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### Cookshire Elementary becomes a Living School



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A group of special guests were invited to tour Cookshire Elementary school, which has recently transformed into a 'Living School', incorporating nature into all aspects of the learning process to help reduce stress and benefit from the positive impacts, both mentally and physically, of being connected to the natural world.

Among the guests were members of the Eastern Townships School Board, representatives from Dawson College in Montreal, who are partners in the initiative, and members of the St. Francis Naturalists' Club, instrumental in keeping the environment on the minds of students by sponsoring guest lecturers in local schools. The club is credited for bringing the Living School idea to Cookshire through Dawson guest lecturer Chris Adam.

Visitors from Cape Breton University and University of Toronto were also in attendance to visit the living elementary school, which will likely serve as a model for other schools and campuses to follow in the future. See story inside on page 4

# Cookshire Elementary becomes a Living School

Sherbrooke Record · 8 Jun 2018 · 4 · By Matthew Mccully

Cookshire Elementary (CES), the oldest among the ETSB elementary schools, has taken on a new life and a new purpose-to re-connect people, community and nature by becoming a Living School.



Under the guidance of Dawson College in Montreal, the elementary school students and staff have adopted a philosophy of sustainable happiness and well-being for all through a variety of activities and projects bringing nature into the school and classrooms on a daily basis.

The idea came about thanks to a longstanding program by the St. Francis Valley Naturalists' Club.

For around 25 years now, the club has been sponsoring visits to ETSB schools by naturalists and environmental specialists. Among them was Chris Adam, who happens to be the Coordinator for the Sustainability Office and Living Campus at Dawson College.

A Living Campus or school is a concept of integrating the natural world into all aspects of education in an effort to foster sustainability and benefit from the positive impact both mentally and physically, that comes with exposure to nature.

Adam paid a visit to Cookshire Elementary last year and the students were so engaged, that he was invited back for two additional days. Among the topics addressed was how nature is a free facilitator for stress reduction as well as 'a great creator of situations of wonder', as Adam put it.

At that point, interim principal Tina Jacklin started to think, "Why can't this be something we can do every day?"

According to Jacklin, the first step was for the staff to sit down and discuss their values and beliefs as a school, what they have, what they want to be, and what's important.

The school made the unanimous decision to get serious about the Living School concept and developed a partnership with Dawson College through Adam in December of 2017.

Cookshire, while still under several feet of snow, wasn't in a position to start gardening just yet, but Jacklin said one of the school's first initiatives was a garbage audit.

For a full week, the students went through all the garbage generated at the school each day, separating what could be recycled and composted. Jacklin said at the end of the week, the results of the audit were that of all the garbage from the school, only 9 per cent was real garbage, the rest could be recycled or composted.

In April, representatives from CES attended a Living School symposium at Dawson where Adam and CES worked to clearly define what the attributes of CES as a living school should be.

Since then, the teachers and students have been implementing the plan of action, incorporating the natural world into the school and classroom wherever and whenever possible.

CES made the announcement official yesterday, and invited local media and special guests on a tour of the new Living School.

During the tour, the Grade 1 class was busy feeding the worm composter. On the menu today was apples and cucumbers. Jacklin said that the students keep worm journals, logging what the worms like and how they are doing. The students pointed out that the worms are big fans of bananas, but aren't especially fond of peeling.

Grade 5 and 6 students talked a science fair they had held recently, where the students did a variety of different experiments looking at the affects of pollution and the importance of protecting the environment.

On a table in the hallway of the school were dozens of little cups containing caterpillars. According to Jacklin, they are being raised by the students, and when they become butterflies, they will be released into the pollinator garden being developed on the school grounds.

Jacklin then invited St. Francis Valley Naturalists' Club President David Wright, one of the special invited guests, to break the ground to plant a yellow plum tree, the first of what will become a fruiting hedge bordering the schoolyard for the students to enjoy and cook with.