



Government of the Northwest Territories
Response to Committee Report 15-19(2) Report on the Review of the Auditor
General's 2020 Audit of Early Childhood to Grade 12 Education in the Northwest Territories

Background

The Standing Committee on Government Operations (SCOGO, or Committee) presented Committee Report 15-19(2): "Report on the Review of the Auditor General's 2020 Audit of Early Childhood to Grade 12 Education in the Northwest Territories" (Report) on June 1, 2021.

SCOGO reviews the reports of all statutory officers. When reviewing a compliance audit report from the Office of the Auditor General (OAG), the Committee holds a public hearing with representatives of the OAG to explain their findings. Representatives of the audited department also attend to explain their response to the audit.

SCOGO held its review of the OAG compliance audit report virtually on November 06, 2020. The OAG had found that the Department of Education, Culture and Employment (ECE) "took steps to plan, support, and monitor the delivery of equitable, inclusive education programs and services that reflected Indigenous languages and cultures, to support improved student outcomes." However, the OAG also concluded that "these actions were insufficient for it to fully meet its commitments and obligations. Providing sufficient support in key areas, such as Indigenous language and culture-based education, and monitoring the outcomes of its education programs, is necessary to help ensure that students in the territory are being given the best chance for success." The OAG made nine recommendations as a result of its 2020 audit. ECE has agreed with all of them.

SCOGO's report contains six recommendations for ECE on the subject of early childhood to Grade 12 education in the Northwest Territories (NWT). Responses to these recommendations are outlined as follows.

Recommendation 1

The Standing Committee on Government Operations recommends that ECE develop performance measures for each area highlighted in the compliance audit and the corresponding ECE action plan to achieve specific outcomes, and to report annually on these measures.

GNWT Response

In fall 2020, ECE completed the *Action Plan to Improve Junior Kindergarten (JK)-12 Student Outcomes in the NWT, 2021-2022 to 2023-2024* (Action Plan). This Action Plan responds to both the OAG audit report and recommendations stemming from the internal mid-point evaluation of the 10-year Education Renewal and Innovation (ERI) Framework, 2013-2024. The Action Plan has refocused ECE's efforts toward improving student learning outcomes for the remaining years of the Framework's implementation.

The Action Plan contains 30 specific actions grouped under seven themes:

1. Quality Early Learning and Child Care;
2. Workforce Development and Capacity Building;
3. Curriculum and Student Assessment;
4. Student Supports;
5. Training, Developing and Support for School Employees;
6. Governance; and
7. Monitoring and Evaluation.

The Action Plan identifies which recommendations from the OAG and ERI evaluation are addressed by each theme.

In 2020, the JK-12 Education Systems Performance Measures Technical Report (Technical Report) was developed to report on the performance measures for areas highlighted in the OAG audit report, as well as the Action Plan. The 2019-2020 version of the Technical Report can be found [here](#); the 2021 version is currently being finalized.

An online action tracker was also developed for the items in the Action Plan to track and report publicly on ECE's progress on each item. The tracker is located on ECE's website [here](#).

Recommendation 2

The Standing Committee on Government Operations recommends that ECE report annually on each action related to revitalizing official languages, including on the oral proficiency assessment tools, the Indigenous Language revitalization certification program and the mentor-apprentice program.

GNWT Response

ECE is committed to supporting the revitalization of the official Indigenous languages in the NWT and continues to implement the NWT Indigenous Languages Framework and Action Plan (2018-2022), a four (4)-year blueprint for Indigenous language revitalization with commitments to strengthen, revitalize and promote Indigenous languages in the NWT.

ECE partners with Indigenous governments and communities to deliver Indigenous language revitalization initiatives, such as the Indigenous Language Revitalization Certification Program and the Mentor-Apprentice Program (MAP). The MAP evaluates adult learners using the Oral Proficiency Assessment (OPA) evaluation tool for monitoring and accountability purposes. Data from these assessments is collected at the beginning and end of the program for learners to better understand their proficiency levels and measure progress, and for ECE to track the efficacy of the program. This data is shared with the learners and kept internally by ECE. There is currently no framework for reporting externally at this time.

