

Grand Opening of Sagamok Anishnawbek's New Biidaaban Kinoomaagegamik

Sagamok Ontario, Thursday, September 12, 2024 – A community grand opening ceremony was held in Sagamok Anishnawbek to celebrate the opening of the newly constructed elementary school, Biidaaban Kinoomaagegamik. Students starting Early Learning 1-8 were welcomed into the building on September 3 for their first day back of the 2024-2025 school year.

Sagamok Councilor, Michael Abitong, welcomed Elders, Gimaa Angus Toulouse, invited guests, teachers, education department staff, and community members to Biidaaban's grand opening ceremony on Thursday morning. Students were part of the ceremony as well, dressed in ribbon skirts and ribbon shirts, hand sewn with care by Sagamok's Grandmas and Aunties Group over the last year. An opening prayer from Patricia Trudeau and honour song by the Young Warriors preceded remarks from invited guests, which included Maria Kamin (Indigenous Services Canada), Stephanie Campbell (Architect at J.L. Richards), and Andrea Franceschini (Project Lead at Colliers).



Biidaaban students wear ribbon skirts and ribbon shirts sewn by Sagamok's Grandmas and Aunties

Gimaa Angus Toulouse offered thanks for the warm, sunny day, as well as a reminder that this Biidaaban project is in some ways, a continuation of the original Biidaaban school which opened in 1985 but was “never finished”. Now, the children will have access to everything they need – from classrooms to a gymnasium and close proximity to the outdoors for land-based learning – all in one building. Gimaa also stressed the importance of bringing Sagamok’s rich history, language and culture, as well as ongoing Treaty relationship into the classroom.

Director of Education Vance McPherson shared the four pillars of Sagamok’s Education Department – Safe and Supported Learning; Awesome Learning Experiences; Clear and Adaptive Processes; and Anishnaabe Aadziwin language and culture infused throughout– and invited everyone to notice the ways in which each priority is embodied by the physical space of the new school.

This opening of the new Biidaaban school is not wholly symbolic, but a real opportunity to support Sagamok’s children in their journeys of self-identity, learning, and success.

“Students in Sagamok Anishnawbek are the next generation of leaders, and now have a better opportunity to receive a quality education that will inspire and set them on a path to success. Congratulations to Chief Toulouse and the community on the grand opening of the new Biidaaban Kinoomaagegamik school. The new Kindergarten to Grade 8 school will help the youth of your community reach their goals and continue their education in a safe and culturally inclusive environment.”

-The Honourable Patty Hajdu, Minister of Indigenous Services and Minister responsible of FedNor

"Biidaaban Kinoomaagegamik represents a bright future for the youth of Sagamok Anishnawbek. This new school is a foundation for both education and self-determination within the community, where children can build a future rooted in cultural knowledge and strength. Congratulations to Chief Toulouse and the community for creating a space that will inspire for generations to come."

- Terry Sheehan, MP for Sault Ste. Marie and Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Labour and Seniors

"The opening of Biidaaban Kinoomaagegamik marks a significant milestone for the Sagamok Anishnawbek Peoples. This new school will empower their children through traditional knowledge, and provide them with the tools they need to thrive academically, socially, and professionally. My sincere congratulations to Chief Toulouse and Sagamok Anishnawbek’s leadership for their hard work in bringing this vision to life."

- Marc G. Serré, MP for Nickel Belt, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Energy and Natural Resources and Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Official Languages.



From left to right: Sagamok Councilor, Michael Abitong; Sagamok Director of Education, Vance McPherson; Sagamok Chief Angus Toulouse; and Sagamok Councilor Lawrence Solomon

An empowering dedication of the school was presented by Anna Marie Abitong, former Director of Education and tireless advocate for the new school project. Abitong shared the history of the school's name, which was first spelled *Beedabun*, meaning first glimpse of

light seen at the beginning of each new day. Now on its third evolution, Biidaaban Kinoomaagegamik stands proudly in Sagamok Anishnawbek, supported by teachers, staff, and community members ready to nurture the light of each and every child who walks through the door.

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