



[thestar.com](#)  
Advanced Search

[HOME](#) [NEWS](#) [OPINION](#) [BUSINESS](#) [SPORTS](#) [ENTERTAINMENT](#) [LIVING](#) [TRAVEL](#) [WHEELS](#) [HEALTH](#)

[Toronto & GTA](#) | [Ontario](#) | [Canada](#) | [World](#) | [Ideas](#) | [Global Voices](#) | [Obituaries](#) | [Local Highlights](#) |

## Native school talks move ahead

### YouTube campaign forced the government back to table with Attawapiskat leaders, NDP MP says

Apr 07, 2008 04:30 AM

**RICHARD BRENNAN**  
OTTAWA BUREAU

OTTAWA—Indian Affairs Minister Chuck Strahl says the government is making some progress on improving the school situation in Attawapiskat, which has become the subject of a YouTube campaign.

The elementary school in the isolated northern Ontario community was contaminated by a large diesel spill in 1979 but continued to house students until 2000 when parents pulled their children out because of growing health problems.

Since then, students have been housed in makeshift portable classrooms. There are 400 students from junior kindergarten to Grade 8.

- [Email story](#)
- [Print](#)
- [Choose text size](#)
- [Report typo or correction](#)
- [License this article](#)

[BOOKMARK](#) ...

Chief Theresa Hall met with Strahl's senior ministerial staff and departmental officials last week and agreed to create a working group to look into improving conditions at the school, Strahl said.

NDP MP Charlie Angus (Timmins-James Bay) started a YouTube campaign to pressure the Conservative government to fund the school.

"It's clear that the YouTube campaign forced the government back to the table," Angus said.

"If the government is simply trying to turn the political heat down they are mistaken. The campaign will continue until the government agrees to build a school."

Angus said that Strahl cancelled plans last December to build a replacement school in the community 1,300 kilometres north of Toronto on James Bay.

Strahl said the working group includes members of the native community, departmental and ministerial officials from Indian and Northern Affairs, and the school board.

"It's really the first time that everybody has been in one room together talking about the same issue, including both short term and long term," the minister said.

"The chief and council seemed very pleased with the progress and Mr. Angus did as well," he said.

Late last year, Strahl announced that an unexpected school fire in another native community meant having to replace it at a cost of \$13 million, putting the Attawapiskat school further down the pecking list.

Ontario's public school boards have encouraged their 2.1 million students to write letters to Strahl's department to urge funding for a new school.

Waterloo trustee Catherine Fife, vice-president of the Ontario Public School Boards' Association, said her organization wanted students in Attawapiskat to know other students in Ontario care about them.

Several schools plan to lead a student awareness campaign for Attawapiskat, including Toronto's Neil McNeil Catholic Secondary School and The Student School, a public alternative school.