

## **Cleveland's Grade Fives get First Look at Canada Pavilion**

What was more exciting? Getting a pre-opening sneak peak of Canada Pavilion? Hanging out with the Olympic mascots? Having a go at simulated snowboarding? Or having a personal chat with Prime Minister Stephen Harper? All of this and more is what awaited Mrs. Baldwin's and Mrs. LaPrairie's very excited Grade Five class, Div EO3, on the morning of February 12. The class had been lucky enough to receive an invitation from the Prime Minister's Office to join Stephen Harper at Canada Pavilion to watch the hand-off of the Olympic Flame.

After disembarking the bus at the corner of Georgia and Cambie, everyone needed to clear serious security before entering the plaza in front of Canada Pavilion, but not before cheerful staff presented all the visitors with Pavilion pins. In the plaza the students followed the instructions from the many security staff and handlers in order to create a path through the visitors and journalists for the soon-to-arrive torchbearer. No sooner was everyone lined up than Miga and Quatchi emerged from the Pavilion. So much for the path. The children couldn't help but scream with delight as they ran to meet the mascots and get photos.

Soon the word spread that the torch was about to arrive, and this was confirmed by the emergence of Prime Minister Stephen Harper from the Pavilion. He shook hands and chatted easily with Cleveland students, but then the music rose and the torchbearer arrived swiftly, ending up in front of the Prime Minister where the arriving torch "kissed" the waiting one. The kiss seemed to go on and on, and everyone cheered and cheered. As the second torchbearer left, the first one dramatically yanked the toque from his head and threw it into the crowd. A Cleveland student was lucky enough to catch it!

Inside the Pavilion, which would not be officially opened to the public until the next day, the Prime Minister gave speech catered to the students, and acknowledged the contributions of many well-known Canadians to sports. After the speech Senator Nancy Greene Raine and the Prime Minister explored some of the interactive exhibits with the students—including simulated snowboarding and hockey, sports memorabilia like an original Maurice Richard hockey jersey, and hands-on replicas of the Olympic Torch—and then the Prime Minister spent about 20 minutes just chatting and posing for candid photos with the kids.

This great morning was topped off with a group photo of the students with Prime Minister Harper, taken by his official photographer. The entire event was an amazing experience for all. As one student summed it up, "Today was the best day!"

Photos of the event can be seen at

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/citycaucus/sets/72157623421433516>.