

Cox Students Create Graduation Themed Mural and Walkway

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Photo by Kelly Smith/The Guilford Courier

A.W. Cox Elementary School Principal Vince Agostine and 4th-grade students view, for the first time, the mural the graduating students are leaving behind.

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Guilford High School seniors weren't the only ones graduating last week. Fourth graders at A.W. Cox Elementary School left their very own mark through the elementary style graduation project in the form a student-created walkway and mural.

With the help of a dedicated group of teachers and parents, Enrichment Coordinator Elizabeth Kozarec, art teacher Joseph Bernier, and Developmental Assets for Youth (DAY), 4th graders spent seven sessions creating the water-themed mural located inside the school.

Principal Vince Agostine addressed the eager youngsters during the unveiling ceremony.

"I've come to realize there is something very special about this school. It's different than any other school I've been to," Agostine said. "I'm delighted with what's behind this curtain here because I think it represents so much of what I think of when I think about this class. Every time I look at this, I'll think of you and how much you brought to this school."

Kozarec, who spearheaded the project, said this is only the second time the school has done something like this (the first mural was made in 2009). The idea of both projects was to allow the children to take pride in their experience at Cox. Their efforts symbolize moving

towards the future and celebrating the success they've achieved so far. Every 4th-grade student had a chance to participate in the mural, with help from artistic parents and teachers.

The second part of the project was the walkway, located on the school's playground. On June 15, the last day of school, students left their handprints in the concrete along its perimeter. Suzio Concrete out of Meriden donated the concrete to be used for the walkway. Students also buried a time capsule in which each 4th grader wrote a note to his or her future self. A reunion will be held when the kids are seniors in high school, when they'll be invited to come back, reminisce, and view the notes they once wrote. Along the side of the hand-printed walkway, students also planted a garden and a tree to represent growing into adolescence.

"Senior year we're going to have a reunion and they'll come back and see how the tree has grown, just like they've grown," Kozarec said.

DAY pitched in on this project in an effort to promote positive behavior among the young students. Lyne Landry of DAY said the group was especially excited to assist with this project because it was one of the first times that it had teamed up with elementary-aged children.

"When the opportunity came up to sponsor these projects at Cox, it was perfect timing to start including elementary school kids. The younger kids start building upon their assets, the less likely they will be to engage in risky behaviors when they reach the upper grades," Landry said. "What a great self-esteem and self-worth booster knowing that they have made a difference as early as elementary school."

As the enrichment coordinator, Kozarec has been gearing her lessons toward character building and exploring. She was thrilled by the outcome of the project and the willingness of the students to create something that they could be proud of for years to come.

"For the 4th graders, it's all about building pride," she said. "They can do something, they can make a difference, they can make this place prettier, and they can make their school a better place for other kids."