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Launch of Southern Tutchone Bi-cultural School Program

WHITEHORSE – Kindergarten students at St. Elias Community School in Haines Junction are now enjoying a curriculum enhanced with lessons in Southern Tutchone language and culture.

The community will celebrate the launch of the pilot program at the school gymnasium, led by Education Minister Patrick Rouble, Champagne and Aishihik First Nations Chief Diane Strand, the school council, and the many people who worked on the program's development.

"The launch of the bi-cultural program is an important milestone for the Department of Education, Champagne and Aishihik First Nations and St. Elias School Council," Rouble said. "I commend the contributors for their innovation and creativity to bring local wisdom and culture to the school's curriculum."

"This project is the result of a collective dream and desire to revitalize our language and our culture, and it is good to see those dreams finally being brought to fruition," Strand said. "Much hard work has taken place to get this project ready to be delivered, and I greatly appreciate the efforts of the many people who played an integral role in getting this project off the ground but also acknowledge that there is still a lot of work left to be done."

Language lessons began on September 21 for kindergarten students and will continue through grade 2. The pilot will run for three years and then be evaluated. The vision is to promote awareness and sensitivity of First Nations culture while promoting pride and belonging amongst First Nation students. Both governments hope that greater fluency in the Southern Tutchone language occurs within family and community.

The program aims to enhance the academic performance, parental satisfaction and attendance for the participating students. The framework for the program can be adapted to suit other First Nations and other schools.

"I am optimistic that this program will be a success, for it is through the vision of our people, the wisdom of our elders and the promise of our youth that our culture, language, and values will thrive," Strand added.

"This program supports preservation of the Southern Tutchone language and culture by integrating it into the classroom," Rouble added. "We want to promote the student's intellectual development and improve their motivation. In this way, it is part of the Department of Education's work to improve achievement for all students, and to work to eliminate the achievement gap between First Nation and non-First Nation students."

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Contact:

Emily Younker
Cabinet Communications
867-633-7961
emily.younker@gov.yk.ca

Michele Royle
Communications, Education
867-393-7102
michele.royle@gov.yk.ca

Shandell McCarthy
Champagne and Aishihik First Nations
867-456-6887
smccarthy@cafn.ca