

# Customer Views

An interview with Lesley Fisher, Principal  
Walden Public School, Rainbow District School Board

## What affect did the newly constructed school have on the students, staff and the community?

The students watched the construction of the new school as it was being built. The workers allowed teachers to bring their classes near the construction site to observe the progress.

This provided an excellent hands-on learning experience. Ameresco's Project Manager brought the work site into the classroom through a series of presentations and photographs to educate everyone about what was happening on the site.

Workers took the time to explain how the new heating, cooling and ventilation systems worked and how they would benefit students. The installation of girders and solar panels generated a lot of positive discussion among teachers and parents. The circulation of fresh air was a huge improvement. They also noticed that the new floors created a healthier environment within the school, as they

only require water to clean rather than chemicals.

Teaching and non-teaching staff love the new school. In the older buildings, a number of classrooms lacked natural light. The new school is designed to maximize natural lighting. Students have noticed that, as natural light floods into the classroom, lights are turned off by sensors to reduce energy consumption.

The new school design, with an elevator, has made it easier for children with mobility issues to access classrooms.

## How does the overall building impact teaching and learning?

Teachers have already noticed that students are more focused. That could possibly be attributed to improved air circulation. We have also noticed that asthma-related health issues seem to be less frequent. In addition, the classrooms are equipped with the latest in technology which certainly enhances teaching and learning.



A student works in tempered air comfort in the new facilities at Walden Public School.

## How are students responding?

Students are delighted with their new surroundings as are teachers. They like the warm flooring. Students in older grades sometimes sit on the floor for parts of the literacy classes or other activities. They can feel the heat and have a good understanding of how the heat is being transferred and evenly distributed throughout the school.

When students are more comfortable, they learn more effectively.

## How are parents and other members of the community reacting?

The entire community is responding positively to the new school. Some people found it difficult to conceive how the new school would capture the sense of community of the older facilities, but once they saw the bright, efficient and green features, they were pleased.



Main entrance to the new environmentally friendly Walden Public School in Lively, Ontario

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The display case to showcase the geothermal tubing and the visibility of the solar panels are making a statement as well. We will be mounting a plaque explaining the geothermal process as well as installing a 40" monitor displaying our energy consumption and savings for everyone to see.

## What is the benefit to you?

Staff and students are very happy in the new facility and this is conducive to teaching and learning. That is the primary benefit. From a sustainability perspective, it is certainly exciting to be part of a school that is leading the way. It's more challenging to realize energy efficiency in older buildings because they are not as environmentally friendly as newer facilities.

We are all very happy with the environmental focus within the new school. We have carpeting made from recycled materials, energy efficient appliances and smart boards which reduce paper consumption. Our new school supports teacher efforts to infuse sustainability into everything that we do.



A young student can learn on the floor comfortably as a result of the heat-generated from geothermal energy.

## How have you tied greening into the curriculum and youth environmental action in your school? How have the students/teachers/parents reacted?

Through our partnership with Dearness Environmental Society, we had special presentations as we began to emerge as a green school. We established litter-less lunches encouraging students to take responsibility for packaging.

Older students participated in a Conservation Fair, whereby students invented objects using recycled materials. For example, one student created a doll house that ran on alternative energy, using a bicycle to generate power for the lights. This was an excellent, visible demonstration of how students are creatively capturing alternative energy choices.

## Any advice to other school districts considering this type of new school construction?

Green, sustainable energy is the way to go, if you want to be proud knowing that you are doing what you can to protect the environment. The rewards and cost savings outweigh the investment, and, most importantly, it provides a better teaching and learning environment for students, teachers and staff.

The Rainbow District School Board is to be commended for having the vision to build facilities with a focus on the future and sustainability for all.



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