

MEDIA RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MATAWA FIRST NATIONS COMPLETE COSTING FOR 2020/2021 SUPPLEMENTARY FUNDING TO MAKE SCHOOLS SAFE IN THE COVID-19 GLOBAL PANDEMIC

Thunder Bay, ON- Further to a July 1, 2020 [announcement](#) sounding the alarm on the lack of 2020/2021 supplementary funding to make schools on First Nations safe in the COVID-19 global pandemic—Chiefs of the Matawa Chiefs Council (MCC) have accepted a comprehensive *Matawa Emergency COVID-19 Education Response Plan* that was developed by the Matawa Education Department with First Nations schools/Education Authorities in the Matawa Tribal Council.

The plan includes costing to address areas of need for the safe and appropriate resumption of studies for students of all 9 Matawa First Nations and including the [Matawa Education and Care Centre](#). **It estimates that \$25,035,927.17 in supplemental funding is required for all educational facilities for the 2020/2021 academic year starting in September 2020.**

The overall estimate was broken down based on the individual needs for each school respectively. As it is a matter that involves the protection of lives of students, school staff, and the entire community—the MCC directed that the plan be developed to reflect costs as precisely as possible.

The issue of students' safe return to school on First Nations has received growing attention as, to date, it has not been of a part of government economic response plans related to the COVID-19 global pandemic. Raised initially by Nishnawbe-Aski Nation, it was recently raised again by them on a broader scope at a COVID-19 Trilateral Table involving various departments of both federal and provincial governments. It has also been raised by the Ontario New Democratic Party both in parliament and through written correspondence to Ontario ministries. While governments consider their response to support First Nations' return to school—the MCC is providing their individualized plan on how that can be best achieved.

The detailed *Matawa Emergency COVID-19 Education Response Plan* includes itemized costing for the unique needs of Matawa schools that include (but are not limited to):

- Upgrading schools and staffing to meet new health and safety guidelines associated with COVID-19
- Increasing broadband connectivity (where required) to prepare schools for remote education (including consideration for low-income families unable to afford internet access and/or student learning devices)
- Providing appropriate mental health support to ensure a return to a safe and welcoming environment that supports learning
- Increased land-based learning
- Increased student transportation
- PPE supplies
- Student resources for additional home-based curriculum and learning materials
- Equipping schools with technological tools to provide instruction and professional development on use of technology
- Professional development on effective use of technology-based resources, managing students learning remotely, the 'Flipped Classroom Approach', cross-curricular planning, etc.

- Teacher equipment and resources that offer at home and synchronous learning opportunities to students as a regular part of their remote learning plan

The plan will be forwarded to governments shortly. Decisions on school operations in Matawa First Nations and the Matawa Education & Care Centre this coming September 2020 will be guided partially by the response of governments which the MCC hopes will be viewed as a priority given that September is a month and a half away. The MCC, the Matawa Education Department and the Education Authorities in Matawa are not prepared to settle for anything less than what is required to ensure their students are safe and are hopeful that the due diligence they undertook in providing a detailed costing plan will be fully supported.

In 2004, the federal government was called upon by the Auditor General in a report to “immediately develop and implement a comprehensive strategy and action plan, with targets, to close the education gap.” To date, no strategy to close the gap has been implemented. In 2016, the Verdict of the Coroner’s Jury in the *Seven Youth Inquest* called upon Canada to “provide additional funding to meet a host of educational needs including, but not limited to: new or renovated infrastructure to meet the demands of overcrowding, teacher retention, healthy learning environments, and internet bandwidth to support full access to all available online learning for all learners.” Both recommendations have not been fully implemented and the MCC are saying an opportunity is not only available for Canada to act now but for the Ontario government to play a larger role in ensuring the safety of children in First Nations schools in the province. As indicated on July 1, the MCC are calling for safe-schools-specific funding that is outside of general proposal-based or core funding that is currently being made available which ignores students’ specific educational needs in their classrooms and schools.

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“This funding is required for the Matawa Education and Care Centre to offer safe, supportive and equitable (to the province) education programming and services for our students.”

—*Brad Battiston, Principal*

“In working with the Education Authorities in Matawa, it is clear that they are highly concerned about having no resources that would enable them to safely reopen their schools this September. The education gap cannot be widened once again by jeopardizing school years for our students.”

—*Sharon Nate, Matawa Education Manager*

“While school boards in Ontario are currently canvassing parents on options for return to learning delivery models, our Education Authorities at this time barely have that option. There is no way around it, resources are needed to ensure the safety of our students. Time is running out for First Nations, there is only one and a half months left to the start of school.”

—*Chief Rick Allen, Constance Lake First Nation*

“The governments of Canada and Ontario must treat our students the same as all students in the country. This is not the time to focus on any perceived jurisdictional ambiguities between them when it comes to providing resources to educate First Nations students. The only focus during this coronavirus pandemic time is their safety and ensuring they can continue their studies.”

—*Chief Cornelius Wabasse, Webequie First Nation*

