



MEDIA RELEASE

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Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools and Partners Receive Premier's Award

REGINA – Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools, the Saskatoon Tribal Council and the College of Education Indian Teacher Education Program at the University of Saskatchewan have received the 2017 Premier's Board of Education Award for their joint submission of "*ni ahkwatonâmonân: An Indigenous Language Pathway to Improved Student Learning Outcomes at St. Frances Cree Bilingual School.*"

The Saskatchewan School Boards Association (SSBA) co-ordinates the Premier's Award each year. The award was presented on behalf of Premier Brad Wall during the SSBA Annual General Assembly on Monday night.

"I want to congratulate the partners for winning this year's award," Saskatoon Churchill-Wildwood MLA Lisa Lambert said on behalf of Premier Wall. "This award honours the great work they are doing at St. Frances Cree Bilingual School, expanding opportunities for our First Nations and Métis students to improve their learning."

In their application for the award, the partners said the St. Frances Cree Bilingual Program provides the foundation for students to achieve their full potential and offers an incubation site for innovations in Indigenizing the curriculum and improving First Nations and Métis student learning outcomes.

"We are both honoured and humbled to receive this award for the Cree bilingual program at St. Frances," said Diane Boyko, Board of Education Chair at Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools. "When we started this journey with our partners years ago, it was a bit of a risk. We were optimistic about its success, but there were a lot of unknowns about how a Cree language program would be received in the medium- to long-term. Ten years later, we have a thriving school community, and the school is bursting at the seams."

Boyko said the board is very thankful to have great partners in education and noted that it is very gratifying for a program that embraces Indigenous language, culture, identity and community to be recognized. But even more rewarding is the fact that the innovative programs and supports have resulted in marked improvement in student outcomes, she added.

"The St. Frances Professional Development School (PDS) project is designed to achieve the common benefits of the PDS model, including targeted teacher learning and high student achievement; but it also achieves more," said Michelle Prytula, Dean, College of Education. "Through its focus on Indigenous student identity and Indigenous language and culture, it sets the bar for teaching and learning models province-wide."

"One of the TRC calls to action mentions that Aboriginal languages are a fundamental and valued element of Canadian culture and society, and there is an urgency to preserve them," said Tribal Chief Mark Arcand, Saskatoon Tribal Council. "This award demonstrates what incorporating our identity and language can do for a school in the city of Saskatoon where the Indigenous population is steadily increasing."

The \$3,000 award is sponsored by Xerox Canada. The award recipient is recommended by a panel that includes representation from education sector partners.

“The importance of embedding Indigenous language and culture into the curriculum in Saskatchewan has certainly been internalized by St. Frances’ Cree Bilingual Program,” said Damien Johnston, VP Western Canadian Operations, Xerox Canada. “Their unique approach has helped to integrate the language, history and culture of First Nations/Métis communities, with tools and programs designed to support this innovative approach. The results speak for themselves with increases in attendance and improved performance, not to mention an enhanced sense of belonging for students. We are proud to be associated with St. Frances, congratulations from Xerox on your award!”

Developed in 1999, the Premier’s Award recognizes educational innovations and improvements focused on student achievement that have been advanced or directed by boards of education. The prize is to be used to support or extend the innovation or project.

“The Premier’s Award shines a spotlight on great work being done by boards of education throughout the province,” said SSBA President Dr. Shawn Davidson. “Although there is only one recipient of the award, each submission is worthy of recognition for advancing the goal of improved outcomes for all students.”

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