

January 20, 2021

Committee Chair
Standing Policy Committee on Planning, Development & Community Services
City of Saskatoon
(Via Email) City.Clerks@Saskatoon.ca

Dear Committee Chair and Committee Members:

RE: St. Frances Cree Bilingual School Capital Project Request

St. Frances Cree Bilingual School (St. Frances) began as a partnership initiative with Saskatoon Tribal Council in 2006 and began delivering Indigenous language and cultural programming in the fall of 2007. Since its inception, enrolment has increased from less than 150 students to over 640 registered students, including those in childcare through Grade 9. The program's resounding success has led to facility and space challenges, which in turn inhibits our ability to expand or enhance programming. In response to these challenges, Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools temporarily relocated Grades 6 to 9 to the former St. Patrick School on Bateman Crescent in Saskatoon. Since then, the community expressed a need to be united at a single location in order to focus their efforts on providing an environment that values Indigenous language and cultural learning through Indigenous design, community access, collaborative spaces, and partnerships. The Government of Saskatchewan approved a new school replacement for St. Frances as part of the 2020 provincial budget. The new school will be built on the existing Sion School site at 2010 7th Street East.

The St. Frances Program Plan identified unique program attributes in the areas of language and culture, as well as the learning program and community participation. Since its inception over 13 years ago, St. Frances Cree Bilingual School has been built on partnerships and community engagement. One of the distinct aspects of the Program Plan is a design that fosters physical activity development and functional fitness. Throughout the consultation process, recommendations have come forward to include physical-activity spaces that benefit both students and the broader community. Below are key recommendations:

- The gymnasium space be constructed for functional and high-performance training and community use.
- The outdoor and playground space should be vast, modern, and designed using models that encourage creative play, reduced bullying, safety, and ease of supervision.
- The incorporation of spaces for family fitness activities and community use, such as a workout and fitness space that is free and available outside of school hours.

Many current St. Frances students face socioeconomic challenges. The school community is comprised largely of First Nations or Métis students from lower-income households who may experience financial and access barriers to health and wellness, recreation, or educational services. The students and their families would benefit enormously from the expanded learning programs, greenspace and play space, and enhanced partner programs envisioned for the school.

Students from 58 neighbourhoods within Saskatoon and four surrounding towns actively choose the Cree programming available at St. Frances. Residents in the Exhibition, Queen Elizabeth and Pleasant Hill neighbourhoods account for the greatest number of students, compared to other Saskatoon neighbourhoods. The city-wide busing system enables and stabilizes its relatively mobile student base as members of its community and ultimately connects Indigenous students throughout the Greater Saskatoon area with their culture, thus creating broader relationships and opportunity.

In September 2020, Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools' senior administrators had the opportunity to share schematic designs of the new school and program plans with the Holliston Community Association. Councillor Cynthia Block was present during this meeting and shared interest in bringing this opportunity forward to City Council. Now that the municipal elections are complete and the new St. Frances facility is moving into detailed design, we ask that a partnership between Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools and the City of Saskatoon be formalized to support the actualization of spaces dedicated to fostering physical activity and functional fitness for both the St. Frances Cree Bilingual community as well as residents of Saskatoon, specifically those from the Holliston Community.

As our many planning groups continue their work designing this school, a timely confirmation of any capital commitment would be very much appreciated.

On behalf of Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools,



Diane Boyko, Board of Education Chair
Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools

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ohsītatān - let us build it

Renewing First Nations language and culture



St. Frances
Cree Bilingual School



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About Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools



We are Saskatchewan's largest Catholic school division, providing Catholic education from pre-kindergarten through Grade 12 in Saskatoon and area, Biggar, Humboldt, Martensville and Warman.



50 schools

19,755 students



almost **2,000** staff



3,437

First Nations, Métis and Inuit students.



17% of our students are First Nations, Métis and Inuit.

Our Mission

Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools: a welcoming community where we nurture faith, encourage excellence in learning and inspire students to serve others, making the world a better place.

