



Education in the Northwest Territories—2010

Department of Education, Culture
and Employment



Office of the Auditor General of Canada
Bureau du vérificateur général du Canada

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Auditor General of Canada
Vérificatrice générale du Canada

To the Honourable Speaker of the Northwest Territories Legislative Assembly:

I have the honour to transmit herewith my report on Education in the Northwest Territories—Department of Education, Culture and Employment to the Northwest Territories Legislative Assembly in accordance with the provision of section 30 of the *Northwest Territories Act*.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sheila Fraser".

Sheila Fraser, FCA

OTTAWA, 11 May 2010

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Education in the Northwest Territories

Department of Education, Culture and Employment

Main Points

What we examined

The Northwest Territories Department of Education, Culture and Employment is responsible for providing early childhood programming, elementary and secondary education, and post-secondary education and training to residents of the Northwest Territories to assist them in developing the skills, knowledge, and ability to be self-reliant and to take full advantage of social and economic opportunities. In 2009–10, the Department allocated just over \$5 million to early childhood programming, almost \$149 million to elementary and secondary education, and just over \$32 million to adult and post-secondary education.

The Department shares responsibility for education with eight education councils (similar to school boards in provinces) and Aurora College. The councils and the College report to the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. Made up of community-elected representatives, education councils are responsible for delivering elementary and secondary education to about 9,000 students in 49 schools. Aurora College, the only territorial college, is the primary delivery agent for adult and post-secondary education.

We examined how the Department has planned, monitored, and reported on education and training programs designed to increase opportunities for students to participate fully in the social and economic development of the Northwest Territories.

Audit work for this report was substantially completed on 30 November 2009.

Why it's important

Education is vital to the progress of both individuals and the Northwest Territories as a whole. It lays the foundation for success at work and throughout life and benefits the economy, society, and individual quality of life. Numerous studies indicate that well-educated citizens are better able to meet the demands of a modern economy, and are more likely to become productive, healthy, and participating members of society.

What we found

- The Department of Education, Culture and Employment has expanded its early childhood development programming to better prepare young children for school; its statistics show an increase in the number of licensed day care facilities from 99 in 2005 to 117 in 2008. The Department has also placed increased emphasis on educational programming in day care facilities. However, it has not developed a means to assess whether children who attend day care facilities perform better when they enter the elementary school system than children who do not. In addition, in 2008, it did not inspect each day care facility, as required by the *Child Day Care Act*, to ensure that all facilities are complying with the health and safety requirements of the legislation.
- The Department's data shows that secondary school graduation rates have increased steadily since 2004–05. However, indicators of student achievement such as Alberta Achievement Test results, high school diploma examination results, and functional grade levels show limited or no progress during the same time period. The Department has not undertaken formal detailed analyses of the causes underlying the lack of improvement against these indicators and has not developed detailed action plans for improving student performance against these indicators. The lack of progress limits student access to post-secondary education, training programs, and job opportunities.
- While the Department has a strategic plan that includes several initiatives to strengthen the education system, it does not have a comprehensive territory-wide framework outlining its plans to improve student performance against key indicators. However, in early 2009, the Department introduced the Aboriginal Student Achievement Initiative. The Initiative is intended to improve the performance of Aboriginal students and close the persistent gap between the graduation rates of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students.
- The Department monitors education councils' compliance with its directives on elementary and secondary education that are intended to provide guidance on key requirements of the *Education Act*. Where it identifies deficiencies in compliance, however, it does not formally follow up to ensure that education councils have fully implemented corrective actions. In addition, except for one directive, it has not formally assessed how effective the directives are and whether they remain relevant.

- The Department has improved its public reporting on elementary and secondary student performance with the inclusion of additional indicators in its Towards Excellence reports. However, it generally reports on performance by community size and not by education council, ethnicity, or gender, making comparisons among these important categories difficult.
- The Department has responded to continued low literacy and education rates among adults through its Adult Literacy and Basic Education directive, delivered in communities across the Northwest Territories through Aurora College's Community Learning Centres. However, while the Department collects data on the number of persons who take training, it has collected limited information to determine whether intended results are being achieved.
- Limited information on the performance of adult and post-secondary students is available; there has been little public reporting on post-secondary education since 2006. The Department has not ensured that regular evaluations of training programs are undertaken.
- The Department has identified labour market needs in specific sectors, although not all key sectors have been assessed, and it produced labour market reviews intended to report on employment trends across the Northwest Territories. The Department has also put in place mechanisms that use partnerships to identify regional and community labour market needs and help co-ordinate the delivery of training. Training provided through the mobile trades unit is delivered through such a partnership.

The Department has responded. The Department agrees with all recommendations. Its detailed responses follow each recommendation throughout the report.

Introduction

Education in the Northwest Territories

1. The Government of the Northwest Territories views education as critical to the future development of the territory. While education is only one factor important to development, the Government considers it a means to invest in and provide for its citizens, enabling them to reach their full potential and to contribute to society.

2. The results achieved by Northwest Territories students, however, lag behind those in many regions of Canada. Statistics Canada data from 2006–07 shows that while the graduation rate for secondary schools across Canada was 71 percent, in the Northwest Territories it was 55 percent (compared with 65 percent in Alberta, 68 percent in Yukon, and 30 percent in Nunavut). The Government of the Northwest Territories recognizes that improving education results is crucial to the territory's social and economic development.

3. **A challenging northern environment.** The Department of Education, Culture and Employment identifies a number of factors that add to the complexity of delivering education in the North. The Northwest Territories is vast: it is comparable in size to Alberta and Saskatchewan combined, representing about 13 percent of Canada's territory with 1.3 million square kilometres. The population of about 43,000 is spread over 33 communities, most of them in remote locations with fewer than 1,000 residents. Only five communities—Behchoko, Inuvik, Hay River, Fort Smith, and Yellowknife—have a population of more than 2,000. Yellowknife is the capital and home to about 19,000 people. The two major highways in the territory reach fewer than half of the communities; many rural and remote communities are accessible only by plane or winter ice roads. People in smaller, remote communities may not want to move away to work, and there are fewer opportunities for long-term, full-time employment where they live.

4. Approximately half the population of the Northwest Territories is Aboriginal. The territory recognizes 11 official languages, including English and French, with Aboriginal languages spoken more often in smaller, remote communities. The revitalization of Aboriginal languages is a continuing challenge for both communities and the government.

5. Territorial statistics show that mining, oil and gas, and government are the key employment sectors. The cyclical nature of

resource-based industries impacts the education system, as residents may be more likely to attend school during economic downturns. The higher cost of living in the North may also influence people's decisions about whether to earn income through work or to attend school. As well, many northerners prefer to have education and training opportunities available as close to home as possible, particularly those adults who have children and who need the support of their families and communities.

6. The governance of the territory is evolving through land claim settlements and self-government agreements with First Nations. To date, the Northwest Territories has three comprehensive land claim settlements and one self-government agreement. Self-government agreements have the potential to alter the delivery of education since they may allow First Nations to directly administer education, potentially outside of the territorial education system.

7. Planning and delivering education in the Northwest Territories is complicated by all these factors, and by other factors such as low literacy rates; the shortage of housing, which can result in overcrowded houses with limited space for study and sleep; the continued reliance on traditional economies (especially in smaller communities), which can prevent students from attending the prescribed number of school days in a year; and the effects of substance abuse and foetal alcohol syndrome, which can impact attendance and student performance. Finally, the legacy of the residential school system has had, and continues to have, a negative impact on support for formal education.

