



Media Release

Bishop Smith Catholic High School hosts Mino-Pimàdiziwin Kitigàn Opening to begin Indigenous History Month

June 4th - The Renfrew County Catholic District School Board is proud to announce the opening of the Mino-Pimàdiziwin Kitigàn courtyard at Bishop Smith Catholic High School. After just under a year of planning and work, the courtyard is now open for students and staff to enjoy.

The opening ceremony began with a land acknowledgement read by students, followed by a smudge given by Elder Irvin Sarazin and a traditional drum song offered by RCCDSB staff, students, and community partners. The remarks from students were a beautiful tribute to the hard work and care that went into this important project.

The courtyard project was borne out of a desire by Indigenous students to have a culturally relevant and inclusive space in which they felt a sense of safety and belonging. The Ministry of Education offered a summer learning grant to enhance engagement at the high school level. The Board's Indigenous Education Team chose to use the money for a reach-ahead credit for students entering Grade 9 and combine the wishes of secondary Indigenous students to have a cultural space and undertake a leadership credit from a project management lens to enhance and reimagine this courtyard.

The journey began with in-class sessions focused on inventory taking, needs assessment, consultation, garden design, and budgeting. The team looked into what plants they could incorporate into the gardens, and what materials they had to work with. The team also learned that a tree that was already in the courtyard was planted in memory of a former teacher, Lillian Smith, and this beautiful tree remains as part of the space.

The team had a session with a Senior Biologist, Jenn Braun from the Blue Heron Environmental Group, who discussed what plants they could incorporate to attract and sustain butterflies, bees, and birds. They chose to plant milkweed and other flowers that would provide food throughout the spring and summer.

To complete the project, students were given steel-toe work boots, a certification in WHMIS, and a tool bag full of Milwaukee tools from Skills Ontario. This was also supported by the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP), and 6 students who worked hard on this project received a Learning Strategies: Skills for Success (GLS) credit, and 8 students received volunteer hours towards the community service graduation requirement. Students will still have the chance to gain volunteer hours while maintaining the space by weeding, planting, staining, and more.

The Courtyard includes a Traditional Algonquin Teaching Lodge that Elder Irvin Sarazin helped build with students, newly mulched gardens, an outdoor learning space and medicine garden, a gazebo, an Inukshuk, a perennial bed, and more.

The Bishop Smith community is delighted to have a dedicated, cultural learning space that is accessible to all. RCCDSB would like to extend special thanks to the staff and community partners who helped make this project possible.