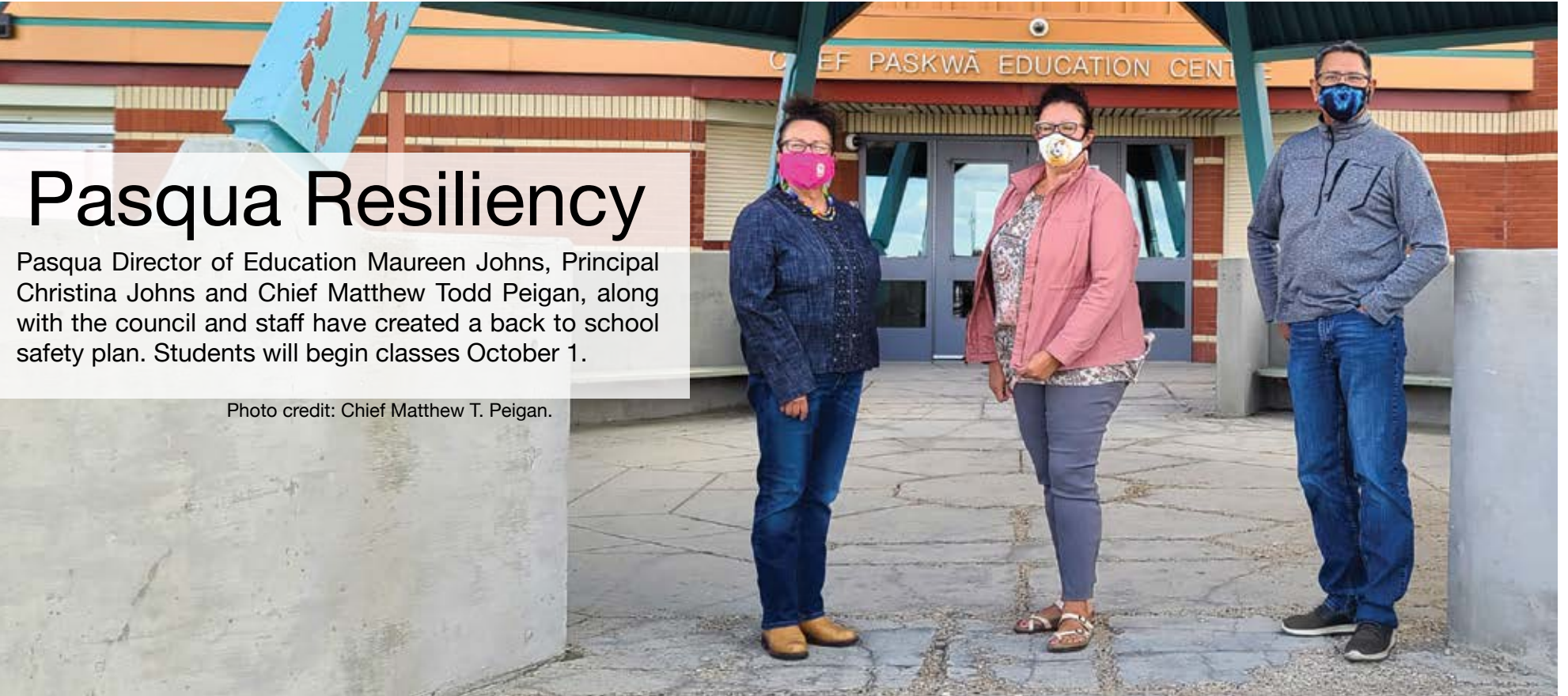


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Pasqua Resiliency

Pasqua Director of Education Maureen Johns, Principal Christina Johns and Chief Matthew Todd Peigan, along with the council and staff have created a back to school safety plan. Students will begin classes October 1.

Photo credit: Chief Matthew T. Peigan.

*By Jeanelle Mandes
of Eagle Feather News*

During the 2019 Christmas break, Pasqua First Nation Chief Matthew Todd Peigan paid attention to news about the new sickness in China and knew it was time to bring out the pandemic plans the First Nation had created during the 2003 and 2009 SARS and H1N1 outbreaks.

“It was just a matter of bringing that out and modifying it. To be frank, I think some of the council and some of my senior staff kind of thought I was crazy. When cases started being apparent in Canada, then people started paying attention,” Peigan said.

In those early days, when there were so many unanswered questions, Chief and council had far-reaching discussions about all the possibilities

and considered the sorts of problems they might need to solve.

They took stock of supplies on-hand in the community and listed what might be needed. They discussed what on-reserve facilities could be used for isolating members who might test positive or get sick. They even considered where they might have a morgue if things got really bad.

The community hall became the central storage site for food and supplies, including many items ordered from Amazon.

Soon the deliveries began - cots, groceries, hand sanitizer, surgical masks, N95 masks, face shields, gloves, gowns and even two breathing apparatus for, “if worse came to worse,” Peigan said.

“Everyone started the whole pandemic emergency response on Pasqua.

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HOMESCHOOLING

Multiple new groups have recently been created on Facebook to help parents in the province who are homeschooling.

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September 2020 is our
What's new in
Education Issue

NEXT ISSUE: ROLE MODELS



LAND BASED LEARNING

“Fall is a good time, the genesis of our program was to launch around a hunt. We love the moose.”

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POSTSEC PREPS FOR COVID

“A lot of work has gone into converting our courses online, because most of our courses were face to face,”

- page 12

Pasqua First Nation takes proactive approach to pandemic safety

... continued from page 1

Things really took off on the implementation of that plan," he said.

On March 12 Saskatchewan had its first presumptive positive case of COVID-19.

Three days later, Peigan addressed the community in a Facebook Live presentation and formally suspended operations of the school, told everyone to stay home and introduced other emergency measures.

Education assistants were reassigned to identify elders and vulnerable community members and to visit them regularly. Community people were hired to



Pro Metal Industries Ltd. owned by Pasqua First Nation made acrylic barriers around students and teachers desks to help limit the spread of the coronavirus. Photo credit: Chief Matthew T. Peigan.

staff round-the-clock security check stops at entrances to the First Nation. They kept track of who left and returned in case anyone became ill and non-members were barred entry.

"It was just a plan to ensure the safety of those on reserve," Peigan said.

Pasqua has approximately 2,450 members, including some throughout Canada and in the U.S. Every adult member received \$150 and each household received a \$150 grocery card and cleaning kits with hand sanitizer and cleaning products, which were also couriered to far-away households.

"It's a complete team effort... I cannot thank my staff, my directors, my council enough for all that they do to ensure the health and safety of the people of Pasqua," said Peigan.

Pasqua Director of Education, Maureen Johns, said development of the school plan began as soon as the K to 12 Paskwa Education Centre closed.

"Our plan has been formed by research, by best practices, by sharing knowledge with other education (and health) directors, cross-Canada research. Interviews were done and we sought out advice traditionally and ceremonially. We had a whole range of perspectives that helped to shape our plan," Johns said.

From March to June, teachers and staff created packages of assignments that were delivered to the approximately 200 students.

This fall's school opening has been postponed to October 1, providing time to check the plan with the province and implement it at the First Nation.

The team intends to take a blended approach that will see classes divided in half, with each group alternating days at school with days at home, so that there are never more than 12 children in a classroom.

Education packages are being assembled for students for their at-home days.

Each student family will be supplied with a laptop computer and software package that works with limited bandwidth and discourages Facebook usage. School staff will coach parents on how to deliver home learning.

On the days at school, education assistants will be on buses to take temperatures, sanitize hands and give each child a new mask every day. Kids will sit only with those from the same household.

Those who don't use the bus will enter the school by a different door and go through the routine there.

Inside, acrylic barriers, supplied by the First Nation's own Pro Metal Industries Ltd, will separate desks and will be erected in other high-traffic areas within the school.

Portable sinks and sanitizer stands will be placed throughout the building and in each classroom.

Recesses will be staggered with groups of kids kept away from each other to lessen cross contamination, said Principal Christina Johns.

Peigan said it will be expensive to maintain the safety measures but protecting precious life is most important.

"My view and the council's view is, you shouldn't put a price tag on life because... what we're safe guarding is our existence. To ensure that everyone is safe and healthy, I don't think there's a price that you can put on that."

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Concern for teacher safety prompts home schooling

*By Brendan Mayer
for Eagle Feather News*

Concerns about the safety of Saskatchewan teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic have inspired an Indigenous single mother to homeschool her daughter. Tanya Jackson says she will be homeschooling her five-year-old daughter Luci until the coronavirus is under control.