*We love because He first loved us.
John 4:19*

Vision

At Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools we are:

Rooted in faith.

Growing in knowledge.

Reaching out to transform the world.



Reconciliation requires sustained public education and dialogue, including youth engagement, about the history and legacy of residential schools, Treaties, and Aboriginal rights, as well as the historical and contemporary contributions of Aboriginal peoples to Canadian society.

TRC Report



itahpacikēwin (vision)



Our vision for Cree language programming at St. Frances School began in 2007 for students in kindergarten through Grade 3. Established through a partnership with the Saskatoon Tribal Council, the vision for the city-wide program incorporated Indigenous knowledge and teaching methodology.

Slow, steady growth was part of the plan, adding one grade per year as those original Gr. 3 students progressed to Gr. 8.

Growth was steady. But it wasn't slow. Within 11 years, student enrolment had grown from 40 to 600. Students from over 50 Saskatoon neighbourhoods and surrounding rural areas attend St. Frances. The school quickly became a significant location for Cree culture and language revitalization in Canada and is now the largest Indigenous-language school in the nation.

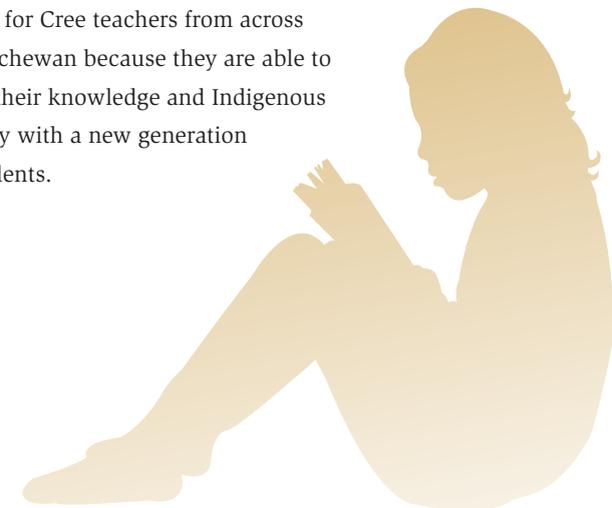
Twelve years later, St. Frances Cree Bilingual School is an award winning Cree language school with a student population that far exceeds the physical limitations of the school facility.

Reclaiming Indigenous culture and language

In addition to treaty education—that's taught in all of our schools—and Cree language instruction, students and families at St. Frances Cree Bilingual School support Cree culture and heritage programming at the school. The school's Young Wolves drum group, traditional flute players powwow dance troupe and annual powwows have been integral in helping students embrace traditional aspects of their Indigenous heritage. Elders and teachers support the implementation of traditional Cree ceremonial practices throughout the school day.

This focus on language and culture increases student interest and engagement in learning, which in turn bears fruit for student learning. Reading, writing and math outcomes have grown steadily, and we know integration of culture and language will continue to help us narrow the learning gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous learners. Cree bilingual students have the highest Gr. 9 retention rate among First Nations and Métis students in our school division, which is a good start to higher graduation rates.

St. Frances has also become a school of choice for Cree teachers from across Saskatchewan because they are able to share their knowledge and Indigenous identity with a new generation of students.





wīatoskēmitowin (working with each other)

From the beginning, partnerships have been an integral part of the educational model at St. Frances Cree Bilingual School. Saskatoon Tribal Council (STC) has walked with us from the beginning.



The māmawohkamātowin Partnership has enabled us to grow in understanding together, increase our collective awareness of present educational needs for Indigenous students, and open doors for future growth. STC also has a 75-seat daycare on site.

In 2017, we established a Professional Development School with the Indian Teacher Education Program (ITEP) at the University of Saskatchewan's College of Education. This unique model solidified an existing partnership that allows teacher candidates to spend more

time at the school to gain valuable experience, while giving them the opportunity to share new and innovative ways of teaching with school staff.

Other key partnerships include:

University of Saskatchewan College of Nursing: facilitating opportunities for fourth-year nursing students to spend four months in the school, delivering health promotion programming, vision, hearing and dental health screening, and community health assessments.