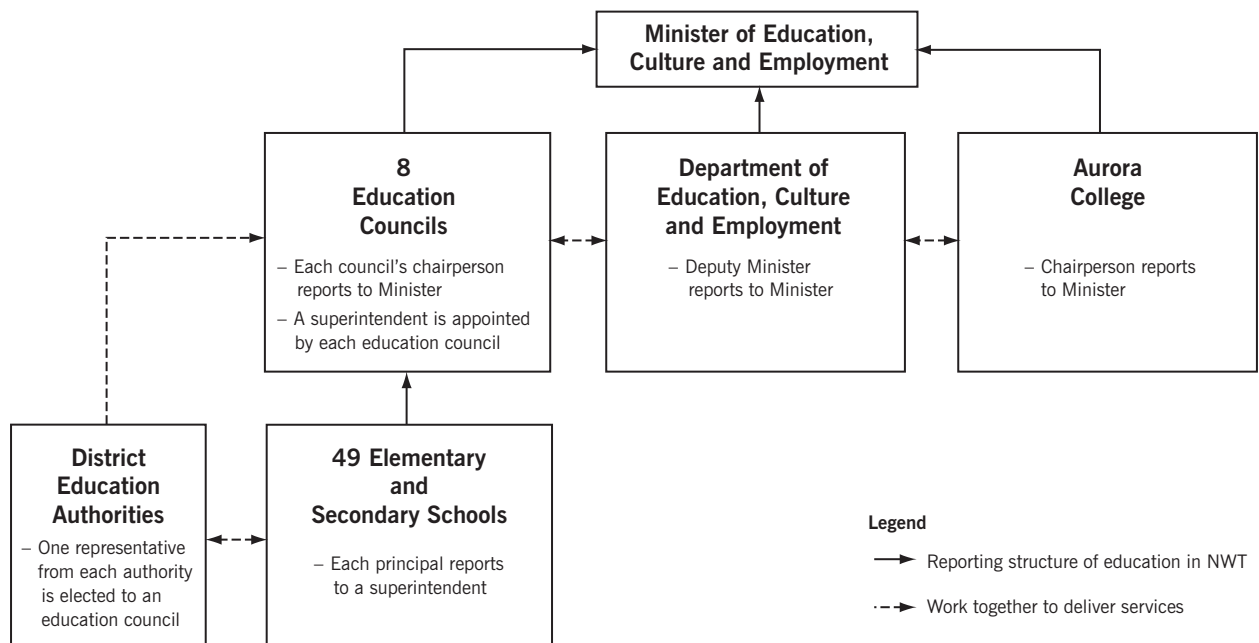
8. A relatively new education system. The last 60 years have seen significant changes in how education is viewed and delivered in the Northwest Territories. Until the mid-1940s, education was provided mainly by church missions, with students usually housed in residences in a few larger centres. Beginning in the late 1950s, the federal government initiated a development program that included education; in 1969, it transferred education to the territorial government. The subsequent establishment of education councils (the equivalent of school boards in provinces), starting in the 1980s, increased local control of education. In recent years, significant developments in the education system have included the expansion of school programs to offer grades 10, 11, and 12 in small communities; the introduction of community learning centres (adult education) in most communities; an increase in the number of Aboriginal teachers in classrooms; and increased post-secondary offerings.

Shared responsibility for education

9. In the Northwest Territories, responsibility for education is shared among the Department of Education, Culture and Employment; education councils; and Aurora College—the only college in the territory. These organizations all report to the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment (Exhibit 1). In addition to these government institutions, the private sector, communities, parents, and students all play a role in ensuring education is a priority.

10. **The Department of Education, Culture and Employment.** The mandate of the Minister and the Department of Education, Culture and Employment is to provide residents of the Northwest Territories with access to quality programs, services, and support to assist them in making informed and productive choices for themselves and their families regarding education, training, careers, employment, child development, languages, culture, and heritage. The Department derives its authority from the *Education Act*. It employs approximately 210 people—about 140 at its headquarters in Yellowknife and just over 70 in the regions. The Department has indicated that approximately 50 people work in its education programs and services.

Exhibit 1 Education in the Northwest Territories is a shared responsibility



Source: Office of the Auditor General of Canada

11. In the area of early childhood development and schools, the Department's Education and Culture Branch

- provides programs, services, and financial support for the delivery of early learning and child care, as well as school programs across the Northwest Territories;
- develops program standards, provides support programs, develops a culturally relevant curriculum, measures student progress, and supports education councils and authorities; and
- monitors compliance with legislation, standards, and directives for early childhood facilities and elementary and secondary schools.

12. In the area of adult and post-secondary education, the Department's Advanced Education and Careers Branch provides financial support and direction for the delivery of post-secondary programs and services so that residents can acquire knowledge and skills to become self-reliant and to take better advantage of social and economic opportunities. The Department provides support to Aurora College in the planning, research, development, and evaluation of adult and post-secondary programs and services. It also provides student financial assistance to residents who wish to pursue post-secondary education, both in the Northwest Territories and in southern jurisdictions. In 2007–08, about 800 students, or 60 percent of those receiving student financial assistance, attended colleges and universities outside of the Northwest Territories.

13. For the 2009–10 fiscal year, the Department's operations budget was approximately \$300 million. The Department allocated approximately two-thirds of its operations budget, or \$200 million, to third parties in grants and contributions—just over \$5 million was allocated to early childhood development, almost \$149 million to elementary and secondary education, and just over \$32 million to adult and post-secondary education (Exhibit 2). Elementary and secondary school contributions are provided to education authorities based on government priorities and education needs. This funding framework plays a pivotal role in directing and supporting education councils to achieve education objectives. School contributions are calculated based on enrolment and to cover annual operating and maintenance costs. In addition, the Department was also allocated about \$77 million in capital and infrastructure contributions, which it planned to invest in school construction and renovation, as well as information technology. The Department of Public Works and Services manages construction and renovation projects.

Exhibit 2 The Department of Education, Culture and Employment's overall budget in 2009–10 was more than \$375 million

Operations	Main Estimates (\$000)
Compensation and benefits	21,084
Grants and contributions	201,232
Early childhood development	5,221
Elementary and secondary education	148,703
Post-secondary education	32,400
Student grants for post-secondary education	8,850
Culture	6,058
Amortization and other expenses	77,315
Sub-total Operations	299,631
Investments	
Capital and information technology projects	76,889
Sub-total Investments	76,889
Total	376,520

Source: 2009–2010 Government of the Northwest Territories Main Estimates

14. Education councils. Eight education councils are responsible for the delivery of education programs to about 9,000 students in 49 elementary and secondary schools across 32 communities. They are also responsible for the administration of the schools. The term "education councils" used throughout this report refers to the four divisional education councils, the two Yellowknife district education authorities, the Tlicho Community Services Agency, and the Commission scolaire francophone des Territoires du Nord-Ouest (Exhibit 3).

15. Education councils are led by elected representatives, as set out in the *Education Act* and associated regulations. They are responsible for the operation and administration (including financial administration) of the group of schools within their division, implementing the curriculum, managing personnel, enrolling students, and initiating proposals for new construction or other major capital expenditures.

Exhibit 3 The Northwest Territories has eight education councils



*Yellowknife District Education Authority, Yellowknife Public Denominational District Education Authority, and Commission scolaire francophone des Territoires du Nord-Ouest.

Source: Department of Education, Culture and Employment

16. In the 2006–07 fiscal year (the last year for which aggregate information is available), education councils employed almost 1,100 people. Teachers accounted for 731 of these people (up from 714 in 2005–06), and most had one or more university degrees. The Department is responsible for licensing teachers. In 2007, it announced its current strategy for increasing the number of Aboriginal teachers in the Northwest Territories.

17. Each education council appoints a superintendent who is responsible for supervising the administration and delivery of education in the schools within its jurisdiction. The superintendent has authority over school principals and approves contracts and hires teachers and principals.

18. District education authorities. District education authorities are elected bodies at the community level. Each district education authority selects one of its members to serve at the divisional level on the education council, which functions as the school board (Exhibit 1). Outside Yellowknife, district education authorities are responsible for the school(s) within their communities, including providing representation on hiring committees for school staff, setting some local policies for the school, hearing student discipline issues involving expulsion, and guiding the school staff in developing culturally appropriate school activities. The two English district education authorities located in Yellowknife have the additional responsibilities of education councils mainly because of the number of students they serve.

19. Aurora College. Aurora College is the only college in the Northwest Territories and the primary delivery agent for adult and post-secondary education. It was established under the *Aurora College Act* and is directed by a board of governors, the members of which are appointed by the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. The chairperson of the board reports to the Minister. The College delivers, directly or through partnerships, a variety of certificate, diploma, and degree programs, as well as trade and apprenticeship programs relevant to the territorial labour market. Degree programs include a Bachelor of Science in Nursing and Bachelor of Education. The College also delivers adult literacy and basic education programming ranging from basic literacy to Grade 12-level courses at community learning centres in smaller communities and at its Fort Smith, Inuvik, and Yellowknife campuses. The College is responsible for the Aurora Research Institute.

20. Aurora College currently employs over 140 people on a full-time basis and over 150 casual and term employees. Each year, it serves between 3,500 and 4,000 students, which represents about 1,400 full-time equivalent students annually. In addition to funding provided by the Department, the College generates a portion of its revenue from fees and other activities.

