**Connaught Street school celebrates Bear Witness Day at Government House**

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​FREDERICTON – Teachers and students at Connaught Street School will join Lieutenant Governor Jocelyne Roy Vienneau and First Nations leaders in marking Bear Witness Day at Government House on May 9-10.

“I am proud to host this important event at my Official Residence,” said The Hon. Jocelyne Roy Vienneau. “Government House has always been linked to our Indigenous community. The Wolastoqiyik people consider this location to be sacred ground. That legacy is alive and well with the Bear Witness project.”

"We are pleased to support this project that gives students the opportunity to learn more about Bear Witness Day and First Nations history and culture," said Education and Early Childhood Development Minister Dominic Cardy. “One of the objectives of the 10-year education plan is to ensure all learners value diversity and understand the culture and history of First Nations people.”

“This is an exciting project that creates an in-depth and authentic learning experience for our students,” said Principal Barb Corbett. “Bear Witness Day speaks to Truth and Reconciliation. It teaches the importance of treating everyone fairly regardless of who they are within the context of a First Nations cultural experience.”

Every year on May 10, people across the country gather their Spirit bears together to celebrate Bear Witness Day and Jordan’s Principle, a guiding rule established in 2007 to help ensure First Nations children have access to all public services when they need them.  On May 10, 2016, in a landmark decision, the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal ordered the federal government to fully implement Jordan’s Principle, named in memory of Jordan River Anderson from the Norway House Cree Nation in Manitoba. The Spirit Bear, representing First Nations children receiving services across the country, presided over these hearings.

Corbett said Connaught Street School received a Global Competencies grant from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development to embark on their month long project. Grade 3-5 students heard from First Nations leaders, worked with them to make beaded necklaces and leather medicine bags and name their bears. The students were gifted with a string of copper jingles for their bears from Amanda Reid Rogers, vice-president of Indigenous Engagement at the University of New Brunswick, which they rang in recognition of Jordan River Anderson and their work in taking part in reconciliation. Students wrote letters to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and to Jordan’s family and also attended an annual powwow hosted by UNB.

On May 9, Grade 3-5 students will place their Spirit bears on display at Government House and take part in opening ceremonies with the Lieutenant Governor and First Nations Elders Imelda Perley and Ramona Nicholas.

On May 10, all students from Connaught will visit Government House to learn from​ Oromocto First Nation students about traditional dancing, drumming and oral storytelling as well as the meaning of a smudge ceremony. They will also visit a downstairs gallery to view an art exhibit which will be open to the public weekdays for the rest of the month.

Other activities took place at school during class time with students teaching other students about what they had learned about First Nations history and culture and what it means to Bear Witness.

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