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Keeping Up the Pressure on Ministe

News Release for SooNews.ca
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The campaign to build a school for the children of Attawapiskat continues to gain steam in Sault Ste. Marie.

Korah Collegiate student Mitchell Case helped spearhead the campaign in a number of local schools, with the help of Principal Holly Wickett. Since the first wave of the campaign here, Case has collected over 130 letters to Indian Affairs Minister Chuck Strahl from students at Korah

Collegiate, Central Algoma Secondary School, Rosedale Public School, Aweres Public School, and H. M. Robbins Public School. Another nearly 400 petition signatures were collected from students at W. C. Eaket Secondary School in Elliot Lake and Korah Collegiate.

Children in Attawapiskat have been waiting for over 8 years for a new school. The community's original elementary school was contaminated by a diesel spill in 1979 and closed in 2000 after several students became sick. The school's 400 students have since had to study in poorly insulated portables in one of Ontario's harshest climates.

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Education on First Nations territory is the responsibility of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. The last three Ministers have committed to moving ahead with the construction of a new school; however, in December 2007 the new Indian Affairs Minister Chuck Strahl arbitrarily cancelled the project.

In May, Sault MP Tony Martin hosted Timmins—James Bay MP Charlie Angus here to speak to local students and activists about the neglect faced by First Nations children in Attawapiskat at the hands of the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs. Angus spoke to students from the Batchewana Learning Centre, Korah Collegiate, and Saint Basil's Secondary School. Martin commented then that "education is central to any hopeful future for our First Nations' children. Any vision for Canada as a progressive, dynamic country has to start with a better relationship with and support for our First Nations."

In Timmins this week, NDP leader Jack Layton said the Attawapiskat school issue is fundamental and won't go away because the children there won't let it.

"Those young people in Attawapiskat, they make me smile, they get my emotions going, because they're so keen on what they know is right," Layton said.