21. Key Department planning and reporting documents. In November 2005, the Department of Education, Culture and Employment released *Building on Our Success*, its Strategic Plan for 2005–2015. The Plan included objectives, priorities, and actions to be undertaken over the next decade in early childhood development, elementary and secondary education, adult and post-secondary education, and other areas under its jurisdiction. Performance indicators were established for these objectives. In 2007, the

Department published a progress report on the implementation of the Strategic Plan, and included an update on commitments and actions, as well as targets for each of the performance indicators. The Department has indicated it will issue a subsequent progress report in 2010. The Department also presents in its annual business plans major program and service initiatives that it intends to undertake or complete during the year, progress achieved during the previous year, and results achieved against selected performance indicators.

22. Performance information on the Northwest Territories education system is mainly reported in two publications: *Towards Excellence: A Report on Education in the NWT* and *Towards Excellence: A Report on Postsecondary Education in the NWT*. The former report, intended to be published every two years, contains education indicators that cover key aspects of the elementary and secondary education system, from expenditure levels on education to the number of graduates. The latter report contains education indicators that cover aspects of adult and post-secondary education, such as the number of Aurora College graduates.

Focus of the audit

23. In this audit, we examined how the Department of Education, Culture and Employment oversees the education system of the Northwest Territories. We looked at how the Department has planned education and training programs, monitored progress achieved in implementing its plans, and reported the results to the public and the Legislative Assembly.

24. Our audit focused on early childhood development, elementary and secondary education, and adult and post-secondary education programs. We did not audit the delivery of education via the education councils or Aurora College, although we did review some of their documents to validate our observations about the Department. The audit did not examine the quality of the curriculum or of teaching. Neither did it examine income security programs such as student financial assistance; culture, heritage, and language programs; or employment programs. Furthermore, it did not examine the Department's management of its human resources, school facilities, and information technology projects. Finally, it did not assess the adequacy of quality assurance mechanisms for data collection.

25. Our audit work on the Department's post-secondary training programs touched on areas also being covered in a separate audit by our Office, which will be reported to Parliament in our 2010 Spring

Report. That audit looked at the federal role in supporting foundations of development in the Northwest Territories, including federal support for training and local economic development initiatives designed to improve residents' ability to participate in development opportunities.

26. More details on the audit objectives, scope, approach, and criteria are in **About the Audit** at the end of this report.

Observations and Recommendations

Early childhood development

27. The Department of Education, Culture and Employment views education along a continuum: early childhood development impacts success in elementary and secondary school, which in turn impacts success in post-secondary institutions. More specifically, the Department notes that the healthy development of young children in the Northwest Territories is crucial to their later development and requires significant attention and improved results. For young children who are at risk of not succeeding in the education system, early intervention is critical to provide additional support and to prevent serious problems later in life.

28. Early childhood programming took on increased importance with the introduction of the Early Childhood Development Framework for Action in 2001. According to the Framework, the Department is responsible for developing a comprehensive early childhood learning system that includes licensed programs and services located in schools, centres, and homes. These programs and services are to include an educational development component.

29. The Department licenses day care facilities and monitors them through annual inspections to ensure compliance with the *Child Day Care Act* and the *Child Day Care Standards Regulations*. Licensing requirements pertain mainly to health and safety. The Department also provides program development support to community organizations interested in delivering programs and services for young children and their families. Its regional early childhood development consultants inspect day care facilities and provide ongoing support to them (including support in delivering educational development activities). Finally, it provides funding to Aurora College for the delivery of an early childhood development certificate program.

The Department has expanded its early childhood development programming to better prepare young children for school

30. We examined the Department's strategic and annual business plans as well as other documentation to determine whether they contained actions and performance indicators to guide the development of a system of day care facilities.

31. We found the Department has established adequate planning practices in the early childhood area. Between 2005 and 2008, the childhood development system expanded from 99 to 117 licensed day care facilities with approximately 1,700 spaces (serving a population of approximately 4,000 children less than six years of age).

32. The Department has identified some performance indicators (such as the number of licensed day care facilities and the number of individuals who have completed the early childhood development certificate program) to plan and monitor the development of the early learning system. Initiatives to improve the children's health, literacy, and language have been introduced and staff training is being provided.

The Department's monitoring and reporting on day care facilities is incomplete

33. We examined how the Department monitors licensed day care facilities' compliance with the *Child Day Care Act* and *Child Day Care Standards Regulations* (the Act requires the Department to conduct inspections annually) and whether it collects the information it needs to determine the success of its early childhood development programming. We reviewed the Department's inspection reports for the years 2007, 2008, and 2009 and related documentation.

34. We observed that the Department did not inspect all day care facilities each year, as required by the legislation. In particular, we found that in the North Slave region (Yellowknife), the Department inspected only 50 percent of the facilities during 2008. The average number of months between each inspection in this region exceeded 20 months. The Department has told us that this was because of a shortage of staff. If inspections are not done on a regular basis, the Department does not have adequate assurance that operators of child care facilities have continued to comply with the legislation's health and safety requirements.

35. We also found that the Department has not yet begun to collect data on the educational component of programming delivered by day care facilities (such as numeracy and literacy instruction), and the

Department has not yet established a plan to do so. As well, the Department has not developed a mechanism for early childhood educators to share information with the elementary school system on the progress of young children. Nor has the Department developed performance indicators to assess whether children who have attended these facilities perform better when they enter the elementary school system than those who have not. While other jurisdictions such as Yukon do this assessment, we were unable to find documentation of any Department plans to assess this aspect of the success of its early childhood development programming.

36. Given that it has been nearly a decade since the Early Childhood Development Framework was launched, and that there is now a well-established regime of licensed day care facilities, it is important for the Department to consider what is working well and what needs to be improved as it goes forward. It would be useful to determine whether early intervention is better preparing children for elementary school.

37. Recommendation. The Department of Education, Culture and Employment should

- ensure that all day care facilities are inspected annually, in accordance with the *Child Day Care Act* and *Child Day Care Standards Regulations*;
- collect critical data as is considered necessary and cost-effective to help assess the success of the program;
- formally evaluate the success of its early childhood development programming and report the results to the Northwest Territories Legislative Assembly and the public; and
- use this information to make necessary adjustments to early childhood development programming.

The Department's response. Agreed. The Department has conducted a review, and all inspections are up to date. Ongoing monitoring is also being increased by the development of an electronic tracking and reporting function within the Department's computerized client management system.

The Department will initiate discussions with stakeholders to investigate the possibility of collecting and monitoring data to support the success of the program. An evaluation of the Early Childhood Development Framework for Action is being undertaken in 2010–11. Results will be made public and used in determining the need for planned adjustments.

Elementary and secondary education

Secondary school graduation rates—the number of graduates (irrespective of age) as a percentage of the total 18-year-old population. Secondary school graduates include only students graduating from secondary school programs and do not include those young people who completed their Grade 12 through Adult Literacy and Basic Education (ALBE) or grade equivalency.

Alberta Achievement Tests (AAT)—a standardized student achievement testing system used in Alberta for children in grades 3, 6, and 9. The NWT Department of Education, Culture and Employment uses the AAT because Northwest Territories schools use the Alberta curriculum.

Diploma examinations—examinations that students must pass to obtain their high school diploma.

Functional grade level—the grade level of the curriculum that a student is working on for the majority of the school year. Functional grade level information is collected in the subject areas of language arts and mathematics.

Student achievement—the ability to read, understand, and use information, usually measured in the key subject areas of reading, writing, mathematics, and science.

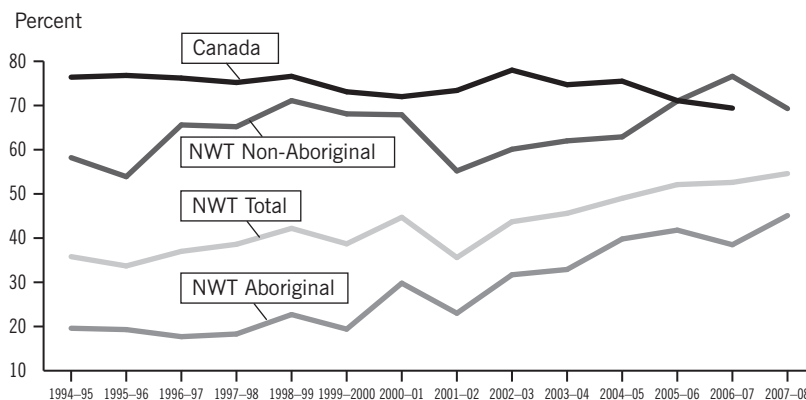
38. To put the education initiatives and actions of the Department of Education, Culture and Employment in context, we reviewed available departmental data on student performance. Organizations consider various indicators to understand the performance of students, since no single performance indicator in itself captures adequately all the dimensions of student performance. The Department has established several indicators to measure student performance, including **secondary school graduation rates**; **Alberta Achievement Test** results (administered to a selection of students in grades 3, 6, and 9); secondary school **diploma examination** results; and **functional grade levels**.

