

**Aurora College Transformation Progress and Benefits**

Mr. Speaker, one year ago, Members of this House made the transformation of Aurora College into a polytechnic university a priority of the 19<sup>th</sup> Legislative Assembly. Today, I would like to provide an update on some of the progress that has been made toward this goal.

Earlier this month, Aurora College released a three-year Strategic Plan which sets out the vision, mission, values, and strategic directions that will guide the college's operations for the next three years, and helps set the stage for key transformational changes. Two of the four strategic pillars of the new plan are Academic and Research Excellence and Learning-Centered. In support of these pillars, Aurora College is introducing a Centre for Teaching and Learning pilot project that will promote academic excellence through the professional development of faculty and staff in the practices of adult education, instructional design, educational technology, and will promote proven ways to engage students in learning. The Centre will foster a learning-centred environment to help ensure student growth and success. It is a key step in strengthening the foundation of the College, and transforming it into a world class institution.

Mr. Speaker, polytechnic universities provide hands-on, technology-based programs that are often developed in collaboration with partners. We have already heard from a number of potential co-investment partners, from industry to community-based organizations, who have told us that they need a Northern workforce with the academic background and technical skills to meet the challenges of today's economic realities. We will continue to foster these relationships and build the partnerships so we can meet the needs of the labour market and our residents.

To support transparency and meaningful engagement we have engaged with Indigenous governments, campus communities, post-secondary and industry stakeholders, students, College employees and the public on key aspects of the proposed approach.

Engagement with Indigenous governments is being guided by our Indigenous Engagement Approach which is grounded in the principles of United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action. I have made a commitment to ongoing and meaningful engagement with Indigenous governments throughout the transformation.

Mr. Speaker, the polytechnic university will expand the scope of quality programming offered in each of our small communities and provide a clear path for Northerners to achieve their education and career goals. Understanding the benefits and limitations of online learning during the pandemic has strengthened the resolve of the College to transform into an institution that will meet the needs of residents in all communities.

Increased access means leveraging our network of community learning centres to ensure residents can get a foothold in the education system and receive more training close to home.

This will also allow the institution to better meet students where they are in their education journey. This means, among other things, introducing laddered programming that allows students to begin their education at a level that is right for them, so they are able to build their skills and advance onto degree programs if they chose. Increasing access will also increase professional development opportunities across the territory that will empower our residents to advance in their careers and help fill Northern jobs with Northerners.

As the polytechnic university emerges from transformation, it will be stronger, more accessible, and have more programs which will attract more students from the Northwest Territories and beyond. This investment in the education of our residents is an investment in our territory and its future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.