

Developments in Wellness in Education

Mr. Speaker, programs focused on both teacher and student wellness are foundational to Education Renewal. Mental wellness is essential for everyone involved in teaching and learning, and we have acted to address this need.

In response to the critical need for mental health supports for schools and in communities, the Departments of Education, Culture and Employment and Health and Social Services are partnering with education bodies and Health and Social Services Authorities to provide counselling services for children and youth within schools and in the community. We are using a four year phased-in approach that began in 2018.

Counselling services will be provided by Child and Youth Care Counsellors who live in the community or by a travelling team of counsellors.

These counsellors will be part of a larger continuum of mental health and wellness services for children and youth. Counsellors will have strong, integrated relationships with education staff and other community staff, including social workers, nurses, doctors, community counsellors and youth centre staff.

Mr. Speaker, schools with fewer than 75 students will receive mental health counselling services from a travelling team, who will provide three separate week-long visits per community each year, as well as services via technology. Schools with 75-250 students will have a full-time counsellor; those with 251-500 students will have two full-time counsellors, and schools with more than 500 students will have three full-time counsellors.

For the 2018-2019 school year, the Dehcho and Tłı̨chǫ services are in place and running. All the counsellor positions except one have been filled. The travelling team visits from September to December have all been completed and the winter visits are scheduled. They will return for a third time in the spring.

The Sahtu and Beaufort Delta regions will be set up in the 2019-2020 school year, followed by the Yellowknife region in 2020-2021 and the South Slave Region in 2021-2022.

Mr. Speaker, teacher wellness is also an important focus of the Department. Starling Minds, an online mental health support platform for teachers, was made available to all NWT teachers through a collaborative initiative between ECE and the NWT Teachers' Association. Now in its third year, this support stemmed from a Memorandum of Understanding on Mental Health in the Workplace in the most recent Collective Agreement with the Teachers' Association.

As well, following the implementation of the 2017-2018 three-year pilot of the Strengthening Teacher Instructional Practice, we have received positive feedback on the time that educators now have to plan, collaborate and participate in professional development.

The Northwest Territories Teachers' Association surveyed its membership in November 2017 and assessed the impact the extra time provided to educators across the North. They received numerous comments and observations. The feedback from educators was incredibly positive, as an example, one educator said:

"STIP changed my life! I normally have to write exams, mark exams, write report card comments and contact parents outside of the school day. I have my life back and my wellness has improved dramatically. STIP is a game changer for wellness in the teaching profession."

Mr. Speaker, Child and Youth Care Counsellors, travelling mental health teams, access for teachers to the Starling Minds platform and Strengthening Teacher Instructional Practice are innovative ways of improving educational outcomes by addressing issues of mental wellness in schools and communities across the NWT.

Research, investment and piloting have been important in getting these initiatives off the ground, but none of them could have been implemented without our partners in education. We can all be proud of the collaboration among GNWT departments, education and health authorities and the NWT Teachers' Association that has led to strong programs supporting

the well-being and success of school children, youth and teachers. All of our communities will reap the benefits of these programs for many years to come.

Masi, Mr. Speaker.