

Kattawapiskak School in Attawapiskat opens next week ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

In a few days students will start classes at Kattawapiskak Elementary School - the first proper school the First Nation of Attawapiskat has had in 14 years.

The community held a final vote on Thursday to name the school and settled on the traditional Cree word for the community: "Kattawapiskak" meaning "people of the parting rocks."

Five names were put forward for the new school and it was originally a tie at Wednesday's referendum between Kattawapiskak and Shannen Koostachin Memorial.

Shannen Koostachin was the student who sparked a national campaign to get the school in the first place. The 15-year-old was killed in a car accident in 2010.

"Every time I do step into that school, Shannon's memory will always come to mind," said Chelsea-Jane Edwards. Koostachin's friend.

In the end the community voted for Kattawapiskak.

However, Timmins-James Bay MP Charlie Angus doesn't think people should put too much emphasis on the name.

"We should be focusing on the incredible impact that school's going to have on the young people of Attawapiskat and James Bay," he said, adding that Koostachin's efforts won't ever be forgotten.

"When I talk to the young people in the community, they tell me, they call it Shannen's school."

In 2000 the reserve's elementary school was closed due to toxic contamination after a fuel pipe under the building ruptured and spilled diesel fuel. The contamination from that spill is believed to date back to 1979.

The history of the troubled reserve includes sewage flooding and a severe lack of infrastructure which, in the winter of 2011, resulted in the issuing of states of emergency by Chief Teresa Spence.

Children and community leaders rallied for years to have the new school built and after about 10 years the Harper government eventually agreed to the project.

In 2012, Attawapiskat and the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs announced a contract to build the new 5,808-square-metre school at a cost of about \$31 million.

The school will accommodate 540 students from Kindergarten to Grade 8, according to the AANDC government website.

Classes at the Kattawapiskak Elementary School begin on Tuesday Sept. 2. and an opening celebration for the new facility will take place on Sept. 19.

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