80%** of survey respondents indicated they **used KHOC kids' booklets or lesson materials with their classes**.

Seventy-nine percent (**79%**) of teachers who used the booklets agreed that the **KHOC booklets were valued or enjoyed by their students**; 15% were not sure, and 6% did not feel the booklets were valued or enjoyed by their students.

Almost all (**97%**) Agreed or Strongly Agreed that **KHOC activities were age and grade-appropriate**. Teacher comments about the booklets included:

- *They really found them to be engaging and pertinent to the learning we did in 3rd grade this school year.*
- *They loved the outdoor games/activities, which were new to me and I liked as well.*
- *We went to Coyote Hills and to Ardenwood this year. My students loved both trips. -We read and made agreements to the "Outdoor Agreements" We used lessons 1 and 2 throughout the year - and both lessons in Play it Safe. The kids enjoyed all of them.*
- *Student were super excited to complete some of them with their families at home.*
- *I have made up special activities and tasks related to the Redwoods that I use at Redwood Park.*
- *They really enjoyed the lessons about exploring nature: the woodpecker, cricket, and bird beak pages were a big hit with the students. They also really like: Plant a seed. The diagrams were very helpful and perfect for my students.*
- *The booklets are quite large and hard to get through. If there was just a smaller packet asking questions about the site we visited, it might be more useful.*
- *I wish there were some access to some video to frontload the lessons for students. Some of the lessons my students did not have any background information to make connection to the lessons.*
- *The "connecting with the past" lesson is a little vague/hard to grasp.*

Most (**90%**) Agreed or Strongly Agreed KHOC activities were **engaging and fun** for students:



KHOC lessons are designed to be used by third graders of **different cultural backgrounds and language abilities**, including Spanish speakers. We asked teachers how students of different backgrounds and language abilities reacted to KHOC activities. Most indicated that the booklets worked well for English Language Learners:

Outdoor learning activities are more accessible for my students with limited language and academic abilities. They THRIVE in these environments.
~A KHOC teacher

- *I loved that there were books in Spanish. I had 3 "Newcomer" students in my class this year, and they were able to participate in the lessons with ease. :)*
- *We appreciated the mix of Spanish and English booklets for our dual immersion school.*
- *They were able to organize their thoughts and express their ideas in both drawings and sentences.*
- *They did not have difficulties. The workbooks worked for the variety of cultural backgrounds in my class.*
- *The visuals were wonderful and helped with vocabulary acquisition.*
- *We read and highlighted in the materials. I used these as part of my ELD curriculum.*
- *I have a diverse class (both cultural backgrounds and also individual ability levels) and all of my students enjoyed the activities.*
- *Most students found the content useful and enjoyed drawing what they saw. ELL were also able to use the booklets with some translation support*
- *Anything that involved visuals and movement was helpful and appreciated.*
- *The booklets and lesson ideas were great. My students enjoyed the hands on activities, like playing the Ohlone games and the "in a box" sketching activity. I chose activities that everyone could participate in regardless of language or skill level, so we did not have any difficulty. I used the resources I had available at school, like circles on the playground and tan bark, rather than sticks, to throw. I also made the "sketch box" out of used file folders. We were only able to complete 3-4 lessons because several must be done outside of school, like "camp under the stars." The book is a good resource for students and families outside of school. :).*
- *There were always ways to change the lesson/lesson outcomes to support multi-lingual learners.*

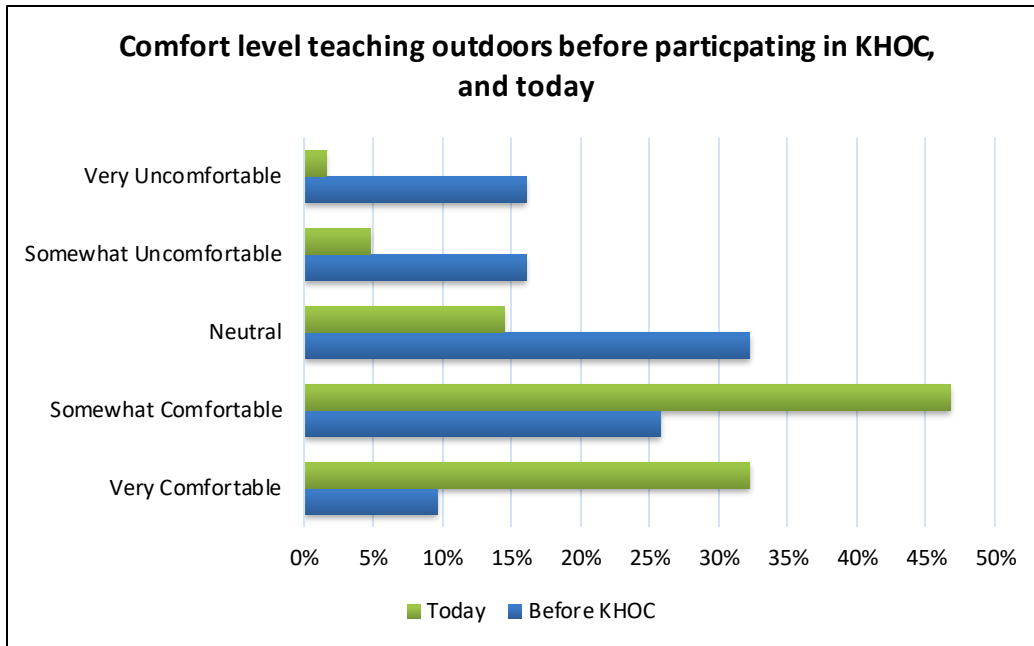
There were also suggestions to consider for future iterations and translations of the booklet:

- *I found that many students struggled with some of the vocabulary words in the lessons were particularly difficult for them. They were able to use the diagrams and captions provided to make connections and this helped them to visualize and grasp the concepts better.*
- *My kids liked the discussions we had and the activities. The only hard thing is I have many English learners who had trouble reading it.*
- *Students liked building the paper kites, and liked the coloring pages. There seemed to be a little too much reading for the students.*
- *Teacher book needs more information/help to guide lessons.*
- *Great visuals and easy to understandable format. Would be great to have a vocabulary preview/review for my EL learners.*

An important KHOC goal is **increasing participant comfort and skills in teaching outdoors**, and our survey this year asked respondents two questions to assess any increase in comfort:

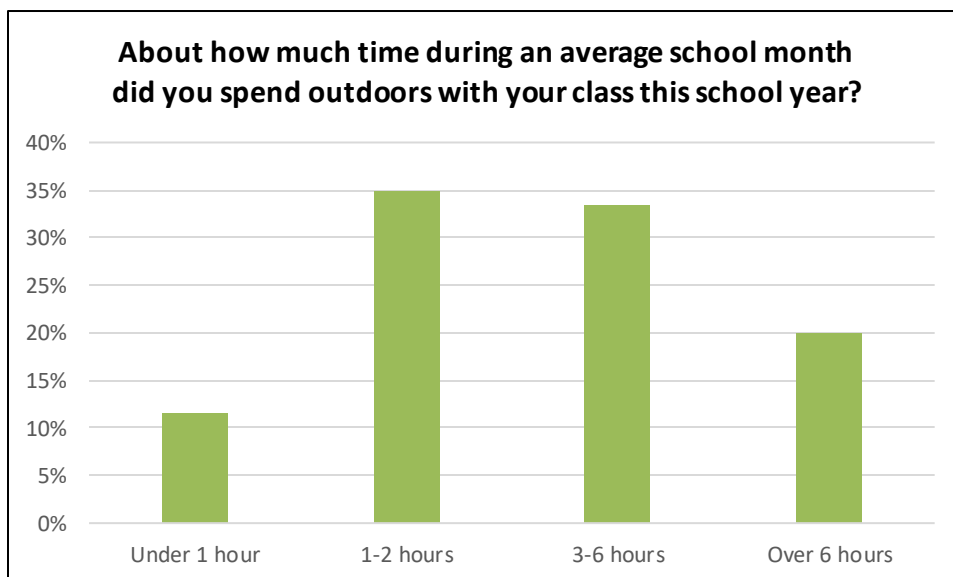
- **Before participating in KHOC, what was your comfort level teaching outdoors?**
- **What is your comfort level teaching outdoors today?**

Responses were rated on a range from Very Uncomfortable to Very Comfortable. As illustrated in the table below, the rate of respondents saying they were Comfortable or Very Comfortable increased from **36%** “before KHOC” to **79%** “Today” (or at the time of the survey after participating in KHOC 2023-24). In short, the proportion of respondents who were comfortable more than doubled.



