



# The Premier's Board of Education Award for Innovation and Excellence

Historic Submission for the First Indigenous  
controlled Board of Education in  
Saskatchewan: Ile-a-la-Crosse Northern  
School Administration Area No. 1 formed by  
Minister's order May 6, 1974.

## Table of Contents

|       |  |   |
|-------|--|---|
| I.    | Who We Are .....                                       | 3 |
| II.   | Background .....                                       | 4 |
| III.  | Goals of Program .....                                 | 5 |
| IV.   | Direct Board Participation .....                       | 5 |
| V.    | Innovative Nature of Initiative .....                  | 5 |
| VI.   | Sustainability .....                                   | 5 |
| VII.  | Stakeholder Support of Innovation .....                | 6 |
| VIII. | Continuing Partnerships .....                          | 6 |
| IX.   | Improved Student Achievement .....                     | 6 |
| X.    | Appendix .....   | 7 |
| A.    | Staff and Leadership with Roots in The Community ..... | 7 |
| B.    | Teaching Resources in Michif.....                      | 8 |
| XI.   | Sources .....  | 8 |

## I. WHO WE ARE

**Name of Innovation:** Historic Submission for the First Indigenous Controlled Board of Education in Saskatchewan: Ile-a-la Crosse Northern School Administration Area No. 1 formed by Minister's order May 6, 1974.

**School Division:** Ile-a-la Crosse School Division 112

**Board Chair:** Duane Favel

**Director of Education:** Sharon Hoffman

**Temporary Education Committee 1973-1974:** Vital Morin (chair), Allan Morin, Jonas Favel, Irene Desjarlais, Marie-Rose Morin, Tony Durocher, Leo Belanger, Isadore Laliberte

**Board of Education 1975-76:** Vital Morin (chair), Andrew Bouvier, Mary Daigneault, James Favel, Joseph Favel, Frank Kenny, William McLean, and Napoleon Johnson (Elder).



## II. BACKGROUND

Ile-a-la Crosse is the second oldest community in Saskatchewan. It was formed in 1776 as an important location on the Churchill River system for the fur trade. Prior to that it was an important trading location for the Cree and Dene peoples. The first school in Ile-a-la Crosse dates to 1846. Between 1846 and 1973 education was controlled by the church and white settlers although the community is comprised 95% of Indigenous people.

According to the documentary “Ile-a-la-Crosse, History in the Making” by the University of Saskatchewan the existing school burnt down on October 31, 1972, and the government, which managed the Northern School District from La Ronge, restarted school on a rotating basis in December of that year but did not establish a fully functioning school until December 5, 1973. The community felt the government did not move fast enough to clean the site or reestablish a school.

The bureaucratic governing structure, the colonial attitude of government and the elitest attitude of the teachers frustrated the community and they began having public meetings. A Temporary Education Committee formed entirely of Indigenous people, were elected at a public meeting on January 17, 1973. As quoted in “Ile-a-la-Crosse, History in the Making” local people wanted to have “full Sovereign power of administration, government, and control of all aspects of new school. . . it will be autonomous and responsible to the local people.” This group of people had sophisticated ideas about how a school system should run, and they wanted the best for their children. The drop out rate at this time was 95% and students were being put two or three grades back when they went south to finish their education. The teachers kept to themselves and only associated with other white professionals. Very few locals had ever been in a teacherage, and parents did not feel welcome at the school and had only been at the school if school principal summoned them.

These well articulated group of people had ideas to make Ile-a-la Crosse a better school and they worked with the government to transition to local control. This was explained by Vital Morin in “Ile-a-la-Crosse 1776-1976 Sakitawak Bi-Centennial” p. 72.

“We have a local board elected and looking after the total operation of the school here. There were a lot of meetings from the take-over. There was quite a conflict within the community. A lot of people thought that the local people would never be able to run their own school. But, the majority of the parents thought that the local board would run a better school.”

“The school itself is going to be one of the best. With the new school and equipment, I hope it will impress the students ... attending this school and make it more interesting to them, so that they attend more regularly than they have been doing. We have a lot more to offer in the school now, than we’ve ever had before.”

“By having the knowledge of what the kids at Ile-a-la-Crosse need as far as education is concerned, the types of programs, we would point these out to the type of teachers that would be able to teach these types of programs.”

“Some of the things that the people thought should be taught here is our own culture, our own history. People were starting to lose interest in their own culture. These are the things we thought we could bring back and sort of keep the people aware of what they are and not lose it in the white society. We know for sure all our kids won’t become doctors, lawyers, and office people. There will always be a number of people who are thinking of going back trapping and fishing and try to do their own type of living that they have done before. These are some of the things we consider could be taught in the school. By having our own local board, a lot of these things can be implemented in the school.

