



# ***Kids Healthy Outdoors Challenge (KHOC)***

2022-2023 School Year Report

July 2023

**KHOC is funded by:**



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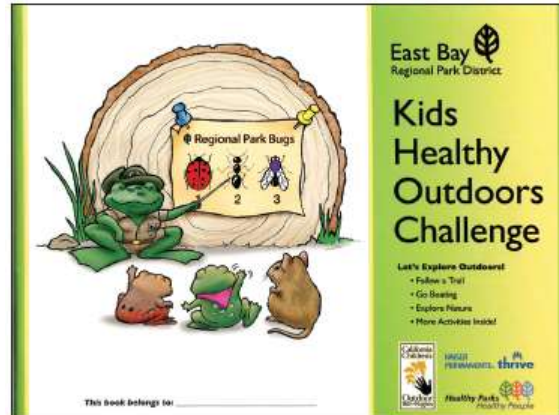
Marina Vista Elementary at Black Diamond



Parkmont Elementary at Coyote Hills

## I. Introduction and Summary of 2022-2023 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, not supplant, the teaching of required content in a new way—outdoors, with teachers leading activities.



KHOC includes a teacher guide and a student workbook, produced in both 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 is required to complete three of the ten lessons (“challenges”) from the booklets *and* take a field trip to an EBRPD park of their choosing.<sup>1</sup> Anticipated **outcomes** include:

- Increasing teacher comfort and skills in teaching outdoors, and importantly, increasing the time third grade classrooms spend outdoors.
- Diverse teachers supported 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 2022-2023 was KHOC’s second active cycle after the COVID-19 pandemic, and the 10<sup>th</sup> full year of the program.<sup>2</sup> There were **107 participating KHOC teachers/classrooms** this year. This was more than double the number in school year 2021-2022 (n=52), when fewer teachers were invited, and more dropped out after being accepted.

To participate and get a no cost bus for a park trip, teachers needed to attend the KHOC orientation that occurred virtually, on Zoom, for the second year in a row. An *optional* in-person orientation was also offered, focusing on activity kits for teachers to take self-guided field trips at four parks. This also gave teachers a chance to pick up the KHOC booklets for the students at their schools.

*I enjoyed the in person orientation because I got to experience what students would see, listen for and determine what activities be enjoyable. It was also helpful to see firsthand what species are present at the park.*

~A KHOC Teacher

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> KHOC was on hiatus in school year 2020-2021.

Although pandemic restrictions lifted this year, there were still **major changes and challenges** in operating the program.

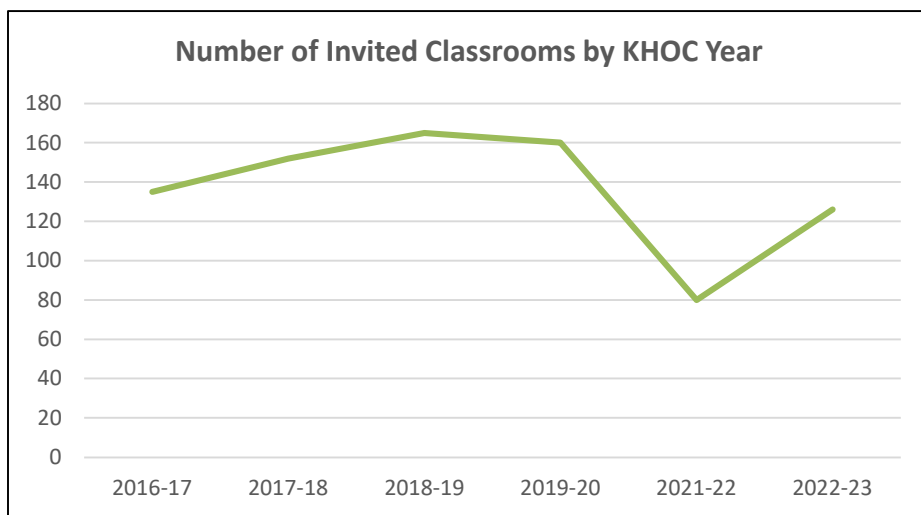
First, EBRPD saw very high demand for park and Naturalist services. After the pandemic, many schools across the region wanted to go to the parks.

This demand increased concurrently with a shortage of bus transportation. Many bus companies closed in the pandemic (when buses were out of use, companies lost drivers and have had difficulty re-hiring them). As a result, EBRPD now has fewer bus companies to work with. Some school districts have their own fleets (which are cheaper); however, they *also* have high demand, and can be hard to book. As a result, scheduling transportation for KHOC park trips was challenging.

EBRPD implemented a single application reservation system this year so teachers could request a Naturalist program and secure bus transportation simultaneously, but with the bus shortage, EBRPD could not *guarantee* transportation would be available on the reserved trip date. A number of classes were disappointed as a result.

The heavy storms of winter 2022-2023 complicated trip scheduling. Many parks were subject to closures due to downed trees, mudslides, damaged structures, and washed-out roads. If a teacher booked a trip at a closed park, EBRPD attempted to find a replacement date and park, but due to transportation challenges, this was not always possible. Thus, some classes were allowed to book a trip after the original May 12 deadline, and as noted, some classes were unable to take a trip at all.<sup>3</sup>

**Teachers and Schools Invited to Participate:** In fall 2022, 211 teachers/classrooms applied to KHOC; of these 126 were invited to participate.<sup>4</sup> This was a planned increase from 2021-2022, the first KHOC year after the COVID-19 pandemic, when just 80 schools were invited to participate. The following chart depicts the number of invited classrooms over the past six KHOC cycles.



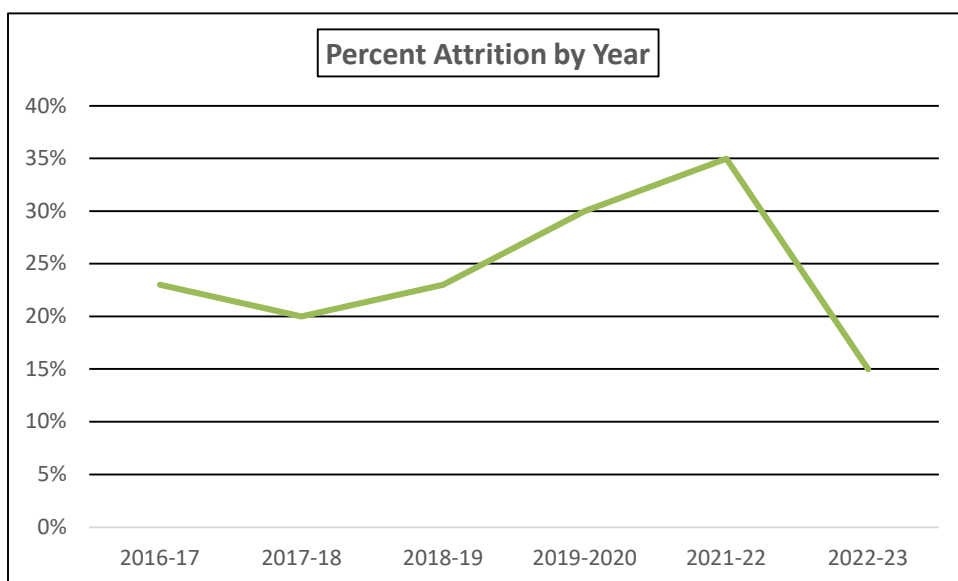
<sup>3</sup> If a third year KHOC teacher had a trip cancelled due to storms, they will automatically be accepted for KHOC in school year 2023-2024.

<sup>4</sup> EBRPD invited half of applying teachers from each applicant school. This enabled invited teachers to share a bus on their KHOC trip with non-participating classes, therefore all applying schools were represented in KHOC. However, teachers who had already participated in KHOC for 3+ years were ineligible to participate.

Of invited classrooms, 59% came from Alameda County schools, and 41% from Contra Costa County schools. This latter percent is a decrease from 49% in 2021-2022, important because Contra Costa County Fish and Wildlife Committee has made a grant investment in KHOC.

