

York Region schools press pause to get active



By Jake Courtepatte

For one day last week, York Region students were asked to pause their iPhones, laptops, and other devices to get moving instead.

Schools across the York Region District School Board (YRDSB) were challenged to take part in the 'Pause to Play' program, encouraging students and their families to put away their electronic devices.

At Regency Acres Public School in Aurora, the Pause to Play program meant a day of physical learning and outdoor activities for the school's elementary-age students.

Organizing the activities at Regency Acres was the school's 'Minister of Education,' Yasmeen Al-Kas, as well as the 'Minister of Health,' Maddy Reeves. The Grade 8 students are constantly searching for new initiatives to implement into the daily lives of their fellow students, from physical activity to healthy snack carts.

'We're hoping to have something once a week,' said Al-Kas, who competes in soccer at the provincial level.

Reeves also plays competitive soccer, and both students are keen to drive home the importance of healthy living to their peers.

'It's important to still get outside as much as you can and get moving,' said Reeves. 'We wanted to make a fun day where you can try new things, there's a lot of different stations.'

While the Kindergarten students took part in a nature walk, the rest of the school had the option to choose from fifteen different activities, ranging from karate, to soccer, yoga, and even cricket.

Oswald Jones, a director coach at the Rising Star School of Excellence cricket program, jumped at the opportunity to teach the students a new sport.

'A lot of these kids would never have had the opportunity to try cricket,' said Jones. 'But here we are, teaching them the game, and they have been doing really well.'

According to Stats Canada 2011, only seven per cent of elementary-age children get at least 60 minutes of physical activity six days a week. Sixty minutes of activity can make a child do better in school, improve their health, feel happier, and improve self-confidence.

Regency Acres has been a leader in physical activity for its students even before the Pause to Play program, already a participant in the YRDSB's Healthy Schools and Workplaces program, as well as Activate Aurora, an initiative to make Aurora Canada's most active community by 2020.

?We're always looking for fun ways to get everyone active and healthy,? said Al-Kas. ?It should always be an important part of your daily routine.?