

- FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE -

Maskwacîs Celebrates the Grand Opening of the Theresa C. Wildcat Early Learning Centre

Maskwacîs, Treaty 6 Territory, Alberta, December 8, 2023— The Theresa C. Wildcat Early Learning Centre successfully celebrated its grand opening on December 8, 2023. This new school is located on Ermineskin Cree Nation in Maskwacîs, Alberta. The event marked the beginning of a new chapter in Maskwacîs Education Schools Commission (MESC) early learning education programming. From the soul-soothing pipe ceremony and inspiring remarks to the unveiling of a plaque honouring late Theresa C. Wildcat's accomplishments, every element reflected the excitement and hopes for education in Maskwacîs.

The project was initiated by Ermineskin Cree Nation to replace the aging Ermineskin Kindergarten School and was followed through to completion by MESC after the amalgamation of the four school authorities in Maskwacîs. The new 2944 sq. m facility is designed specifically for four and five year old kindergarten students. It features a large central gathering space with a star blanket pattern on the floor and a large glass covered structure above resembling a tipi. On either side are two classroom pods, each with 5 classrooms and learning commons designed around a stylised 2 storey tree and an indoor slide. The building reflects Cree culture with a Cree specific classroom, a cultural room, as well as a land based learning park and play area. The exterior of the building is designed to be reminiscent of a traditional drum and has a Plains Cree beaded motif on some of the exterior panels. The Government of Canada committed an investment of \$19.2 million to support the new school.

“Congratulations to the Maskwacîs Education School Commission (MESC) and Ermineskin Cree Nation on the official grand opening of the Theresa C. Wildcat Early Learning Centre. Your collaborative efforts and hard work have resulted in this truly extraordinary facility. It will serve students by providing excellence in education and by celebrating the knowledge and values of the Maskwacîs Cree. This school will ensure the generations to come will have a fair and equal chance to succeed.”

*The Honourable Patty Hajdu
Minister of Indigenous Services*

Theresa Cecilia Wildcat, 1927-2011, a citizen of Ermineskin Cree Nation, received her teaching certificate from the University of Alberta in 1952 and became the first teacher from Maskwacîs. Theresa has been described as a visionary and dedicated educator, a pioneer in the field of education, a great inspiration and role model, and an advocate for both education and her community. She set an example of sixty years of dedicated service with a sincere and deep interest for the betterment of her people, the advancement of First Nations education and the preservation of Cree language and history. For more information on Theresa's contributions and accomplishments, visit the Theresa C. Wildcat Early Learning Centre website at <https://twel.maskwacised.ca/about/tcw>.

*“As parents, we must encourage our children to keep going to school and teach them our Cree language. Today's children are tomorrow's leaders.”
Theresa C. Wildcat*



Maskwacîs Education Schools Commission

The ceremony, designed to showcase the centre's state-of-the-art facilities, innovative programs, and educational offerings, created a positive impression among attendees. A tribute to the late Theresa C. Wildcat by her son, Dr. Brian Wildcat, was an inspiring moment of reflection, allowing the community to honor her memory and significant contributions to education in Maskwacîs. The ceremony culminated in a symbolic ribbon-cutting ceremony with the Wildcat family and delegates, symbolizing unity and a commitment to quality education.

"The grand opening ceremony was an uplifting celebration of education and the vibrant future that awaits our children. We're excited to be able to create an environment that is a source of inspiration and joy, nurturing the potential within each child."

*Dr. Shauna Bruno
MESC Board Chair*

As the community reflects on the success of the grand opening, the positive energy and enthusiasm generated during the ceremony will undoubtedly carry forward as the Theresa C. Wildcat Early Learning Centre continues its mission of providing a nurturing educational environment rooted in Maskwacîs Cree culture and values.

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ABOUT MESC

In 2017, Maskwacîs Chiefs and Councils amalgamated 11 schools from 4 separate authorities to create a single education authority for the Maskwacîs Cree. The education authority was developed based on Maskwacîs Cree values and is focused on the needs of students. Extensive consultation, research, planning and negotiations took place leading up to the inception of Maskwacîs Education Schools Commission (MESC).

MESC is owned and operated by the Ermineskin Cree Nation, Louis Bull Tribe, Montana First Nation and Samson Cree Nation. MESC schools offer Indigenized curriculum, by embedding Cree culture, language, and traditions into all Maskwacîs schools with emphasis on Wâhkôhtowin, Nehiyawewin, Nehiyaw Pimâtisôwin, and Îyiniw Mâmitonehickan.