

Centre for Indigenous Excellence and Land-Based Learning opens in Caledon]

Peel District School Board officially opened centre on November 22

By Zachary Roman

The former Credit View Public School, which has sat unused since 2017, has been transformed into a 'ground-breaking' Centre for Indigenous Excellence and Land-Based Learning.

On November 22, the Peel District School Board (PDSB) officially opened the centre alongside Indigenous community members and Treaty Partners. The centre will be fully operational in Spring 2023, and, in the interim, PDSB will be offering select programming for staff and students.

According to PDSB Communications Manager Malon Edwards, PDSB's Indigenous Education Team, Treaty Partners, and Indigenous communities led the work on the creation of the centre in collaboration with PDSB.

'Over the next year, the space will continue to provide opportunities in land-based learning and access to Indigenous Ways of Knowing from community partners for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students and staff,' said Edwards in a media release.

Caledon's PDSB Trustee, Stan Cameron, said the opening ceremony for the centre was extremely moving.

'It was very exciting, there were lots of people in attendance. It was a very powerful introduction to the centre,' said Cameron. 'I'm very proud that this centre has been opened in Caledon.'

Nicole Reynolds, PDSB Coordinating Leader of Indigenous Education, said she's thrilled to be able to welcome Indigenous students, families and community members to the new centre which honours Indigenous ways of knowing.

'This is an exciting step the [school] board is taking toward their commitment to reconciliation and educational sovereignty,' said Reynolds.

Edwards explained that First Nation, Métis and Inuit students will receive 'barrier-free access to educational programming in safe, culturally meaningful and responsive learning environments' at the new centre.

Rashmi Swarup, PDSB's Director of Education, said the centre is long overdue and that she looks forward to 'working in solidarity with the Indigenous Education Team, Treaty Partners, and Peel's Indigenous community to create a space that nurtures a sovereign approach to education.'

Cameron said while the centre is ground-breaking, he agreed it's long overdue and a welcome asset to the community. He said land-based learning is really important, as now more than ever respecting the land and what it gives us is critical.

'I have a very large garden' we're privileged to have enough land to grow lots of food,' said Cameron. 'I've been asking all of our Caledon public schools if they would like to consider growing a vegetable garden on each of their school properties, with a view to helping children, staff, families and community members be a part of that garden, growing food that they would give away.'

According to Edwards, The Centre of Indigenous Excellence and Land-Based Learning will be the worksite for PDSB's Indigenous Education Team; a place for learning grounded in anti-colonial practices and Indigenous ways of knowing for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students; a space where Indigenous students can access cultural education; a field centre for students to receive experiential learning opportunities; a space for professional development for PDSB staff toward reconciliation; and a place to build partnerships and network with community and treaty partners.