



NEWS RELEASE

Wednesday, June 20, 2007

Partnership strives to nurture potential of First Nations and Métis students

SASKATOON, June 20, 2007 – Leaders from Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools, Saskatoon Tribal Council Inc. (STC) and Central Urban Métis Foundation Inc. (CUMFI) today announced they will enter into a partnership that will see their organizations work together in several key areas to enhance the success of First Nations and Métis students.

The announcement was made during a ceremony at St. Frances School. In September 2007, St. Frances will become home to the *nêhiyawak* Cree Immersion Kindergarten program, which was created as a direct result of the organizations pledging to work more closely together. (Please see attached information sheet.)

“Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools has an increasing number of First Nations and Métis students in our schools,” said Jim Carriere, chair, Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools Board of Education. “We have long been committed to reaching out and working with these communities and this new partnership builds on that.

“Working together, bringing traditional knowledge and teachings into the classroom and making our schools positive places for First Nations and Métis children are all part of helping these students succeed,” he added.

The establishment of the Cree Immersion Kindergarten at St. Frances is especially exciting, he said, because it provides an opportunity for young aboriginal students to learn the Cree language and traditional ways in a faith-based, Catholic education program.

This integration of spirituality and self-awareness will become an integral part of the partnership, as indicated in the proposed mission statement: “With spirituality as our foundation, we support our communities by enabling them to grow in their understanding of the past, increasing their awareness of the present and by providing holistic opportunities for learning and growth in the future.”

... more

“Language is the foundation of culture and as such, language retention has been of primary concern to the First Nations members of the Saskatoon Tribal Council. The new Cree Immersion project, which we undertake in partnership with Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools, is one piece of a larger strategic direction described by the Saskatoon Tribal Council’s Education Unit,” said STC Tribal Chief Joe Quewezance.

“We are pleased to have the opportunity to work closely with Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools on this initiative. It demonstrates a clear understanding that language retention, First Nations culture and identity is the foundation for healthy, happy students. We hope that this will in turn result in higher academic achievement and the preparation of First Nations youth to make a significant impact and contribution to the province,” Quewezance said.

Representation from the Métis community will ensure the partnership authentically represents First Nations and Métis students, families and communities. “A partnership in education is a partnership for the future,” said Shirley Isbister, CUMFI president.

“The impact will be felt for generations and will offer an innovative and creative way of providing education to our aboriginal people. It will also provide the opportunity to remove barriers as more non-aboriginal people learn about Métis and First Nations culture and history.”

The work of the partnership during the upcoming school year will be supported by a \$220,000 grant from Saskatchewan Learning. One of the next steps is hiring of a full-time partnership coordinator to help develop and guide upcoming initiatives from the partners.

“The Government of Saskatchewan believes in strong partnerships with First Nations and Métis peoples in education planning and decision making at all levels of the education system. Working in close partnership with First Nations and Métis peoples leads to a seamless education that provides young people with learning opportunities that reflect and respond to their unique cultures, needs and aspirations,” Learning Minister Deb Higgins said.

“It is through the efforts of such partnerships that make Saskatchewan a better place for young people to live, work and build strong futures.”

- 30 -

For further information, please contact:

Donella Hoffman
Communications Consultant
Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools
659.7077 – office
229.3743 – cell