We also seek to maximize the *time* third grade classrooms spend outdoors. The majority (**63%**) of respondents indicated that **participating in KHOC has “increased the amount of time I spend teaching outdoors.”**

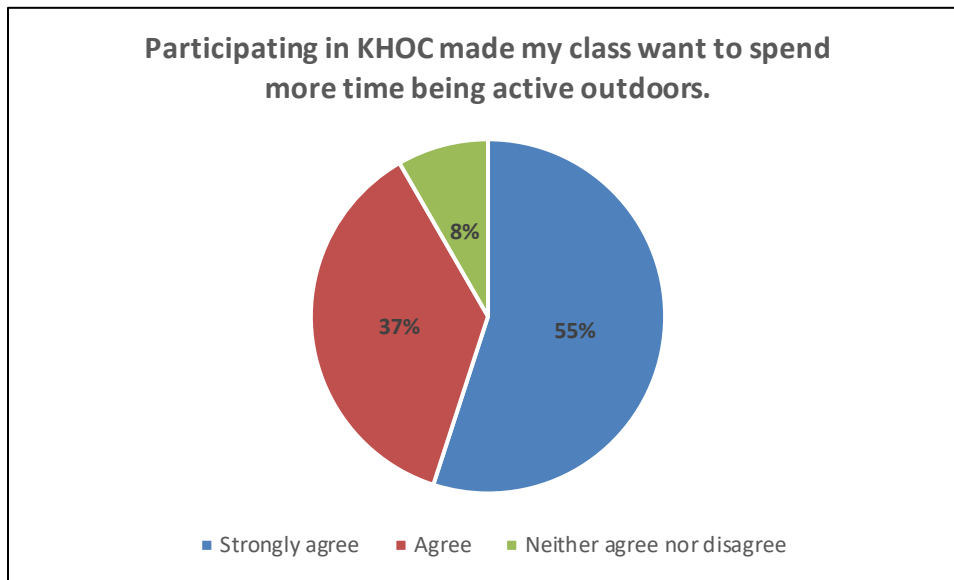
In addition, in school year 2023-24, on average, over **88%** of respondents spent **at least an hour or more outdoors with their class; 53% spent three hours or more.**



We love it! It's my favorite field trip of the year - I love sharing my love of the outdoors with my class. This year almost all of them had never been on a hike! They had a great time and hopefully will bring their families and lead the way.

~A KHOC teacher

Moreover, **92%** Agreed or Strongly Agreed that KHOC **made their class want to spend more time being active outdoors.**



Forty-three percent (**43%**) of teachers who responded also indicated **additional training about how to teach outdoors would be valuable**, with suggestions that highlighted more information about EBRPD locations, flora and fauna, as well as best practices for teaching outdoors. Comments included:

- *Workshops or modelled instruction*
- *Online training*
- *Training on selecting and designing developmentally appropriate and standards-aligned outdoor lessons.*
- *Best practices from Rangers about teaching children in nature.*
- *Knowing the information to be presented. What is special/unique about the location.*
- *Showing how to implement some of the lessons either in the field (at the parks) or in the classroom. Given time to gather the items needed to teach some of the lessons in the classroom or at the park.*
- *Activities I can do at school.*
- *How to create an all-day outdoor ed day.*
- *Names of trees, plants, history, and animals.*
- *Types of leaves/trees.*
- *Training about animals and nature within specific parks. I would feel more comfortable teaching in nature if I felt like more of an expert in one park.*
- *Going to new outdoor places to be able to take my students.*

- How to plan for outdoor lessons and what to look out for.
- Guided lessons, optional extensions training..

5. KHOC Activities - Park Trips: Teachers chose between two types of park trips:

- 1) One with an EBRPD Naturalist-led program, or
- 2) A self-guided trip utilizing activity kits available at four EBRPD parks (Reinhardt Redwood Regional Park, Garin Regional Park, Radke-Martinez Regional Shoreline, and Shadow Cliffs Regional Recreation Area).⁵

EBRPD incentivizes teachers to take self-guided trips because it increases skills and knowledge that teachers can use for the rest of their careers.

Students loved this trip the best of the three field trips we took. They felt connected to the Earth and calm and joyful in the Redwoods. It was a very playful and joyful experience. The most playful and joyful of the year!
~A KHOC teacher

As part of the survey, EBRPD asked respondents if they were aware that teachers who took the self-guided park trip received a **free Regional Parks Foundation membership** (with benefits including free day-use parking). Despite information in the orientation, just **43%** of respondents were aware of this incentive. At year's end, 19 teachers were eligible for this free membership.

Of survey respondents, most (**97%**) had taken a KHOC park trip, compared with 92% in the overall participant cohort. One survey respondent indicated they did not know if they had taken a trip, and the one teacher who had *not* indicated it was because I could not get bus transportation for my trip (e.g., no buses were available on the date of my trip).

Among teachers who had a trip, **86%** chose the Naturalist-led trip, and **14%**, the self-guided trip. (These rates are similar to the overall cadre of participants, in which 18% took a self-guided trip, more than double the 8% in 2022-23.)