39. Department data shows that secondary school graduation rates have increased steadily since the 2004–05 school year (Exhibit 4). However, the other key indicators of **student achievement**—Alberta Achievement Test results (exhibits 5 and 6), secondary school diploma examination results, and functional grade levels—show limited or no progress since 2004–05.

40. Alberta Achievement Test results show limited or no progress in grades 3, 6, and 9 in Math and in grade 6 and 9 in Language Arts between 2004–05 and 2007–08 (exhibits 5 and 6).

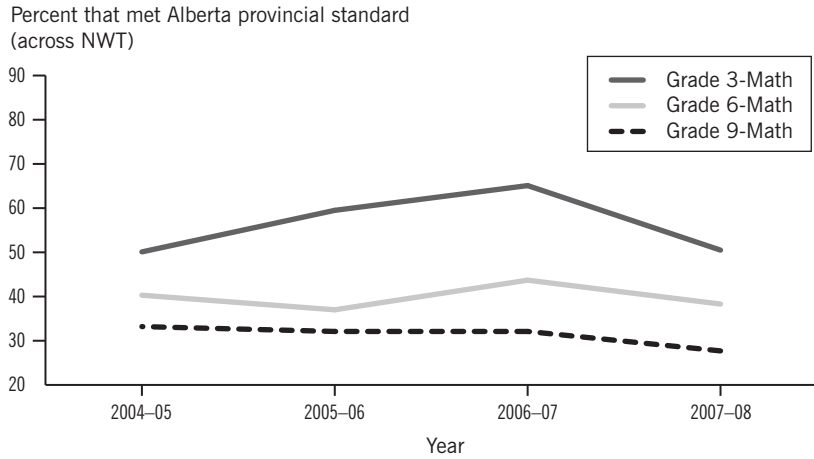
41. As well, diploma examination results do not show significant improvement since 2003–04. For example, between 2003–04 and 2007–08, for the 10 diploma examinations, average marks decreased in six subjects. The same holds true for the percentage of students working at or above their functional grade level: in 2005–06, 72 percent of students were working at or above their grade level in math; this decreased to 69 percent in 2006–07 and 67 percent in 2007–08.

Exhibit 4 Secondary school graduation rates in the NWT have increased steadily since the 2004–2005 school year.



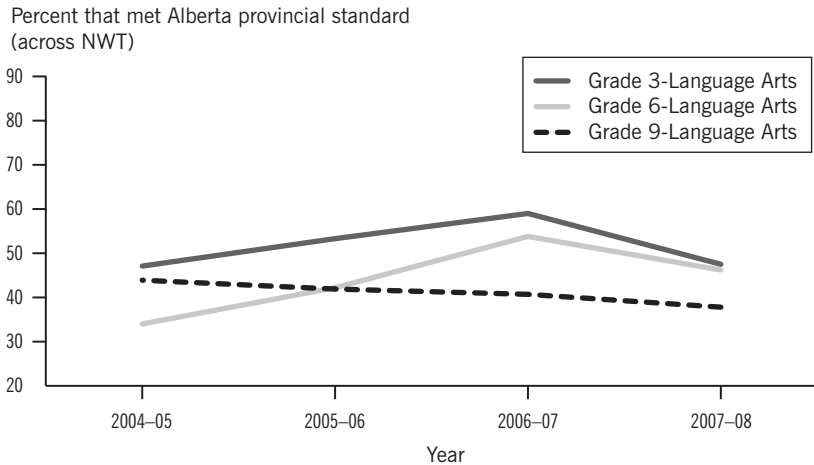
Source: Northwest Territories Bureau of Statistics

Exhibit 5 Alberta Achievement Test results in math show limited or no progress since the introduction of testing in the 2004–05 school year.



Source: Data obtained from the Department of Education, Culture and Employment

Exhibit 6 Alberta Achievement Test results in language arts show limited or no progress since the introduction of testing in the 2004–05 school year.



Source: Data obtained from the Department of Education, Culture and Employment

42. While data for some of these indicators was collected over a relatively short time period and may not capture the impact of recent Department actions to improve student achievement, these diverging trends in graduation rates and student achievement nevertheless raise questions. It is not clear how students succeed in closing the gap between Grade 9 performance, as indicated by Alberta Achievement Test and functional grade level results, and Grade 12 graduation rates. Analysis of diverging trends in student performance indicators could help the Department identify their underlying causes. An analysis of student performance could include, for example

- an examination of why graduation rates have increased in recent years,
- whether rates vary by education pathways (academic level versus trades or apprenticeships versus basic level skills),
- why graduation rates have increased while other key indicators have shown limited or no improvement, and
- why diploma examination results have improved for some subjects but not for others.

We did not find formal analyses of this nature.

The Department does not have a detailed territory-wide plan to improve student performance

43. In addition to assessing whether the Department had identified and investigated the underlying causes of the diverging trends in student performance indicators, we also assessed whether it had developed plans to improve student performance along these key indicators and established targets to monitor progress against commitments. Comprehensive and integrated plans and associated strategies and actions are important because they provide a road map to guide improvements, and they show administrators, educators, students, and parents that improving performance is both an immediate and long-term priority. They provide a means for the Department to play a leadership role in making improvements.

44. We examined the Department's strategic and annual business plans, as well as those of four education councils and three individual schools, to determine whether they included the identification and analysis of the underlying causes of low student performance, and comprehensive and integrated plans to improve student performance against the key indicators set out by the Department—secondary

school graduation rates, Alberta Achievement Test results, diploma examination results, and functional grade levels.

45. As we observed in paragraph 42, we found that the Department has not undertaken detailed analyses of these causes. While the Department has identified a variety of factors that can have an impact on student achievement, such as the inadequacy of student preparation for the tests and family stressors, it has not done a detailed analysis of these or other factors to assess whether and how they are the root causes of lower student performance.

46. We also found that while the Department's Strategic Plan sets out priorities and actions it plans to take, including broad, results-based goals, it does not have a clear strategy for improving student performance against the key indicators. The Strategic Plan sets the Department's overall direction in the area of education and priorities, including, for example, actions to increase the number of child care centres, expand course offerings in schools, improve the recruitment and retention of teachers, and strengthen student support and program quality monitoring. The Strategic Plan sets out the importance of these actions in improving education. While these actions may contribute to improving the performance of students over the long term, they do not constitute a set of detailed measures designed to improve student performance in terms of secondary school graduation rates, Alberta Achievement test results, diploma examination results and functional grade levels.

47. The 2007 progress report on the Strategic Plan further illustrates the above observation. In the progress report, the Department signalled its intent to improve student performance by increasing the graduation rate from an average of 45 percent in 2000–05 to an average of 60 percent in 2011–15. While this indicator and related target are clear, neither the Strategic Plan nor the progress report includes an explicit indication of the specific actions the Department will undertake to improve graduation rates, Alberta Achievement Test results, diploma examination results, or functional grade levels.

48. Education councils are responsible for the delivery of education programs within their jurisdiction and the improvement of student performance. We found that only two of the four education council plans that we reviewed included specific strategies and actions designed to improve student performance. One of these plans included a goal to improve school attendance, functional grade levels, and Alberta Achievement Test results, and a series of actions and activities to achieve this goal. A third council did not have a plan or a strategy to

improve student performance, and the remaining council's plan did not specifically focus on improving student performance.

49. Without assessing the underlying causes of diverging trends in student performance, the Department is not in a position to provide optimal guidance to education councils in setting their detailed action plans for improving student performance. In the absence of such guidance, the education councils we examined, which had plans, chose to act on their own to pursue their own education priorities. These priorities may or may not cover specific actions to improve student performance; an example of an education council priority that does focus on a specific action to improve student performance is provided in Exhibit 7. We observed that the plans of educational councils covered a wide range of education issues that reflected their regional context.

