



May 31, 2021

KATRINA NOKLEBY
MLA, GREAT SLAVE**Oral Question 544-19(2) Mental Health During the Pandemic**

This letter is in follow-up to the Oral Question you raised on February 11, 2021 regarding volume of leave taken by teachers as a result of COVID-19.

Identifying trends or increases in teacher leave, specifically stress leave, is difficult to determine. Given that there are no specific provisions for stress leave in the Northwest Territories (NWT) teachers' collective agreements, along with factors unique to COVID-19 health and safety requirements (i.e., daily screening and the two week mandatory isolation period following travel outside of the NWT) it is difficult to identify any emerging trends in leave taken over the past year.

Anecdotally, the Department of Education, Culture and Employment (ECE) has heard that teachers are experiencing increased levels of stress both professionally and personally as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Education bodies and the NWT Teachers' Association have been sharing concerns and feedback with ECE staff regarding teacher wellness since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Most often noted are the increased workload and stressors associated with infection prevention and control, changes to the delivery of education programming, and the restrictions that impact teachers' ability to travel and connect regularly with family.

Work to improve supports for teacher health and wellness has been a major focus over the past few years. Supports are available for mental health staff through:

- Starling Minds, an online tool that provides education on mental functioning and how to manage stress, prevent depression and anxiety, and develop resiliency;
- the Employee and Family Assistance Program, which provides 24-hour confidential support in person, by telephone, or through online services; and,
- Lifespeak, an online platform where staff and their families can access expert information on a wide range of topics, including COVID-19 well-being support.

.../2

Our goal has been to continue offering an effective learning environment for all students as the global pandemic situation unfolds. Additional funding, announced in October 2020, allowed for the recruitment of additional teaching positions to respond to any additional instructional needs for students and for a possible increase in sick leave.

Thank you for your questions and interests 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. A/Clerk of the Legislative Assembly
Deputy Minister, Education, Culture and Employment
Legislative Coordinator, Executive and Indigenous Affairs