

MEDIA RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MATAWA FIRST NATIONS WELCOME \$5.6M IN FEDERAL AND PROVINCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS TO IMPROVE COVID-19 RESILIENCE IN COMMUNITY SCHOOLS AND TO SUPPORT THE MATAWA EDUCATION AND CARE CENTRE GYMNASIUM UPGRADE PROJECT

THUNDER BAY, ON: Matawa First Nations welcomed federal and provincial community infrastructure investments including support for the Matawa Education and Care Centre (MECC) gymnasium upgrade project as announced today by the Honourable Patty Hajdu, Canada’s Minister of Health, on behalf of the Honourable Catherine McKenna, Minister of Infrastructure and Communities and the Honourable Ross Romano, Ontario’s Minister of Government and Consumer Services and Member of Provincial Parliament for Sault Ste. Marie, on behalf of the Honourable Kinga Surma, Ontario’s Minister of Infrastructure.

Out of the 35 community infrastructure projects announced today for Northern Ontario overall—10 of them were for schools in the Matawa First Nations member communities and for the MECC in Thunder Bay. Total investments of \$5,616,336 for Matawa students were announced as follows:

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| \$161,000 in federal and \$40,250 in provincial investments for a new portable classroom in Eabametoong First Nation |
| \$161,000 in federal and \$40,250 in provincial investments for a new portable classroom in Webequie First Nation |
| \$161,000 in federal and \$40,250 in provincial investments for a new portable classroom in Marten Falls First Nation |
| \$161,000 in federal and \$40,250 in provincial investments for a new portable classroom in Long Lake #58 First Nation |
| \$161,000 in federal and \$40,250 in provincial investments for a new portable classroom in Neskantaga First Nation |
| \$161,000 in federal and \$40,250 in provincial investments for a new portable classroom in Nibinamik First Nation |
| \$161,000 in federal and \$40,250 in provincial investments for a new portable classroom in Aroland First Nation |
| \$161,000 in federal and \$40,250 in provincial investments for retrofits to the school in Constance Lake First Nation |
| \$160,294 in federal and \$40,074 in provincial investments for retrofits and upgrades for the school in Ginoogaming First Nation |
| \$3,044,775 in federal and \$761,193 in provincial investments for the MECC gymnasium upgrade project |

The investments came through the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Plan and COVID-19 Resilience Infrastructure Stream and came as the world entered into its third wave of the pandemic and after schools in Matawa were experiencing significant challenges with meeting public health recommendations for schools since it began. Construction on projects will start in the near future as funding agreements are put in place.

The Matawa First Nations have been advocating for over a year to make schools safer [expressing concerns about the lack of supplemental funding](#). In July of 2020, a comprehensive Matawa Emergency COVID-19 Education Response Plan was developed with Education Authorities in the Matawa region. On July 23, 2020, [they completed a costing for 2020/2021 estimating that \\$25,025,927.17 was required for all educational facilities for the 2020/2021 academic year starting in September 2020.](#)

The investments made today will help to meet public health recommendations for physical spaces and distancing, providing a safer environment for the students of Matawa First Nations’ schools. During the pandemic, these schools experienced additional classroom space pressures due to the high school students returning from the urban centres when schools they attended were closed to in-person learning due to a climb in COVID-19 numbers.

For students attending the MECC, the funding for an upgraded gymnasium will address recommendations in terms of physical distancing contained within Ontario Ministry of Education COVID-19 guidelines.

QUOTES

“The upgrade of the Matawa Education and Care Centre gymnasium has been a dream for our students since September 2017—the Matawa First Nations Education Authority have the plans in place and are anxious to get it started. It will be dedicated space for health and physical education programming that will reduce the potential for exposure to COVID-19 without the need to use another organization’s gymnasium facility. With respect to our nine (9) Matawa communities who will receive the benefit of these investments—we are thankful for the backing of the federal and provincial governments of our Emergency Education Response Plan, and we look forward to additional investments in support of that plan as we strive to provide a safe space for our students to learn.”

– *President Robinson Meshake, Matawa First Nations Management Board of Directors*

— 30 —

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