Exhibit 7 Beaufort-Delta Divisional Education Council is using the Internet to deliver courses

At the beginning of the 2009–2010 school year, the Beaufort-Delta Divisional Education Council pilot tested the use of the Internet to deliver courses within the academic stream to senior high school students located in different communities. This pilot project received funding through the Department's Student Success Initiative.

Given the remoteness of the communities, the relatively small size of schools and classes, and the difficulty of recruiting and retaining teachers, information technologies provide a valuable way to offer and deliver courses that would not otherwise be available (these courses are necessary for high school students to enrol in more academically oriented post-secondary programs).

The initial test involved secondary students at Moose Kerr School in Aklavik and Chief Julius School in Fort McPherson participating via the Internet in a science 10 class conducted from Samuel Hearne Secondary School in Inuvik. The students participated in class four times a week. The technology used allowed them to follow the teacher's lesson in real time and type in questions or comments that the teacher could see and respond to, again in real time.

If the pilot is considered a success, the Beaufort Delta Divisional Education Council plans to expand the program for the 2010–11 academic year.

Source: Beaufort-Delta Education Council

50. We found that the three individual school plans we reviewed included a specific focus on improving student performance. In one case, a school developed a well-targeted strategy to address the problem of absenteeism (Exhibit 8), which illustrates that when a school and community come together to solve a problem, they can improve results. We noted that schools and teachers can access funding through the Department's Student Success Initiative to support special projects or activities designed to enrich the education program.

Exhibit 8 Moose Kerr School's initiative reduces student absenteeism

Moose Kerr School, located in Aklavik in the Beaufort Delta, serves 153 students from kindergarten to Grade 12. The school was built in 1969. The staff consists of a principal, three senior high teachers, eight teachers for kindergarten to Grade 9 and two Aboriginal instructors. Local community members provide support staff services.

In 2008, school officials became increasingly concerned about continued high rates of student absenteeism and its impact on students' performance in school. The school decided to take a more proactive approach to monitoring school attendance. The school first solicited and obtained the support of parents for this initiative.

The school staff began monitoring student attendance upon arrival at school and then called and even visited the homes of students who were absent to encourage them to come to school, even if they would be late. The school has indicated that, after a few months, daily attendance levels increased from 82 percent to 87 percent. The number of students with a 100 percent attendance rate went from 28 to 37 over this period.

Source: Beaufort-Delta Education Council and Moose Kerr School.

51. Recent efforts and investments made in education have not yet translated into real gains in student performance. This absence of progress limits Northwest Territories students' ability to access post-secondary education, training programs, and job opportunities.

52. Recommendation. The Department of Education, Culture and Employment should

- formally identify the root causes of the diverging trends in student performance and use this information to better target its efforts for continuous improvement; and
- develop, in collaboration with education councils, a comprehensive, territory-wide action plan and targets for improved student performance.

The Department's response. Agreed. The Department is targeting known root causes as part of the Aboriginal Student Achievement Initiative (for example, attendance). An accountability framework has been drafted that will support continuous improvement efforts and provide information for public reporting.

During this fiscal year, the Department will work with education authorities to examine how to best set jurisdiction or school improvement targets for future years.

The Department has introduced the Aboriginal Student Achievement Initiative to address concerns over poor student performance

53. While no territory-wide plan to improve student performance exists within the Department, we reviewed other departmental activities to determine whether their primary focus was to improve student performance. We identified a key effort—the Aboriginal Student Achievement Initiative.

54. Departmental statistics indicate that school attendance at both the elementary and secondary levels is an issue, especially among Aboriginal students. On average, students in Northwest Territories miss 28 days of school during a year. Every year, the average Aboriginal student misses over 41 school days, which is the equivalent to missing two full years of school by the time a student reaches high school. This affects the performance of Aboriginal students, as indicated in the persistent gap between graduation rates of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students (Exhibit 4).

55. In February 2009, the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment announced the Aboriginal Student Achievement Initiative, intended to identify the root causes of and provide ways to eliminate the gap between high school graduation rates of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. Following the announcement, consultations were held with Aboriginal organizations, industry, other government departments, and school superintendents on how to implement the initiative (including how to address the key goal of increasing attendance). The longer term goal of this initiative is to develop and implement a territorial plan to eliminate the achievement gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. In October 2009, the Government announced that new funding would be provided to all education councils to develop pilot projects to increase school attendance. Results of these pilot projects are to be assessed in 2010.

The Department monitors compliance with education directives but has not formally assessed their effectiveness or relevance

56. The *Education Act* requires that all residents have access to education and that school programs be based on the culture of Aboriginal peoples. The Minister has established education directives to give education councils more detailed direction on these and other requirements of the Act. These directives—20 in total—range from administrative issues such as the preparation of the school year

calendar to more substantive education issues such as standardized testing.

57. Two significant directives are the Inclusive Schooling directive, and the Aboriginal Language and Culture-Based Education (ALCBE) directive. The Inclusive Schooling directive requires education councils to respond to the needs of individual students so that their full potential may be realized. Education councils are required to provide the Department with data on the number of students for whom a modified or individual education plan suited to their needs and abilities was prepared. In 2006–07, over 20 percent of students enrolled in grades 1 to 9 were following such plans. The ALCBE directive requires education councils to provide students with school programs and learning environments that reflect, validate, and promote the values, world views, and languages of the community’s cultures. Education councils are required to report activities of this nature to the Department. Funding for these two directives is substantial, and from the fiscal years 1998–99 to 2007–08, has increased from \$8 million to \$33 million annually.

58. We examined how the Department monitored education councils’ compliance with the reporting requirements of these two directives. We reviewed the reporting requirements of the directives, the information education councils provided to the Department, and the feedback the Department gave to education councils on the information that was provided.

59. We found that education councils generally complied with the reporting requirements included in the two directives examined. However, we found that education council reports on ALCBE activities were often general and did not provide enough information for the Department to assess the extent of compliance with the requirements of the directive. The Department has acknowledged this and has proposed to strengthen the reporting requirement associated with the ALCBE directive.

60. We found that the Department regularly reviewed reports it received from education councils and communicated resulting concerns or suggestions to the councils. However, we found little evidence that the Department actively followed up with education councils to determine whether they had taken actions in response to issues it had raised.

61. As well, we found that the Department has not undertaken formal reviews of these two key directives to determine whether they

are achieving their intended results and continue to be relevant, and had no plans to do so. To date, the Department has completed a review of one of the twenty directives established by the Minister—the Student Assessment, Evaluation and Reporting directive.

62. Compliance with education directives is important to ensure the application of specific sections of the *Education Act* and to determine whether funding has been appropriately spent. Without adequate monitoring of education councils' activities, the Department cannot assess the extent of compliance with directives or their continued relevance and suitability.

63. Recommendation. The Department of Education, Culture and Employment should

- follow up on corrective actions taken by education councils to address issues the Department has raised as a result of its monitoring of education directives;
- develop a strategy and timetable for formally assessing the success and continued relevance of education directives; and
- formally strengthen the reporting requirement for the Aboriginal Language and Culture-Based Education directive.

The Department's response. Agreed. The Department is expanding its accountability and reporting activities to allow for more effective monitoring of directives, including a schedule for assessments. A working group of Departmental and education authority officials will be established to begin this work. The Aboriginal Language and Culture-Based Education directive will be the first education directive reviewed.

Reporting on student performance has improved but more is required

64. We compared education indicators on student performance included in the Towards Excellence report on elementary and secondary education with indicators reported by education ministries in other provinces and territories, by the Council of Ministers of Education, and by Statistics Canada. We found that the Department's published education indicators were similar to those of other education and statistical organizations and that the Department had improved its reporting on student performance over the last four years. Student performance indicators now include secondary school graduation rates, functional grade levels, Alberta Achievement Test results, and diploma examination results.

65. As the Department progresses in implementing the Aboriginal Student Achievement Initiative, it will become important to inform the public and the Legislative Assembly about its results and its impact on Aboriginal peoples. The latest Towards Excellence report presents data on student performance indicators mainly by community size. We noted that it did not break down most indicators into categories such as by education council, ethnicity, and gender. Residents of a particular region cannot compare the performance of their students with those of other regions in the Northwest Territories. Such comparisons could contribute to improving the overall performance of the territory through, for example, the sharing of good school practices.

