

# Native school celebrates 12 years and first Grade 12 class

After years of hard work and dedication, the Mamawi Atosketan Native School (MANS) can now pride itself as a Kindergarten to Grade 12 school, with its first class of Grade 12 students graduating later this spring.

On Saturday, April 25, students, community members and supporters of MANS filled the school's gymnasium for a Milestone Celebration and Open House to celebrate all the school has accomplished in its 12 years of existence at its current off reserve location.

"By carrying students from Kindergarten through to the completion of Grade 12, the school can also provide direction to students for college and higher education opportunities," said principal Gail Wilton in a press release.

Across Canada, the completion rate of First Nations students who enroll in

high school is 39 per cent, states the press release.

With its sole focus on education for First Nations youth, the school will see a 100 per cent completion rate with its first year of Grade 12 students.

A recently completed addition to the school building was also celebrated during the open house ceremony; donations of labour from Ron Grue, Camrose Rotarian, and a Calgary contractor, William Pier-santi, aided its completion.

It is the new space that allowed the school to add a Grade 12 to its roster.

Over the last 12 years, MANS has transformed from a one-room school with 17 students to a full-fledged Kindergarten to Grade 12 institution.

"You do your little bit and wonder whether you make any difference. (It's) like tossing a marble into a pond," said Sandra Kiehl-bach Toms, who was the

founding teacher/principal of the school at its first location on the reserve in 1985.

"But when many people toss in their marble, look what it can become," she added.

The school is underwritten by the Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and began adding high school classes one grade at a time during the 2012-2013 school year.

During the ceremony, three beaded medallions were given to developer/contractors Alfred Breikreuz of Ponoka and Ken Taylor of Camrose, Lacombe resident Elizabeth Tym as representative of deceased founding donor Mary Kryswaty and Kiehlbach Toms as thanks for their dedication to the school.

MANS first Grade 12 graduating class is being honored in a graduation ceremony to be held Thursday, May 21 at the school, 7 p.m.



A student of Mamawi Atosketan Native School's musical sign language group waits to perform during the Milestone Celebration. Picture by Kelly Dreger



Alfred Breikreuz of Ponoka accepts a hand-beaded medallion as a thank you award from Krista Abt, MANS student, and Mark Johnson, President of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Canada, thanking him and Camrose building contractor Ken Taylor for their donations of time and labour in the construction of the school at the MANS Milestone Celebration. Picture by Kelly Dreger

## WCPS board

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FNMI student success co-ordinator Shelagh Hagemann heads the committee and focuses on creating successful transitions for FNMI students between grades and schools.

"We already have this Wisdom and Guidance Committee in place. We're working toward trying to make a difference," said trustee Donna Peterson.

"We do have strategies in place to work with our First Nations students," said Bratland.

Trustee Lorrie Jess says if an appointed First Nations member is placed on the board, the public is going to expect Dutch, Hutterite and German-specific trustees — to name a few examples — to have representation opportunities.

The board has directed superintendent Larry Jacobs to respond to the Nipisihkopahk Education Authority. Bratland does not think the issue will reappear before the board

until the upcoming election is over and the budget and financial chaos school boards are facing has settled.

Bratland says the board wants the time to make a good decision.

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