Teachers received their invitations in September 2022, with mandatory virtual orientations held in October. (Note: In the 2021-2022 survey, most teachers preferred orientations be held as early in the school year as possible, with 60% of respondents preferring October. EBRPD responded to this request by scheduling both mandatory and in-person orientations in October.)

Ultimately, 107 of 126 invited teachers (85%) attended the orientation and participated in KHOC. The attrition rate of 15% was markedly lower than in recent years. Attrition had reached a high point in 2021-2022, likely because many teachers were still finding their footing after the pandemic:



**KHOC Participants:** Ultimately, 107 teachers attended the KHOC orientation and participated in KHOC. They represented 62 schools and 21 school districts: 38% came from Contra Costa, and 62% came from Alameda County. The schools were 31% urban, 65% suburban, and 4% rural.

The 107 participating classrooms contained about **2,650 students**; average classroom size was 25. Among students, there was wide variation in socio-economic status, with low-income status measured by eligibility for Free and Reduced Price Meals (FRPM): This rate ranged from 5% to 100%. On average, **46% of students were eligible for FRPM** (down from 61% last year). Many were also English Language Learners:

	Average	Range
% students eligible for FRPM	46%	[5%, 100%]
% English Language Learners	33%	[3%, 90%] Spanish, Cantonese, Mandarin, Tagalog, Mam, Vietnamese, Russian, Hindi, Farsi and Arabic commonly spoken

The diverse students were *approximately* 41% Latinx, 9% African American, 21% White, 18% Asian, 2% Pacific Islander, <1% Native American, and 8% More than One Race or Unknown.

Of teachers, **45%** (n=48) were *Previous Participants* in KHOC compared to 31% in 2022-2021. The current rate of previous participation is similar to that in 2019 (49%) and 2018-19 (44%).<sup>5</sup> Since KHOC is a long-standing program, it makes sense that many teachers have participated before.

**Park Trips:** There were **75** KHOC park trips taken during the year (compared to 43 last year). Over **4,800 students and other passengers** attended these trips.

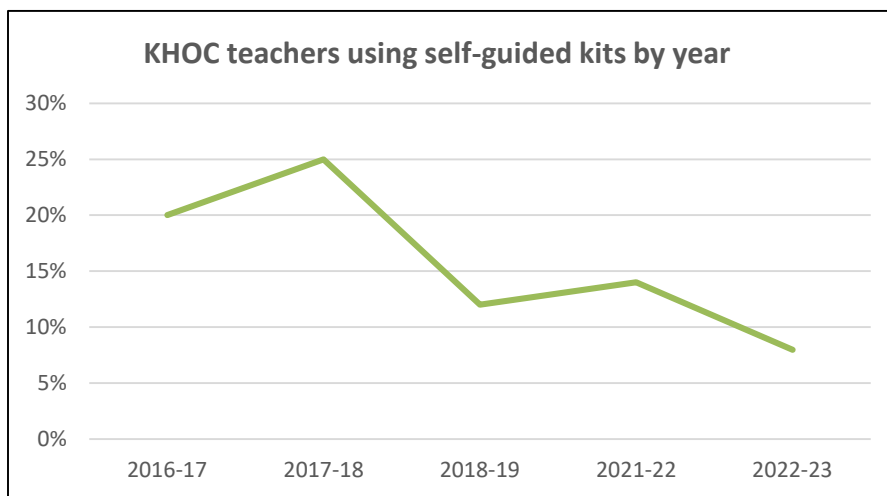
The **most popular park trip destinations** were Black Diamond Mines (a historical preserve that contains relics of three mining towns and former coal and sand mines), and Coyote Hills (with acres of marshland and rolling grassland-covered hills, steeped in rich indigenous culture):

**2023 EBRPD Parks Visited by Percent of Trips**

<b>Black Diamond Mines</b>	25%	<b>Ardenwood</b>	4%
<b>Coyote Hills</b>	24%	<b>Big Break</b>	4%
<b>Tilden Nature Area</b>	9%	<b>Redwood</b>	3%
<b>Crab Cove</b>	9%	<b>Martinez Shoreline</b>	3%
<b>Sunol</b>	9%	<b>Del Valle</b>	3%
<b>Shadow Cliffs</b>	7%		

The vast majority of teachers (**92%**) chose to have a Naturalist guide their park trip, but **8% of KHOC teachers opted for a self-guided trip** using a Teacher Kit designed for use at four park locations.<sup>6</sup>

It is a program goal for teachers to learn to lead self-guided trips outdoors, increasing their skills; **however, the rate of teachers doing so is at its low point since kits were introduced.**



<sup>5</sup> KHOC generally limits participation for any one teacher to three years. One caveat is that if a teacher with 3+ years of experience applies along with less experienced teachers, and if that school requires all third grade classrooms to have the same experiences, those teachers *may* participate.

<sup>6</sup> 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 importantly, determine the **impact** KHOC had during the year.

This year, 61 of 107 participating teachers (57%) took the survey. Notable findings included:

- **92%** Agreed or Strongly Agreed that in the future, they **“intended to continue teaching lessons to get kids active outdoors.”**
- **66%** of survey respondents Agreed or Strongly Agreed that **“participating in KHOC has increased the amount of time I spend teaching outdoors.”**
- **81%** Agreed or Strongly Agreed that participating in KHOC **“made their class want to spend more time being active outdoors.”**
- **79%** said their students **“wanted to return to EBRPD parks in the future, or with their families.”**
- **93%** Agreed or Strongly Agreed that they would **“return to EBRPD parks with their class next school year.”**
- **93%** said they **“would participate in the KHOC again.”**

*The Naturalist was excellent! Students were completely engaged the entire time. Afterwards I took our two classes on a hike where students truly had the time of their lives! They could not stop talking about what an awesome trip we had, plus parent volunteers loved the Naturalist presentation and the hike.*

~A KHOC Teacher

As KHOC ends its **10<sup>th</sup> program year**, this report celebrates EBRPD successes, and details suggestions to improve and continue to grow the program.