"I really wanted to keep the teachers safe," Jackson said. "Having one less kid to worry about helps keep them safe. My daughter is always trying to hug people that she sees. I'm only going to assume other kids want to do that. A vaccination would help me feel better about it."

Jackson lives in Prince Albert and her parents are from Stony Rapids and La Ronge. She has a casual position and says she would be looking for a full-time job if she was sending her daughter to school for kindergarten.

"I wanted to spend more time with my kid," Jackson said. "I don't feel that the Saskatchewan government did enough to protect the students or the teachers. I think there could have been things done to help keep everyone safe like reducing class sizes."

Multiple new groups have recently been created on Facebook to help parents in the province who are homeschooling.

"I joined a couple of the Facebook groups," Jackson said. "They were a great resource to connect with. A lot of parents are very anxious. We're doing what we can to stay safe."

While school divisions have launched online learning options, Jackson says she didn't care for on-

line school when she was a student.

"If I had to do it with my daughter, I think she would adapt to it. It's a tough call because a lot of kids have learning issues."

Saskatchewan Rivers School Division director of education Robert Bratvold said some parents are concerned about the safety of their children.

"They are willing to make that commitment to a distance learning program. We have had a large group of families who are interested in this. They don't want their children to miss out on their education. Sometimes the child might have medical conditions."

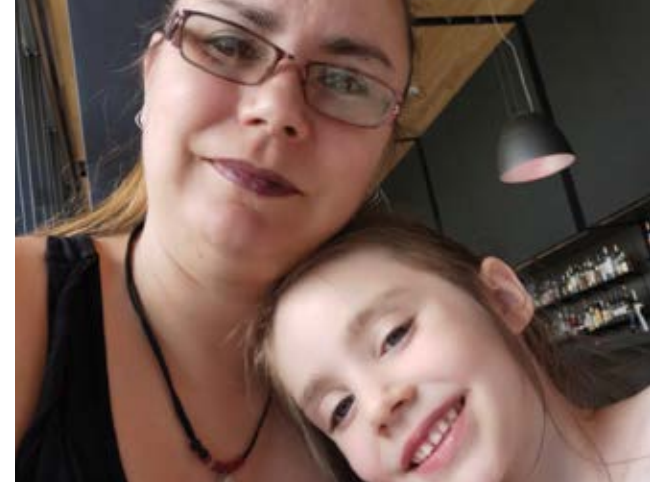
The federal government is providing \$112 million for secondary and elementary schools on reserves and \$74.9 million for Saskatchewan's 27 school divisions and the province has previously committed \$40 million from the COVID-19 contingency fund for education support. The money is being used for pandemic-related costs including staffing and supplies.

There is no indication yet if any of that money will go toward supporting home schooling.

Bratvold said on September 1 that the division hadn't yet heard how the roughly \$75 million will be dispersed.

School divisions also had an additional \$40 million in savings allocated for schools during the pandemic.

"We have enough cleaning supplies, masks and PPE," Bratvold said. "We've budgeted for the reasonable purchasing of those over the course of the year. I think the bigger challenge is staffing requirements. It's a much more difficult adjustment to fund different



Tanya Jackson is homeschooling her daughter Luci this fall. Photo submitted.

needs related to COVID-19."

The Ministry of Education acquired six million disposable masks this summer for the school divisions. Face shields have also been provided for staff members. Each school division in the province is choosing which students will be required to wear masks at their schools.

"I think the Ministry of Education and the provincial government have done some great things in terms of communication," Bratvold added. "The ministry has had regular conversations with school divisions. I think they have done a really good job of being open and relying on medical evidence. We are fully prepared for students to come back. Teachers are generally excited to be back. They want to make sure things are safe."

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September Editorial Notes

Welcome back to our September "Back To School" issue after a month hiatus. We are witnessing a time that isn't what we are used to, especially with students heading back to school. There are many parents that are choosing not to send their children to school because of the possibility of a COVID-19 second wave to come. It's very understandable and normal to have these thoughts. Many, if not all schools have been in the early planning stages ever since the world shut down in mid-March, as the numbers of COVID-19 cases arose. Teachers and staff also had their doubts and raised their concerns. It's commendable to see how so many communities and leaders worked to ensure a school safety plan was put in place.

I was in that hesitant state at first. I wondered what to do for my daughter, Sharlize. She will be returning to a Regina Public School that specializes in autism. This was the school that I battled with a couple years ago after they asked me to either voluntarily remove my daughter from this school due to her meltdowns (which is very common with autism) or keep her in until the next meltdown which, would end with a medical exclusion. Basically, it meant my daughter wouldn't have received any education.

In this issue, you will read about what the school year will look like during this pandemic in the north, central and south parts of the province.

My other option was to transfer her to a private school in Regina that is hidden and secluded. If you were to see this school, you would think

it was a juvenile detention centre. It was quite a predicament I was in.

I ended up putting my daughter in the private school. I was appalled that this school had no playground, no gym, no classroom windows and no recess. And this school was pretty open with me upon registration that they use physical restraints on the students when needed. It was heartbreaking to know that my daughter and the other students were subjected to a school like this.

I took my case to the Saskatchewan Minister of Education, Gordon Wyant. I had the opportunity to meet with him to express my concerns. I left the meeting feeling optimistic. That's when things looked up for my daughter and me. We had such a strong support team that were behind our backs the entire time. Even Indigenous leadership, advocates and families stood with us during this battle.

During a private meeting with the Regina Public Schools, I was informed that my daughter would be welcomed back to the school with all my recommendations honoured, which included support from Jordan's Principle to hire an educational assistant to work solely with my daughter. It was a momentous victory. I fought for my daughter's right to an adequate education – it's her inherent Treaty right.

She will be going back to school this fall. I was nervous at first about sending her back during this pandemic. But I was reassured that her school will be taking the extra precautions to ensure the safety measures are strictly followed. Like every other parent, we must take it day by day and know that the school administrations are working hard to provide a safe space for our kiddies.

In this issue, you will read about what the school year will look like during this pandemic in the north, central and south parts of the province. At Eagle Feather News, we will continue doing



Editorial Notes

Jeanelle Mandes

our best to bring you the latest news coverage surrounding COVID-19.

Remember, it's only a temporary norm with all the changes. Like I said many times, we must adapt to these times of change. Speaking of adapting. I was introduced to Zoom where I will be teaching my journalism courses through. At first, the thought of teaching online instead of in person sort of frightened me. I wondered how I would be able to deliver some lessons online. But I quickly adapted and learned that Zoom isn't that bad. Actually, I am liking it. I am in the comfort of my home. With my coffee cup near me while covered in my warm fuzzy blanket (away from camera view, of course). Sometimes, you'd see my cat Mr. Fuzz running fast behind me or him thinking my keyboard is a comfy spot for him to lay down. It's funny at first then it gets annoying.

In closing, I would like to welcome our new intern, Morgan Esperance from Beardy's and Okemasis Cree Nation (wooo!) She is a journalism student at the University of Regina's School of Journalism. So, expect to read amazing stories from this budding journalist!

Be safe everyone. Wash your hands, cover up with a face mask when in public and continue practicing social distancing. Ekosi.



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Mother tells son's story for International Overdose Awareness Day

Sugar's son, Ashton, 22, doesn't come into her home anymore, ever since he overdosed there in March. He's been living on the streets in Calgary, addicted to fentanyl.



New health centre named in honour of late Chief Starblanket

"We're really honoured to have that name [chosen]. He was a longstanding leader in our community and to leave a legacy and to remember his good work he did for our communities..."



Government of Canada declares Indian Residential Schools of "national historic significance"

"I lift up and honour those we lost in the Indian Residential School System, the Survivors of these schools, and their families."

Education Interns face additional learning with COVID-19

*By Morgan Esperance
of Eagle Feather News*

The common student jitters about starting a teaching internship are magnified for Tim Merasty, who has diabetes.

Merasty, who is in his third and final year of Indigenous Education at First Nations University of Canada (FNUniv), has mixed feelings.

"I'm not looking forward to it, but I also am looking forward to just finishing, it's going to be so weird," said Merasty.

"I don't want to be at risk, but I also want to finish my program on time, so if we have to do it then I will do it, but I don't want to do it if I don't have to," he said.

Merasty is diabetic and could be considered high risk, depending partly on how well he manages the condition.

Having experience with Zoom already, he would be comfortable teaching that way. If being in the classroom is required, following protocols will be important to him.

"I will be wearing a mask and keeping my distance as much as I can and just telling them (to) keep washing their hands, wearing their mask. That's pretty much all you can do right now," he said.