Ile-a-la Crosse Northern School Administration Area No. 1 was formed by Minister’s order May 6, 1974. The school board made decisions about the construction of the new school, which was designed by Metis architect Douglas Cardinal. They hired 21 new teachers that first year with only 1 teacher remaining from the previous year. No longer was it forbidden to speak Cree at school and resources with racist ideas were weeded out. By January 1, 1975, all assets of the school division were controlled by the new board. This was the first-time Indigenous people were making decisions about who would teach their child and administer the school, the responsiveness of school, the school’s awareness of colonization and oppression and most people were enthusiastic. Ile-a-la Crosse Temporary Education Committee and the subsequent elected Board of Education were the first Indigenous controlled boards of education in Saskatchewan.

### III. GOALS OF PROGRAM (1973)

- Local control of education.
- Democratizing control of school.
- Control of hiring and firing of teacher.
- Serve the needs of the local community.
- Gym available to community.
- Parent involvement.
- Indigenous languages respected.
- True history of Indigenous peoples taught.
- Teachers being part of the community.
- Improvement of graduation rate.
- Rebuilding of new school with a high school
- More trades, training, and adult education in school

### IV. DIRECT BOARD PARTICIPATION (1973)

- Future board present at community meeting in January 1973.
- Temporary School Committee selected at community meeting January 17, 1973.
- Temporary School Committee met with government in productive way.
- Board hiring of teachers for 1973-1974 school year.
- Board selection of architect Douglas Cardinal.
- Formed Board subcommittees with input on:
  - Curriculum
  - School Events
  - Acceptance of Cree/Michif Language
  - Resources
  - All staff hiring

### V. INNOVATIVE NATURE OF INITIATIVE

- Decolonization processes a focus in 1973.
- Recognized importance of Indigenous language and culture in 1973.
- Parent /Teacher connection seen as key in 1973.
- True history focus in 1973.

### VI. SUSTAINABILITY

- 2023 will mark 50 years of Indigenous controlled education in Ile-a-la Crosse.
- 25 years of Michif Festivals.
- 30 years of Michif Instruction at every grade level.
- Upisasik Theatre 1976-1984.
- Michif 10, 20and 30 accepted as provincial courses separate from Cree 2019.
- 2007 new Joint Use Facility built in Ile-a-la Crosse.
  - High School
  - Hospital
  - Community Agencies
- Partnership for Michif Language Use in Early Learning 2019.
- Amiskowisti outdoor learning site opened in 2012.

