



SEVEN OAKS
SCHOOL DIVISION
community begins here

Community

B E G I N S H E R E

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WEST ST. PAUL SCHOOL

From the colour scheme in the front entry hall to the outside recreation areas, West St. Paul school is focused on having a welcoming, community-oriented environment. Located in a rural environment, West St. Paul School already had a strong connection with the area residents, many of whom are graduates whose own children now attend the k-8 school.

"We have over 100 parent volunteers," says Grant Patterson, Principal. "We now have a parent rep in every class to increase our home-school connection."

When Grant Patterson and Jacky Molyneux, became the admin team this year, they immediately caught the community spirit. Patterson sits on a local recreation committee to help maintain and enhance the connection between the school and the area. They also have repainted and rearranged the front entryway to create a warmer atmosphere for students, staff, and visitors.

The staff and the Parent Advisory Council work closely together on building the community connections. With no community centre in West St. Paul, the school has served in that capacity. The PAC has fundraised to provide recreation equipment for the students and members of the community alike. The PAC also works in the community to help family members who may be in crisis. The PAC efforts at West St. Paul School are exceptional.

For the Birds



Mr. Calisto's grade 5 class has gone wild for the Eastern Loggerhead Shrike. This robin-sized bird is an endangered species that prefers grassy areas with some thorny bushes where it can nest and 'prepare' its meals. Working with Shrike Recovery Action Group and Ducks Unlimited Canada, Calisto's students are contributing to an important effort to save this species.

The school project has five key thrusts:

1. Become experts on the Loggerhead shrike;
2. Partner with a habitat biologist from Oak Hammock Marsh (Ducks Unlimited Canada);
3. Educate fellow students, school, and community about the Loggerhead shrike; and
4. Participate in a field study of the project.
5. Create a Shrike habitat by planting trees in the school field.

Students have begun planting spruce and hawthorn trees to provide shelter and appropriate habitat for the birds. With a scope, the students can keep their distance from the birds while observing their behaviour and knowing that they have helped make a home for this species at risk.

"The students are the stewards of the bird and are spotters in the spring," Calisto explains. "They carry this over to their own homes, keeping track of sightings and passing on the information to the biologist."

Through their contributions to the habitat for the Loggerhead shrike, these grade 5 students are also enhancing their school's environment and learning to be 'citizen scientists.'

Computers & Clay in the CLASSROOM



For the last two years, the grade 7 students in Kimberly Zealand's class delved into the creative world of 'claymation,' with the support of Music teacher Earl Isaac. The project gave students a chance to explore a new art form, learn more about what computers can do, and develop their skills in concentration and patience required for the final videos.

"The students were interested in what computers could do with animation," Zealand says. "Each student participated in making all aspects of their claymation come to life."

The students had to build background 'sets' and create the clay components for their videos. They would photograph the clay pieces, move them, photograph again, and continue the process until their story was complete. Then the photos were run through a computer program to produce the final 'movie' version, available for viewing on the school's website (<http://www.7oaks.org/wspaul>).

The experience was so positive, Zealand plans to continue it with this year's grade 7 class. Working in groups of 3 and 4, it is another way West St. Paul helps build a sense of community among the students and, by putting the final products on the website, bringing in the broader community to share in the students' endeavours.

3 simple rules

This year, West St. Paul School is emphasizing Three Simple Rules: Take Care of Yourself, Take Care of Each Other, and Take Care of this Place. Although the rules are 'new' to the school, they really were part of the general culture of the school. By formalizing them, the rules have become more entrenched.

"Since we instituted the rules this year," says grade 6 teacher, Warren Olson, "I see the students taking them to heart. They are a big part of the classroom and I use them at home with my own kids."

Olson encourages his students to use the rules as a context when they think about their own actions, about what people are doing around them, and about events around the world. In particular, the rules provide a framework for a regular roundtable discussion about different issues.



"Most of the students can see how to apply the rules in specific situations. The goal is to have them think about them before they react," Olson says.



Simply Artrageous

Beautifying the school, exploring creativity, and learning about great artists – these are among the goals and the outcomes of West St. Paul's Artrageous program. The entire student population learns about one artist at a time, with material and activities geared for each age group.

"Depending on the grade, the students learn about the artist's style, their particular influences on the art, and then have a chance to create their own work in the style of that artist," explains Joey Roberston, grade 4 teacher and coordinator of Artrageous.

This fall, the school focused on Pablo Picasso and in the winter, students will decorate large cardboard 'houses' in the style of a different artist. During February's I Love to Read month, older students will read to younger students in these houses.



Speaking OUT

Middle years students at West St. Paul make sure their voices are heard. In fact, they are encouraged to speak up and express their views through a semi-formal student group. As they go through grades 7 and 8, every student will have a chance to speak out on different topics and be a 'leader' among their peers. During October, for example, the focus was on Unicef, when grade 7 students visited different classrooms to talk about this organization.

"If there is something new in the school like a television," says grade 7 student Vanessa Sikora, "we'll talk to our classmates about how we could use it."

Presenting to classes, listening to their peers, and taking their concerns to the staff, are experiences that will benefit the students throughout the rest of the school life and in the future. With their eyes on the immediate future, Vanessa's friends are looking forward to their chance to be a student leader and voice in the school.



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