With some elementary and high school students working from home and a certain number of students allowed in the classrooms, internships

may be different, said Dustin Brass, Undergraduate Program Coordinator for Indigenous Education at FNUniv.

"They're going to be lacking some of the experience but... they'll gain some living in the realities that they're in now," Brass said.

For the fall semester, full internships, like Merasty's, are continuing, but pre-internships have been cancelled, Brass said.

The decision was made based on the amount of time interns will spend at the schools.

Pre-interns go out sporadically so the school is not their sole bubble, increasing the possibility of exposure for interns and students.

Those who are doing full internships will be there from the beginning of the term and will follow their school's protocols, he said.

Prior to COVID-19, students taught lessons to their peers. Now Brass will encourage micro-lessons with interns' family members or other people within their personal bubbles. Getting practice using protocols ahead of time is important for developing safe teaching habits, he said.

"This is a very human faculty and so that affects our interactions and how do we work with people physically as educators," Brass said.



Tim Merasty is in his last year of Indigenous Education at First Nations University. Photo submitted by Tim Merasty

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Northern schools roll out safety plans for 2020-21

By *Judith Iron*
for *Eagle Feather News*

What the 2020-21 school year will look like in the north has been the topic of conversation for many communities recently. With the announcement that school would continue normally in September many parents had a difficult time deciding whether or not they will be sending their kids to school.

First Nations and Métis communities in the north have been proactive in doing what they can to protect their people from contracting the Coronavirus since its onset.

Educators are holding meetings with parents to discuss the health, safety, and wellness of students who will be returning to school in September.

Sharon Hoffman, principal at Rossignol Elementary School in Île-à-la-Crosse, has covered all the bases for the new school year for the pre-Kindergarten to Grade 6 students.

The Northern Lights School Division #113 (NLSD 113) has a welcome alternative for hesitant parents, who will have the option of registering their kids for online school.



The Jans Bay School will practice social practice distancing, required to wear masks, daily sanitizer and staggered entrances. Photo by Judith Iron.

“We will be staggering entry into the school using five entrances,” said Hoffman. “The janitors will be cleaning the bathrooms a lot more and doing hourly sanitizing of the high traffic areas.”

Hoffman also plans to have students wear masks when social distancing is impossible. The school will have an outdoor wellness period in lieu of the regular recess so the kids will still have a break from class while getting some fresh air.

The Northern Lights School Division #113 (NLSD 113) has a welcome alternative for hesitant parents, who will have the option of registering their kids for online school. On August 22 the division announced that online education classes would be available for Kindergarten to Grade 12 through their website at edcentre.ca.

Dean Squires, principal of the Ed Centre says, “We are very excited to

offer the K to Grade 9 this year. It’s brand new to our service, but we’ve had many successes over the years.”

The Jans Bay school will practice social distancing, require masks, stagger entrances into the school, do daily sanitizing, and will increase the frequency of the cleaning of the building, said superintendent Jackie Durocher. All of the NLSD 113 schools have their own back-to-school plans based on the chief medical health officer’s guidelines and suggestions.

“We are doing everything we can to meet all safety requirements for this year’s return to school. Our main concern is the health, safety, and wellness of our students, staff, and the community,” says Durocher.

Jason Young is the Director of Education for the Northern Lights School Division. “Our focus really is how do we assist students and parents in providing them with a quality education during this pandemic? We intend to go forward in a way that is safe for students and staff because their education and health is important to us,” he said.

The consensus is that the 20-21 school year will most likely include masks, hand sanitizers, constant sanitizing, social distancing, staggered arrivals, and temperature checks.



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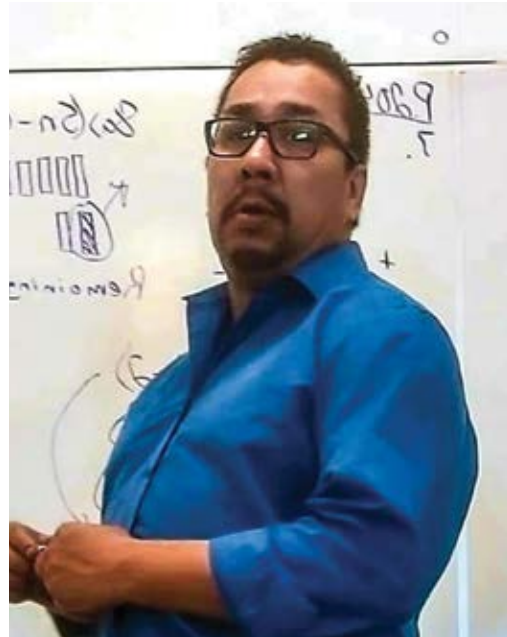


Teachers reassured by school opening plans

By Jeanelle Mandes
of Eagle Feather News

When Balfour Collegiate teacher Leah Missens heard in June that educators would be returning to in-person teaching this fall, she had concerns.

"I was stressed out thinking what the (school year) would look like and what kind of measures and precautions that we are going to put in place. I feel confident now," said the 15-year teaching veteran from Pasqua First Nation.



Ahtahkakoop First Nation teacher Gene Isbister. Photo submitted by Gene Isbister.

Balfour Collegiate will use a cohort model, postpone extra-curricular activities and have one-way direction signs throughout the school. It will also encourage hand washing, provide hand sanitizer and minimize congestion in the hallways. It will have students use water bottles instead of fountains.

"Things evolved and questions were answered. It gave me a bit more peace of mind. My own mindset had to change and understand that this is the reality that we are living in. I am making sure that I look after myself as well," she said.

Grade nine teacher, Gene Isbister from Ahtahkakoop First Nation,

was also disappointed when he learned that schools would be returning in the fall.

He is concerned about how social and physical distancing will happen

when there are no reduced class sizes at the school.

"It's going back to normal," he said. "Myself and many of the parents that I talked to, they want something where they could feel safe to send their children."



Leah Missens is an educator at Balfour Collegiate in Regina. Photo submitted Leah Missens.

Isbister said students and staff have access to masks and sanitizers in every room. As well, everyone will receive temperature checks upon arrival at the school.

"I'm happy to be back with students because I feel our school has taken proper steps to keep our students and staff safe," he said.

The Government of Canada announced that school divisions across the province will have access to additional funding as Saskatchewan is set to receive \$74.9 million as a result of a new spending.

"We know that there will be increased costs associated with staffing, preparation and supplies," said Education Minister Gordon Wyant in a media release.

"With the federal government's contribution, there is now up to \$150 million available to our education sector for costs associated with a safe return to school."

Updates will be made to the Saskatchewan Safe Schools Plan as necessary based on the advice of the Chief Medical Health Officer.

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Students show improved attendance, confidence, skills with land-based learning teachers say

By **Andréa Ledding**
for *Eagle Feather News*

Land-based education is especially healthy during the COVID-19 pandemic, says educator Kevin Lewis of Ministikwan Lake Cree Nation.

"For the times we're in right now, it's a really good option to keep people safe - physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually," he said.

"We can move around and break up those chemicals that cause depression, anxiety. We need to let the land heal us right now."

Lewis started a culture camp eighteen years ago that evolved into a year-round land-based program.

"Pipes, smudges, prayers and languages are the first and foremost things we use and afterwards everything falls into place," he said.

In 2018 they launched a Cree-immersion program.

"This incorporates language, identity, story and history. We're starting to formulate assessments from the instructor and student side," Lewis said. Masters and PhD students are interested in researching and developing it; their Centre of Excellence includes a research arm which features guest instructors.

Classes, whether in urban or rural settings, can take a stroll and look for medicine or teas or animal life, he said.

"It's so healthy for everybody you just feel good spending it outside."

"Fall is a good time, the genesis of our program was to launch around a hunt. We love the moose."

Moose hide is used for drums and rattles. In September they have a bow-making workshop.

Without the distraction of cell phones (they don't have much cell service in the area,) it's easier for students to be immersed in the experience of being on the land and around the water, he said.

Kids from kindergarten to grade 10 respond well to the program, which helps develop cognitive, motor, and social skills, as older students help teach younger ones.

"The students respond well," he said, "they mentored really well and coached each other amazingly."

"It was a community that we saw through the two years and we're hoping to go into a third year with the immersion school."

Lewis describes land-based learning as a treaty right but also a responsibility.

"We just need more programming like that all over the place," he said.

Garrick Schmidt who teaches at Ochapowace agrees. A recent graduate of Regina SUNTEP, he wanted to bring his personal passion and knowledge for being out on the land to Kakisiwew School.

