



TOWN OF FORT SMITH

Post Office Box 147, Northwest Territories, X0E 0P0

February 13, 2017

Premier Bob McLeod
Honorable Alfred Moses, Minister of Education, Culture and Employment
Honorable Louis Sebert, MLA Thebacha
Government of the NWT
Box 1320
YELLOWKNIFE, NT X1A 2L9

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FEB 17 2017
Legislative Assembly
Members Offices

Re: Funding for Aurora College Bachelor of Education Program

On behalf of the Town of Fort Smith, I am writing to express my opposition to the recently announced cuts to Education, Culture, and Employment affecting Aurora College and am asking you to reconsider the proposed termination of Aurora College's Teacher Education Program.

The Aurora College mission statement states that the college "is focused on Student Success and is committed to supporting the development of our Northern Society through excellence in education, training, and research that is culturally sensitive and responsive to the people that we serve." Reducing funding for Aurora College hinders the ability of the College to provide culturally relevant programming designed to meet the needs of northern communities. The Teacher Education Program educates and empowers many leaders and teachers in the North in a unique way that honours our indigenous culture.

The Bachelor of Education Program at Aurora College prepares teachers to work effectively in Northern classrooms; to integrate Aboriginal cultural perspectives in classrooms; to utilize community and traditional knowledge resources; to teach all subject competently for grades K-9 and to meet the needs of each child placed in their classrooms. By eliminating this program, it forces students to southern institutions causing Northern society to suffer by removing the aspects of emphasizing northern culture and tradition in Education.

In a review of the Strategy for Teacher Education in the NWT, the reasoning and support for this program is clear and is still relevant. The program was built on a desire to return the control of Aboriginal children's education to Aboriginal peoples with a target of 50% Indigenous teachers. TEP is seen as an opportunity to remove systemic and social barriers that prevent access and success in the mainstream education field. From 1968-2005, there were 268 graduates of the program, of which 78% were Indigenous; yet, in 2004-2005 only 11% of the teachers in the NWT were Indigenous. Almost all indigenous graduates remain in the NWT; whereas, the teacher turnover rate for Southern hires is approximately 18% and the average annual cost of removal of southern hires over the period of 2000-2004 was \$1.2 million. Some graduates move on to other careers in the field of education. However, 79% of the graduates from 1991-2005 were still



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working in the field of education in the NWT. Others went on to other careers in the Northwest Territories: Teaching Administrators; College Instructors; Principals; Family counselor; Assistant Deputy Minister; Supervisor of Schools; Grand Chief. University degree programs prepare you for the workforce beyond education, as demonstrated, and as can also be seen by past MLAs and Premiers who have gone through the program.

According to the report, diploma graduation rates were as follows:

1969-79: 83

1980-1990: 48 (avg 4/yr)

1991-2000: 94 (avg 10/yr)

2001-2006: 44 (avg 3/yr)

Additionally, degree graduation rates were as follows:

1974-2006: 131

Since this report was published there has been an average of 6 graduates per year; graduation in this program has been constant over the last 20 years and increasing since the start of the program. It is disappointing that budget cuts from the GNWT to Aurora College will result in the termination of a program which started in 1968 and when it should be celebrating 50 years of educating teachers in the NWT in 2018, is now being phased out entirely.

In defense of removing the program, there have been arguments that these graduates can attend a Bachelor of Education program in the southern provinces. Attached to this letter is Appendix I from the Strategy for Teacher Education in the Northwest Territories which details the barriers and strategies to eliminate these barriers. Many of these strategies are able to be and have been implemented at Aurora College. In the Appendix, it is noted that the majority of these students are mature teacher trainees with children and that a strategy to eliminate this barrier is assistance with day care. On January 10, Fort Smith Town Council met with Minister Moses and the Deputy Minister of Education, Culture and Employment in Fort Smith to discuss Junior Kindergarten. In a follow-up letter, Minister Moses wrote, "Fort Smith is home to Aurora Campus. Providing more options to access free, quality early childhood programs for college students' children has the potential to attract more college students and increase attendance. This will be a benefit to the town and territory as more Northwest Territories (NWT) residents may find moving to Fort Smith to complete programs a more viable option to acquire education, enhance skills, and improve employability." The Town of Fort Smith also partnered with Aurora College to initiate community discussions for a daycare in Fort Smith and the daycare is currently set to open in March 2017. The Town of Fort Smith sees the value in all programs at Aurora College and the longstanding contribution that the college has made to our community.



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The Ministerial Mandate for Education, Culture, and Employment addresses many aspects which affect teachers, education, and culture-based education.