## VII. STAKEHOLDER SUPPORT OF INNOVATION (1973)

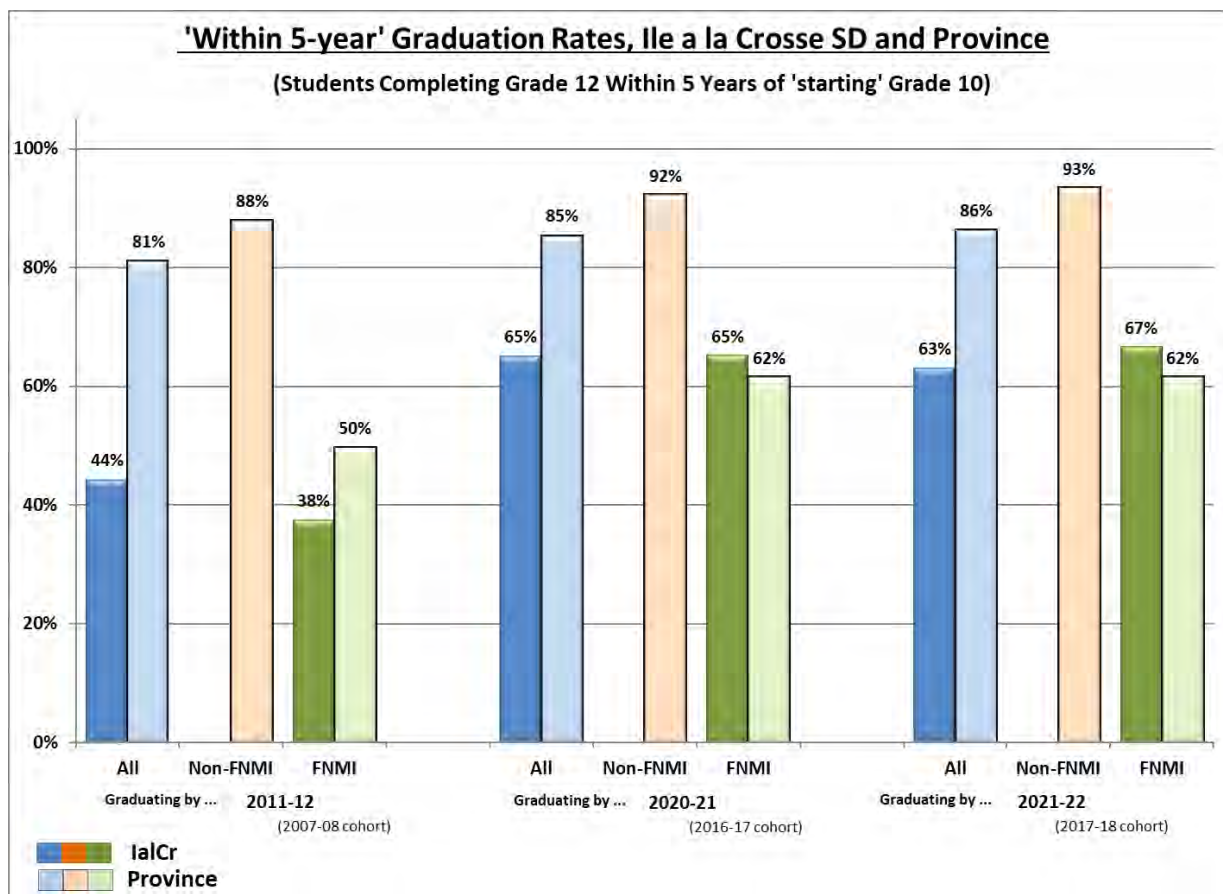
- Began with a series of public meetings.
- Difficult conversations occurred; all stakeholders were invited (community, teachers, church).
- Election organized by Local Community Authority.
- 70-80% turnout of community at public meetings.

## VIII. CONTINUING PARTNERSHIPS

- Northern Village of Ile-a-la Crosse
- Metis Nation of Saskatchewan
- Ile-a-la Crosse Friendship Centre, Aboriginal HeadStart
- Gabriel Dumont Institute, Dumont Technical Institute
- Northlands College
- Sakitawak Development
- SHA

## IX. IMPROVED STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

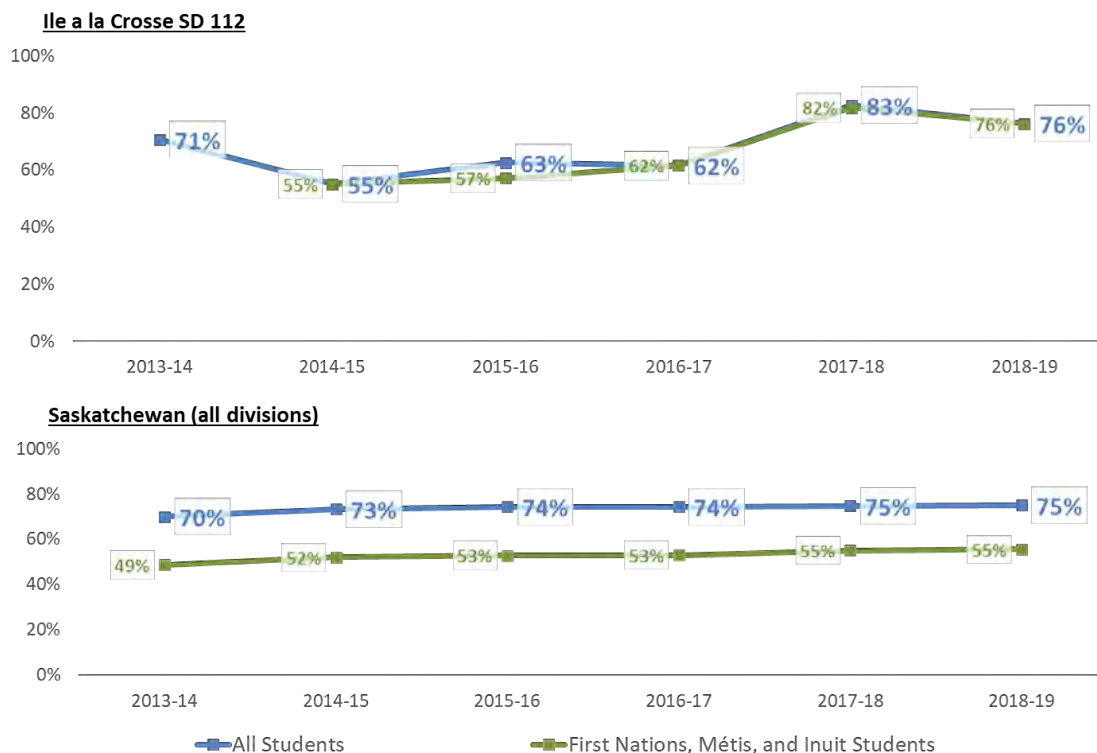
- Less than 5% was grad rate in 1973 and was 63% in 2022.