"Students weren't getting out onto the land or just out once every two or three weeks, and instead we were outside almost every day," said Schmidt. "With that I'm able to do cross-curriculum connections. Being able to teach what I do, it's vital to build and bring back those skills not all the students know. A few families still hunt regularly, maybe they trap, but to see how happy these families are to see these practices being brought back to the school!"

He has also noticed positive changes in behaviours, enthusiasm, and attendance.

"Getting those students outside that can't sit in a desk all day long, I was able to see the strengths of students right away," he said. "We got out and had a trap line, set snares for rabbits, made stews and soups and cooked meat over the fire."

Last year he taught 12 grade-eight students and will work with them again this year, teaching grades six to nine in the outdoors, land-based program. He enjoys the growth that occurs with skill-building and confidence.

"It's a good healing piece because the land teaches so much. I'm integrating the Saskatchewan curriculum but the land is the curriculum, the stars, the animals, the seasons," he said. "The kids love to be in school... any stress that they had at home, being out on the land they had time to talk about things and have little sessions out on the land."

Student Mishauna Prettyshield agrees.

"I always enjoyed being out on the land. Doing hands-on learning was much better for me," she said. "Doing these types of things with my classmates



Courtenay Lake Paddle featuring outdoor and land-based education classes. Photo supplied by Garrick Schmidt.

was so much fun because every day we would learn something new."

Classmate Eva Bear agreed.

"Learning how to live off the land was showing me how my ancestors lived," said Bear. "It was better to learn about it in real life and not just a text book. Learning about survival in real life was awesome."

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Fewer subjects a result of pandemic safety measures at Ahtahkakoop school

*By NC Raine
for Eagle Feather News*

Ahtahkakoop Cree Nation High School sits snugly near the centre of its first nation, just across the road from Hines Lake, and has remained a gathering point for youth during the summer months.

Principal Shaun Sasakamoose is privy to some of the conversations of the youth hanging around the schoolyard.

“The kids have been asking me when they can come back. They’re excited to get back to school,” he said.

As such, Sasakamoose and Ahtahkakoop have been doing everything in their power to make this school year a safe experience for their eager students. For the first month of classes, students will be divided into two groups, with group one attending school on Monday-Tuesday, and group two attending Thursday-Friday, with Wednesday being set aside for disinfecting the school.

The school is also making masks mandatory for everyone in the building, and is taking the temperature of every person who enters the bus or school. A temperature over 38 degrees means a 14-day self quarantine or a clean bill of health from a doctor following a Covid-19 test, said Sasakamoose.

“We’re taking safety here very seriously,” said Sasakamoose. “The kids’ population is quite static; they don’t travel much. The game-changers are the staff, some of who are coming from Saskatoon or Prince Albert. That’s why we are so stringent on getting temperatures checked, wearing masks, getting Covid-checks.”

As for education, because of the reduced hours, Sasakamoose said the school will be concentrating on math, English Language Arts, and Cree as their core subjects, with health and science being put on hold.

“We want to put every measure in place. When you’re in the middle of the storm, you can’t see the end but it’s there. We’ll get out of this even stronger, and if this happens again, we’ll know what to do.”

Nakoda Oyade Education Centre at Carry the Kettle Nakoda First Nation is similarly taking a careful approach to the new school year.

Starting on the first day of classes, September 15, students will be divided into cohorts and remain in their classroom ‘bubble’, with teachers going to them rather than having students move around the school.

Everyone will be sporting protective gear, with staff and students grade 4 to 12 wearing masks, and students from kindergarten to grade three wearing either masks or face-shields. Bus drivers will be taking and logging the temperature of each student before they climb aboard, and the school itself will be restricted to only students and teachers.

Mental health is being made a priority.

“The biggest challenge is dealing with the impacts (of the pandemic). We are having conversations with everyone to make sure they feel emotionally supported. If we don’t create that emotional support for teachers, families, and students, we’re going to have some challenges,” said Robert Kowalchuk, director of education at Carry the Kettle.

Additionally, the school has invested in Vital Oxide, a fogging or misting cleaning agent often used in hospitals, the “gold standard”, says Kowalchuk, which the school will use in their busses and commonly touched areas.

“Because of the long history of trauma, and Indigenous people having elevated health risks, we’re trying to create the safest possible environment for our students to return,” said Kowalchuk.



Shaun Sasakamoose, Principal of Ahtahkakoop Cree Nation High School.
Photo courtesy of Shaun Sasakamoose.



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STC, Nutrien and KPCL deliver school backpacks in Saskatoon

By *Andréa Ledding*
for *Eagle Feather News*

Trullie Jimmy and her siblings were excited to receive well-stocked backpacks, delivered right to their home this year.

Jimmy is going into grade nine at Mount Royal, and admits she's a bit nervous to leave elementary school behind, but she's not too worried about COVID, and she's looking forward to math classes. When asked about how the backpacks made her feel, that was an easy answer.

"Happy," said Jimmy. Her siblings agreed, as four of the six Jimmy children that were home at the moment organized on the lawn to pose for a picture with White Buffalo Youth Lodge workers Toni Oliver and Tara Arcand, who were in the midst of delivering backpacks all over the city for the second day in a row. Everyone was happy to see each other after a summer apart.

Chief Mark Arcand of the Saskatoon Tribal Council said they had to make adjustments this year to their normal delivery of the annual free backpacks and school supplies, because of COVID-19.

"Last year we did 2,500 backpacks plus a big carnival, this year because of COVID we dropped it down to 1,500," said Arcand, adding that with the money donated, they ordered not only regular school supplies but 15,000 disposable masks so that each student gets ten, and hand sanitizer as well.

On August 25 and 26, the 1,500 backpacks were filled by volunteers and supporting donor organizations, including Nutrien and KPCL, and the next two days they were delivered to homes.

"As a kid, I remember being so excited to get back to school – to learn new things and see friends – and getting organized with school supplies was that crucial transition period between fun and games in the summer to getting back to developing and learning in school,"

"It's community support," said Arcand. "On Sunday we did free haircuts for kids that came in, with five hairstylists from Sunsera donating their time."

Julie Ann Wriston of Nutrien says her company stands with community partners in ensuring that future leaders, the youth, have every opportunity to not only participate, but thrive in their education.

"Saskatoon Tribal Council prides itself on resiliency and has continued to create an environment of success for youth," said Wriston, adding that although this year's backpack giveaway was different with the presence of COVID-19, the care and attention shown by the planners and supplier network in ensuring that kids still have what they need to start the school year off right is a strong signal that the relationships can rise to any challenge. "We are in this together, because together, we grow."

Mary Panteluk of KPCL said it was her company's third year participating, and her second year helping organize.

"As a kid, I remember being so excited to get back to school – to learn new things and see friends – and getting organized with school supplies was that crucial transition period between fun and games in the summer to getting back to developing and learning in school," said Panteluk. "We are fortunate to have many community and business members coming together to support this initiative and help those that need an extra hand up right now, especially during these unprecedented times."

Besides the masks and sanitizer, this year's supplies also included reusable water bottles, along with the usual writing tools, notebooks and binders.

"I had the opportunity to meet some of the families and kids from a distance when delivering backpacks and many of those I spoke with were excited and ready to go back," said Panteluk. "The backpacks and supplies provided are fundamental to supporting kids as they continue their education throughout grade school and develop into leaders of the future."



Teigan, Trillin, Tiana and Tiara Jimmy received backpacks delivered by Toni Oliver and Tara Arcand of the White Buffalo Youth Lodge in Saskatoon. Photo submitted.

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Pinehouse therapeutic photography featured in new children's book

By Morgan Esperance
of Eagle Feather News

The true story of a Pinehouse boy who started having suicidal thoughts after losing his grandfather, but found life-saving solace in photography has been turned into an illustrated children's book.

With the help of youth in the community, primary care nurse Dre Erwin created the book to bring awareness to mental health and suicide in northern Saskatchewan and how photography can be used as therapy.

The Little Boy who Found Happiness, in the Most Unusual Place went to number one on Amazon after being published on September 3, he said.

As a nurse in an isolated community, Erwin had seen depression and the results of depression firsthand. Knowing the problem is widespread, he wanted to draw attention to the lack of resources in northern communities.

"I was really motivated by the idea or the goal of helping other youth in other communities," said Erwin.

"I felt upon myself to try and do more. What else can I do as a nurse besides wait for it to happen and I get a phone call? How can we prevent it?"

Erwin, originally from Regina, started a therapeutic photography club in 2016. After seeing how much it helped, he decided to write a book.

Involving the youth was an obvious project for the photography club.

"They wanted anime, they all thought it would be more interesting to have something like that because they're more interested."