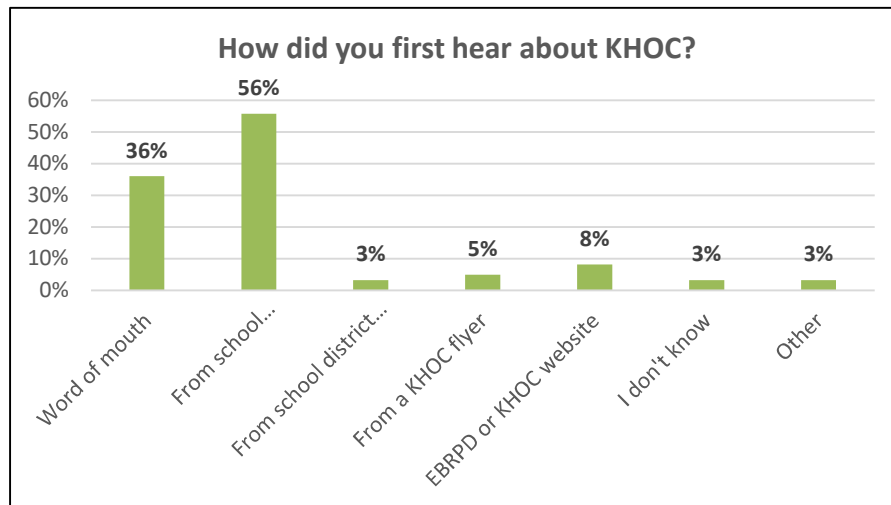


KHOC students at Tilden Nature Area

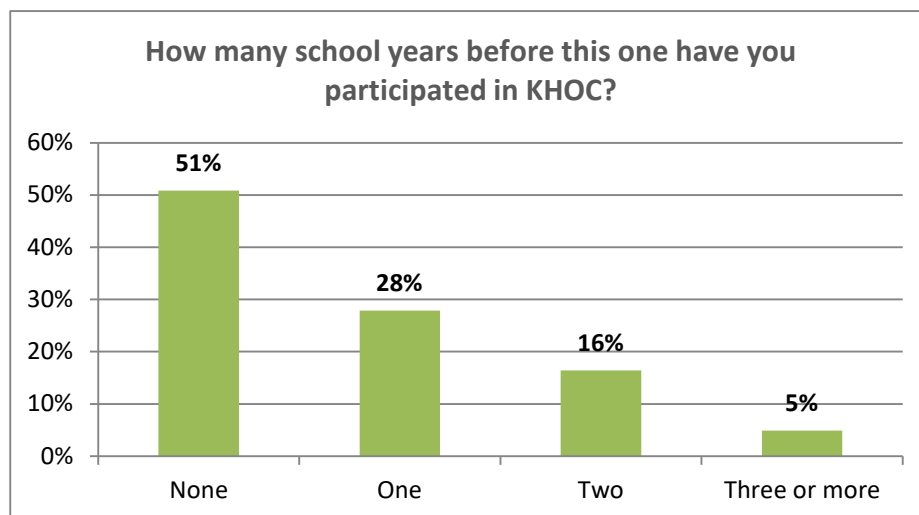
## II. Educator Survey Results

**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 2023 Educator Survey was conducted on SurveyMonkey from May 23 through June 4. In all, **61** complete or partial responses were received, a response rate of **57%**.

This year, to determine how to reach future teachers (especially those who haven't participated in KHOC before), we asked about program marketing, how teachers **first heard about KHOC**. The vast majority (92%) had heard about the program **through word of mouth** (e.g., another teacher) or their **school administrator**.<sup>7</sup>



Of respondents, **51%** had never participated in KHOC, while **5%** had participated three+ times:<sup>8</sup>



<sup>7</sup> EBRPD sends KHOC fliers to all elementary school superintendents and principals in the two counties at the beginning of the school year.

<sup>8</sup> KHOC has a three-year limit, but if a teacher with 3+ years of KHOC experience applies along with other teachers, and if that school requires all classrooms to have the same experiences, those teachers *may* participate.

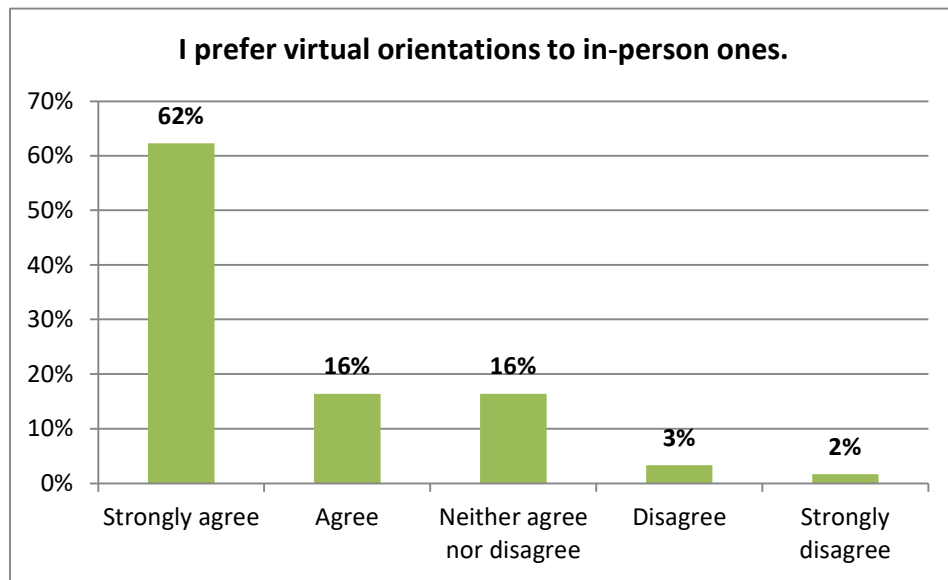


**2. The KHOC Orientation:** At the beginning of each school year, EBRPD requires teachers to attend an orientation to participate in KHOC. Important topics include reserving buses and Naturalists (and using the new online single application reservation system that rolled out this school year), as well as exposing teachers to self-guided trip activity kits. In October 2022, the mandatory orientations occurred **virtually**, on Zoom.

There was also a second, *optional in-person* orientation in October for teachers to pick up KHOC booklets for their classes and learn about the self-guided Teacher Kits.

Our survey asked teacher for feedback on both orientations.

First, we wanted to know how teachers felt about **virtual vs. in-person orientations**. Whereas last year (the first year Zoom orientations were held), 60% of teachers Agreed or Strongly Agreed that they preferred them, in school year 2022-2023, virtual orientations were preferred by **78%** of respondents.



Moreover, **86%** of respondents Agreed or Strongly Agreed that the virtual teacher orientation **“provided me the information and resources to successfully participate in KHOC.”** Only 3% disagreed.

It appears that the popularity of virtual meetings continues to increase in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. This was largely borne out in teacher comments about the virtual orientation, which included suggestions for improving them:

- *I really appreciated the selection of evening times since it is hard to find time to go to an in-person orientation during the school week and busy weekends. Thank you for offering virtual orientations!*
- *I appreciated the outline that was sent to us to help us know what we needed to complete the requirements. I would recommend continuing to send that email with the checklist again next year.*
- *I appreciate East Bay Regional Park District and feel fortunate to have had a field trip funded, I think that it was a little challenging navigating the transportation piece, as I received several conflicting emails. Additionally, our field trip was originally cancelled due to weather. The next*

available date with 2 guides wasn't until the end of the school year. I am wondering if there is a way to buffer/plan in some make-up days for classes that get "rained out"

Questions about the optional in-person Orientation: Of survey respondents, 19 (or 32%) also attended an in-person orientation in and EBRPD park. Ninety-five percent of them (95%) indicated they had received a demonstration of the self-guided Teacher Kit during this orientation.

Although teachers indicate preference for virtual orientations, comments about the in-person experience show that teachers gain a lot from participating:

- *This was a very valuable orientation. The modeling and hands-on activity gave me a lot to consider and plan out while "practicing."*
- *I enjoyed meeting the Naturalists and having them go through the different parts of the Kit.*
- *It was nice to go to the in person park orientation and meet other teachers. This gave us the ability to learn more about different programs other teachers use.*
- *I met at Garin Park. The two people who led it were THE BEST! It was such a wonderful experience using the tools.*

Suggestions for improvement included:

- *...I would recommend digital copies of at least some of the resources in the kit.*
- *I'm sure you've already taken this feedback into account, but check to make sure that the in-person orientation doesn't conflict with other events scheduled at the park. There was a race scheduled at our start location, and we lost a lot of time finding one another and reconvening at another location.*
- *The park did not have the workbooks. It would have been beneficial as that was the main reason I attended the in person park orientation. We planned a Naturalist led tour.*

**3. 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.

Teachers can pick up booklets at an in-person orientation (on behalf of all the classes for their school), and at many EBPRD Visitor Centers. But because that can involve going out of one's way, not all teachers obtain booklets.