Naturalist led programs continue to be very popular: **96%** of those who took this type of trip indicated they would choose it again in the future. Comments about Naturalists were enthusiastic:

- *The naturalist was organized and kept the program moving forward. She also helped students in the visitor's center and educated them on our walk.*
- *Having a naturalist guide program was very engaging and interesting for my students. It increased the level of curiosity for my students.*



Students attend a naturalist program at TNA

⁵ Most of the activities in the kits can be used at any EBRPD location.

- *I thought our naturalist was outstanding. Jenna was able to work with the high energy of my 3rd graders, giving them a great experience with our hike. Knowledgeable, personable, and perceptive in her timing.*
- *It was a wonderful experience for my students. Not only were they able to learn new things about their community/area, they were able to learn them from someone else besides me. They really enjoyed the field trip. They were able to come back and write about their adventure.*
- *The program was great. We used the information that they learned on this trip to help them connect with their communities and the past. It was a great segway for the Lesson: Connect with the Past.*
- *Awesome!! They always point out different animals and plants that I'm not aware of.*
- *It was great! We were able to learn a lot more about the Ohlone peoples and how they used the environment.*
- *I really enjoyed the naturalist guided trips. I believe the students and adults learned more from the "professionals."*
- *It was great! Loved the interactive activities the students got to do (scavenger hunt in the visitors center, nature walk with binoculars, meeting a creature). I went to redwood regional last year and I think the program at crab cove was more interesting for the students.*
- *Super engaging, loved the walk with binoculars, loved the scavenger hunt in the visitor center, loved meeting one of the reptiles, and enjoyed our naturalist's program - fun & educational!*
- *The knowledge and expertise of the naturalist is what makes the program special and valuable for our students. It is great to have an expert lead the class and share all the insight and be able to answer questions.*
- *I would love to enjoy one of the KHOC parks and field trips earlier in the year.*
- *Sometimes they spend too much time on a topic and lose student interest. Please consider that many students are just so excited to be outside that they just want to be outside.*
- *My naturalist was not as strong this year, but perhaps it was the program we selected, which was more open ended. I liked the one I did a previous year in which we started inside and learned a bit and then went outside to explore these things.*
- *Sadly the naturalists were mad at us for bringing more students then reported earlier in the year. We filled in paperwork earlier in the year and by the time our field trip occurred our classrooms were assigned more students.*
- *All naturalists and docents need a speaker and microphone to speak to large crowds outdoors. Only one of the docents had one, and the ones without one were much harder to hear, and the students were more likely to disengage because they could not hear the naturalist.*

Because EBRPD is still promoting **self-guided park trips**, we wanted to learn *why* some teachers (n=8) chose them. By and large it was matter of scheduling and convenience:

- *There were no dates left for the naturalist led trip*
- *The naturalist was unavailable.*
- *We were first supposed to go to Black Diamond Mines but because of the confusion regarding the availability of the buses we had to cancel. We then opted for the self-guided trip to Sunol park.*
- *We wanted to go somewhere with the kids and it was easier to go somewhere when we were our own guides.*
- *The incentive helped. But mostly because it was easier to schedule.*

For one teacher it was a matter of comfort and experience: *I did it before and I have materials for Redwood Centers that we created. I feel comfortable leading this trip.*

Half (50%) of the self-guided teachers would have **preferred a naturalist-led trip to a self-guided one if they had it to do over again**. Only five (5) of the eight (8) self-guided trip takers used the Teacher Kit; 80% of these said the kit helped them prepare for the trip (rating the kits a 4 or 5 out of 5 on a Likert scale).

Reviews of the kit materials were mixed:

- *Materials were wonderful.*
- *I thought the kit was helpful especially the laminated photos of the Redwoods. I think it would be great to have some kid friendly books about the Redwoods. I also added measuring tapes for estimating the height of the redwoods. I would also love more information about birds and critters in the redwood habitat, i.e., banana slugs.*
- *It was helpful. I left some scavenger hunts in it. This made getting started easier.*
- *Well... NO the kits were a mess! I had to clean and organize them before the trip. There were almost enough materials for one class in each kit. I borrowed all three from Coyote Hills Regional Park to take to Garin. She mentioned no one had used them in years. I happily cleaned them up, inventoried them and returned them the next day after our field trip. The water kit was the most popular with the kids.*

One teacher remarked, *"I think a review of the kits would be great. In fact I only used them because I was familiar with the program from years ago. Had I not been a part of the program before I would not have known they had the kits to use at Garin Park. They were a lot of fun!"* It's true that EBRPD has not held kit training since it stopped doing in-person KHOC orientation. However, we do let teachers know that they can get a kit, and a demonstration of materials in the kit, at park visitor centers.