A ten-year-old youth from the community created the lead character, and about dozen more contributed with illustrations and photographs used for backgrounds in the book.

"I wanted to include them as much as I could," said Erwin.

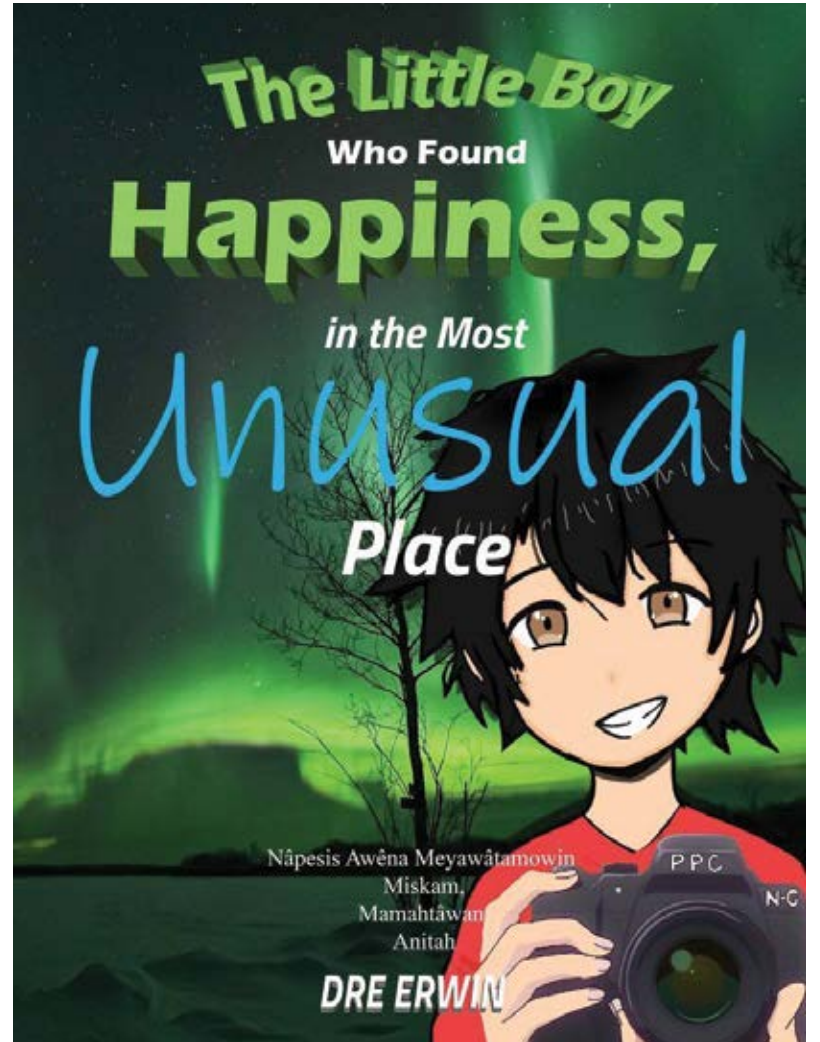
Cree teacher Alfred Tinker from Pinehouse translated the story into Cree, so the book also offers some language learning.

Erwin's photography page on Facebook attracted the attention of a professional editor, who reached out to Erwin and edited the book for free.

Erwin also created the Canadian Photo Health Authority, an umbrella organization which now has connections across Canada, Erwin hopes to encourage more communication and have good messages in it.

Erwin encourages therapeutic photography, and says anyone can do it if they have a cell phone. The book can show everyone how this can be done in any community, he said.

"Think about how it made you feel to go out, what were you thinking when you took that picture. What do you want other people to think and feel when they look at your picture?"



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Trade schools to reduce students on campus, emphasize distance learning

By NC Raine
for Eagle Feather News

As trade and vocational schools welcome students back, Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies (SIIT) and Saskatchewan Polytechnic have been devising procedures to ensure students can safely get their hands dirty.

When Saskatchewan's Phase I of the shut-down took effect in March, SIIT developed COVID-19 protocols to allow five programs to finish the year. That experience allowed the school to see what would be required this fall.



Tavia Laliberte, VP of Academics at SIIT.
Photo courtesy SIIT, Victoria Lamb Dover.

"In some ways, we were lucky because we had a very small group of students and staff that we had to bring back. We set up procedures around safety, and were able to alter them in ways that were a little more flexible than if we had brought back hundreds or thousands," said Tavia Laliberte, SIIT Vice-President of Academics.

SIIT has reduced the number of students enrolled in its programs this fall by 10 to 20 per cent; students will maintain two metres distance whenever possible and wear personal protective equipment (PPE), including eye protection in some trades. SIIT will also deliver much of its theoretical education virtually.

And because SIIT has campuses, career centres, and community learning locations across the province, mass gatherings typically found at higher-learning facilities is significantly reduced.

"We do have some advantages at SIIT. We are a smaller institution, with smaller cohorts and we have a very distributed education model. We don't have one huge campus that you come to, we come to you, we come to your community. There's pros and cons to that, but in the case of a pandemic, there's advantages there," said Laliberte.

Sask. Polytech will take the significant preventative measure of allowing only ten percent of the student population on campus, including only those



Has Malik, Provost and VP of Academics at Saskatchewan Polytechnic. Photo courtesy Sask Polytechnic.

participating in hands-on labs, shop, and clinical components, said Has Malik, Provost and Vice-President of Academics.

Before entering campus, every individual will be required to do a daily coronavirus check. Masks are mandatory on campus, and Sask. Polytech has fully mapped student movement, including which entranceways, washrooms, and hallways may be used.

Sask. Polytech will continue offering theoretical courses through distance learning.

"A lot of work has gone into converting our courses online, because most of our courses were face to face," Malik said.

"We're careful in making sure each of our courses has learning outcomes that are associated with each of our programs," he said. "We are making

sure that any course that needs to be on campus, we are providing that



Deanna Speidel, Director of Indigenous Strategy Saskatchewan Polytechnic. Photo courtesy Deanna Speidel.

opportunity, whether its a welding shop, hair stylist, or clinic for health professional, we're putting the protocols in place so students can come to campus."

Special supports are also being offered to Indigenous students. Sask. Polytech hosted a virtual summer transition program for Indigenous students to get acclimated to the new virtual platforms and is building a new sense of community for the Indigenous students.

"Even though our student centres are closed... we have virtual platform including a Facebook room, scavenger hunt, book clubs to build that sense of community and relationship building that students aren't receiving as they're not on campus," said Deanna Speidel, Director of Indige-

nous Strategy at Sask. Polytech.

"The experience this year may look a little different but the quality of our education and our credentials will remain the same."

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A student's tips for students during the pandemic

*By Sophia Lagimodiere
for Eagle Feather News*

For many university students, back-to-school is very overwhelming. These feelings are often alleviated when students reconnect with peers and professors and attend start-of-the-year social events. Interactions such as this remind everyone that they are not alone. This year, however, as many universities move primarily online and social distance measures stay in place, students are left facing even more hurdles.

I never imagined that I would be taking my first year of law school online during a global pandemic. If it was not for my support system, I do not know how I would be able to navigate these unstable times as a student. Students have to balance various pressures, from financial, housing, childcare duties and food security, while still trying to maintain their grades and mental sanity. I imagine many students share the same fears about starting school online as I do; some much more than others.

This shift to online learning has highlighted the many challenges that disproportionately impact Indigenous students during the pandemic. Those returning to their communities for online school may face additional barriers, such as unreliable internet and cell service if they are located in a remote area, or difficulty concentrating on their course material if they share a household with multiple family members. For those who cannot return home, isolation may be a difficult and lonely time.

Indigenous students need to remember the resilience they carry within themselves and the resources available to them. I decided to create a guide in hopes to help students navigate these trying times.



A statue wearing a face mask at the University of Saskatchewan.
Photo by Sophia Lagimodiere.

Establish a Routine

When nothing else around you is stable, it is important to establish a routine. Something as simple as waking up at the same time every day, making your bed in the morning, or going for a walk every afternoon, can help you feel more in control of your surroundings.

Get Creative

If this year has had a silver lining, it would be that it has forced us all to be more innovative. In the blink of an eye, many special occasions, traditions and social gatherings had to be cancelled. This has not stopped people from celebrating. From online weddings, drive-through grad ceremonies, balcony music performances and backyard convocations, people have found ways to adapt.

Stay Virtually Connected

As students, it is important to have a support system. Staying virtually connected this school year will help keep you motivated and less lonely. If you can create a group chat with some peers, or email your professors for help once in a while, it will remind you that you are not alone. Additionally, Indigenous youth are using online platforms, such as TikTok, to create a strong virtual community, by sharing cultural practices, stories and personal challenges.