\*Note in these graduation years 100% of students were FNMI

- In 1973 students were behind 2 to 3 grade levels when they moved south, in 2019 they were above provincial average in Grade 3 reading.

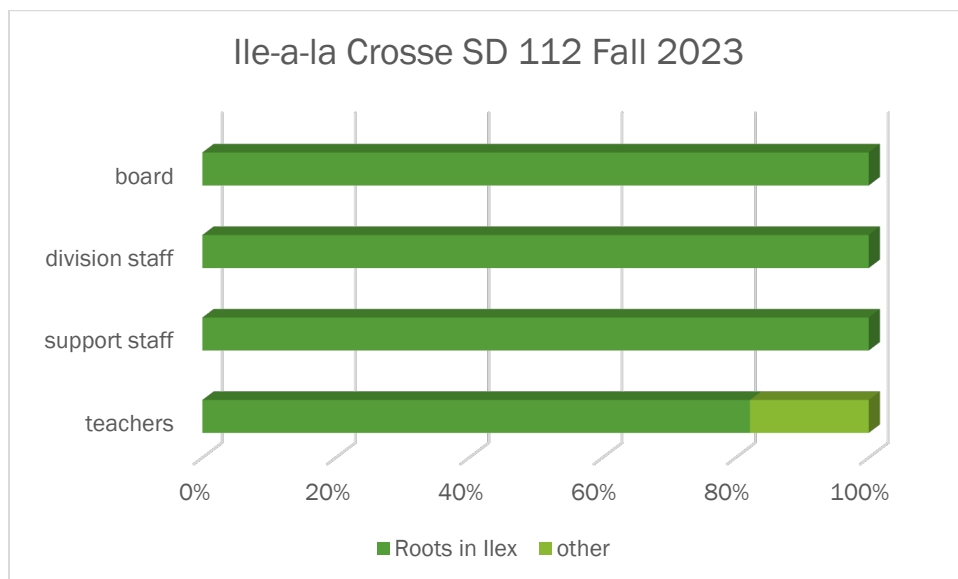
**Percentage of Grade 3 Students Reading At or Above Grade Level, 2013-14 to 2018-19**



**X. APPENDIX**

**A. Staff and Leadership with Roots in The Community**

- In 1973 0 teachers had roots in the community in 2023 80% have community roots.



## B. Teaching Resources in Michif

|   |                              |                           |
|---|------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Capan Ekwa niya   | La sal                       | Tanti oma ki miyawihk     |
| La hers Robert Sakitawak ohci   | Ayisinowak                   | Akihcikewina              |
| L' cimili   | Ka-nipihk(in the summertime) | La shamp                  |
| Tanwihkahk pisiskowak?  | Nīso iskwīsisak ekwa niska   | Number book               |
| Annie li blowan n'domaw'so  | Pisiskowak ekwa obibisisimak | Pisiskowak micowak        |
| Kiskinohamakewiskwew Chellsea   | Li kolarr                    | Michif Dictionary         |
| Pisiskowak  | Blinks goes berry picking    | Sakitawak                 |
| Tanti micowin?  | Kokoms& ribbon skirts        | Miyaw                     |
| Tan'sisi ta-osihtayah ocihiminsa siwahtikwa l'jam(how to make strawberry rhubarb jam) |                              |                           |
| Opasew sipi nitachihonan dal'skido ahci(our ski-doo trip to canoe river)              |                              | Micowin                   |
| Lasmen kisikawa ekwa nisosap pisimwak   |                              | Northern Michif to Go App |

## XI. SOURCES

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Longpré, Robert (1977). Ile-a-la- Crosse 1776-1976, Sakitawak Bi-Centennial. Ile-a-la- Crosse Bi-Centennial Committee, January, 1977.

Morin, Vital (1973, March) New Breed, 10-11.



Respectfully submitted,

Board Chair Signature:

Duane Favel

Director of Education Signature:

Sharon Hoffman