University of Saskatchewan College of Dentistry: provides oral health screening and treatment in collaboration with the College of Nursing students.

Sask Sport Dream Brokers: Sask Sport provides one full-time support person, called a Dream Broker, to increase access for children and families to sport and culture programming that would otherwise not be available to them because of cost barriers.



...we must learn to practice reconciliation in our everyday lives—within ourselves and our families, and in our... schools, and workplaces.

TRC Report



Marcella Ogenchuk

*RN, PhD , Associate Professor,
University of Saskatchewan College of Nursing*



We need to rethink access to health.

Being able to provide health services right in the school works because that model is built on a relationship of trust.

The nursing students, school professionals and families are all learning together, which will make a difference for these students and future generations.





kaskihowin (success)

By all accounts, we are
extraordinarily pleased with
success and support of
St. Frances Cree Bilingual School.

Well, all but one: space.



The physical limitations of the 1950s-era school have become a barrier to growth and student success. School grounds can no longer accommodate portable classrooms (which outnumber classrooms in the permanent structure).

Playground space is so crowded students need

to walk to a nearby city park/playground. We can't fit all of our students in the gym for an assembly. Washrooms are inadequate. And space for those valuable partnerships we mentioned is almost non-existent.

We're proud of the innovative ways teachers and staff work around this glaring constraint: coordinating gym and playground use for

physical activities is a juggling act; custodial rooms have become consultation rooms, and hallways have become break-out areas.

In the fall of 2018, a contingency plan was implemented to temporarily relocate Grades 6 – 8 to a different school campus. In 2019, Grade 9 was added to this second site.



Jayce Sutherland, parent.

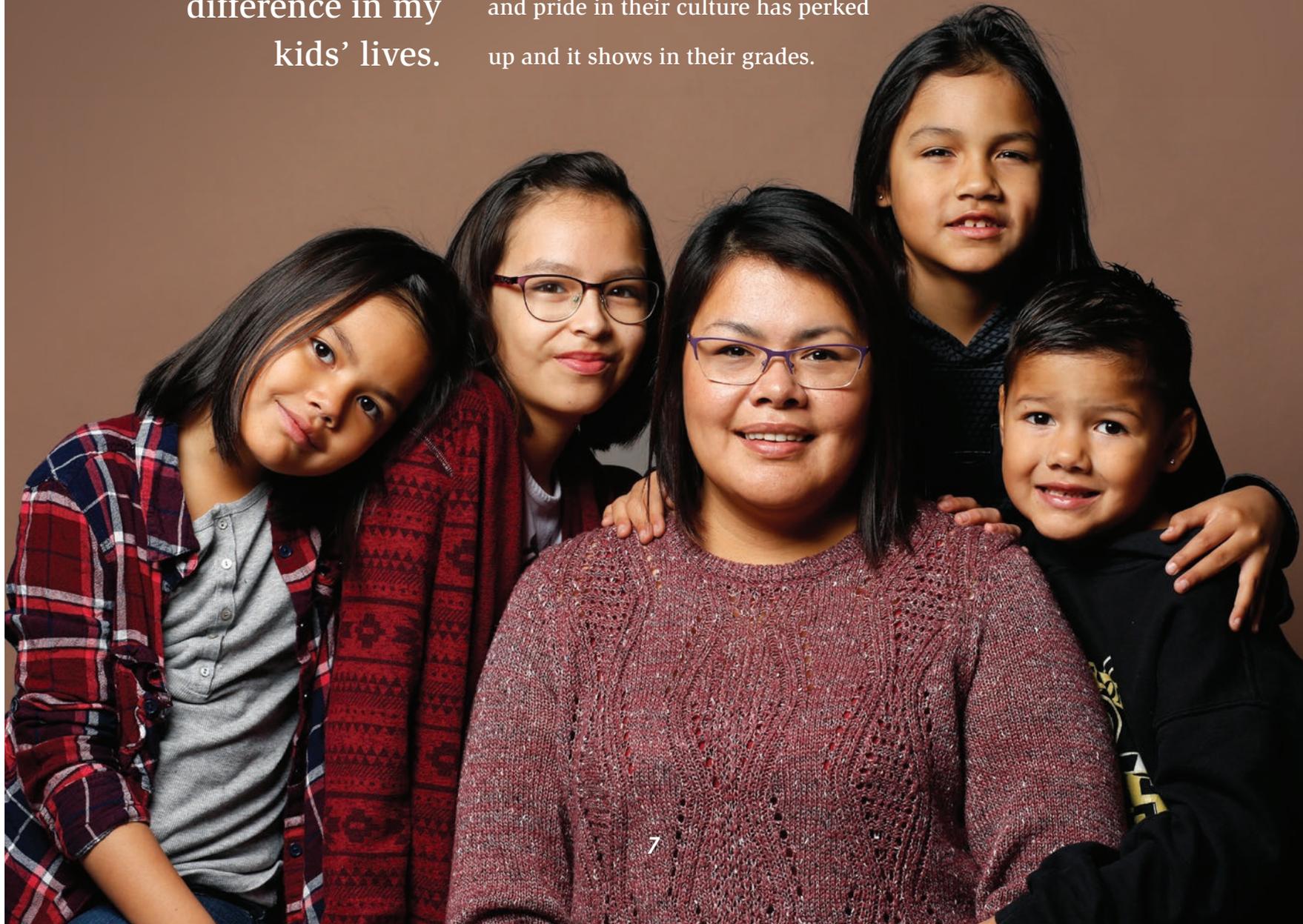
“ An education with our culture and language has made a real difference in my kids’ lives.