COVID-19 signs at the U of S Thorvaldson Building in Saskatoon, SK on Aug. 21, 2020. *Photo by Sophia Lagimodiere.*

Practice Self-Care

It can be easy to lose yourself in the stress of school and other commitments, but nothing matters more than your well-being. People have different ways to cope with stress, such as playing an instrument, dancing, connecting with nature or cooking. Find an outlet and remind yourself throughout the year to prioritize your mental health.



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Revamped northern teacher training program enters second year

By Morgan Esperance
of Eagle Feather News

Olivia MacDonald is a northerner who wants to teach in the north.

Last year, she was among the first students of the Northern Saskatchewan Indigenous Teacher Education Program (NSITEP), which replaced the 40-year-old Northern Teacher Education Program (NORTEP) in LaRonge.

Now in second year, MacDonald says she most enjoyed the cultural aspect of the program.

"It's hands on... they take us out for the traditional learning, and we get a lot of help from the faculty," she said.

She also appreciates that there are opportunities for help with funding and textbooks.

MacDonald, who Métis, is disappointed that she won't be learning on campus with her classmates this year, but she encourages other northerners who would like to teach, to consider the program.

Partnering with Gabriel Dumont Institute (GDI) and the University of Regina, NSITEP delivers a teacher education program that will earn students a Bachelor of Education degree from the U of R.

Headquarters are in La Ronge, but classes are delivered online by instructors in Regina and

Prince Albert.

"We are located on Treaty 6 territory within the Lac La Ronge Indian Band (and on the) homeland of the Métis so both partners have been very supportive," said program head Morris Cook.

He said the 26 students entering their first year and the 20 in second year are from all across the north.

From "Cold Bay to Beauval to Pinehouse and Île-à-la-Crosse and some from the Meadow Lake area, and some from Battleford... it's not geographically restricted," he said.

Cook said he cannot remember any major challenges within the first year because of the support he has had from the partners and the band.

The pandemic has forced the program to deliver its classes online and pre-internships have been cancelled by the U of R.

"Those have all been cancelled. We'll figure something out and we will catch our students up when circumstances allow us to get there," Cook said.

"With COVID and all, that's been our main focus...we want to make the educational experience as healthy as possible," he said.

Cook gives a special recognition to the Advisory Board, comprised of three GDI members and three Lac La Ronge Indian Band members, for their



Olivia MacDonald is a second year NSITEP student. Photo submitted by Olivia MacDonald.

support. He hopes more students will enroll.

"Hopefully, we're here for years to come and to address the teacher shortage that has always been a concern in the north," Cook said.

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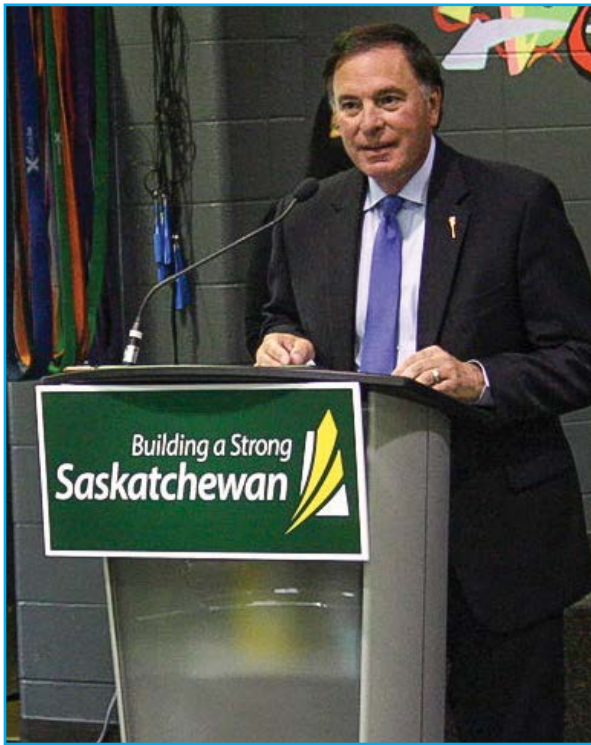
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Saskatoon Cree bilingual school to get new building

By NC Raine
for Eagle Feather News

Saskatoon's only Cree bilingual school, St. Frances, will soon have a new \$34.5 million building to meet a growing demand for Nehiyaw language and culture in elementary grades.

"This new school will create a modern and welcoming Cree bilingual learning space for teachers and students to enjoy, to learn and to discover," Saskatchewan Education Minister Gordon Wyant said at the September 2 funding announcement.



Education Minister Gordon Wyant says "Indigenous design will be at the forefront of planning the new school." Photo by NC Raine.

"Indigenous design will be at the forefront of planning as well as we will strive to create and co-create a space conducive to cultural practice and ceremonies throughout daily learning," Wyant said.

The new school was the Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools' (GSCS) top budget request for 2020 and 2021. It will replace one on McPherson Avenue that was built in 1953.

The facility will replace the current St. Frances school, which outgrew its current 67-year-old building in the east-side Grosvenor Park neighbourhood and is now split between two locations because of overwhelming interest in the program.

The new school, set to open in 2023, will provide space for approximately 700 prekindergarten to Grade 8 students. There will also be 70 new child care spaces for young families.

"This is going to be a game changer inside the city of Saskatoon," said Saskatoon Tribal Council (STC) Chief Mark Arcand.



Saskatoon Tribal Council Chief Mark Arcand is looking forward to the impact the school will have on his own children. Photo by NC Raine.

"We need to rally around a school system that will change kids' lives from poverty to the richness of their culture, their language, and their identity. And a lot of our people are (currently) missing that," he said.

The announcement marks a 14-year collaboration between STC and the GSCS.

Arcand said he's looking forward to the impact the school will have on his own children.

"My children will have an opportunity to be part of a school, to learn something I never learned. That's how we're changing systems that have been negative to First Nations people in this province."

Wyant said the investment in the school is part of



Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools Board Chair Diane Boyko at the announcement of a new \$34.5 million school for St. Frances Cree Bilingual School. Photo by NC Raine.

the 2020-21 budget which provides \$130.4 million in funding for infrastructure projects across Saskatchewan.

Diane Boyko, GSCS Board Chair, likened the school to the heart of the community.

"Soon enough, this land we stand on today will be filled with song and the beat of a drum that sounds like a beating heart. And that's really what this school is going to be – the heart of the community and a hub of activity," said Boyko.

"No longer will an outdated, overcrowded facility be a barrier to this school community reaching it's full potential."

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Saskatoon Public Schools Foundation to raise \$20 million to get all kids reading by third grade

By Michael Linklater
for Eagle Feather News

Supporting children through early learning is crucial for future success. I cannot imagine what it is like to be a kid growing up in today's world. Technology is a big part of their lives and the way they learn. Many things have changed since I was young but what hasn't is that each year kids are still not meeting the minimum standards of reading.

The Baltimore-based Annie Casey Foundation for children shared that, "A child who can't read at grade level by third grade is four times less likely to graduate than a child who does read proficiently by that time."

It is clear to me that the investment into a student's educational success must start within the first five years of school.

The Saskatoon Public Schools Foundation realizes that students who are not reading at or above grade level by the third grade have a lower chance of successfully graduating from high school.

This is why the Foundation will soon announce a major fund-raising campaign that will raise \$20 million to support students in achieving the critical milestone of Grade three reading in Grade three.

The Campaign will focus on 15 schools to achieve 100 per cent grade three level literacy in five years, beginning in 2021.

Four key initiatives over five years will include full-day pre-kindergarten, full-day kindergarten, Early Learner Tutor Program for grades one to three, and summer reading camps for grades one to three. The summer reading camps help reduce summer slippage, where students drop a few reading levels over the summer months.

My eldest son participated in the pilot project of the summer reading camp years ago. Physical activity was a major component to this project and some studies show that exercise prior to learning helps with the retention of information. When my son returned to school in the fall, he increased his reading level and became more confident in his ability to learn. He is currently entering the eleventh grade and has ambitions of taking post-secondary education.

Reading is a fundamental part of learning and it is a sad reality that some children are not reading at grade level. Saskatchewan ranks among the lowest in reading compared to other provinces. It's time we put our support behind initiatives like this so we can combat this abysmal rank.

When we invest in our youth we are investing in the future of our province. I like to believe that I am a beneficiary of the previous generations who invested in me as a youth.