Among all survey takers, **58%** said they would **consider using a self-guided kit for future park trips**, compared to 55% last year.

I did have the Naturalist led program, but I will choose to do a teacher led next time. I would like to see how they differ. I found the Naturalist absolutely knew what he was talking about and I thoroughly enjoyed learning from him.

~A KHOC Teacher

Note: As detailed in Section I, the mines at Black Diamond Mines were closed much of the spring and many teachers were disappointed that their classes could not participate in the tour:

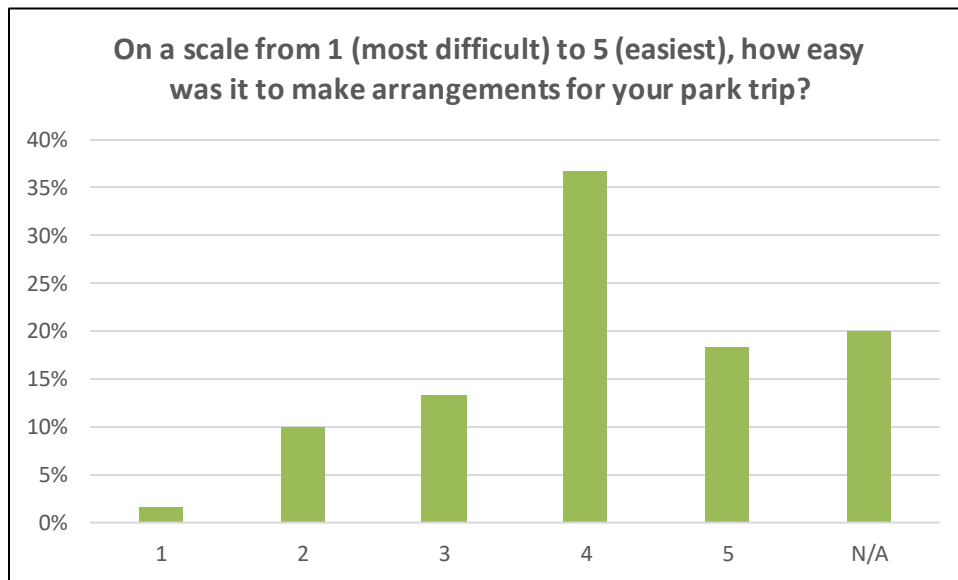
- *Our grade level went to Black Diamond Mines and it was disappointing because the mines are closed. The docents made the best of it, but it is not a worthwhile trip without seeing the mines as part of the learning experience. Our trip was too difficult to change by the time we found out the mines were closed, so we had no other choice. Had we known, we would have chosen a different place to go.*
- *We were bummed to find out that the mines were closed for maintenance during the time of our trip. Wish we could have known sooner and rescheduled so we were able to enter the mines. However, the naturalists did a great job with the other program we participated in (history walk).*

- *It was fantastic-the guides were very articulate and engaging. It was a bummer that East Bay Black Diamond did not coordinate mine maintenance with the trip-the mines were closed.*

6. KHOC Processes: A key program process, one that is frequently challenging, is reserving a park trip, Naturalist program, and school bus.

EBRPD’s single application reservation system enables teachers to book a bus and a Naturalist (if desired) for their trip simultaneously. After completing the online request, teachers receive a message that the request for transportation has been received. The next communication is made by parks transportation staff providing an update on the applicant’s bus request.

We asked teachers how easy it was to make trip arrangements on a scale from 1 (the most difficult) to 5 (the easiest): **just 12% of respondents rated these processes a “1” or a “2”** (those who answered N/A had not been responsible for making trip arrangements). Last school year, 31% of respondents had responded “1” or a “2”.



More comments this year than in the past describe the process as “easy”–or indicated that it was district transportation departments that had introduced the layer of difficulty:

- *Seemed easier this year.*
- *It was very easy!*
- *Super easy, thank you for the support! We couldn't go on our trip without the free bus! Much gratitude for making this happen for our students & families, many of whom have never visited Crab Cove (even though we are a 15 - 20 minute drive away).*
- *Booking the trip is always easy. Booking the bus is harder because you have to deal with an extra entity (school district).*
- *I appreciated the speed of communication between me and park officials.*
- *Our district requires we use their bus company. They are difficult to work with as they are not forthcoming with rates. The teacher who arranged the buses with KHOC was unable to change the dates for a new trip elsewhere besides BDM due to our district transportation being difficult.*

- We are in a large district and getting dates asap is important for reserving buses.
- I am so lucky that I called the parks express ladies... they were so very helpful in scheduling the field trip. If I had not called they might have not known about it.
- This year worked out better in regards to finding out about the bus. In the past, it was frustrating that we got the trip booked but then bus didn't work out. As a Title I school, we can't go without a bus. This part is a huge help to us.
- The hardest part is booking a bus with our school district.

