



Education is an ongoing challenge in Attawapiskat. Only fifty percent of on-reserve aboriginals between the ages of 25 and 64 have completed high school. Additionally, just four percent have completed a university program.

Kattawapiskak Elementary School

Kattawapiskak elementary school opened in the fall of 2014. Before then, elementary students attended school in a series of portables 15 years after the old school was shut down due to a diesel fuel leak underneath the building.

The new school was built as the result of a campaign started by local teenager Shannen Koostachin. She publicized the lack of educational opportunities for First Nations youth and campaigned to raise funds for a new school. Shannen was killed in a car accident, but others picked up where she left off and Kattawapiskak was built as a result. Shannen's vision lives on through the charity Shannen's Dream.

Kattawapiskak's new school logo is a tribute to Shannen and her dream.

Vezina Secondary School

Vezina secondary school is located across town from Kattawapiskak, and stands in stark contrast to the new elementary school. The high school was built in the 1990s and contains 10 classrooms including the kitchen, art room, computer lab and the tech shop.

Maintaining enrollment once students enter secondary school is a struggle. The dropout rate at the high school remains consistent at over 50 percent.

Local Necessities:

- ▶ Build new schools
- ▶ Increase graduation rates
- ▶ Provide cultural, athletic and entertainment programming

When First Nations people obtain post secondary education, unemployment numbers drop significantly. The 2006 census revealed 76.3 percent of university graduates from reserves are employed. In contrast, just 36.2 per cent who have not graduated from high school have a job.

There is no disputing the fact that education is the best hope for people growing up on struggling reserves.

"We need to create space, whether through sport or culture or recreation, to make people feel alive."

Bill Yoachim, Snuneymuxw First Nation
on Vancouver Island | Source: CBC