I grew up in Saskatoon attending a community school. The extra supports were of great significance to my success. I recall being "that kid" who struggled with reading. I remember very vividly being terrified when my teacher would scan the room looking for a student to read the next paragraph. I always did my best to hide so I would not have to read because I was embarrassed of my reading ability at that time.

The few times I was chosen to read I felt nervous of what my fellow classmates would think of my ability.

Some of my friends that were asked to read said no or would even walk out of class. Looking back, it all makes sense to me. Those kids probably struggled more than I did and felt so much worse that they simply refused to read.

It saddens me to think of where they might be today, knowing that 65 per cent of Canadians in prisons have less than a grade eight education. Then I think about the number of students each year who are not achieving the proper reading level and it weighs heavy on me. I ask myself, where will they end up? How can I help them?

This, among many other reasons, is why I have happily agreed to sit as one of three Co-chairs for this wonderful fundraising campaign. The money raised will help to support the students most in need, which will give them a greater chance at success. I believe it is our duty to help those most in need.



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This training program is a combination of effective combat techniques designed to give you an introduction on how to protect yourself and escape to safety if attacked. The five-day training program is not boxing, or any combat sport. This program can lead into the four-week self defense program.

4-Week SELF DEFENSE

This training is a program designed to help you learn practical techniques that will allow you to build your confidence in protecting yourself in real life situations where someone is set on causing you harm. This training is not boxing, MMA, karate or any combat sport. It is training with a main focus being your safety and escape to a safe environment. This program is 4 days per week for the four weeks.

6-Week PEER MEDIATION

This six week program teaches participants to utilize Reality Therapy/Choice Theory concepts to address bullying and conflict in ways that lead to resilience through better lifestyle choices. The program will utilize role play to mimic real life situations where participants can practice skills that lead to better outcomes for the individuals involved. It is 2 days per week for the 6 weeks.

5-Day INTRODUCTION TO BOXING

These five days will include teaching the participants proper boxing stance and punching techniques (jabbing, hooks, body punches, etc). There will be foot movement taught and conditioning tools. The participants will have an overview of what is involved in learning to Box.

4-Week BOXING

The program will provide: 1. Training for youth or other community members in boxing techniques both Offensive and defensive. 2. Training of prospective community coaches. 3. Instruction in the administration of a boxing program, a) Form b) competition c) Equipment d) Training techniques, skipping and hand wrapping e) uniforms. The program runs 4 days per week for the 4 weeks.

5-Day LOW IMPACT EXERCISES FOR ELDERS

A low impact, thirty-minute workout program that is designed to provide elders exercise techniques to improve their overall health. This program provides elders an opportunity to socialize and have fun at the same time as improving their fitness. These five days provide a sample of some of the exercises available in the 5 week fitness program for elders.

5-Day ABDUCTION PREVENTION TRAINING FOR PARENTS AND YOUTH

This program teaches parents and youth situational awareness and safety skills. For example: What is stranger danger? How and Why to make noise? What is Cyber Safe/Why? Spying vs Parenting? This program also assists parents with establishing better trust and communication with their children and ensures the communication is appropriate for the age of the child. The training uses Reality Therapy techniques to provide a positive, fun environment.

5-Day PUMP AND JUMP

This program provides low and high impact options for participants depending on their fitness level. The program is designed to provide people at any fitness level exercises that are fun and can be successful in improving their fitness. It is a combination of many fitness techniques from a variety of training methods.

5-Day SAFE PHYSICAL MANAGEMENT TRAINING

This training will focus on introducing skills for situational awareness, de-escalation strategies and ways to maintain a safe space and a safe presence. These skills are designed to assist in avoiding physical confrontations. They are taught along with safe physical management techniques. This five-day training can lead into the 4 week course.

4-Week SAFE PHYSICAL MANAGEMENT TRAINING

This training stresses situational awareness and de-escalation skills and strategies to assist in avoiding physical confrontations. These procedures are used in situations where the safety of the acting out individual (person in behavioral stress), or the safety of others, are in imminent danger. This training stresses de-escalation skills and strategies as important methods of intervention with safe physical management techniques used when necessary. This program is 4 days per week for the four weeks.

PROTECTION DOG TRAINING

Dogs that are trained for family or personal protection.

Compassion needs to be part of the new normal



Comment

Alyson Bear

With summer coming to an end and school about to begin, as parents we are all wondering what we are going to do? What is this year going to look like? How do we prepare our children or even how do we feel safe and comfortable sending our kids back?

As a single income household, I have no real choice in sending my children back to school or not and managing everything. I have already had many curveballs thrown my way in life so I understand that anything could happen any day. This unpredictability in the future is what we need to be prepared for while we send our children back to school. It is always good to have back up plans but not always easy, especially in single-parent households.

If Covid-19 and 2020, in general, has taught us anything it is that nothing is a guarantee and that certain things in life will always be out of our control. The one thing that is in our control is ourselves and how we prepare our children. I am sad my youngest will be starting kindergarten this way, but I will do my best to not instill fear and anxiety in her because of, not just the transition to kindergarten, but doing it during this whole pandemic. This is a new learning curve for all of us, together.

As we go back to school and work, some will continue to be online and others will have new protocols to follow and many of our plans we had have changed significantly already. We are adapting to these changes which is another lesson that we can take from this pandemic. Change means leaving our comfort zones for something new and this also means we can create a more aware and conscious world with more compassion and understanding.

The world needs more compassion when it comes to people's situations, lives, mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual wellbeing. We are learning now that we can accommodate people with different needs and abilities whether that is working from home or having more support for someone who might not be able to adjust as easily as someone else.

Being more considerate of others is something that needs to happen, especially in the workplace. Personally, I have been having a hard time trying to find stable support due to pulling my kids from daycare since the start of this pandemic. My children and I are figuring out what back to school looks like, their schedule, my schedule as I am also two months into a new job transition myself amidst the pandemic.

While we know now more than ever that we cannot predict the future, unexpected things happen in life and this also means being more considerate and understanding of the situations people are in. I can only speak to my own lived experience as a single parent. There are challenges that we face on our own and I have been told that it's my own fault that I am a single parent. Now because one parent is absent the other is forced to carry the brunt and work twice as hard as everyone around them. This is the reality of the type of world we live in, every person for themselves, very individualistic.

I think we are entering a shift that is more community-driven and which circles back to the way in which Indigenous peoples traditionally lived. We helped one another. Our Nations were only as strong as our weakest members. Our tax systems were not compulsory, we helped those who needed help because we had more. I find the answer to everything is coming full circle and back to who we truly are. I feel as though this capitalist, patriarchal, individualist society is really showing its true colors amidst the people being pushed into new and uncomfortable comfort zones where we can hopefully, learn and grow together.

To live in a community and society where I feel safe and supported is the ultimate goal, despite being a single parent with the odds stacked against me. Having more people who are understanding can only benefit everybody and especially our children, versus being quick to judge and impose biases to look down on others. Out with the old mentality and make way for a new which puts our health before wealth. I know we are still not there yet, but I choose to be hopeful and that the power remains in the people. Due to the unpredictability we enter together maybe we can be more compassionate to one another.

I pray for a smooth transition for everyone and that all our babies stay safe.

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Government of Canada declares Indian Residential Schools of “national historic significance”

By EFN Staff
of Eagle Feather News

The Government of Canada has announced National Historic Site status for two former Indian Residential School locations and recognized the “national historic significance” of the residential school system.

The announcement was made September 3, five days after activists in Montreal decapitated a statue of John A. Macdonald, in part because of his role in the creation of Indian Residential Schools.

Recognizing the residential school system as “a tragic and defining event in Canadian history” and recognizing Portage La Prairie Indian Residential School in Manitoba and Shubenacadie Indian Residential School in Nova Scotia are part of the Government’s response to Call to Action 79 of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), according to news release issued Thursday.

Call 79 demanded national commemoration of residential school sites and the history and legacy of residential schools.

National Chief Perry Bellegarde of the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) said this announcement ensures the tragic history of residential schools and survivors will not be forgotten by future generations.

“I lift up and honour those we lost in the Indian Residential School System, the Survivors of these schools, and their families,” Bellegarde said.

“First Nations and all Canadians must know the truth about what happened in these institutions and why.”

Jonathan Wilkinson, Minister responsible for Parks Canada, said the country must acknowledge and understand its history in order to build a more equal and just country.

“This includes facing the difficult periods and actions that exist, including the wrongs perpetrated against Indigenous peoples, and the ongoing intergenerational trauma that has followed,” Wilkinson said.

Portage La Prairie and Shubenacadie schools were made national historic sites after communities nominated them to Parks Canada officials, according to the news release.