*We were so happy we got to do the KHOC program because it allowed us to go to Coyote Hills Regional Park and learn about the Ohlone of the past and present. It was an amazing field trip and it wouldn't have happened without KHOC!*  
~A KHOC teacher

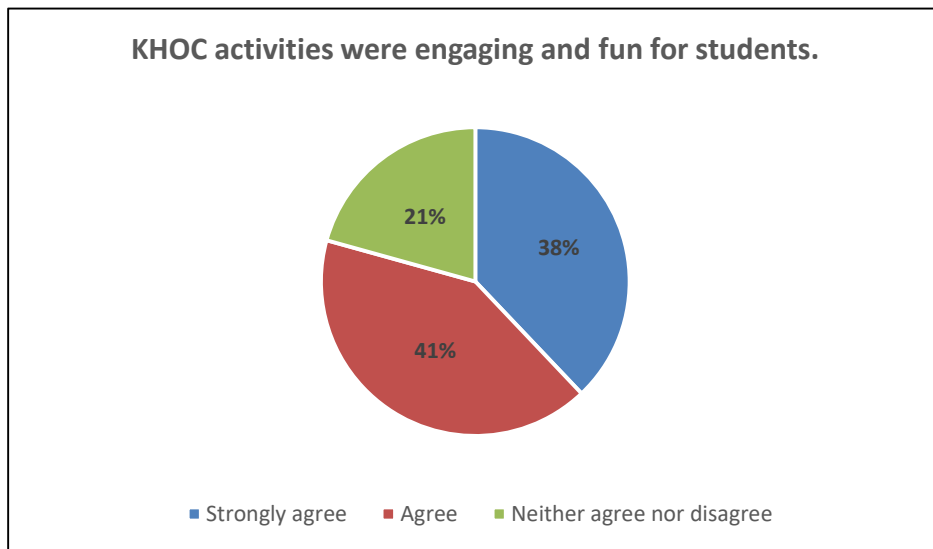
Our survey results showed that **77%** of respondents **did obtain the KHOC booklets** and lesson materials. Of the teachers who *did* obtain the materials, **80%** used KHOC kids' booklets or lesson materials with their classes.

Almost all of teachers who used the booklets agreed that the **KHOC booklets were valued or enjoyed by their students (92%)**, and that **KHOC activities were age and grade-appropriate (91%)**. Teacher comments about the booklets included:

- They were able to make connections of what they learned at Crab Cove to lesson 4 and lesson 5 when we planted our own plants (beans and radish) in the classroom.
- It's nice that they cover an array of topics related all to the outdoors, which may not be otherwise covered using the regular classroom curriculum.
- The lessons with visuals were better received by students.
- The lessons were very engaging and the kids really enjoyed them.
- While the lessons are well thought-out I did feel that some of the lessons would not be suitable for us to teach in the classroom. Some of the lessons would be better done at how with family if the families are able to do so.
- I missed out on a great opportunity that my grade level partner tried... making kites and flying them. The students looked like they had a blast trying their kites out. I plan to do this in the future.
- If you are revising the booklets in the future, consider activities that ask students to copy drawings of animals, artifacts, mini maps that they might encounter at the parks.
- Activities that relied on a shared experience worked better than those that relied on prior knowledge or experience. For example, my students really enjoyed the World in a Box lesson (which we did together as a class), but weren't all able to answer the prompts about a historic place that they've visited in the past (Lesson 1).

*It was nice that you provided Spanish versions for our students. They liked playing the games that came with the lessons.*  
~A KHOC teacher

The majority (**79%**) also Agreed or Strongly Agreed that the 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, and here's what they told us:

- *It was beneficial to Spanish translated books for students who are English language learners. The visuals were great as well. Some students didn't need any guidance but others needed a little*

explanation. Overall, I think the activities were great. Many students opted to take the books home to do more activities.

- Majority of my students are EL's. So I had to read certain things out loud whole group.
- The content was accessible to all my current students.
- Lessons worked well. I was able to bring back Spanish books for my English learners. They enjoyed the topics and lessons.
- I work at a dual language school with students who are receiving instruction in both English and Spanish. It was helpful to receive half my booklets in Spanish and the other half in English for my students.
- My students were able to complete the activities within the booklet with ease, and they enjoyed them.



**KHOC students using lessons from the booklet**

- We did a nature book about plants and animals within the redwoods prior to the trip which helped build interest and understanding. Leaf rubbing was fun and laminated photos of redwoods. Perhaps some games could be added.
- It was great to have them available in Spanish and English, although I ended up with half and half which made it a little harder to teach. We had also been learning about the Ohlone people and the kids were excited to see some of their learning reflected in the book.
- The lessons worked well with my students that were reading and writing on grade level. However, students that were still developing readers had trouble decoding the work.
- The only problem was reading because I have language learners of many different levels and some couldn't read it.
- My students didn't feel a strong connection with the booklet, probably because it did not tie directly into the field trip itself. It would be nice if the book included map of the Bay Area so that students could locate the parks closest to them and maybe a checklist of parks to visit.

Several teachers commented on the need for additional “scaffolding” in the booklets:

- I think there are many pages that have lines. This can be a little daunting to a third grader. I am wondering if there might be some sentence frames, or examples also added. This would be especially useful for our English Language Learners.
- Some lessons could include more scaffolding for our English Language learners with sentence frames, background vocabulary, more visuals.
- They enjoyed the booklets. The pages focused on drawing and active participation (vs. lots of writing) are best.

Importantly, a few of the teachers observed that there were differences in environment and equity considerations that impacted student use of the booklet:

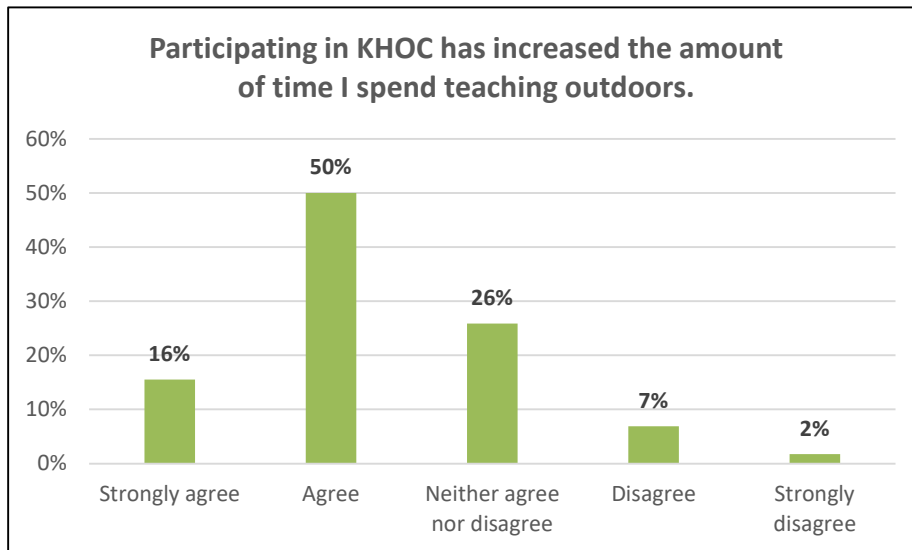
- I skipped some of the writing prompts because they didn't feel equitable. For example, some of my students have gone on many outings with their families to historic landmarks (both locally and

during travel opportunities), but others haven't. Many of my students also couldn't write small enough to write on the lines in the booklet.

- The lessons were good, and I was able to explain and show pictures of things they might have known. It exposed some of them to new vocabulary. We loved the games. Our only problem is that we are an enclosed school with fake grass/turf. We didn't have access to even leaves! I just did the activities I could.
- I noticed that the written materials for students to use on the field trip (for example, nature guides, flow charts, scavenger hunts, maps) were only available in English. In general, that's usually fine for the kids, but I think the chaperones could participate more actively if they also had them in their home languages.

An important KHOC goal is **increasing participant comfort and skills in teaching outdoors**, and surveys in past years have shown that the program succeeds at this. We also seek to increase the time third grade classrooms spend outdoors.