- Take steps to close the skills gap using the Skills4Success strategic framework
- Get more 18-24 year-olds into the labour market by using a better mix of improved educational attainment and skill development while matching skills with employer needs through improved career development supports
- Implement the Education and Renewal and Innovation Framework by:
 - o Implementing the renewed K-12 Inclusive Schooling Directive which provides greater direction on roles and responsibilities, increases the number of Program Support Teachers, increases emphasis on training and increases accountability.
 - o Implementing a renewed Aboriginal Language and Culture-based Education Directive in order to strengthen the role of schools in supporting Aboriginal language development and culture in programming

The vision of the Skills4Success 10-Year strategic framework was “NWT residents have the skills, knowledge, and attitudes for employment success.” The four foundational goals of the framework each support having the TEP Program at Aurora College.

Goal 1: Increase skill levels through relevant education and training.

Goal 2: Bridge education and employment gaps through targeted supports

Goal 3: Grow the NWT workforce through Partnerships

Goal 4: Improve decision making with relevant labour market information

In page 15 of the supporting document, NWT Jobs in Demand: 15 Year Forecast, there is a list of the forecasted top 20 jobs in demand for University Degree Level of Education. Elementary school and kindergarten teachers are at the top of the list, third on the list is Secondary school teachers, followed by College and other vocational instructors, number 18 on the list was Education policy researchers, consultants, and program officers. The need for Kindergarten to Secondary school teachers alone was over 1300 positions. It seems counter-intuitive to cut this program when the need for this level and type of education is clear.

Removing the Bachelor of Education program from Aurora College in Fort Smith is crippling to our schools, our culture, our history, and our local economy. The history of Fort Smith being the Education Capital of the NWT and the administrative center of the NWT is constantly challenged, with jobs, services, and programs increasingly going to Yellowknife or Hay River. More often, we see higher level jobs leaving to other communities forcing our residents to transfer out of the community in order to advance in their careers.

With the removal of the Bachelor of Education program, not only are we losing the jobs at the college, but we lose the students that come into our community. 32 students are currently in the Bachelor of Education program spread over the 4-year period. 32 students and their families living in Fort Smith, contributing to our economy, volunteering, working and enrolling their children in our schools. If there is not alternate employment, we face losing the 6 staff from our community; these professionals will likely not remain in the community without employment. The six staff and



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their families, the 30 students and their families – those families leaving Fort Smith equates to losing another 2 positions in our schools, which means less teaching jobs available. Those 8 professional jobs and the 30 student families alone equate to at least a million dollars of spending lost to our community. Our retail and economic activity will be impacted; our home values will decrease; our resources of volunteers will diminish. When looking to grow our community and economic development, we face a devastating loss to our population and to many aspects of our community.

The decision to cut degree-granting programs affects residents from across the North. Having these programs at Aurora College gives Northern residents the ability to respond to the culture and to the challenges of working within these careers in the North. The ability to get an education in the North encourages students to remain in the North and to return to their communities.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada findings resulted in many Calls to Action in regard to Education; many were specifically in regard to knowledge of the history of Aboriginal peoples, including the history and legacy of residential schools. One of the research projects through the Aurora Research Institute “Decolonizing Learning in Communities Across Canada: Stories of Hope” looks at different approaches to decolonial education that are emerging. The information is expected to ultimately “arm teachers, schools, academic institutions and communities with the knowledge they need to move forward with the broad-sweeping changes that are required.” There are two NWT Case studies included in this project. One of these is “B.Ed. A Journey. This project looks at how the Aurora College B. Ed program prepares its students to practice decolonized education. Over their four years, students work with elders and faculty to understand the colonialism on their communities, reflect on their self-identity, develop leadership skills, and begin to envision what decolonial learning looks like in their community.” The other is “ECE Residential School Curriculum.” This case study reviews the collaborative and territory-wide process used to develop the new curriculum which teaches students about the legacy of Indian Residential Schools. Both the South Slave Research Center, Aurora Research Institute, and one of the college Bachelor of Education staff is involved in this research. Information on this partnership can be found in the Aurora College Annual Report where \$240,000 was granted to Aurora College from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council to fund this study. These partnerships and this education are important not only to Fort Smith but across the Territory. These findings will be used across Canada to inform decolonial education curricula.

On Friday, February 10, at the Yellowknife Town Hall meeting, the first question to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau was regarding Indigenous education. “Schools systems across the country, including post-secondary, are not meeting the needs of our Indigenous learners. Specifically, we are looking at the Calls to Action for the TRCC in the area of Education. Here in the NWT, we just learned that the Bachelor of Education Program had been cut due to funding constraints. Northern-trained Indigenous teachers are required to help close this education gap. What will the federal government do to support Indigenous Students and Indigenous teacher candidates?”