The Portage La Prairie school site is on Keeshkeemaquah Reserve, part of the reserve lands of Long Plain First Nation in Manitoba.

“This site will always represent a horrific past for Survivors and their families,” said Chief Dennis Meeches of Long Plain First Nation.

“Many Survivors and community members have since joined in the effort to preserve the building and their stories because this is also a story of resilience and a long journey towards healing,” Meeches said.

The former Shubenacadie Indian Residential School site is in the Sipekni’katik district of Mi’kma’ki overlooking the village of Shubenacadie, Nova Scotia.

Mi’kmaq and Wolastoqew children from Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, Quebec and possibly other Indigenous communities, attended the school.

“Between 1930-1967, over 1,000 Mi’kmaq and Wolastoqiyik students attended the Shubenacadie Indian Residential School, including my father and uncles,” said Tim Bernard, Co-chair of the nominating committee.

“This site will stand as a testament to the impact of the experiences of our Survivors, their families and communities, and will preserve a part of Canadian history that should never be forgotten,” Bernard said.

Parks Canada worked with the First Nations nominators to tell the stories of survivors and determine the historic values of the site, according to the news release. Parks Canada is working with Indigenous peoples to incorporate Indigenous views, histories, and heritage into national parks and historic sites.

The announcement by Parks Canada Minister Jonathan Wilkinson came just five days after a Montreal statue of Canada’s first Prime Minister was toppled by activists protesting police brutality and systemic racism.

Macdonald promoted residential schools despite abuses and deaths and imposed a head tax on Chinese people to discourage their immigration, but these facts are not included on the plaques that laud his accomplishments.

On Aug. 31, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau spoke against the protesters’ action, saying “those kind of acts of vandalism are not advancing the path towards greater justice and equality in this country,” but he also said Macdonald’s unacceptable words and actions should be acknowledged along with his contributions to Canada.

Carolyn Bennett, Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations said the announcement “comes at a time when people are standing up against systemic racism, injustice and violence.”

“The Residential School System is a tragedy born of colonial policies that harmed children, their families and their communities,” she said.

“This is a time for us all to determine what role we will play in promoting a better understanding of the past so that we can make the changes necessary to build a better future together,” Bennett said.



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Reconciliation Ally Barbara Pelletier

By Betty Ann Adam
for Eagle Feather News

Barabara Pelletier was in high school in Germany when she decided to come to Saskatchewan to help undo the harms Europeans had imposed through Indian Residential Schools.

Looking back, the Indigenous Student Achievement Coach at Yorkton Regional High School laughs at her younger self's naivete.

"I had no clue what I was getting into. Maybe had I known, maybe I wouldn't have done it, but I'm glad I did," she says.

Pelletier's first Indigenous contacts were powwow dancers who performed in Germany in 2001. That led her to do a school research project on colonialism and residential schools, back before most mainstream Canadians were aware of them.

"People like me came from Europe and, whether they knew it or not, brought so much hurt while looking for better lives for themselves. I couldn't shake that," she said.

While her sisters had asked for dishes when they graduated high school, Pelletier asked for suitcases, saved her summer job earnings and left for Yorkton.



There, her powwow contact introduced her to Karen Cote, who became her roommate. Cote took Pelletier to bingo where she met Cote's grandparents, Delbert and Mabel Whitehawk, her parents and some of her siblings.

"We had so much fun, we almost got kicked out because we laughed so much the other players couldn't hear the bingo caller."

It was the beginning of a deep friendship with the family. She visited them monthly, and was invited for Christmas, Easter and Thanksgiving.

"I loved them and they loved me and that was what I so needed at that time in my life, being young and away from home."

In Germany, she had never been close to her aunts and uncles, but among the Whitehawk family, she learned the value of extended family and kinship.

"That strong family togetherness was really eye-opening for me and really changed how I live my life," she said. She saw how they were relationship-focused and less worried about outward appearances.

"They just enjoy visiting, put on some tea and some toast and just visit and be with each other... That was a new experience for me.

"I have lots of visitors over. It's something I want to instill in my kids."

Delbert Whitehawk adopted Pelletier before he died in 2004. When he died, the two-bedroom house was crammed with people, together in their grief and for three days she was among the family, preparing for the burial and cooking and sitting together.

"That was a deep experience for me," she said.

From the time Pelletier arrived in Saskatchewan, she took an assortment of jobs from waitressing to picking corn, but a gig working at a faith-based drop-in centre had her working with youth, and one with a community organization that had her supporting young parents, set her on a path toward social work.

Along the way, she married Saul Pelletier of Key First Nation and they had two daughters, now nine and 11. The couple has split but she makes sure the girls have regular visits with their father's family.

She graduated in 2015 from the University of Regina with a Social Work degree.

She has always been drawn to working with youth.

"I really like getting to know people and hearing their stories and being able to work through those tough times in their lives. I just think that's a huge honour," she said.

As an Indigenous Student Achievement Coach, she counsels teens at the Entayan room (which means home in Saulteaux,) a classroom that functions as a drop in space with twice-weekly visits from Elders, food on hand, tutoring and friendly faces.

She advocates for students who feel misunderstood by their teachers and finds out what's behind absenteeism or too many missed assignments. Her history of work with Indigenous families and her own family connections, means some of the students have already known her for years.

"When they know I know their mom or their auntie or their grandma or my kids are related to them, it really makes for that trusting relationship," she said.

Some of the youth have said without the Entayan staff, whom they know and trust, they wouldn't be at school.

Pelletier's former colleague at Entayan, Jessica Kyle, says she is a positive presence for Indigenous students at the school.

"She's so compassionate and knowledgeable and kind. And I think students are drawn to that. She's always going to be genuine.

"She'll advocate, whether it's being that middle man between kid and administration or kid and home... It helps them to stay in our school and feel connected."

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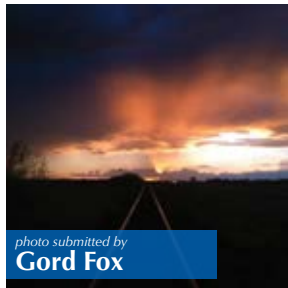


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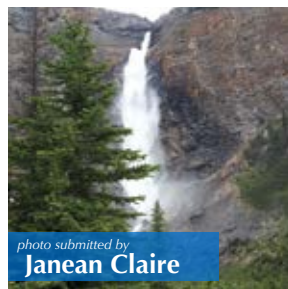


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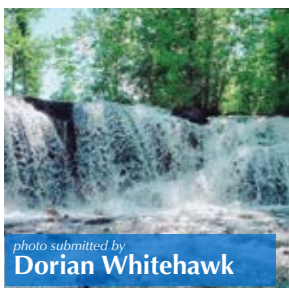


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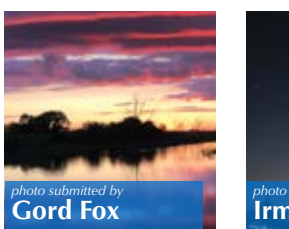


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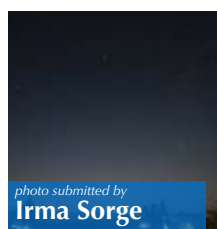


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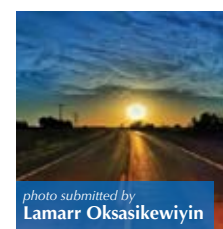


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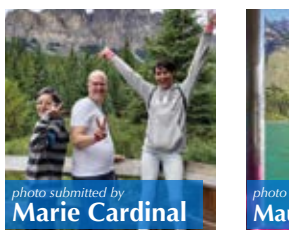


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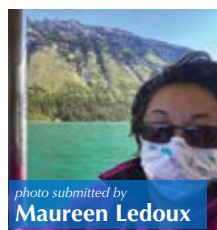


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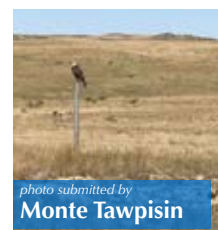


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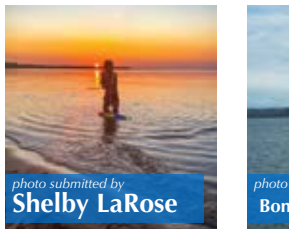


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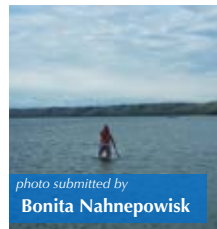


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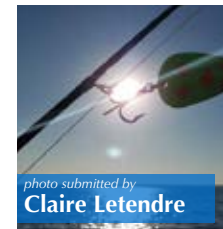


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