This year, **66%** of survey respondents Agreed or Strongly Agreed that they **“spent more time teaching outdoors this year than last year.”**

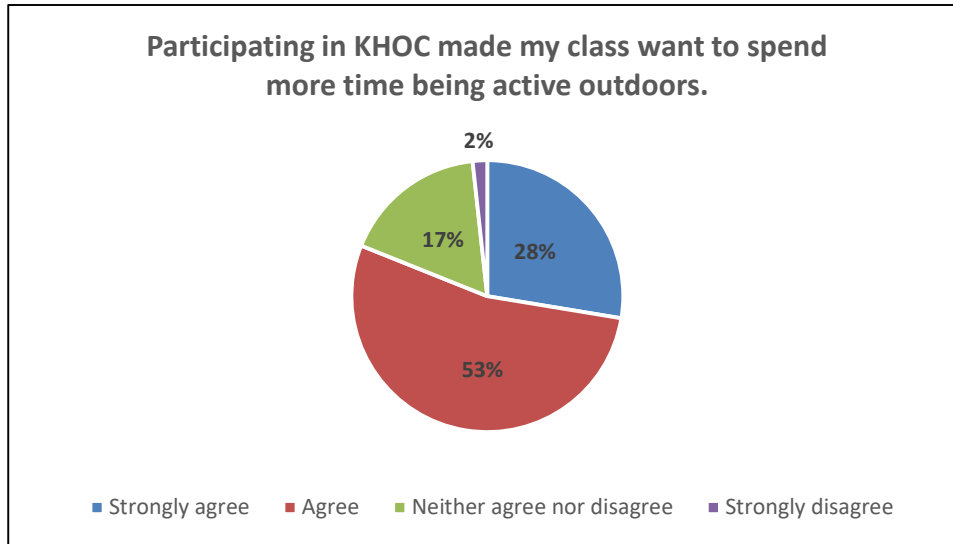


This rate is down from previous years (e.g., 86% in school year 2021-2022), suggesting the teachers on the whole may already be teaching outdoors before participating in KHOC.

*Even though I have attended multiple Naturalist led field trips in past years, I do not feel confident in my sense of direction in the parks or with my animal or plant knowledge to lead a great field trip on my own without a Naturalist. I also find it meaningful for students to meet Naturalists and hear from another adult outside of me and find out about a career path involving nature.*

~A KHOC teacher

The majority (**81%**) also Agreed or Strongly Agreed that KHOC **“made their class want to spend more time being active outdoors.”**



**4. 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).<sup>9</sup>

*I knew it was going to be a great trip when I heard the screams of joy and excitement on the bus as we entered the park, driving through the green hills, and seeing old building and animals.*  
~A KHOC teacher

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

As part of the survey, EBRPD asked respondents if they were aware that teachers who took the self-guided class park trip received a **free Regional Parks Foundation membership** (with benefits including free day-use parking). Just **38%** of respondents were aware of this incentive (another important reason to orient teachers to their options).

Of survey respondents, **78%** had taken a KHOC park trip, while (for a variety of reasons), 22% had not. The following chart details reasons these teachers did not take trips. They include some of the programmatic challenges discussed in Section I.

My trip was cancelled due to storm closures at the park I had chosen.	13%
I could not get bus transportation for my field trip.	40%
I could not schedule a park trip in time to meet my district’s deadlines for field trips.	20%
Other (e.g., weather, application not received, no response to application)	27%

<sup>9</sup> Most of the activities in the kits can be used at any EBRPD location.

Among teachers who had a trip, **82%** chose the Naturalist-led trip, and **18%**, the self-guided trip. The self-guided rates are slightly higher than those in the overall cadre of participants (92% Naturalist-led, 8% self-guided.)

**Naturalist led programs** continue to be very popular: **92%** of those who took this type of trip indicated they would choose it again in the future. As noted earlier, fewer teachers than ever before had chosen self-guided trips, and this may reflect a general sense of burnout among teachers in the wake of the pandemic. Comments about Naturalists were enthusiastic, and included:

- *The Naturalist program is amazing! We appreciate their knowledge and everything they can share and questions they can answer.*
- *Students enjoyed hearing the things the Naturalist had to say. They looked forward to the low tide at 10am. They were able to explore after the low tide. Students loved the trip!*
- *I'm grateful that my students had the opportunity to learn from a Naturalist. It helps them understand that jobs in the sciences are accessible. Plus they benefit from all the specialized knowledge the Naturalists have.*



Peralta KHOC students hiking

- *We loved the Coyote Hills Ohlone Cultures Naturalist guided program! We enjoyed walking around the park and observing the types resources the Ohlone people had access to such as tule and acorn. The students really enjoyed playing the Ohlone outdoor games and exploring the visitor's center which allowed them to touch a model tule boat, see pictures, engage in Ohlone crafts, touch animal skins, and more.*
- *The guided tour was very interesting and engaging, I couldn't have provided that much detail and facts. It enhanced learning for our class because we are from the area and showed our history.*
- *The Naturalists were extremely helpful and knowledgeable in enhancing our KHOC learning for our class. I also like that they were flexible with our high-energy students, and to be able to address high-interest organisms that were discovered during the program.*
- *When I and a fellow teacher had our trip we split our 2 classes. One Naturalist took us on a hike. While the other Naturalist taught the students about adaptations with the help of Lumpy the Snake. When our hike/lesson was finished the groups switched Naturalists this was extremely helpful because it allowed the students to hear from someone else. This also helps them stay focused when they were nearing the end of the trip.*
- *The Naturalists did a great job. They kept the pace of the day. They also have way more knowledge on the area than I have. It's really beneficial for the*

*It was amazing! We got to work with a whole team of Naturalists. They were prepared, knowledgeable, personable, and had planned terrific age-appropriate activities for the kids. Plus, the Visitor's Center at the end was amazing. They even brought a snake out for the kids to see and touch!*

*~A KHOC teacher*

kids to A) hear information from an expert; B) learn from various adults and C) see and be familiar with parks employees so they know they're a resource while the students and families are outdoors.

- Love, love, love the Naturalist-guided programs out of Crab Cove - so knowledgeable and engaging with the students! Being a classroom teacher putting together all the logistics of a field trip, it makes it worthwhile to have a Naturalist meet us onsite to engage my students in an educational experience. Without the Naturalist, I would not be encouraged to make the trip by myself.

Because EBRPD is still promoting **self-guided park trips**, we wanted to learn why some teachers chose them. Though we had a very small number of responses (n=4), we learned that many teachers feel confident and prepared to teach outdoors (perhaps as a result of KHOC participation). Teachers said:



KHOC students with Naturalist at Tilden Nature Area

- *I felt confident that with the research I did prior to the field trip combined with the information provided on the Regional Parks website I would be able to successfully guide my class.*
- *I had developed lessons that I felt comfortable teaching.*
- *I am familiar with the area and I did the in-person orientation there and felt I was shown what to do and where to go.*
- *Doing a self-guided trip allowed me to have more flexibility in scheduling and in the activity planning. I was able to incorporate other science/outdoor ed activities that I thought were a good fit for my students.*

Half (50%) of the self-guided trip takers used the Teacher Kit and indicated that the kit helped them prepare for the trip.

*...It [the Teacher Kit] was clear and I really appreciate having it. I would like to see more games and mathematical lesson on estimating height/circumference of trees. Maybe songs on banana slugs. More fun stuff! I supplemented with Newsela reading on redwoods, books about Owls and Who Pooped in the Park about tracking and scat.*

~A KHOC Teacher

Encouragingly, **55%** of all survey respondents said they would “**consider using a self-guided kit for future park trips.**”

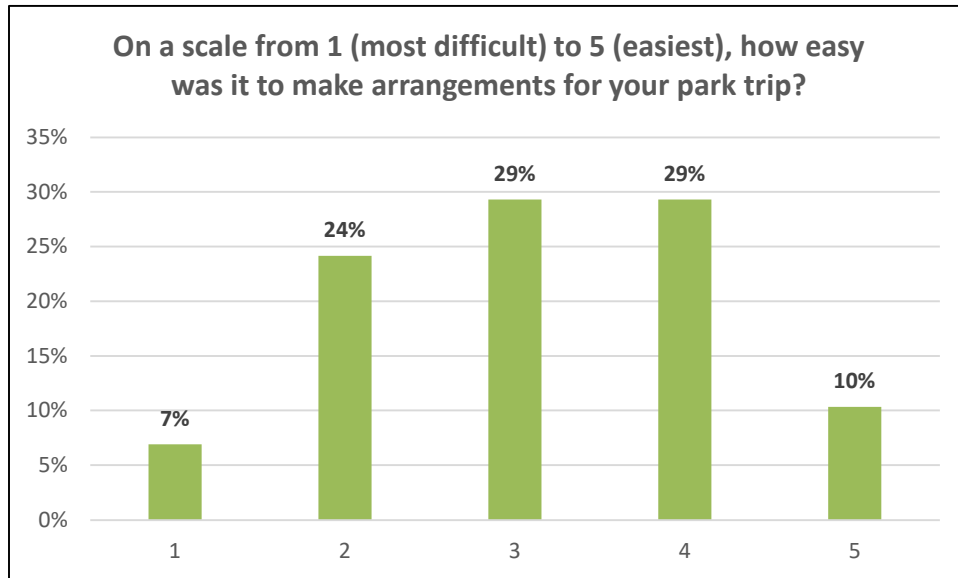
**5. KHOC Processes:** A key program process, one that is frequently challenging, is reserving a park trip, Naturalist program, and school bus.

