



Saturday, December 13, 2008

Click to enlarge

EMAIL US

SERVICES SUBSCRIBE EMPLOYMENT NEWS RESEARCH CENTRE CLASSIFIEDS ADVERTISING

2 DAYS TO THE NEW WINNIPEG SUN.COM



Current Conditions
Partly cloudy
-18°C
Full Forecast

NEWS

The Red Road

Thu, December 11, 2008

PART 5: First Nations School teaches 'who we are'

By MARK BONOKOSKI, Sun Media

Email	Print	Write	Size: A A A
Share:		+	Help

Until the 2007 shooting death of 15-year-old Jordan Manners at C.W. Jefferys Collegiate, and the ensuing clamour for everything from cops in the hallways to an Afrocentric elementary school, the First Nations School of Toronto rarely showed up on the media's radar screen.

But all that changed when Toronto lawyer Julian Falconer released his 1,000-page report on Toronto school safety and, deep within that document, singled out the aboriginal elementary school at Dundas-and-Broadview for its extraordinarily low academic standards and high rate of suspensions.

The Native school's entire Grade 3 class did not meet provincial standards in reading, writing or arithmetic in 2006, said Falconer's report, adding that a full third of its students from junior kindergarten to Grade 8 had been suspended at one time or another during the previous three years.

Falconer called them "disturbing realities."

"The school occupies the lowest rung in academic standing amongst the 451 elementary schools in the (Toronto District School Board)," said Falconer's report. "(And) over the last three years, the First Nations School of Toronto has suspended an average of 33.44% of its students."



Wayne Kodje has been principal at the First Nations School of Toronto for the last nine years. (Mark Bonokoski, Sun Media)

"The fact that we are failing yet another generation of aboriginal students is not a secret. It is well known to the (school board) and it is well known to the teachers, parents and students," said Falconer.

The First Nations School of Toronto, despite optics that it is somehow new, started in 1977 as an "alternative school" called the Wandering Spirit Survival School, all in a push to close the "achievement gap" between the academic performance of aboriginal students and non-Native students.

Falconer's report noted, however, that the "achievement gap" for aboriginal students

FEEDBACK

Do you agree with the jury's decisions in the Phoenix Sinclair murder trial?

- Yes
- No

SUBMIT

Results

[\\$78/hr - Now Hiring!](#)

Earn money from home this month. Earn up to \$1,700-\$7,900/month. www.ontariojobs.com

[Find a used Ford](#)

Get it now at Zender Ford in Edmonton www.autonet.ca

[Find the right job for you](#)

Browse listings and apply for jobs. Search from 14 search engines in 1. www.info.com

[Brother network solutions](#)

Brother has everything you need to network your systems for less. www.brother.ca

[Find used Chrysler](#)

Save money! Get it now at Village Chrysler in Ajax www.autonet.ca

Klix.ca

Advertise!

- Home News
- Winnipeg
- Manitoba
- Canada
- World
- Columnists
- Sports
- Entertainment
- Opinion/Comment
- Columnists
- Lifestyle
- Business
- Swimsuit 2008
- Photo Galleries
- Blogs
- MyWinnipegSun
- Sun Speaks
- Video
- E-mail Alert
- E-Edition
- RSS
- Jobboom



Business Name

City

Find a Business

Find a Person

Special Sections

- Virtual Flyers
- Homes & Condos Nov. 15
- Homes & Condos Dec. 6
- Holiday Gift Guide
- Christmas Song Sheets
- Pilot Mound Chamber Profile

Contests

NIE

CrimeStoppers

Wanted

Caught On Tape

Life's Issues

PSAs

has increased, rather than decreased, over the past five years, and he blamed the school board for failing to support the school with, among other things, aboriginal role models and counsellors.

That was then.

Wayne Kodje, 56, has been principal at the First Nations School of Toronto for the last nine years and, while Falconer tossed no blame on his shoulders, he is not immune to the criticism nor is he unaware of the challenges.

SUNshine Girl



Today's Gallery
Calendar 2009
Swimsuit 2008

Born on the Nipissing First Nations reserve near North Bay, the Ojibway educator has taught in many northern reaches, and has been a school administrator for the last 15 years.

