



October 13, 2020

LESA SEMMLER
MLA, INUVIK TWIN LAKES

Oral Question 317-19(2) COVID-19 Pandemic Relief Funds for Education

This letter is in follow-up to the Oral Question you raised on June 10, 2020 regarding pandemic relief funds to assist education bodies with unbudgeted COVID-19 expenses.

I am pleased to inform you that the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) recently announced \$12.371 million in additional funding for School Contributions COVID-19 Support, of which \$4.85 million will be received from the Government of Canada. This funding will help address the concerns of education stakeholders with regard to the increased costs of delivering educational programming during the pandemic. Education bodies have expressed concerns over how to cover the increased costs of technology for blended learning, substitute and casual staff wages, and materials and supplies, including personal protective equipment (PPE). Parents and guardians are concerned that there will be gaps in the delivery of programs, particularly if there are partial school closures due to COVID-19. The Departments of Education, Culture and Employment (ECE) and Finance have worked to proactively address these concerns.

Funding will go towards:

- Computers and internet connectivity devices to support remote learning by students;
- Teaching positions for schools that are unable to fit all students due to physical distancing requirements;
- Custodial salaries to support additional cleaning and sanitizing;
- Salaries for substitute teachers; and
- Increased materials and supplies.

ECE continues to work with education body Superintendents to track and report all COVID-19-related expenses to facilitate ongoing cost-recovery efforts and minimize the financial impact of the pandemic on education bodies.

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In addition to the increased funding supports, ECE supplied education bodies with sufficient PPE and disinfecting and cleaning products to allow all schools in the territory to safely deliver remote learning to the end of the 2019-2020 school year. ECE also coordinated the provision of additional supplies required by the Chief Public Health Officer's updated protocols for the 2020-2021 school year. PPE is available in a variety of sizes for both students and educators, and wherever possible, products are sourced in the territory. For example, ECE purchased 7,125 hand-sewn cloth face masks from a Fort Smith business over the summer. To further support students and educators, ECE supplied two reusable cloth face masks to each student for the start of the 2020-2021 school year, and also arranged a donation of adult-sized reusable and recyclable face shields for NWT educators from an Ontario-based company, The Canadian Shield. ECE continues to work with other GNWT departments on local COVID-19 procurement initiatives.

Education leaders have worked tirelessly alongside my Department to ensure the safety of students, educators and communities as the top priority, while simultaneously delivering a remote learning program that enabled students to meaningfully finish classes last June and return to school this year.

Thank you for your questions and interest in this matter.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R.J. Simpson', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

R.J. Simpson
Minister, Education, Culture
and Employment

- c. Minister, Finance
- Principal Secretary
- Clerk of the Legislative Assembly
- Secretary to Cabinet
- Deputy Minister, Education, Culture and Employment
- Deputy Minister, Finance
- Legislative Coordinator, Executive and Indigenous Affairs