EBRPD went live with a new online single application reservation system this school year, enabling 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): **69% of respondents rated the ease of arrangements at "3" or better** (down from 81% the prior school year):



When asked about any challenges in making reservations, there were many comments, including from teachers who were able to navigate the process, or who had **difficulty working with their school district transportation departments:**

- *We didn't have any challenges. I did appreciate how quickly questions were answered.*
- *Our district, MDUSD, is incredibly hard to work with. You guys are great!*
- *MDUSD has its own weird bus issues but that's more on us.*
- *Not a lot of challenges, but I did not order the bus in time so we had to change our date. The mistake was 100% on me, but the transportation and park worked with me to change a new date. I really appreciate them working with us when it had been a mistake on my part.*
- *The school district and the parks end up in a mini stand-off, where the district wants the funding to be given in order to secure the bus and the parks want the bus secured before they send the funding. It can sometimes cause issues, but this time it was relatively smooth.*
- *It was difficult trying to get a bus because we had to go through our school district first to attempt to get a bus from their fleet. Due to their delay in responding, time was running out to secure a bus. Thankfully we got help from KHOC who then got a bus from a private company where we then were able to meet our deadline.*
- *Our challenge was that one of our KHOC teachers picked in the fall moved to a different role in our school. Her priority was no longer our grade level. We had planned on going to Ardenwood and were VERY disappointed when we couldn't get a date scheduled with a bus. I really hope that this will not deter you from picking our school again next year. We are SO grateful and committed to taking our students on field trips!*

However, **thirty-five percent (35%)** of teachers who commented had complaints about KHOC communication issues during the bus reservation process:

- *It would have been helpful to have the bus information sooner as they fill up quickly in our district.*
- *I didn't get a response!!! Do I get a do over for next year? It was the worst this year! I have KHOC done before and never was it like this.*
- *I was confused about the trips that required payments or no payments. Also, I didn't know I was offered a date until I called to follow up. In the confirmation email there was a statement that said it could take 6-8 weeks to secure transportation. I think the March deadline should be moved up sooner since many schools in our district have their final days of school during the first week of June and there are just too many end-of-year activities piled on to those final weeks. I'm also in favor of a full in-person orientation where we can interact with other educators and engage with KHOC staff live. :) I miss that! While we did not get to do a KHOC field trip this year, we enjoyed the booklets (I made copies from a previous booklet) and were encouraged to go outdoors more often—especially to our school garden and big yard outside. Thanks for all you do! I hope to work with KHOC again next year.*
- *The person that I was coordinating with for our trip was taking extremely long periods to get back to me. I had to email her multiple times to get a response. For that reason, we had to keep changing the date of our trip. Overall, it was a very frustrating experience to coordinate a Naturalist-led trip. The same thing happened last year when we scheduled a different KHOC trip.*
- *The bus company didn't call me back, but made arrangements with my team teacher who was also KHOC approved so it did get confusing to book a bus for me and time consuming with phone calls back and forth.*
- *Communication was difficult at times.*
- *I thought I had booked my bus because I think I used a wrong link which was a challenge. Making sure you send a confirmation that request was received is important.*
- *There were issues with our reservation of buses. We were supposed to have 2 buses but had only one and I got an immediate response but my colleague did not. Her request was lost a couple times and it took a few calls to sort it out.*
- *It took a while for communication to get back to me. and the bus scheduling people never kept me updated on whether or not they paid for the bus. I still do not know if they paid for it.*
- *At one point, communication worried me. 2 teachers were selected (so one bus each and we could bring one class each), but transportation had us (our school) with only one bus. This was easily fixed with a couple emails, but it still worried me for a few days.*
- *The process for getting the bus was unclear. The documentation on the website or the email did not match the procedure that worked with our district's transportation. After we got the park date set, we got a quote from the transportation provider. Then, we sent that \$ estimate to the EBRPD Parks Express person. After, EBRPD used the estimate from the USD transport to provide their "Agreement to Pay" with invoicing instructions and the bill was sent to KHOC and EBRPD to let them know that payment is pending and they will coordinate. We had a couple back-and-forth emails between our district, the transportation provider, and EBRPD to figure this last part out, and is where clarity in the steps and making sure all people were on the same page could have been helpful.*
- *Multiple conflicting emails about transportation.*
- *It was difficult to book because there were just so many different contact people. One person helped with getting a date. Then I reached out to transportation and they then said we use our own buses in the district so I worked with our office manager too. Then the head Naturalist contacted*

me but it was in my junk email. So I emailed the original scheduler trying to figure out groupings and weather related questions. My emails got passed to the woman whose emails were going to my junk folder so I was not getting my questions answered (or so I was worried). I finally called and got that all sorted out. It's just a lot of different point people.

- It was extremely frustrating how little communication I received about reserving a bus for our field trip date. I had to reach out several times on my own, instead of being warned that they were not yet able to reserve a bus for us yet. When we finally found out they were unable to reserve a bus for us, it wasn't until the week of our field trip. By this point, I had spent a significant amount of time and effort getting field trip clearance through my school/district, collecting permission slips from every student, and organizing school lunches, only to have to cancel the field trip all together. I was then told that my class could potentially reschedule for another date, but was never contacted again for an opportunity.
- I couldn't get information on how to do it, by the time I got info they were taken.
- I think that communication needs to be better. Teachers have a lot on their plate and organizing a field trip can be very time consuming. I attended the virtual orientation, picked up booklets, filled out paper work and applications, and followed up with emails about the transportation several times. After all of my time spent planning the field-trip, I was notified a week before the trip that there was no bus. This could of been communicated sooner. This is a great program and I wish my students could have benefited from it. It seems to me like the departments were not communicating appropriately and promptly with each other and with educators.
- I understand that COVID impacted the availability of buses. I also understand some districts have fleets. Our district does not. I would not have participated had I known there was a chance we'd have no bus. The Naturalists at the in-person orientation were great; I just spent many hours on this yielding no trip, so it was frustrating.
- It is a great program when you have people on the arrangement side who you can contact by phone if they don't respond to multiple emails. I have called in years past.

There were also a number of complaints about **timing/late verification for the trip:**

- Since reservations are made months prior it was hard to choose which park and time of year it is best to visit considering the weather.
- The bus reservation process was not smooth. Having such late verification for bus transportation just isn't fair to our students or parents (we were told it was a no-go, but then a bus was available). Our parents lose money when they don't work. They are making a sacrifice to be with us. We need to feel as certain as possible that the field trip will happen on the day planned.
- We did not know what size bus we would be getting until the day of, so we were unable to invite another class to join us on the trip. It would have been nice for them to come with us since there was plenty of room on the bus, and the other teacher was willing to do a self-guided tour.
- The park reservation was easy. The bus challenge was beyond frustrating. Had we known a bus wasn't available, we could have booked one with our PTA money. But due to the last minute waiting and waiting, we just ended up not being able to take our class anywhere.
- I was able to book the park trip months in advance, however, the transportation was never booked. Despite several follow ups, I received notice that there was no transportation available about a week before the scheduled date.
- We need more advance notice to complete paperwork on our end. Some e-mails sent didn't pertain to me which made bus confirmation confusing. (bus was late too).