However, teachers did call attention to several snafus. Some related to **communication issues** during the bus reservation process, which was an over-riding theme of comments last school year.

- There are too many components for planning the trip, it needs to be streamlined.
- Too many hoops to jump through.
- It took forever to get the bus situation worked out between our district and KHOC. We kept getting billed even though the buses were free. It took over a few months to get it settled.
- It is a little confusing because we had to apply for the naturalist led program at Coyote Hills separately from our KHOC application and we find out about them at different times, which can make it challenging for logistics.
- When we booked, we were not sure how many busses we'd get. The number of students in most of our classes is around 25, then we do our best to bring about 1 parent for every 5 students. Transport is then for 3 classes. That's about 75 students + 15 parents + 3 teachers = 93. It is difficult then when the parks put a limit on class sizes so small. We realize we could do 2 classes one day and then send another class another day, but we don't really know how to make this all work without knowing how many busses we will get and the dates we might get to attend.
- I chose to take a naturalist led trip, however the email was sent with dates over our winter break and sent to spam! Please do not email teachers over a long break! I usually check my email, but didn't those few days surrounding holidays and when I went to book my dates were all taken!! Receiving a confirmation that the request was submitted and received along with an estimated time for a response would be greatly appreciated.
- Gave dates and did not get a response for at least a month after and at that point most the dates we could do were already booked.
- More communication between departments
- Please make the overall process easier with communication between all parties and the school.



Students hike Coyote Hills

We plan to increase instructions about communication in orientation this year. Often, the KHOC program administrators can help resolve issues if teachers contact them at the KHOC email address. There is also space on the field trip/naturalist application for teachers to convey any special challenges they might have with district timelines, school day schedules, etc. And because communications go to the Lead Teacher at school, it will be

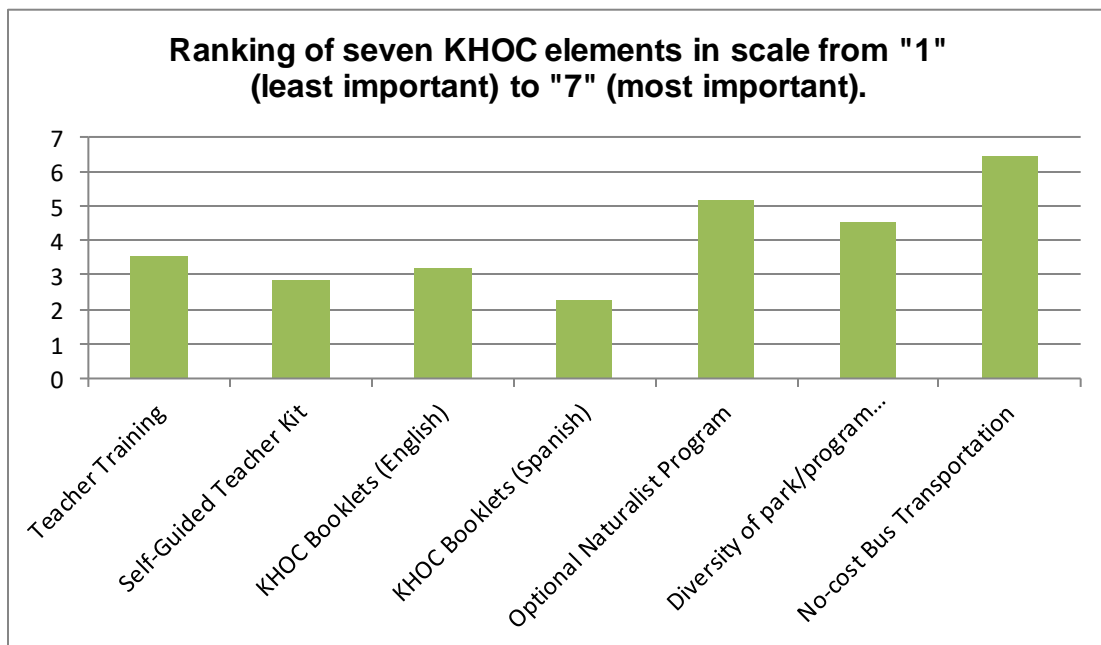
important to stress that schools should choose a lead who can serve as a consistent, reliable point of contact.

