

Indigenous Languages in Schools and Communities

Mr. Speaker, Indigenous language revitalization is a shared responsibility. Language revitalization is not something that can be done solely by schools. Rather, numerous stakeholders, including Elders, Indigenous and community governments, language groups and families must work together to see our nine Indigenous languages thrive.

Mr. Speaker, in the past year, including \$5.9 million from the federal government, we have invested \$11 million in Indigenous language revitalization, through Indigenous governments who have the authority and responsibility to design and deliver Indigenous language programming in their communities.

In December, we invited Indigenous language experts to participate in conversations about defining the differences between language learning, language revitalization and language acquisition. Participants worked on identifying where current initiatives fit in and learned about tools and strategies for language revitalization. Many programs are at different stages of development.

Initiatives include community projects, regional initiatives, and territorial approaches. Language classes for front line staff, carving and sewing classes in the community language, and community phrase books are all good examples of community-based projects. Regional initiatives involve close collaboration between communities on projects such as dictionaries and calendars, sharing resources and promotional materials across the region, and regional meetings.

At the territorial level, we are partnering with Indigenous governments, Aurora College and southern universities on programs like the University of Alberta's Canadian Indigenous Languages and Literacy Development program, or the University of Victoria's Indigenous Language Revitalization program.

Mr. Speaker, in the last sitting, I announced that the 2017 Northwest Territories Aboriginal Languages Framework: A Shared Responsibility would soon have an accompanying Action Plan. The Action Plan is in the final stages of development and will be released in the May/June sitting.

At the same time, the Indigenous Languages Education Secretariat has continued its work on Indigenous language revitalization initiatives. We have made further investments in community radio stations for Indigenous language programming. Professional development opportunities have been offered and Indigenous language communities have been supported to deliver language and culture programming.

Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned earlier, it takes everyone working together to revitalize and increase access to Indigenous languages, but our schools are playing their part. Right now, in 19 of our schools, students are hearing and using Indigenous languages during their school routines and in interactions with staff and other students. These schools are piloting the new Indigenous languages curriculum, called Our Languages.

This curriculum promotes Indigenous language instruction in the classroom, but also encourages a whole school approach to Indigenous language use. The Our Languages curriculum is not a graded program. It has five levels ranging from emergent to capable. A student's proficiency in a language, not their age or grade, determines the level at which they work.

With feedback and input from this first year pilot, the Our Languages curriculum will be further piloted throughout the territory in the 2019-2020 school year, in every classroom from junior kindergarten to grade 12.

Mr. Speaker, as the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment, and as an Indigenous person, I find it deeply gratifying that our students have the opportunity to use and learn Indigenous languages in our Northwest Territories school system. We can all be proud to represent a territory that works so diligently to revitalize and increase access to our Indigenous languages.

Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.