- We had a trip planned for Tilden Park at the end of the month, however despite numerous phone calls, it wasn't until a few weeks before our field trip, did we find out that there were no buses available to us that day.
- The booking of the trip worked fine and my bus reservation was requested in January for an April trip. I never heard from the dept that schedules transportation until the week prior to the trip when I was informed my trip would have to be cancelled because there were no busses available. My students were extremely disappointed.
- We had difficulty reserving bus transportation. I was told (twice, for two different parks on two different days) within a week of our departure date that bus transportation hadn't been secured, even though I reserved the trip months in advance. On the second try, I ended up arranging backup parent drivers and secured a bus two days before we were supposed to leave.

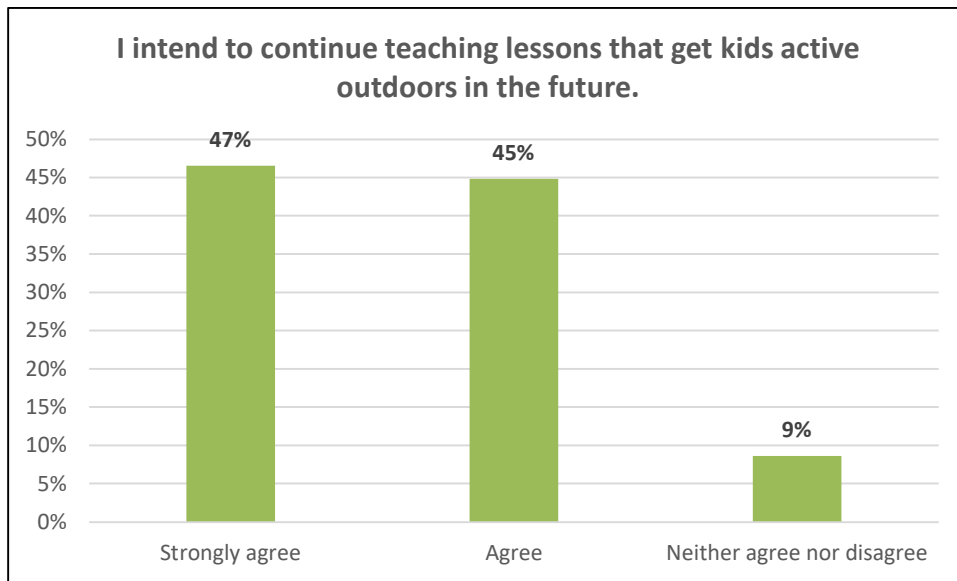
As noted in Section I, the EBRPD transportation department (which books buses across the system, not just for KHOC), had one of its most *challenging* years ever. Bus resources were scarce, and sometimes, the bus companies were not responsive to requests. EBRPD also recognizes that communication is an issue, and that as one teacher remarked, there are “*many hoops to jump through.*”

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 KHOC application for teachers to convey any special challenges they might have with district timelines, school day schedules, etc. We will increase teacher training about how to communicate such issues to KHOC staff.

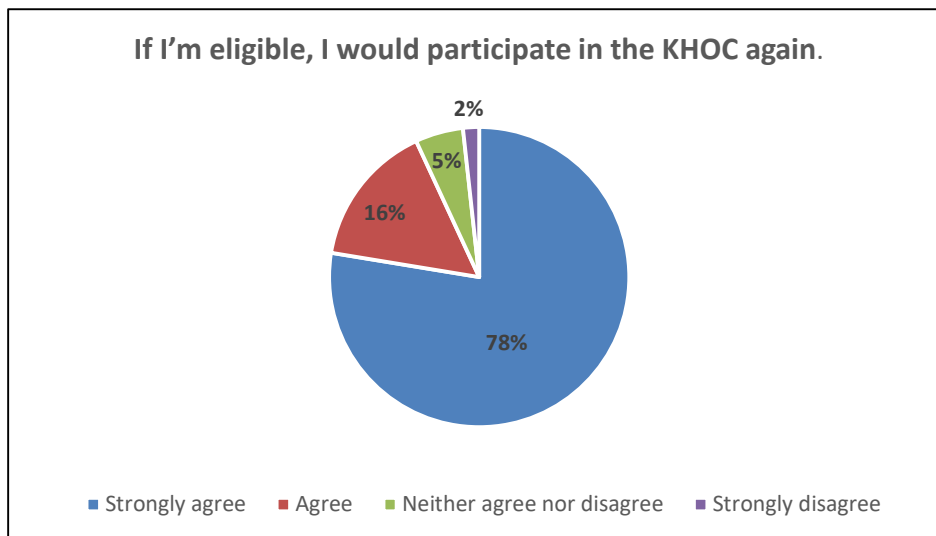


Peralta Elementary students with their bus

**6. KHOC in Future Years:** EBRPD also wanted to find out about future plans teachers had for using KHOC or teaching outdoors. Encouragingly, **92%** Agreed or Strongly Agreed that in the future, they **“intended to continue teaching lessons to get kids active outdoors.”**



In addition, **66%** Agreed or Strongly Agreed that they **“planned to use KHOC lessons and/or booklets with other classes in future school years.”** (Nine percent disagreed they would use the booklets). And **93%** Agreed or Strongly Agreed that they would **“plan to visit EBRPD parks with my class next school year.”** (The remainder were neutral on this question). Similarly, **93%** indicated that if they were eligible, they **“would participate in the KHOC again.”**



KHOC can have a major impact even beyond the classroom. The majority, **79%** felt, based on student reaction to the park trip, that **“students wanted to return to EBRPD parks in the future, or with their families.”** (Many respondents, 14%, checked “N/A” for his question, indicating that their class had not been able to take a trip.)

Teachers told us:

- *My students really expressed wanting to go back and visit Black Diamond Mines as well as for myself. We all thought it was the coolest thing ever.*
- *We really enjoyed the focus on local native Americans because that is our social studies standard.*
- *Students really enjoyed just being out in nature and seeing all of the different plants and scenery around them.*
- *Students were also really excited to go on a school bus as they had never been on one!*
- *They all felt like our Crab Cove trip was the BEST. FIELD. TRIP. EVER! Playing outside on the beach together was a lot of fun for them.*
- *Our Naturalist, Anthony demonstrated how Ohlone people made fire and used spears for hunting. The students LOVED the demo! They couldn't stop talking about it on the bus.*
- *Students said it was the best day ever! They really enjoyed hiking around and thought our guide was really funny.*
- *They loved the sandbox, map, and fish-bike-rack, and enjoyed checking out things they saw in the water. They also were super-engrossed in the waterlife examination activity (where they got to scoop water into containers and take a closer look at the organisms present). The staff at Coyote Hills were excellent at pacing, presentation, and student management. They knew how to capture students' attention, keep them engaged, and keep things moving every 15 mins or so.*
- *Loved the bilingual Naturalists. Great program, thank you!*
- *Our bus driver this year was great! Very professional and helpful.*
- *Kids said: "This is so cool! Look what I found! Look its moving! What is that? This is awesome!" "Wow, I found a banana slug!" "I love it here!" "I'm going to come here tomorrow!" The next time I come...." "My mom and dad love taking walks." "We out here in the wilderness!" "I didn't know trees could be this big!"*

*Students loved getting out of our congested school neighborhood and exploring the wide open space. One recent immigrant student said, "Oh, this is just like home." As a teacher, I really appreciated how the Naturalists were kid-friendly and presented engaging material in addition to being experts about local history, flora and fauna.*

*~A KHOC teacher*



Parkmont Elementary students at Coyote Hills

### **Teachers say KHOC has a big impact on families too!**

- *Families were so appreciative. For many it was their first field trip for their child.*
- *The students talked about going back to Coyote Hills with their families. Some wrote about the trip in great detail in their journals. Parents loved pictures I shared with them from our trip and commented how they too want to go back with their entire family.*
- *My students asked about exploring other mines. They also asked about when the parks is open so they could show their families.*
- *Families were amazed that Redwood Park was so close to their San Leandro community - many of the families told me that they will return with their own families to take advantage of these beautiful parks!*
- *They loved the hike we took on our own after the presentation. The students loved getting out of the classroom. We encouraged going on family hikes and many families did this.*
- *One of our students when walking around the park repeatedly commented on how beautiful everything was. A few students with parents plan to return to the park for future visits.*
- *It would be great if students left our Black Diamond trip with a pamphlet with park hours and info - great conversation starter and opportunity to share with families. I think it would help increase future visits.*

### III. Recommendations & Plans for the Future

KHOC celebrated its **10<sup>th</sup> full program year** in 2022-2023 after having been on hiatus during the COVID-19 pandemic. School year 2021-2022 was a “re-building” year for the program, but this school year, EBRPD returned to offering outdoors park experiences to a full cadre of third grade teachers—107 classrooms across Alameda and Contra Costa Counties.