7. KHOC in Future Years: EBRPD also wanted to find out about future plans teachers had for using KHOC or teaching outdoors. The survey respondents this school year overwhelmingly planned to continue KHOC and or outdoor teaching activities:

- **97%** Agreed or Strongly Agreed that in the future, they **intended to continue teaching lessons to get kids active outdoors.**
- **77%** Agreed or Strongly Agreed that they **planned to use KHOC lessons and/or booklets with other classes in future school years.**
- **98%** Agreed or Strongly Agreed that they would **plan to visit EBRPD parks with my class next school year.**
- All 2023-24 participants will be invited to participate for a third year in school year 2024-25, and **98% planned to participate in KHOC next year.**

For planning purposes, EBRPD also asked survey respondents which KHOC elements were most important to them. Survey respondents were presented with a choice of seven program elements, and asked to rank them from least to most important.

Seventy-nine percent (79%) of respondents ranked **No-cost Bus Transportation** in the number 1 spot, while 14% ranked **Optional Naturalist Program** in the number 1 slot. Per the chart below, these two elements were, by far the most important to respondents, followed by EBRPD's **Diversity of park/program options.**



Finally, KHOC continues to have a major impact *beyond the classroom*. **All (100%)** respondents said their students **wanted to return to EBRPD parks in the future, or with their families**.

Teachers told us about student reactions, which included:

- *"I want to bring my family here and take them on a hike"*
- *"I am going to tell my mom she has to bring me back!"*
- *"You mean we can go into the mountain and look inside it, I want to show my sister. She won't believe this!"*
- *Many of my students said "I'm gonna tell my (mom/dad) to bring me back here!"*
- *"My mom will never believe I saw this. I need to take her here"*
- *All of our adult chaperones had a great time too. Many of them had not been to the parks before and it made them definitely want to return on their own.*
- *They told me on the bus that they wanted to bring their families with them next time. They kept saying how much fun they had.*
- *Kids were really excited to go on the hike and also to be able to pet the cows and feed the animals. Many students did say they'd want to bring their families with their siblings.*
- *Tilden Park is gorgeous. We had an amazing time. I heard parents, teachers and kids say they want to come back another time. I plan to return with my own children.*
- *Students were excited to share their learnings with their families and because it's so close to our school, they can easily access it.*
- *Families were so excited to learn about what Crab Cove has to offer. Many reported that they will be returning in the future with their families to explore more.*



Student feeding goats at Ardenwood

III. Recommendations & Plans for the Future

KHOC has weathered the turmoil of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as heavy storms that disrupted the program in 2022-2023. In school year 2023-24, EBRPD invited more classrooms to participate (171) than ever before. And after 11 full years, KHOC is, in the words of one survey respondent, “a well-organized outdoors education program that we can count on.”

As always, collecting teacher input each year gives us valuable input into things we can do to improve the program. This will be important to designing future iterations of KHOC (currently planned for 2025-26). The following details what we learned this school year, and what we plan to do differently in the future.

Thank you for making it possible for my students & families to visit their local East Bay Parks. I believe that having students & families get out into their parks is so important for learning, growing & being an active member of our community! Students really enjoyed their visit, the naturalist program and the free transportation! We love KHOC and want to continue again next year!

~A KHOC teacher

KHOC Recruitment for school year 2024-2025: This year will be the third and final year of continuous participation for the current cohort of KHOC schools. All third grade teachers/classrooms at these the approximately 34 schools that successfully participated in KHOC this year will be invited back. (To confirm that they want to participate in 2024-25, teachers will have to submit an application in fall 2024.)

In our survey this year, one teacher remarked, “I am not sure I really understand the changes. Since we went last year and this year, does that mean we only get to go one more year?”

In the fall 2024 application, we will clarify that this 2024-25 is the final year for the current cohort. But throughout the year (including at KHOC orientation), we will educate teachers about park resources they will have as an “Emeritus.” We plan to create a KHOC Emeritus Resource Packet with park brochures and maps, a list of EBRPD’s digital teaching resources, and information about EBRPD’s Parks Express program for transportation options, self-guided teacher kits, and how to obtain future KHOC student booklets.

The KHOC application cycle will be competitive again in 2025-26. Throughout school year 2024-25, EBRPD will be discussing KHOC eligibility requirements as part of planned redesign of the program for school year 2025-26.

Orientation & Materials: In the coming school year, EBRPD will continue virtual orientations, but will try to hold them earlier in the school year (program delays meant the orientation wasn’t held till December 2023).

