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Media/Press Release

Sweetgrass First Nation - nakiwaciy nēhiyawak

February 15, 2024

NEW SCHOOL FOR SWEETGRASS FIRST NATION

Sweetgrass First Nation is excited to announce the sod-turning ceremony for their new school. Sweetgrass is holding a traditional ceremony with Sweetgrass Elders, the community, and government officials on Thursday, February 15, 2024.

Chief Sweetgrass (Weekaskookwasayin) signed Treaty 6 on September 9, 1876, and Wah-wee-kah-oo-tah-mah-hote (Strikes Him on the Back), signed Treaty 6 at Fort Carlton on August 28, 1876. The bands joined in 1884, and a reserve was surveyed west of Battleford for the band members. Sweetgrass has a proud history of sharing their stories and rich heritage with everyone and has maintained the Cree language and knowledge over the decades. The Cree language remains central to the community's sense of identity and indigeneity.

The existing school at Sweetgrass was constructed in 1976/77 and recommended for replacement in 2001 by a qualified architect and engineering assessment team. Funding was not made available at that time and instead sustaining renovations were made to protect the asset with little change to the educational spaces. Although the wood building has been well maintained, it became far too small and outdated to offer Sweetgrass children the programming and sense of belonging that the community wishes for them.

Sweetgrass is pleased to announce construction on the new school is starting. Approval for funding of the new school was received in 2022 and continued with engagement sessions with the community and much dialog with architects about the spaces needed, the materials, modernizing, and being the facility the community needs from a holistic perspective.

“Today’s groundbreaking demonstrates our shared commitment to better meet the needs of Sweetgrass students and building more inclusive and vibrant places to live,” said the Honourable Sean Fraser, Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities. “First Nations led education is important in creating prosperous, resilient, and sustainable Indigenous communities. This new school will not only enrich the student experience, but will also ensure access to culturally appropriate educational systems, resources, and teachings.”



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“Today, Sweetgrass First Nation are breaking ground on their new leading-edge school. This will provide Sweetgrass First Nation students with quality education that will offer culturally-relevant education and teachings. Every person deserves a fair chance to succeed, and key to that is an education like the one that will be offered at this new school,” said the Honourable Patty Hajdu, Minister of Indigenous Services.

The new school will include dedicated spaces for Elders and traditional knowledge teachings, outdoor learning spaces, a gym with running track, dental office, spaces for visiting professionals, and a warm interior feeling from wood ceilings. The new school will be constructed with a concrete foundation and concrete block walls. The school is primarily funded by Indigenous Services Canada.

Sweetgrass applied for and received \$5,512,876 in additional funding from the federal government’s Green and Inclusive Community Buildings program, which has enabled the integration of a daycare and Head Start into the facility, and the increased use of energy efficient technology at the school, including solar panels on the gym roof. The integration of the early learning facilities will help keep young parents in school, and both facilities will have controlled outdoor spaces for play, as well as their own entrances.

The procurement process included a pre-qualification process to select capable contractors who were a good fit for the community. The construction contract value is \$39,497,000.

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