66. Recommendation. The Department of Education, Culture and Employment should

- ensure that key performance indicators are publicly reported to the Legislative Assembly according to major categories such as education council, ethnicity, and gender; and
- report these key performance indicators in its Towards Excellence reports.

The Department's response. Agreed. The Department will undertake consultations with the education authorities during this fiscal year to determine how additional jurisdictional information could be provided in future editions of Towards Excellence. This data is currently collected and provided directly to education authorities.

Adult and post-secondary education

67. Data from Aurora College shows that the number of graduates in certificate, diploma, and degree programs, as well as in trades and apprenticeships, had decreased by about 33 percent between 2003–04 and 2007–08, mainly because of the discontinuation of the welding program and the suspension of a number of program offerings in trades and apprenticeships. Data on the number of adults participating in Adult Literacy and Basic Education courses shows a level trend during the same period, in part due to the high number of job opportunities in the Northwest Territories.

There are gaps in the measurement of the performance of adult and post-secondary students

68. We examined the Department of Education, Culture and Employment's strategic and annual business plans, as well as those of Aurora College, to determine whether they contained action plans, performance indicators, and targets to improve the results of adult and post-secondary education and to meet labour market needs. We also

reviewed the Aurora College documentation to determine whether it reflected the territory-wide direction provided by the Department.

69. Overall, we found that the Department and Aurora College have established reasonable performance indicators and targets. Departmental performance indicators include the completion rate in certificate, diploma, and degree programs; the completion rate for adult literacy and basic education students; and College students' satisfaction with the quality of education programs. Aurora College's performance indicators also include student completion rates for certificate, diploma, and degree programs; graduate satisfaction with the quality of College programs; and graduate employment six months after graduation. However, we found that no clear strategy has been articulated in Department plans to achieve the targets that have been established.

70. The Department uses College data for its performance indicators. Given that both the Department and the College use student completion rates, we expected that the College would measure the completion rates for adult literacy and basic education students. This was not the case, which suggests the Department cannot monitor this program effectively and that both entities need to better coordinate data collection activities.

71. We also found that the student completion rates for certificate, diploma, and degree programs, as reported by Aurora College, are expressed as a percentage of students in their final year. This definition does not take into account the students who left the course before their final year and therefore reports the completion rate inaccurately.

72. Recommendation. The Department of Education, Culture and Employment should

- work with Aurora College to establish consistent performance indicators and targets for adult and post-secondary education; and
- clarify how it intends to achieve its performance targets.

The Department's response. Agreed. As identified in the Strategic Plan, the Department will work with Aurora College to develop an accountability framework in 2010. This will support the establishment of consistent performance indicators and targets. Multi-year and annual program plans will be adapted to reflect identified indicators and targets.

The Department has made progress in identifying labour market needs and coordinating the delivery of training

73. Credible information on labour market needs enhances the Department's ability to plan, design, develop, and offer effective adult and post-secondary education programs and training to Northwest Territories residents. Coordination of training development and delivery with partners is essential to minimize overlap and to ensure skills gaps are filled.

74. We examined departmental processes and practices to collect and assess information about labour market needs and coordinate the delivery of training programs, including whether a formal labour market needs-assessment has been undertaken. A labour market needs-assessment identifies the distribution of occupations by education, skill, knowledge, and training requirements for both current and future labour market scenarios. It helps decision makers with economic development, education, and training decisions, including labour force development initiatives.

75. **Labour market needs-assessment.** We found that the Department did not have a comprehensive or territory-wide labour market needs assessment. However, the Department has used alternative mechanisms to obtain information on current and future labour market needs and has developed several skills training partnerships with various training organizations.

76. The Department has partnered with industry to produce sector-specific labour market needs assessments. For example, in 2008, the Department partnered with the Mine Training Society to assess the needs for unskilled, semi-skilled, and skilled workers in the mining sector over a period of five to seven years. This assessment led to the Department's revising its mining recruitment and training strategies.

77. The Department has also worked with the Bureau of Statistics to develop territorial labour market reviews. These reviews provide data and information on employment and unemployment trends by economic sector, region, occupation, age, and ethnic group.

78. As well, the Department has undertaken other work to identify labour market needs. In 2007, the Department hosted a Northwest Territories Training Forum, where territorial government officials, industry representatives, training organizations, and other stakeholders discussed labour market needs.

79. Across the Territory, the Department has promoted the establishment of regional training coordination committees or

partnerships that are responsible for specifying regional/ community-based labour market needs and for coordinating the delivery of training programs. Committee membership includes representation from Aboriginal governments, the territorial government, the federal government, Aurora College, industry, and other interested stakeholders. One example of a regional training partnership is the Beaufort Delta Regional Training Group. Membership includes the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation, Gwich'in Tribal Council, the Department of Education, Culture and Employment, Aurora College, and representation from industry. Human Resources and Skills Development Canada is invited to meetings that involve regional stakeholders in education and training.

80. Coordination of training delivery. Regional training coordination committees are also responsible for coordinating the delivery of training programs. An example of a partnership to deliver training is the mobile trades unit (Exhibit 9).

81. At the time of the audit, the Department was also working to develop a current Labour Force Development Framework as a means to further coordinate training. In September 2009, the Department reconvened the Training Forum with key stakeholders to discuss the establishment of a Labour Force Development Framework intended to better coordinate the training development efforts of various parties. The Department anticipates that the Framework will be finalized by mid-2010.

Exhibit 9 The mobile trades unit brings training to communities

In an effort to help meet the needs of industry and to bring relevant training opportunities to remote northern communities, Aurora College proposed the acquisition of a mobile trades unit that could be used to train students in carpentry, plumbing, and basic construction across the Beaufort Delta region. With the support of partners including the Department of Education, Culture and Employment, Gwich'in Development, and the Inuvialuit Land Corporation, the College was able to purchase the unit in 2007 for approximately \$1.9 million.

The unit contains approximately 1,000 square feet of workspace that can be configured to support training in welding, electricity, plumbing/pipefitting, mechanics, and carpentry. It functions as a portable classroom that can be transported anywhere a semi-trailer can go. Since the spring of 2008, the unit has offered nine programs and has been located in Inuvik, Tuktoyaktuk, Fort McPherson, and Aklavik. This has allowed residents access to training they would have otherwise been unable to access in their home communities. College data shows that as of December 2009, 74 individuals had completed training.

Source: Department of Education, Culture and Employment and Aurora College

82. Also in 2009, the Department completed a reorganization of its College and Career Development division. The reorganization included establishing a new unit called the Partnership and Agreement Unit with a manager, two program development and evaluation specialists, and a labour market analyst. The unit will build partnerships and provide the Department with enhanced accountability and reporting on advanced education.

83. These labour market needs-assessment mechanisms provided the Department with useful information on employers' and employees' needs in certain economic sectors or regions. However, we found that labour market needs had not been assessed for other key sectors or regions of the Northwest Territories. Such information is necessary to assess all of the needs to be met over a given period, the relative cost of meeting these needs, and the relative effectiveness of different delivery mechanisms. It is also needed to help the College to be more responsive in developing its programs.

84. Recommendation. The Department of Education, Culture and Employment should

- complete an assessment of labour market needs for all major sectors and regions, and
- use the assessment information to determine how best to design and deliver its programs to help fill gaps in the labour market.

The Department's response. Agreed. The Department has worked closely with partners in specific sector areas (for example, mining and oil and gas development) to assess labour market and training needs that help drive strategic investments in training. The Department is also working on a Labour Market Framework that will address training needs and coordination in various sectors which will help provide valuable information related to previous investments and potential resources that may already exist.

The Department's monitoring and assessment of its post-secondary education and training programs is incomplete

85. The Department and the College regularly collect data on the delivery and results of adult and post-secondary education and training programs. We examined this data and found significant gaps. For example, the College was not tracking students who were completing a portion of their training at the college and going on to finish their program at other southern institutions. As well, the Department and Aurora College were not tracking the number of adults who were

taking training provided through the numerous partnerships they have with organizations such as the Mine Training Society. We also found that the Department and the College were not analyzing the data that is collected on a regular basis in order to improve program delivery. Finally, the Department and the College were not regularly evaluating the results of existing training programs.

86. Without this data and related analysis, the Department and Aurora College cannot demonstrate how much progress has been made in building capacity to meet labour market challenges and needs, and whether existing training programs should be maintained or modified, or new ones considered.

