

Surrey's Salish Secondary: Modern space for modern learning

By Sheila Reynolds

The light. It's one of the first things you notice when you walk through the doors of Surrey's newest secondary school.

Even on a rainy day, it's bright, welcoming and uplifting. With copious windows, glass walls, high ceilings and intentional, open spaces; there are no dark corners or dreary rooms at École Salish Secondary.

"It really does have a positive effect on the overall atmosphere of the school," says principal Sheila Hammond, sun beaming through a garage-style glass door in the school's central atrium area. "I don't think people realize how much of an impact it has on students' attitudes and well-being."

Having just opened in September, École Salish Secondary is located in the rapidly growing Clayton neighbourhood of Surrey, where housing development is swift and ongoing, resulting in other nearby secondary schools feeling the pressures of overcrowding for several years

Designed by KMBR Architects Planners Inc., the \$55.2-million school is 13,685 sq.m sitting on more than 62,500 sq.m of property.

The open-space design allows for modern learning, inviting collaboration between teachers and students and integration of subjects, as encouraged in B.C.'s new curriculum. Flexibility of space is key, with features such as retractable classroom walls, sliding glass doors, large and small meeting spaces and movable, functional furniture, including whiteboard tables and desks.

There are 10 so-called 'learning pods' in the school, each colour-coded, with four studios surrounding three collaborative and break-out spaces apiece. Each is organized by grade and subject area.

In addition to eye-catching details such as overhead wood beams and artwork by nine First Nations artists on sliding glass doors, other major features include two gymnasiums, music, dance and art studios, state-of-the-art metal and wood shops, a 200-seat theatre (complete with catwalk), discovery and robotics labs.

Outside, there are two playing fields, a basketball court, several open patios and plenty of benches. There is even a second-floor outdoor deck that may be used for seating or perhaps a garden or yoga sessions – whatever students decide, says

Hammond, again emphasizing their involvement in developing the school's character. Even the atrium, she says, is awaiting a suitable moniker.

"I keep hoping the kids will come up with a name," Hammond says. "We're really trying to make it student-led, to give them ownership."

The spacious school is currently about half full, with many classrooms and spaces unused in this, its first year. With a capacity of 1,500 students – including English and French immersion programs – Salish welcomed about 825 Grade 8-11 students this fall, allowing this year's Grade 12 students to graduate with peers at their existing secondary schools. Grade 12 will be introduced to Salish in fall 2019. The inaugural year also saw 60 staff members (approximately 40 teachers and 20 support staff) walk through the doors.

The school's opening benefited two other nearby over-capacity secondary schools – Lord Tweedsmuir Secondary and Clayton Heights Secondary, allowing for the removal or reduction of a combined 17 portable classrooms from the two schools' grounds.

While Salish is the first new secondary school in Surrey in 12 years, there have been numerous school expansions in the ever-growing district, as well as several new elementary schools built. Since 2000, there have been 20 new schools constructed in Surrey and White Rock – five of which were replacements for aging schools.

Four more new schools – one secondary and three elementary – are anticipated to be built by 2020.