He knows progress does not happen overnight.

Already in the works when Falconer released his report, but not yet fully unveiled, says Kodje, was a cafeteria that serves students three meals a day (breakfast, lunch and a snack) — all free because of the low socio-economic circumstances of the majority.

Additions to the faculty now include, as part of the overall collective, two special education teachers, an Ojibway language teacher, a Native culture and traditions instructor, a full-time child and youth counsellor, a headstart program for at-risk youth, a day care centre, and a library that didn't exist three years ago.

Classifieds:

Autonet

Classified Extra

Jobboom

Obituaries

"This year ... one suspension," says Kodje. "That's it."

When Falconer was writing his report, the school had 75 students.

On Canoe:

Comics

Lotteries

Crossword

Horoscopes

TV Listings

Movie Listings

Health & Fitness

Trends

Discovery

Eat

Sex Files

Gadgets

DIY

This year it has 90.

"A lot of that increase has to do with us having a full-fledged cafeteria," says Kodje, the costs covered primarily by corporate sponsors and grants.

"We also now have white-board technology in most of the classrooms, which is very interactive and hands-on," he adds.

"Aboriginal kids are visual learners, tactile learners — the 'show me' kind of kids.

"Having white-board technology in class really engages them. They can go up and touch the screens, and move things around — all of which gets them more involved in the lesson," says Kodje. "It's beginning to turn things around."

Because the First Nations School of Toronto has less than 100 students, its academic results under the province's standardized Education Quality and Accountability Office are not publicly posted — not because of criticism of notables such as Julian Falconer but because the numbers are skewed due to the small sampling of participants.

Services:

Subscriptions

Classifieds

Advertising

News Research

About Us

Contact Us

"But we're doing better," he says. "This year we had many kids at level two, several at level three, and even a couple at level four. So we're moving up."

According to Kodje, the rise in academic achievement, while not overwhelming, has its roots in the new technology brought into the school, increased participation in the program, and new teaching techniques introduced through the Ontario Focus Intervention Program in language, arts and mathematics.

"We've spent a great deal of our focus over the last two years on how to engage these kids," says Kodje.

"And the difference is in the results."

The First Nations School of Toronto teaches the same curriculum as any other elementary school in Toronto except that it takes any French lesson out of play and replaces it with Ojibway, with added instruction in Native culture and traditions.

Jason McQuabbie, 11, is in Grade 6, and Tasunka McDonald, 13, is in Grade 8.



Get unlimited emails
from sexy singles
FREE!

"It was important for me to come here to know my culture," says Jason, admitting, however, that it was his family's decision, not his.

Young Tasunka McDonald agrees, citing that he would have likely attended a "regular" elementary school if not for his father's insistence that he attend First Nations.

But both boys agree on one thing.

"We have a better idea of who we are," says Jason.

In "regular" schools it is undoubtedly taught that Christopher Columbus discovered America in 1492.

But, at the First Nations school, more culturally correct information is taught — that Christopher Columbus, for example, did not find a deserted continent when he "found" North America.

So it would be wrong to say he discovered it, even though the United State's celebrates Columbus Day every October 12, usually around Canadian Thanksgiving.

Suffice, there were people already there.

And they were not Italian.

Nonetheless, his mistake in thinking he had actually landed on the East-Asian mainland led Columbus to refer to the indigenous aboriginals he met as "Indians".

It was a monicker that obviously stuck.

TOMORROW: Sex trade

Previous story: [A Sun Media special report](#)

Next story: [PART 4: Hero of the Native children](#)

[Click to subscribe](#)

[Click here to sign up for breaking news alerts](#)



 **SUN MEDIA** Daily Newspapers
A Quebecor Media Company

This site is updated by 6:00 a.m. EST each day and includes stories and columns from the day's print edition of the Sun.

[SUBSCRIBE](#) [EMPLOYMENT](#) [NEWS RESEARCH CENTRE](#) [CLASSIFIEDS](#) [ADVERTISING](#)

[Send a Letter to the Editor](#)

[CANOE](#) home | We welcome your [feedback](#).

Copyright © 2007, [Canoe Inc.](#) All rights reserved. Test