87. Recommendation. The Department of Education, Culture and Employment, in consultation with Aurora College, should

- identify and collect relevant data on the results of training delivered through partnerships, and
- undertake a more rigorous analysis of the data in order to assess the success of adult and post-secondary education and training programs and undertake improvements to these programs.

The Department's response. Agreed. The Department will work with Aurora College to develop an accountability framework in 2010 and will include monitoring, reporting, and analysis processes for training undertaken through partnerships.

The Department's monitoring of compliance with the Adult Literacy and Basic Education directive is inadequate

88. In response to continued low literacy and education rates among adults, the Minister issued in 2000 an education directive on Adult Literacy and Basic Education (ALBE). The Department funds ALBE programs and services through contributions mostly to Aurora College and, to a lesser extent, other non-governmental organizations that offer adult basic education services. Aurora College delivers ALBE programming ranging from basic literacy to Grade 12-level courses at the College's three campuses and at community learning centres in communities. Adults who succeed in ALBE programs can enrol in Aurora College post-secondary programs or pursue employment opportunities provided through ALBE programs. College officials told us that approximately 40 percent of students enrolled in the College are in ALBE programs. The directive's reporting requirements for the College include basic information on ALBE programs (including

numbers of individuals enrolled), results achieved with funding received, and other education activities.

89. We examined how the Department monitors Aurora College's compliance with this directive. We reviewed the reporting requirements of the directive and the information Aurora College provided to the Department.

90. We found that the reports Aurora College provided to the Department were inconsistent in the level of detail provided. In many reports, there was limited data on results achieved and answers to qualitative questions were extremely brief or incomplete. Inconsistent reporting makes it difficult for the Department to accurately assess the extent of compliance with the directive, and whether this training yields results.

91. We noted that, as part of the new literacy strategy, Towards Literacy 2008–2018, announced by the Government in late 2008, the Department has identified the data to be collected and that data collection is expected to start in 2010. Collection of this additional data may assist the Department and College in assessing the impact of adult literacy and basic education efforts.

92. Recommendation. The Department of Education, Culture and Employment, in collaboration with Aurora College, should

- establish key performance indicators and targets for expected results for Adult Literacy and Basic Education programs;
- review the reporting requirements of the Adult Literacy and Basic Education directive to ensure that key information is being collected and ensure these reporting requirements are coordinated with those of the literacy strategy;
- monitor adherence to these reporting requirements, and take formal action in cases where requirements are not met; and
- periodically assess gaps in performance, identify root causes, and establish detailed action plans to help close the gaps.

The Department's response. Agreed. The Department will be conducting a formal evaluation of the Adult Literacy and Basic Education program in 2010. It is also developing a tool to track planning, monitoring, reporting, and evaluation of advanced education activities. Results from this review will be used to determine further actions related to this recommendation.

Reporting on the post-secondary education system is not timely

93. We examined performance indicators of adult and post-secondary students' success included in the Department's report *Towards Excellence: A Report on Post-secondary Education in the NWT, 2005* (the most recent *Towards Excellence* report) and Aurora College's annual reports and planning documents. We found that the Department has put in place a set of education indicators comparable to sets of indicators used in other jurisdictions. These indicators cover topics such as student enrolments, participation in post-secondary education, the number of graduates by general categories of training programs (adult literacy and basic education, trade and apprenticeship, certificate, diploma, and degree), and the work experience of graduates after they leave Aurora College.

94. However, the latest edition of the *Towards Excellence* report was published in 2006 and included performance indicators for 2004–05. Four years have passed since that report was published. Aurora College's annual planning and reporting documents do not succeed in filling this reporting gap. The College's business plans provide information only on overall student completion rates, graduate employment, and graduate satisfaction; and the College's annual reports provide general information only on enrolments by campus or by training program. We have already noted that the definition of completion rate was not appropriate. Finally, the College's public documents do not provide information on results of adult literacy and basic education or trade and apprenticeship training.

95. Timely and credible reporting serves to inform residents about the status of their post-secondary education system. It reveals a number of trends and developments that characterize the post-secondary education system and provide valuable insights into the education needs and interests of adults. It also helps the Legislative Assembly to hold the Department accountable for education results achieved. In turn, it helps the Department to hold Aurora College accountable for the results achieved in its area of responsibility.

96. Recommendation. The Department of Education, Culture and Employment, in collaboration with Aurora College, should

- review the performance indicators it reports publicly, and
- publish these indicators regularly.

The Department's response. Agreed. The Department will work with Aurora College to review performance indicators and to coordinate the publishing of public reports.

Conclusion

97. The Department of Education, Culture and Employment has developed strategic and annual business plans that cover the entire Northwest Territories' education system at a general level. It has reported data on the status of the education system, including data on student performance. In each of the areas that we examined, early childhood development, elementary and secondary education, and adult and post-secondary education, we found that aspects of planning, monitoring, or reporting were not adequate and would benefit from improvement.

98. In early childhood development, the Department has expanded the number of day care facilities and identified some performance indicators to plan the further development of its early learning system. We found that planning in elementary and secondary education was not adequate in that the Department did not have a comprehensive and territory-wide plan to improve student performance against key indicators. We did note that in early 2009, the Department introduced the Aboriginal Student Achievement Initiative to improve the performance of Aboriginal students. While more work needs to be done, planning in adult and post-secondary education was adequate, as the Department has identified labour market needs in specific sectors, and it worked with the Bureau of Statistics to produce labour market reviews intended to report employment trends across the Northwest Territories.

99. Monitoring in early childhood development was not adequate. In 2008, the Department did not inspect each day care facility as required by the *Child Day Care Act*, to ensure that all facilities were adhering to health and safety requirements. For the period under review, in elementary and secondary education, monitoring of education councils' compliance with key education directives was adequate, as the Department obtained and analyzed the required information from education councils. However, we noted that in cases where deficiencies were identified, the Department did not actively follow up with education councils to ensure that corrective actions were fully implemented. Monitoring of adult and post-secondary education was not adequate, as there were significant gaps in the data collected. The Department was not tracking students who were doing a portion of their training at the College and then going on to finish their program at other southern institutions. The Department did not ensure that regular evaluations of the results of training programs were undertaken.

100. Reporting on early childhood development was not adequate, as little information on program results had been reported. Reporting on elementary and secondary education was adequate, but there is room for improvement. We found that while the Department was using key education indicators in reporting on student performance, further performance data by education council, ethnicity, and gender may be needed as the Department progresses in implementing its Aboriginal Student Achievement Initiative. Reporting in adult and post-secondary education was also inadequate. There was limited reporting on whether or not the intended results of the Adult Literacy and Basic Education directive were being achieved, and established indicators on adult and post-secondary education have not been published in *Towards Excellence* since 2006.

About the Audit

All of the audit work in this report was conducted in accordance with the standards for assurance engagements set by The Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants. While the Office adopts these standards as the minimum requirement for our audits, we also draw upon the standards and practices of other disciplines.

Objective

The objective of this audit was to determine whether the Department of Education, Culture and Employment has adequately planned, monitored, and reported on education and training programs designed to increase opportunities for residents of the Northwest Territories to participate fully in society.

To this end, we examined

- whether the Department has adequately planned, monitored and reported on
 - early childhood development and elementary and secondary schooling to achieve program goals and objectives, and
 - adult and post-secondary education and training programs intended to help residents acquire the skills, knowledge, and abilities to become more self-reliant and to take better advantage of opportunities;
- whether the Department has assurance that education councils and Aurora College have complied with relevant education legislation, policies, standards, and directives; and
- whether the Department has measured, assessed, taken action on, and reported on gaps in Northwest Territories students' performance and in the Department's achievement of its objectives and goals.

Scope and approach

The audit examined

- the planning, monitoring, and reporting practices the Department put in place in the areas of early childhood development, elementary and secondary education, and adult and post-secondary education;
- the performance information on Northwest Territories students' performance and the actions taken by the Department, education councils, and Aurora College to improve this performance; and
- the Department's monitoring of education councils and Aurora College.

Examination work consisted mainly of a review of documents, data analysis, and interviews with key education officials and stakeholders. We focused on activities undertaken from 2005 (the release of the Department's current Strategic Plan) to November 2009.

The audit did not examine the quality of the curriculum or of teaching. Neither did it examine income security programs such as student financial assistance; culture, heritage, and language programs; or

employment programs. It did not examine the Department’s management of human resources, school facilities, and information technology projects or of environmental and sustainable development issues. Finally, it did not assess the adequacy of quality assurance mechanisms for data collection.