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Prime Minister Trudeau spoke about the importance of a successful education, not just for individual success but for that of communities and that dealing with systemic challenges have to be addressed in a partnership. We need to change our system so that it is driven by Indigenous leadership and is supported by the Canadian Government. The importance of education for Indigenous learners is supported by the Federal Government commitment to investing \$2.6 billion in First Nations Education.

On February 7, during the Corporate Services Meeting, the termination of the Bachelor of Education program was brought up by the Fort Smith Town Council and discussed at length, and the following recommendation was made:

That Council creates messaging to communicate our message of disapproval to the MLAs and other varying forms of government of the cancellation of the Teacher Education Program. CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

We appreciate the strong stance that the regular MLAs took in support of keeping quality educational programs in the North, and we support keeping all current programs at Aurora College. Thank you for consideration of this matter.

Sincerely,

Lynn Napier Buckley
Mayor

cc: Honorable Robert C. McLeod, MLA Inuvik Twin Lakes
Honorable Glen Abernethy, MLA Great Slave
Honorable Caroline Cochrane, MLA Range Lake
Honorable Wally Schumann, MLA Hay River South
Michael M. Nadli, MLA Deh Cho
Kevin O'Reilly, MLA Frame Lake
Rocky (R.J.) Simpson, MLA Hay River North
Kieron Testart, MLA Kam Lake
Frederick Blake Jr., MLA Mackenzie Delta
Jackson Lafferty, MLA Monfwi
Shane Thompson, MLA Nahendeh
Herbert Nakimayak, MLA Nunakput
Daniel McNeely, MLA Sahtu
Tom Beaulieu, MLA Tu Nedhé-Wiilideh
Julie Green, MLA Yellowknife Centre
Cory Vanthuyne, MLA Yellowknife North
Aurora College Board of Governors

Appendix I

Aboriginal Peoples and Post-secondary Education: What Educators Have Learned

A Report prepared by the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation and presented to the Canadian Ministers of Education in 2004

This is an excerpt from a paper examining Aboriginal students in post-secondary education across Canada through the eyes of stakeholders working in the field. It looks at barriers experienced by these students as well as strategies, initiatives and practices that bring about success.

Barriers

- The legacy of residential schools
- Lack of academic preparation
- Rising academic entrance requirements
- Teacher trainees expected to adapt to conventional institutional norms and expectations where culture, traditions and values are not recognized
- Separation from financial and care networks in home communities
- Extensive family responsibilities – majority are mature teacher trainees with children
- Cultural knowledge, traditions and values not recognized or respected in the post-secondary system
- Teacher trainees feel they must accept a new form of consciousness that displaces or perhaps devalues their world view
- The environment may replicate the negative features that led teacher trainees to previously drop out of school
- Almost all faculty are from a different cultural and socio-economic group than Aboriginal teacher trainees
- Little recognition and understanding by faculty of the different cognition and learning styles
- Family stress, discrimination, loneliness, alien environment, distance from home

Strategies to Eliminate the Barriers

- Access programs that actively recruit teacher trainees and help them get the qualifications and financing they need to get into a post-secondary institution
- Special orientation to the institution, dedicated counselling services (personal, academic, career), assistance with housing, day care, adjustments to university life and a new community
- Teacher trainee recruitment – program staff travel to communities to present information about the program
- Packages of information sent to schools, agencies, TV and radio ads
- Programs that improve accessibility of post-secondary programs
- Assistance for teacher trainees with applications, financing, personal orientation, dedicated counselling services (academic, personal, career), housing, day care
- Preference given to Aboriginal applicants
- Introduction to content areas in formal Access programs
- Community delivery involving community input – part or all of program in home communities (Report points out that community-delivered Teacher Education Programs have led to more significant gains in teacher education than in all other post-secondary subjects.)
- Extended practicums in community delivery of teacher education
- Aboriginal institutions
- Broader entrance requirements – not just academics
- Aboriginal curriculum development
- Inclusion of Aboriginal language in the program
- Additional supports
 - Support and activities for spouses of teacher trainees
 - Emergency bursary for teacher trainees having problems with finances
 - A meeting place for teacher trainees
 - Elders available for support
 - Free phone for teacher trainees to call home
- Alternative forms of assessment – more emphasis on oral communication and Aboriginal learning styles (Malatest, 2004)