

Regency Acres brings outside inside to inspire students, community



By Brock Weir

Ella and Sienna Greg still can't believe their eyes when they walk into Regency Acres Public School.

Until very recently, the first thing that greeted visitors to the over 55-year-old Murray Drive school were three stark walls of dark red brick. This area, however, has been transformed into an indoor parkland thanks to the expert brushstrokes of local artists and the insights of each and every student at the school.

Regency Acres formally opened their new 'parkland' on Thursday at a ceremony attended by an at-capacity crowd of students, teachers and parents. The bright walls, visible from the streets, are dotted with silhouettes of students living out the newly-minted Regency Acres pledge, developed by students to create the best environment possible.

'I think it really represents Regency and how much of a school we are and how everyone together is one big family,' says Ella, Grade 8.

Adds Grade 5 student Sienna: 'It is really nice because the pledge represents the school at its best. Respecting ourselves, others and the diversity around us touches your heart and it means a lot in the school.'

The transformation of the school's atrium was an initiative led by the school's parent council, who financed the project through both their budget and fundraising efforts. Joan Lash, chair of the council, says it was about building a feel of a student-oriented community.

'I am blown away,' says Joan of the finished product. 'When you drive by at night, it is just such a beautiful, strong colour. It just looks alive all the time and it is very inviting and welcoming.'

For Principal Lisa Leoni, it was all about fostering a welcoming environment not just for the students, but the community as a whole. Since the two-month transformation process was completed, she says she has seen this vision realised as kids bring their parents to the building in the after school hours to show off their new parkland space, and neighbours without any particular ties to Regency Acres P.S. coming in to enjoy the atmosphere as well.

Most importantly, however, the incorporation of the new pledge into the 'parkland' serves to inspire the kids and staff every day.

'You want students to take ownership over their learning and behaviour, and this is one way to do that,' says Ms. Leoni. 'There has been a lot of research around environment as a third teacher, so when you redefine spaces and create spaces, it shows kids you care about the environment in which they are learning. There was a value placed on creating an environment that is very welcoming for students and the environment is expressed by things they value, want to create, and want to see happening.'

?Students have all taken the pledge and we very much use it as a restorative approach to learning. Oftentimes, this space is used as a reflection piece for students. The vignettes in the scenery reflect the seven core values expressed by the students.?

Becky Knowles, a Regency Acres teacher for over 25 years, says she was ?blown away? by the philosophical principles brainstormed by the students. From the first splash of paint on the walls through to the finished product, it has truly been a transformative experience for the school ? and it has given them ideas on how to incorporate the seven points of the pledge into the future of the school.

Anti-bullying messages have led to anti-bullying presentations through to the next school year, as have initiatives to make the sentiments of the students toward equity and inclusivity even healthier than it is now. Healthy living has also become an important component of the school environment, an initiative Ms. Knowles says is now going ?gangbusters.?

?Kids love this and feel really proud of it,? says Sandy Kennedy, a member of Parent Council. ?They are so excited and it has been such a positive project.?