

MEDIA RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MATAWA LEARNING CENTRE PROVIDES 1st ANNUAL REPORT ON FOLLOW-UP TO JURY RECOMMENDATIONS IN INQUEST INTO THE DEATH OF SEVEN FIRST NATIONS YOUTH

THUNDER BAY, ON: Pursuant to the Office of the Chief Coroner’s recommendations for annual reporting on follow-up, the Matawa Learning Centre (MLC) today released their report entitled [‘MLC 1st Annual Report on Follow-Up to Jury Recommendations from the Inquest into the Deaths of Seven First Nations Youth.’](#)

MLC has designed a program to better meet the mental health, cultural, special education, recreational needs and Treaty, and human rights of the students. It was designed was based on engagement with students, parents, leadership, communities, service providers. Over the past year, MLC has been active in meetings and discussions based on the Jury Recommendations resulting from the First Nations Youth Inquest.

The annual report highlights that MLC wishes to be in a position to implement twenty-three (23) of the twenty-four (24) recommendations (or a somewhat revised version of the recommendations) that were directed to MLC. The annual report also confirms that MLC has taken or is taking all of the steps that it can to implement those twenty-three (23) recommendations and has implemented or is in the process of implementing sixteen (16) of the twenty-three (23) recommendations. Perhaps most importantly, the annual report highlights that in the absence of significant, additional resources from Canada, MLC cannot fully implement ten (10) of the twenty-three (23) recommendations. Discussions with Canada are ongoing and MLC hopes to be in a position to report in its 2nd annual report that significant, additional resources have been and will continue to be forthcoming from Canada so that all twenty-three (23) recommendations have been achieved or will be achieved.

“Overall, our 1st annual report to the inquest recommendations draws attention to the need for immediate, short-term and long-term funding for the Matawa Learning Centre,” said Matawa First Nations Management CEO David Paul Achneepineskum. “Having found that the Matawa Learning Centre’s progress towards implementing the jury’s recommendations has been slow and marked by findings of being unresolved due to lack of resources—we are left with the conclusion that more work needs to be done to improve the safety and academic success of Indigenous youth attending high school in Thunder Bay from the Matawa communities.”

“As one of five (1 of 5) First Nations in Matawa without a high school in my community—Neskantaga First Nation entrusts the education of our youth to the Matawa Learning Centre. They know what Indigenous youth need to succeed in high school and they approach education in a different way and, at a closer level, by supporting families and the community in which a young

person is from. This is what the parties at the table, including both levels of government, needs to support in order to prevent similar deaths of Indigenous youth in the future,” said Chief Wayne Moonias of Neskantaga First Nation.

“It is my hope and dream that Canada and Ontario will soon be announcing investments in our students to ensure their education, health, well-being and safety,” said Sharon Nate, Matawa Education department manager.

MLC will meet tomorrow to discuss the 1st annual report, and other matters, with the joint Political Table which brings all parties of the inquest together for high level discussions.

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For more information, please contact Carol Audet, Communications Manager – 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) has been in operation since 2010. It 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 First Nations. Services provided 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.

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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 granted full party standing after applying in January 2016 to participate in the inquest.

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.