*This was fantastic. You have an incredible team that really works hard to engage with students of all ability levels and backgrounds!*  
~A KHOC teacher

However, school year 2022-2023 was not without challenges. There were harsh winter storms that closed parks, and an ongoing scarcity of school bus transportation resources—a problem that does not appear to be going away.

As always, reflecting on lessons learned provides us with the chance to continuously improve the program. In this spirit, we discuss recommendations and plans in the areas of KHOC **recruitment, orientation, materials distribution, scheduling park trips, cultural/equity considerations,** and how to best **support teachers throughout the KHOC school year.**

**KHOC Recruitment for school year 2023-2024:** This coming year, EBRPD intends to invite a similar number of teachers/classroom to participate as in 2022-2023. However, EBRPD is considering changes in how applicants will be selected, due to challenges in working closely with numerous schools and ensuring equity in allocating program resources.

In the past, KHOC has invited as many schools as possible to participate, even if it meant accepting only *some* third grade teachers from each school (for instance, not inviting teachers who had participated in KHOC 3+ times). Participating classes at each school *each* received a school bus for a park trip, which they could share with non-participating classrooms. With each class receiving a bus, some schools even took multiple field trips. Unfortunately, with transportation and weather challenges this year, some classes didn't get to take a trip at all.

To more carefully allocate scarce transportation resources, EBRPD is considering accepting applications *by school* (i.e., accepting the entire grade at a school), and giving each school only the number of buses they need for each class to attend a trip (e.g., five classrooms might need just three buses instead of five). These efforts will help ensure that all third grade students from each school will have a KHOC experience. This will also help distribute scheduling responsibility evenly among all teachers.

These plans might result in fewer schools participating in KHOC, but they will help ensure scarce transportation resources are more fairly distributed, resulting in more students successfully completing their KHOC experience with a field trip. Further, this approach aims to deepen relationships between school sites, teachers, and Naturalist staff.

EBRPD is working on establishing **selection criteria** for school year 2023-2024, which may include prioritizing schools with:

- High levels of diversity and Free and Reduced Price Meals (FRPM);
- Limited field trip opportunities;



- Limited or no prior exposure to KHOC; and/or
- Teachers who don't have experience, or feel uncomfortable, teaching outdoors.

The KHOC application to participate will include language notifying applicants that resources are limited and that the selection process will be informed by many factors, including data from the 2020 Census and the California Department of Education, geographic data and maps, and how frequently a school already receives EBRPD interpretive services, to name a few.

**Orientation & Materials:** In last year's survey, teachers overwhelmingly wanted orientations to be held as early in the school year as possible so that they had time to plan KHOC activities. EBRPD is proud that it **accommodated this request in 2022-2023**, holding all orientations during the month of October.

This was the second year that mandatory orientation was offered on Zoom, which many consider a time-saving convenience. EBRPD plans to *continue* holding the mandatory orientations on Zoom. However, one ongoing drawback to this approach is that **not all teachers end up obtaining KHOC materials**, including the student booklets.

EBRPD made the materials available at an *optional* in-person orientation focused on using the self-guided Teacher Kits, but most teachers chose not to attend. And while KHOC materials were also available at many park visitor centers, our survey results showed that some teachers had difficulties finding the booklets even after driving to parks.

EBRPD wants to offer orientations and provide materials such as KHOC booklets as conveniently as possible, while honoring teachers' valuable time. We hope to achieve this by relying on teachers to act as ambassadors for other teachers at their schools (e.g., picking up booklets for other classes). KHOC team members may also make other accommodations for teachers, as needed.

*Thank you for this opportunity for a Naturalist-led experience! Especially coming out of the pandemic, my students and families really need outdoor experiences in our world! These field trips really empower the youth in our community! Much appreciation for providing a bus to the field trip, without your support we would not be able to attend!*  
~A KHOC teacher

In orientations and throughout the school year, we must reiterate that if teachers need materials or require assistance with any aspect of the program, **they should contact the program lead at [KHOC@ebparks.org](mailto:KHOC@ebparks.org)**. For instance, many teachers were able to pick up booklets directly at Park headquarters in Oakland by making arrangements in advance.

Another set of materials EBRPD wants to continue promoting are the **Teacher Kits**, which are designed to strengthen outdoor teaching skills and can even be used at school sites. EBRPD will continue to offer any teacher who leads a self-guided trip a free personal Regional Parks Foundation membership.

While we are encouraging and incentivizing the use of self-guided Teacher Kits, we recognize the importance of Naturalist-led programs, particularly in the wake of the pandemic. Having EBRPD content experts teach classes about local geology, flora and fauna helps reduce stress and burden for many teachers.

**Scheduling Park Trips:** School year 2022-2023 was the first year that EBRPD’s single application reservation system was used in KHOC, enabling teachers to schedule a park location, Naturalist program, and school bus simultaneously. Despite challenges in securing buses and having to cancel and reschedule trips due to rolling park closures, the single application system worked to integrate scheduling components and lessen the need for teachers to facilitate communication between Visitor Center staff and the Parks Transportation department. In years past, teachers were responsible for managing communication between their chosen field trip location and transportation staff. The new single application system automated this process and improved internal EBRPD coordination.

Complicating factors, most classes schedule trips in spring (March-May), and especially if teachers wait until later in the year to schedule, it can be hard to find open slots and buses.

This KHOC school year, the deadline to take a field trip was Friday, May 12. It was heavily emphasized during orientations for teachers to **not** plan field trips this late as bus availability decreases at the end of the school year with many schools taking end-of-year celebratory outings. As a result, classes who opted to take a field trip during this time faced extraordinary challenges in securing bus transportation. The KHOC team is considering moving the deadline to Tuesday, April 30 for 2023-2024 KHOC.

**Cultural and Equity Considerations:** As KHOC adapts, we will seek out and incorporate diverse perspectives, knowing that this makes the program stronger. EBRPD plans to review KHOC materials for untold stories and community connections in school year 2023-2024.

In addition, through revised recruitment strategies in school year 2023-2024, EBRPD seeks to reach more students at under-resourced schools, including diverse campuses which have never participated in KHOC before.

**Supporting Teachers Throughout the School Year:** With many teachers noting that communication issues were an issue in this year’s survey, KHOC team members plan to enhance contact resources for teachers. We will provide Visitor Center contact information (for field trip scheduling assistance) and reinforce [KHOC@ebparks.org](mailto:KHOC@ebparks.org) as the best means of contact should any questions or complications arise. We will also ask teachers to note potential or anticipated challenges (e.g., unique school or district scheduling issues) in their initial KHOC applications, so that we can help them problem solve in advance.

KHOC team members will also provide routine reminders via email about the KHOC timeline. This will help teachers to plan ahead for their field trip and clarify all the necessary administrative steps required.

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.

**Goals for School Year 2023-2024:** As noted, EBRPD seeks to invite a similar number of KHOC participants in school year 2022-2023. However, faced with challenges such as transportation that

have not gone away after the pandemic, we seek to adjust administrative considerations (such as recruitment strategies and bus allocation) to make the program easier to navigate.

But KHOC's overarching goals remain unchanged. In school year 2023-2024, we seek to continue empowering educators to teach outdoors and increasing the time third graders spend outdoors. These actions promote healing recreation opportunities for children, teachers, *and* families.



***Thank you to KHOC funders!***

*The Regional Parks Foundation  
Kaiser Permanente  
Contra Costa County Fish and Wildlife Committee*

***And for support and inspiration from:***