Examination work was done at the Department’s headquarters, in selected education councils, and at Aurora College. We visited five communities: Behchoko (Chief Jimmy Bruneau School), N’Dilo (Kalemi Dene School), Colville Lake (Colville Lake School), Aklavik (Moose Kerr School), and Inuvik (Samuel Hearne Secondary School). We also visited the Aurora Campus of Aurora College (Inuvik) and a community learning centre (Aklavik). Finally, we visited an early childhood learning centre in Yellowknife.

Criteria

Listed below are the criteria that were used to conduct this audit and their sources.

Criteria	Sources
Early childhood development programming; elementary and secondary education	
We expected the Department of Education, Culture and Employment to have established action plans, targets, and performance indicators to achieve the goals and objectives set for early childhood development programming and the elementary and secondary school system.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Northwest Territories (NWT) <i>Financial Administration Act</i> • NWT <i>Education Act</i> and associated regulations • <i>Child Day Care Act</i> and <i>Child Day Care Standards Regulations</i>
We expected the Department to have monitored and assessed progress toward targets.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) <i>Financial Administration Manual</i>
We expected the Department to have taken corrective actions, where needed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GNWT Third Party Agencies Accountability Framework • Minister’s Education Directives
We expected the Department to have assessed the results achieved by primary and secondary students and reported these results to the Legislative Assembly.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Department of Education, Culture and Employment’s <i>Finance and Administration Manual for Education Authorities</i>
We expected the Department to have put in place mechanisms to monitor and assess the delivery of programs and services by education councils and to have taken action in areas requiring improvement.	

Criteria	Sources
Adult and post-secondary education	
We expected the Department, in collaboration with Aurora College, to have established action plans, targets, and performance indicators to achieve the goals and objectives set for the post-secondary school system.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NWT <i>Financial Administration Act</i> • NWT <i>Education Act</i> and associated regulations • GNWT Financial Administration Manual • GNWT Third Party Agencies Accountability Framework • Minister’s Education Directives
We expected the Department, in collaboration with Aurora College, to have monitored and assessed progress toward targets.	
We expected the Department, in collaboration with Aurora College, to have taken corrective actions, where needed.	
We expected the Department, in collaboration with Aurora College, to have assessed the performance of adult and post-secondary students and reported these results to the Legislative Assembly.	
We expected the Department, in collaboration with Aurora College, to have assessed labour market needs and revised training programs, where appropriate, to respond to labour market needs.	
We expected the Department to have put in place mechanisms to monitor and assess the delivery of programs and services by Aurora College and to have taken action in areas requiring improvement.	

Management reviewed and accepted the suitability of the criteria used in the audit.

Period covered by the audit

Audit work for this report was substantially completed on 30 November 2009.

Audit team

Assistant Auditor General: Andrew Lennox

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Appendix List of recommendations

The following is a list of recommendations found in the report. The number in front of the recommendation indicates the paragraph where it appears in the report. The numbers in parentheses indicate the paragraphs where the topic is discussed.

Recommendation	Response
<p>Early childhood development</p> <p>37. The Department of Education, Culture and Employment should</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensure that all day care facilities are inspected annually, in accordance with the <i>Child Day Care Act</i> and <i>Child Day Care Standards Regulations</i>; • collect critical data as is considered necessary and cost-effective to help assess the success of the program; • formally evaluate the success of its early childhood development programming and report the results to the Northwest Territories Legislative Assembly and the public; and • use this information to make necessary adjustments to early childhood development programming. (27–36) 	<p>Agreed. The Department has conducted a review, and all inspections are up to date. Ongoing monitoring is also being increased by the development of an electronic tracking and reporting function within the Department’s computerized client management system.</p> <p>The Department will initiate discussions with stakeholders to investigate the possibility of collecting and monitoring data to support the success of the program. An evaluation of the Early Childhood Development Framework for Action is being undertaken in 2010–11. Results will be made public and used in determining the need for planned adjustments.</p>

Recommendation	Response
<p>Elementary and secondary education</p> <p>52. The Department of Education, Culture and Employment should</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • formally identify the root causes of the diverging trends in student performance and use this information to better target its efforts for continuous improvement; and • develop, in collaboration with education councils, a comprehensive, territory-wide action plan and targets for improved student performance. (38–51) <p>63. The Department of Education, Culture and Employment should</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • follow up on corrective actions taken by education councils to address issues the Department has raised as a result of its monitoring of education directives; • develop a strategy and timetable for formally assessing the success and continued relevance of education directives; and • formally strengthen the reporting requirement for the Aboriginal Language and Culture-Based Education directive. (56–62) 	<p>Agreed. The Department is targeting known root causes as part of the Aboriginal Student Achievement Initiative (for example, attendance). An accountability framework has been drafted that will support continuous improvement efforts and provide information for public reporting.</p> <p>During this fiscal year, the Department will work with education authorities to examine how to best set jurisdiction or school improvement targets for future years.</p> <p>Agreed. The Department is expanding its accountability and reporting activities to allow for more effective monitoring of directives, including a schedule for assessments. A working group of Departmental and education authority officials will be established to begin this work. The Aboriginal Language and Culture-Based Education directive will be the first education directive reviewed.</p>

Recommendation	Response
<p>66. The Department of Education, Culture and Employment should</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensure that key performance indicators are publicly reported to the Legislative Assembly according to major categories such as education council, ethnicity, and gender; and • report these key performance indicators in its Towards Excellence reports. <p>(64–65)</p>	<p>Agreed. The Department will undertake consultations with the education authorities during this fiscal year to determine how additional jurisdictional information could be provided in future editions of Towards Excellence. This data is currently collected and provided directly to education authorities.</p>
<p>Adult and post-secondary education</p>	
<p>72. The Department of Education, Culture and Employment should</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • work with Aurora College to establish consistent performance indicators and targets for adult and post-secondary education; and • clarify how it intends to achieve its performance targets. <p>(67–71)</p>	<p>Agreed. As identified in the Strategic Plan, the Department will work with Aurora College to develop an accountability framework in 2010. This will support the establishment of consistent performance indicators and targets. Multi-year and annual program plans will be adapted to reflect identified indicators and targets.</p>
<p>84. The Department of Education, Culture and Employment should</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • complete an assessment of labour market needs for all major sectors and regions, and • use the assessment information to determine how best to design and deliver its programs to help fill gaps in the labour market. <p>(73–83)</p>	<p>Agreed. The Department has worked closely with partners in specific sector areas (for example, mining and oil and gas development) to assess labour market and training needs that help drive strategic investments in training. The Department is also working on a Labour Market Framework that will address training needs and coordination in various sectors which will help provide valuable information related to previous investments and potential resources that may already exist.</p>

Recommendation	Response
<p>87. The Department of Education, Culture and Employment, in consultation with Aurora College, should</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify and collect relevant data on the results of training delivered through partnerships, and • undertake a more rigorous analysis of the data in order to assess the success of adult and post-secondary education and training programs and undertake improvements to these programs. <p>(85–86)</p>	<p>Agreed. The Department will work with Aurora College to develop an accountability framework in 2010 and will include monitoring, reporting, and analysis processes for training undertaken through partnerships.</p>
<p>92. The Department of Education, Culture and Employment, in collaboration with Aurora College, should</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • establish key performance indicators and targets for expected results for Adult Literacy and Basic Education programs; • review the reporting requirements of the Adult Literacy and Basic Education directive to ensure that key information is being collected and ensure these reporting requirements are coordinated with those of the literacy strategy; • monitor adherence to these reporting requirements, and take formal action in cases where requirements are not met; and • periodically assess gaps in performance, identify root causes, and establish detailed action plans to help close the gaps. <p>(88–91)</p>	<p>Agreed. The Department will be conducting a formal evaluation of the Adult Literacy and Basic Education program in 2010. It is also developing a tool to track planning, monitoring, reporting, and evaluation of advanced education activities. Results from this review will be used to determine further actions related to this recommendation.</p>

Recommendation	Response
<p>96. The Department of Education, Culture and Employment, in collaboration with Aurora College, should</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • review the performance indicators it reports publicly, and • publish these indicators regularly. (93–95) 	<p>Agreed. The Department will work with Aurora College to review performance indicators and to coordinate the publishing of public reports.</p>