

The Kingdom's Pride *and* Joy

Beneath a Bible verse painted on the wall by the gym door, the line for Awards Day assembly was impressive. Girls in fancy dresses and boys wearing ties waited alongside classmates in traditional regalia as they chattered in anticipation. Parents with cameras contributed to the buzz at Mamawi Atosketan Native School (MANS) on the last day of school in June.

But the celebration wasn't all about earthly recognition. From the opening prayer to the very special award created by the staff—the Outstanding Achievement Award—students are reminded that building character is what will set them apart now and for eternity.

The parents of Larissa Roasting-Raine were among those who snapped photos and beamed as their children were called forward to receive a “Well done!” from Principal Gail Wilton. Some parents, including Larissa's, became regular participants themselves in the ceremonies, popping up three or four times as their child was recognized and photographed with the principal. To make areas for improvement easier to work on, three categories are rewarded: High Academic Achievement (Honour Roll), Attendance (90 percent and above), and Citizenship. If a student is awarded all three, the special Outstanding Achievement Award is cause for major rejoicing.

“Larissa loves it here,” said her father. Her positive example is making an impression on her preschool sisters, who handled their big sister's awards as she passed them back for safekeeping. Larissa loves MANS so much, her father confided, that she gets upset when a snow day or other circumstances keep her from school.

Larissa is not alone. Several students had a perfect attendance record, but that distinction earned one Grade 7 student a special honour. While all five of the top honour winners are distinguished in their academics, attendance, and citizenship qualities, Shaneek Roasting's perfect attendance, combined with the other recognitions, garnered the top award of the day.

Grade 6 teacher Cheri Notice provides insight into the habits and values these top award students are internalizing.



Jahleel Roasting, Grade 6, receives his Outstanding Achievement Award from Gail Wilton, principal. Jahleel demonstrates the habits of mind and character that will benefit him and his community now and for eternity.

“Jahleel Roasting [who received an Outstanding Achievement Award] is a motivated student who works very hard to not only complete assignments but also understand them. It is this love of learning that drives him to be the best in everything he does,” says Cheri. “From the basketball court to the classroom to being a caring big brother, Jahleel excels. He is very proud of his First Nations heritage and family, and this drives him to want to make his family and community proud.”

Who knows how many times Jahleel has read that Bible verse on the wall outside the gym, or how its message of heaven's approval has given him strength to meet the challenges of reserve life? As the verse on the wall tells him every day, Jesus said, “These children are the kingdom's pride and joy” (Luke 18:16, *The Message*). ■

Lynn McDowell was honoured to witness MANS's 2014/15 Awards Day and to meet some of the earthly parents of the Kingdom's pride and joy.