

MEDIA RELEASE

Tuesday, June 28, 2016

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**MATAWA FIRST NATIONS AND MATAWA LEARNING CENTRE WELCOME
JURY VERDICT IN INQUEST INTO THE DEATH OF SEVEN NAN YOUTH**

THUNDER BAY, ON: Matawa First Nations and Matawa Learning Centre (MLC) today welcomed the Jury's verdict in the Inquest into the death of seven Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) youth.

In January 2016, the MLC was called to testify as Jordan Wabasse was a student at the MLC when he went missing in February of 2011. All of the other subjects of the Inquest were students at Dennis Franklin Cromarty High School. MLC was not an official party to the Inquest when it began on October 5, 2015 but was granted fully party standing after applying in January 2016.

During the February to April 2016 phase of the Inquest, Matawa Education Manager Sharon Nate and MLC Principal Brad Battiston gave testimony regarding the business of the Matawa First Nations Management, when and why the MLC was created along with the challenges that Matawa community schools face. In addition, testimony was given on the students who typically attend the MLC and the types of supports MLC and its students require. By the conclusion of the Inquest, the Jury had heard from over 145 witnesses and seen over 185 exhibits.

MLC collaborated with the other parties involved in the Inquest in providing a joint slate of recommendations for final submissions. They also provided independent recommendations for MLC and Matawa communities.

QUOTES

“Regarding the recommendations delivered by the Jury today, I am hoping that our youth will have better opportunities in education whether it be in an urban centre or in their own First Nation. The way in which our youth are being educated needs to be addressed and I am hoping that the Jury's recommendations today will provide a clear path that will result in outcomes that will be felt right away.”

— *Chief Cornelius Wabasse, Webequie First Nation*

“With the type of support the Jury has shown for the recommendations that the Matawa Learning Centre made jointly with other parties, Nibinamik First Nation is hopeful that the federal government will quickly follow through on implementing them so that our youth can receive the same quality of education as any other youth in Canada.”

— *Chief Johnny Yellowhead, Nibinamik First Nation*

“As the verdict is delivered today, I draw attention to the 1999 *Selena Sakanee Inquest* and the 2013 *Bruce Moonias Inquest* in my community of Neskantaga First Nation and how the recommendations from the Juries in those Inquests did not produce the needed action on the ground. In order to honour the seven youth in this Inquest, action on the recommendations in this Jury’s verdict is needed immediately.”

— *Chief Wayne Moonias, Neskantaga First Nation*

“On this day, we are thinking of the families involved in the Inquest. We are behind and support them in every way. The experience of losing a child is one of the hardest things for a family to endure and this is why having the Inquest was necessary—so that they can have answers and some form of closure.”

— *Chief Dorothy Towedo, Aroland First Nation*

“To the students who may have attended high school with any of the seven youth named in this Inquest—we acknowledge you today. We hope that the outcome of this Inquest will ensure the safety and wellbeing of all First Nation students seeking education in Thunder Bay. As First Nation leaders, we provide our assurance that we will continue to demand the fulsome investigation into the harm or death of any of our youth.”

— *Chief Celia Echum, Ginoogaming First Nation*

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For more information, please contact Carol Audet, Communications Officer – Matawa First Nations at (807) 632-9663 or by email at caudet@matawa.on.ca.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Matawa First Nations Management is a Tribal Council providing a variety of advisory services and programs to 8 Ojibway and Cree First Nations in James Bay Treaty No. 9 and 1 First Nation in the Robinson Superior Treaty. The Matawa Education Department is one of the advisory services and programs. It provides quality, accessible community-based educational support services to seven Matawa First Nation schools including Aroland, Eabametoong, Nibinamik, Long Lake #58, Ginoogaming, Neskantaga and Webequie. The Matawa Education Department operates the Matawa Learning Centre.

Matawa Learning Centre (MLC) is a private First Nations High School in the city of Thunder Bay serving the students of the five (5) remote Matawa communities of Neskantaga, Webequie, Marten Falls, Nibinamik and Eabametoong. The services they provide their students include: academic counselling and support; career guidance; post-secondary services; specialized course and program selections. MLC involves teachers, students, parents and community partners in developing programs and courses that reflect the needs of both students and the Matawa First Nation communities while encouraging each student to develop self-reliance, initiative, resourcefulness, creativity, and responsibility. The learning environment supports self-motivated students who are encouraged to plan and follow their individual learning pathways while supporting reflective, self-directed, lifelong learners. The MLC has been in operation since 2010.