We will continue to limit the orientation to one hour, and to allow as few as one teacher per school to attend (although we encourage *all* teachers to attend). This is critical to ensuring that at least one teacher at each KHOC school is aware of new program processes and expectations. We will also clarify that each KHOC Lead Teacher, and/or the teacher who represents their school at orientation, has a responsibility to carry information back to all third grade teachers at their school (e.g., about field trip details, availability of KHOC digital content, how to get KHOC booklets, etc.) Teachers who take on lead roles need to be a consistent and responsive point of contact. This past

year, some communications to Lead Teachers were not answered, and as a result, some schools never completed a survey form to have KHOC materials mailed to them. (Teachers should also be informed that most KHOC communications come via email, and we use the ones that teachers provide in their application. Schools should apply to KHOC with email addresses that won't be blocked by spam filters.)

EBRPD will consider what, if any, in-person orientation might be offered in the future, e.g., demonstrations of how to use self-guided teacher kits. We also learned from teachers this year that materials in these kits may need to be refreshed and re-organized, and that kits need enough materials and worksheets for all the classes at a given school.

EBRPD will continue to offer any teacher who leads a self-guided trip a free personal Regional Parks Foundation membership. While we encourage and incentivize the use of self-guided Teacher Kits, we recognize the importance, and popularity, of Naturalist-led programs. Having EBRPD content experts teach classes about local geology, flora and fauna helps reduce stress and burden for many teachers.

The program has improved so much since the first time I went on a KHOC trip. The naturalists did an amazing job engaging with the students and adults. I felt that they were talking to the children and not down to them.

~A KHOC teacher

Scheduling Park Trips: Despite ongoing challenges in securing buses, this year, many teachers told us that trip booking was easier (or that challenges were confined to getting transportation through their school districts). For those who *did* have issues, communication between the teacher, Visitor Center staff and the Parks Transportation department can be a roadblock.

KHOC staff will continue to clarify trip planning processes during orientation (choosing a park, requesting a naturalist program, booking a bus), and advise teachers to reach out at KHOC@ebparks.org whenever they have a question or issue.

This year, teachers had questions about unplanned park and facility closures due to factors such as weather and staff shortages (e.g., the mines at Black Diamond Mines). Each year, there are factors out of EBRPD's control that can disappoint KHOC participants. We warn teachers in orientation that issues can arise, and let teachers know we can help them re-plan their trips by picking a different date or park facility.

Lastly, this year some teachers told us they couldn't hear naturalists during park trips. All staff have a portable microphone available, but may need a reminder to use them with large groups.

Supporting Teachers Throughout the School Year: EBRPD seeks to support teachers in KHOC participation, making it as easy as possible. This is why we began mailing KHOC student booklets directly to schools this year (instead of asking teachers to pick them up).

We continuously answer questions and address issues through KHOC@ebparks.org and ask teachers to note potential or anticipated challenges (e.g., unique school or district scheduling issues) in their park trip applications, so that we can help them problem solve in advance.

Finally, the [KHOC website](#) remains the most comprehensive resource for teachers to find answers; locate interactive, online learning materials; review program expectations, and help navigate through

the KHOC experience. The website is updated periodically with helpful information and teachers are encouraged to check back regularly.

What Teachers Want from KHOC: Based on our 2024 survey, the KHOC elements that are most important to teachers are (in order of importance) are **No-cost Bus Transportation, Optional Naturalist Program,** and EBRPD's **Diversity of park/program options.**

These are KHOC cornerstones, but we know that now, and in future iterations of KHOC, there may be other things teachers need. For instance, in the survey this year, 43% of respondents said **additional training about how to teach outdoors would be valuable**, including more information about park locations, flora and fauna, as well as best practices on teaching outdoors. We currently offer **supplemental digital content** for teachers, and should highlight these resources in orientations and future teacher materials:

<https://www.ebparks.org/khoc/khoc-video-supplements>
<https://www.ebparks.org/programs/digital-learning>

These videos have information on the parks and demonstrations for activities to conduct with students outdoors. In addition, at our visitor centers, we offer teacher demonstrations of how to use self-guided park trip kits.

Goals for School Year 2024-2025: EBRPD will soon be seeking input on KHOC redesigns that may take place by school year 2025-26. Any redesign will consider new trends in environmental education, as well as teachers survey input, including their ideas for future training.

In the meantime, in fall 2024, EBRPD will invite the same cohort of schools to participate in KHOC for a third and final year (approximately 170 classrooms). KHOC's overarching goals remain to empower educators to teach outdoors and to increase the time third graders spend outdoors. This promotes healing recreational opportunities for children, teachers, and families.



Thank you to *The Regional Parks Foundation* for KHOC funding!

And for support and inspiration from:

