

Strengthening Supports for Students

Mr. Speaker, the Government of the Northwest Territories has a responsibility to make sure that high school students in the Northwest Territories have access to an equitable, high-quality education that prepares them to be contributing members of our communities. We owe it to our young people to provide an environment that supports wellness, inspires a sense of identity and builds on their strengths, because we know it means a greater chance for success both in academics and in life.

Mr. Speaker, Members are aware of some of our work to date to implement Education Renewal, and, in particular, to meet our mandate commitments to developing options to increase the approaches available to students that lead to graduation, to improve graduation rates, and to provide greater linkages to postsecondary schooling. This work is closely linked to the goals of the Skills 4 Success Strategic Framework and Action Plan 2016-2020, which include increasing skills with relevant education and training, and bridging education and employment gaps with targeted supports.

We have been acting decisively on this commitment, because data, research and northern voices are all telling us the same thing Northwest Territories students need to be better prepared for postsecondary education, work and life, upon completion of high school.

Mr. Speaker, our new approaches include:

- New High School Pathways that offer a wider range of options for high school completion;
- Increasing the number of academic grades 10-12 courses available to small community students by expanding Northern Distance Learning;

- Career and Education Advisors, who will help students choose an educational path that meets their goals while making them aware of in-demand jobs and the skills needed to fill them; and,
- Increasing access to youth mental wellness specialists in schools and communities through the Child and Youth Care Counsellor initiative, in partnership with the Department of Health and Social Services.

Mr. Speaker, High School Pathways will provide grades 10-12 students with more options that are engaging, individualized, flexible and aligned with each student's plans for their future. The outcome we expect will be an increase in the number of students who successfully complete high school, who continue on to postsecondary or training pursuits and who are ready for employment.

Northern Distance Learning is also being expanded. The initiative started in the Beaufort Delta, and is currently facilitated for several communities by experienced teachers in Inuvik's East Three Secondary School. Learning through video interfaces will increase the number of grades 10-12 academically-inclined students who can stay in their home community where they have family supports, and still take academic or dash-one courses.

Mr. Speaker, through the Education Renewal and Skills 4 Success initiatives, we have learned that students and youth also need specialized career and educational advice and supports, so that they can make informed decisions about their future. With more than 78 per cent of Northwest Territories jobs requiring a postsecondary education, we must do a better job of connecting them to the labour market, because their success is critical to the North's economic success.

Students and 18 to 24-year old youths out of school will soon have additional support from Career and Education Advisors, who will help them as they discover their career interests, learn about Northwest Territories jobs in demand, and understand how to acquire the education and experience to obtain those jobs.

This team of advisors will begin their work in the second semester of the 2018-2019 school year. They will advise students as they select a postsecondary pathway and plan ahead, by providing information on the right mix of high school courses and marks to meet the eligibility criteria of postsecondary and training institutions. Career and Education Advisors will promote skilled trades as first-choice careers, encourage students to consider apprenticeships in trades and certified occupations, and assist with finding financial supports.

Mr. Speaker, mental wellness issues gravely affect the lives of a large number of our children and youth. I believe that student academic achievement needs to be built upon a foundation of mental health and wellness. World-wide research supports this perspective. The educational changes we are making will have a better chance of success with the introduction of Child and Youth Care Counsellors in our schools and communities during the next four years. These counsellors will help create a safe and supportive environment to promote the mental wellness of children and youth, which we expect will lead to improved academic outcomes, as well.

All of these changes require the support of Education Authorities, teachers, parents, students, Indigenous governments and employers, if they are to be successful. The Department of Education, Culture and Employment will engage with all of these stakeholders as we move forward.

Mr. Speaker, these changes will happen over the next 18 months, starting with the Career and Education Advisors and Child and Youth Care Counsellors, followed by the expansion of Northern Distance Learning and High School Pathways implementation.

Mr. Speaker, any one of these programs would improve the success of our high school students. Taken together, as part of the comprehensive Education Renewal and Skills 4 Success action plans, they will provide equitable, flexible, and supportive education that prepares northern youth for life, postsecondary education, and employment.

Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.