

Central conserves with outdoor classroom

Amanda Street

June 29, 2010

Six students at Central School have made the environment a priority.

The school's Eco Leadership Team have made strides towards making Central a greener place to be through a number of initiatives, ultimately earning the school a silver Eco Schools certification. In its first year, the team held three assemblies, informing fellow students on how they can do their part to make their school an eco-conscious one. With topics including Earth Day, Earth Hour and energy conservation, the students were successful in changing the way the Main Street public school consumes energy, said teacher Brad Digweed, who leads the team.

"We've made significant reductions in energy consumption by shutting off lights and computer monitors," said Digweed, noting the team's compost program has also seen the school's garbage output reduced by half.

All of these initiatives have led to the school's certification under the Ontario Eco Schools programs which awards schools that have demonstrated achievement in at least four key areas: energy conservation, waste minimization, ecological literacy and school ground greening for shade and energy conservation. The latter achievement will soon be realized at Central.

Digweed has long dreamed of escaping the classroom on a warm summer day and teaching in the great outdoors. Through grants, which were topped up by the school's parent council, work on an outdoor classroom is now complete.

The outdoor classroom features large rocks for students to perch on as well as a variety of plants. Digweed said the goal is to have students be a part of the classroom, by conducting experiments, such as plant monitoring, in the area.

"As a teacher, to provide the opportunity for students to go outside for instruction is a dream come true," Digweed said. "This outdoor classroom will provide the ultimate place for learning."

For Grade 8 student Breanne Henderson, the outdoor classroom will be a tranquil place for students to enjoy.

"It's a space where students can go and relax," said Henderson, a member of the leadership team. "It will also help us conserve energy by learning outside."

Olivia Jordan, Grade 6, is looking forward to the world of science the outdoor classroom will expose. "Students can do a lot of interesting experiments there," she said. "They can chart plant growth and bird watch."

The outdoor classroom has been funded through grants provided by the Teachers Credit Union, the Niagara Community Foundation, the Central Parent Council and the Education Foundation of Niagara.



Central conserves with outdoor classroom. Students at Central School will be taking their pencils and papers outside to an outdoor classroom. This initiative, among others, has earned the school a silver Eco Schools certification. Pictured are: teacher Brad Digweed, Lexie Penny, Grade 8, Breanne Henderson, Grade 8, Ryan Cleaver, Grade 8, and Olivia Jordan, Grade 6, all members of the school's Eco Leadership Team.