One is growing his hair for a warrior braid, one is picking up on beading, one is constantly singing in Cree, and one comes home in “teacher mode” to teach others— including me. Their overall interest in school and pride in their culture has perked up and it shows in their grades.



We must commit to building student capacity for intercultural understanding , empathy and mutual respect.”

Paraphrased from Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action,





kīsihtawin (finishing it)

We can see the light at end of the tunnel. In March of 2019, funding to engage in consultations for a new St. Frances Cree Bilingual School was approved by the Government of Saskatchewan.



Years of community consultations, lobbying efforts of a very committed parent group, and hard work from the Board of Education and division administration is paying off. With capital finding expected to come in March 2020, we want to hit the ground running with plans in place.

Your role is crucial

The reality of a new school facility is an

opportunity to actualize many things that we have envisioned for years (and confirmed through those comprehensive consultations). As thankful as we are for getting provincial funding, capital funding from the province covers what is considered core aspects of a school. Parts of a Cree bilingual-cultural school that we consider essential are not funded. We think students in a world-class educational program deserve a world-class facility.



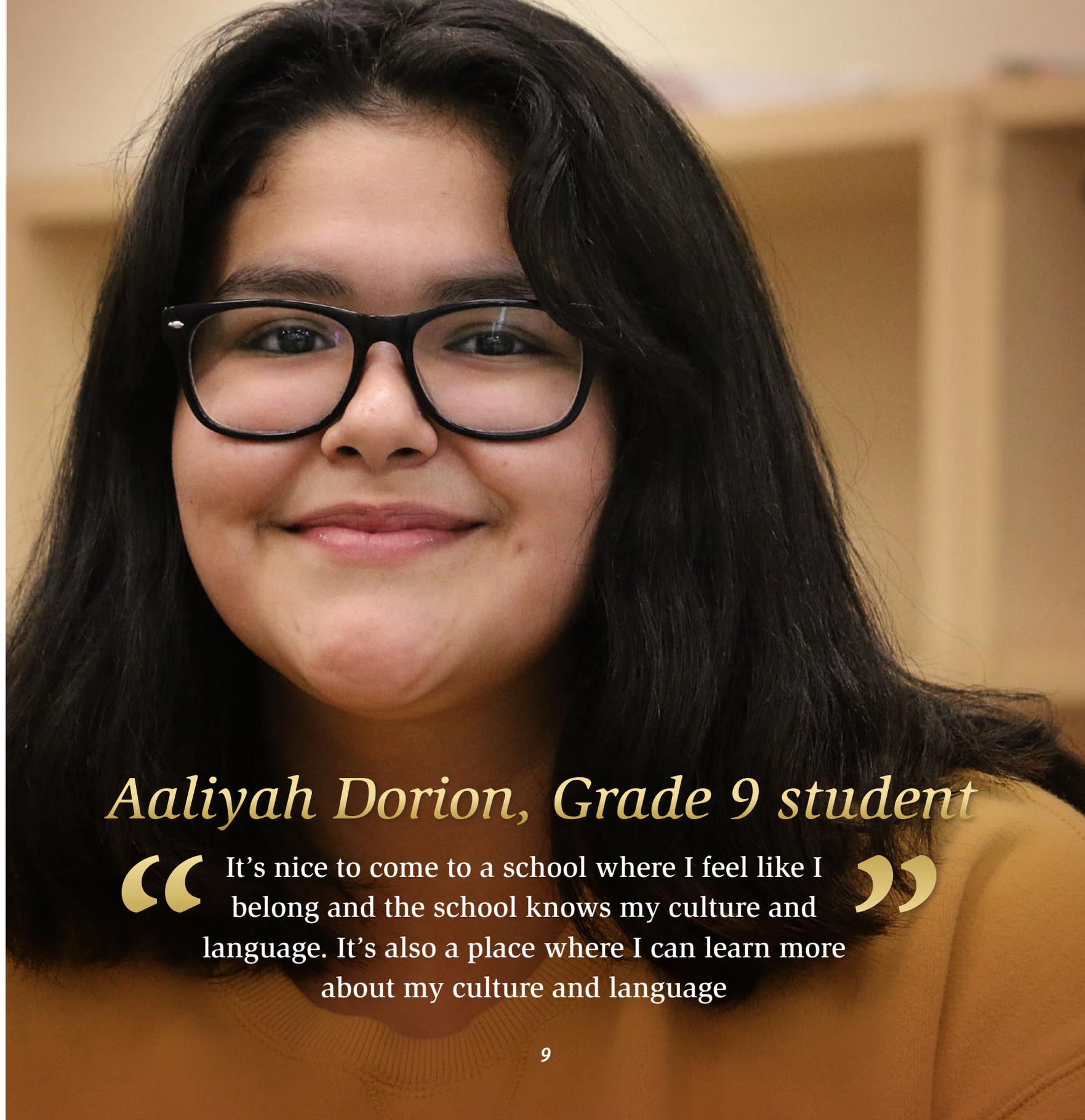


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Aboriginal languages are a fundamental and valued element of Canadian culture and society, and there is urgency to preserve them.

TRC Calls to Action 14 i

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Aaliyah Dorion, Grade 9 student

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It's nice to come to a school where I feel like I belong and the school knows my culture and language. It's also a place where I can learn more about my culture and language

”



That's where you can help. Please consider being a partner in education and support one of the following key areas.

sihtoskātētān (let's support it)



Cultural spaces

Space for students and staff to conduct ceremony are vital. Culturally appropriate ways for Indigenous students and staff to lead and participate in traditional First Nations ceremonies is important for their connection to Cree language learning. Ceremonies must take place within specially designed spaces, and require unique facility considerations such as ventilation for smudging ceremonies and cultural gatherings.

Partnerships

We owe much of the success of St. Frances Cree Bilingual School to our partners, and providing adequate space for them to enrich those partnerships is an important part of the future of the school. For example, space for teacher candidates from ITEP and other visiting partners is important for us to realize the potential of the Professional Development School model. Designated workspace is needed for proper interaction with students and staff.

Health consultations and screening

Something as simple as the lack of transportation to go to the doctor is a significant barrier for many students and families. Students from the Colleges of Nursing, Medicine and Dentistry need space to offer on-site health consultations with students. There is even potential to adopt the pediatric-health model successfully integrated at St. Mary's Wellness and Education Centre.

Playground equipment and design

School communities are responsible to fund-raise for playground equipment—even for new schools. The socio-economic reality of many Indigenous families would make fundraising a barrier. Outdoor play space is an unfunded necessity, not a luxury.

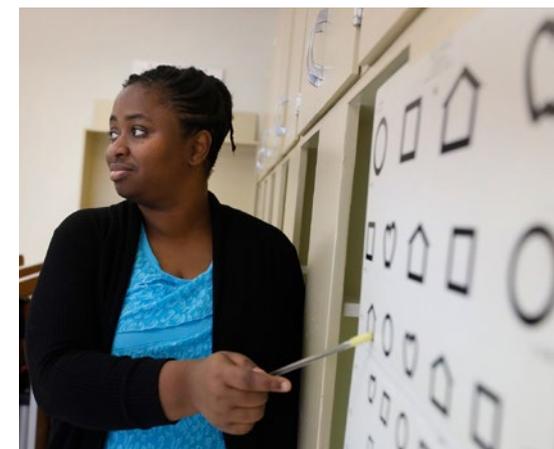
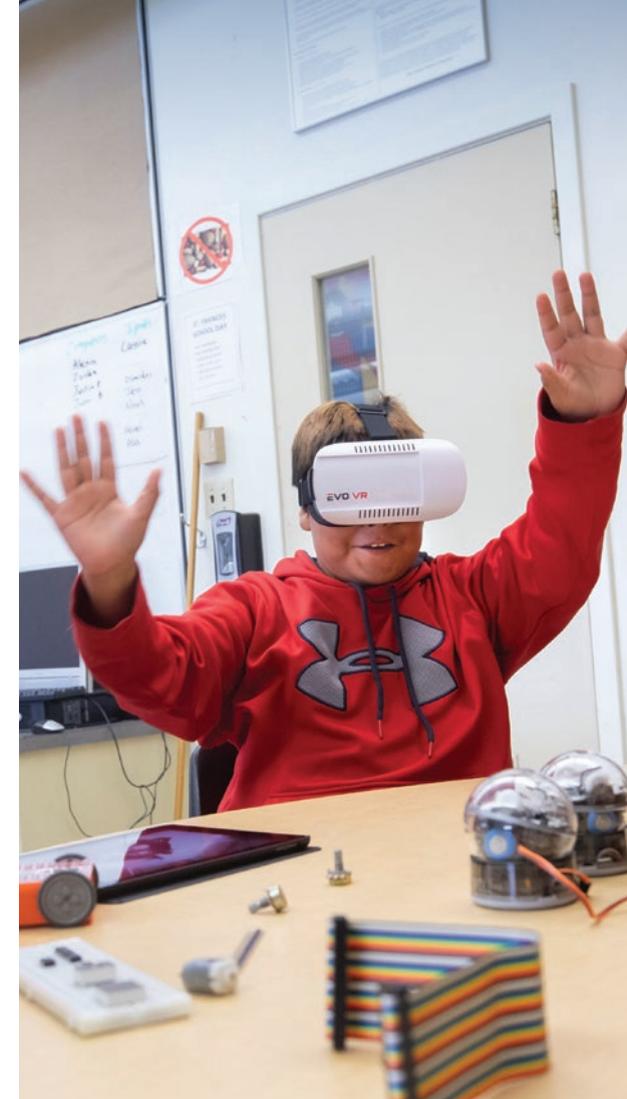
Picking up STEAM

Programming with a focus on Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Math will help equip students for future success in post-secondary school or in the workforce. It also requires additional investment in dedicated space, and specialized technology and equipment.

Other areas available

Do you see another area that is a good fit for you and your organization? We have a variety of recognition options that we are happy to discuss.

Contributions will be managed through Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools Foundation Inc.





kiskēyimisowin
(knowing oneself)

*Faith Bugler,
kindergarten teacher*

“ St. Frances Cree Bilingual School is important because reclaiming our identity is key to future success of our First Nations children. We need to know who we are before we know where we are going. ”



St. Frances
Cree Bilingual School



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