The Annual Report on Official Languages is tabled annually and includes reporting on activities and financial information that support Indigenous language revitalization initiatives and services each fiscal year. ECE agrees with the Committee's recommendation to report annually on Indigenous language revitalization efforts and initiatives, and will aim to do so through the Annual Report on Official Languages.

Education bodies also plan for and report annually on predetermined indicators related to Indigenizing Education under the NWT Education Body Accountability Framework; however, at this time, there is no indicator directly connected to the Oral Proficiency Assessment. ECE will take Committee's recommendation under advisement and work to revise the NWT Education Body Accountability Framework to include data related to Indigenous language oral proficiency in schools.

Recommendation 3

The Standing Committee on Government Operations recommends that ECE include Indigenous language proficiency when hiring positions in the Indigenous Languages and Education Secretariat.

GNWT Response

Indigenous language proficiency is a qualification that ECE seeks when hiring new staff members to the Indigenous Languages and Education Secretariat (ILES); indeed, the following qualifier has been included on all ILES job descriptions and screening tools since 2017: "Proficiency of the incumbent in at least one NWT Indigenous language or French would be an asset."

Hiring proficient language speakers or individuals learning Indigenous languages continues to be a priority for ECE, especially within ILES. ECE looks forward to such a requirement becoming a possibility for all employees of ILES and elsewhere within the GNWT in the future.

Recommendation 4

The Standing Committee on Government Operations recommends that ECE conduct greater oversight on inclusive schooling practices, including through spot checks on individualized learning plans, and report annually on the outcome-oriented performance measures.

GNWT Response

ECE is currently developing an internal and external Inclusive Schooling review process in collaboration with education bodies. Once established, this process will include conducting reviews of inclusive schooling practices in all NWT schools, including spot checks on individualized learning plans: both Student Support Plans (SSPs), and Individual Education Plans (IEPs).

This review process will also include analyzing existing system information at ECE and the Department of Health and Social Services (HSS), as well as Jordan's Principle/Child First Initiative for funding gap analysis and other relevant sources to assess whether students' needs are being met. Currently, under the NWT Education Body Accountability Framework, education bodies are expected to set and report on targets with specific performance measures. Each year, education bodies use the

information from their Annual Reports to inform the following year's Operating Plans. The Accountability Framework also establishes a set of outcome-oriented performance measures for the education system, including those specific to SSPs and IEPs.

ECE conducts a comprehensive review of the education system every five years; the next review is scheduled for 2024. The internal and external inclusive schooling review process will precede the comprehensive review, with a pilot taking place in the 2022-2023 school year, a finalized monitoring plan in August 2023, and implementation in the 2023-24 school year.

Recommendation 5

The Standing Committee on Government Operations recommends that ECE bring forward a plan to better support schools in small communities, to ensure students across the territory have an equitable learning experience. The Committee further recommends that ECE work with District Education Authorities to minimize the impacts of differing school calendars on Northern Distance Learning.

GNWT Response

As an identified action in the Action Plan to Improve JK-12 Student Outcomes in the NWT, ECE is committed to working with education bodies to improve supports for small community schools with a goal of improving the quality of education offered to students in small communities. Specifically, training and supports for small-school principals and for teachers of multi-grade classrooms are planned to be piloted in the 2022-2023 fiscal year.

ECE is currently conducting a cross-jurisdictional scan of evidence-based practices in search of a model that best suits the needs of students and schools in small communities. ECE will be forming a working group to support the work of small schools that will ideally result in a team that can travel to small schools and provide ongoing, wraparound support and training throughout the school year.

ECE will also provide training modules and workshops online, designed to cater to small schools via Canvas, ECE's new Educator Professional Learning Platform (EPLP). This platform will also host a variety of Professional Learning Networks (PLNs) where educators from across the territory can connect with ECE and one another for learning, support and collaboration. This is intended to help address the professional isolation often felt by teachers in small community schools.

ECE is committed to piloting a support network that meets the needs of students, educators and principals. Collaboration and planning for this support network will be centred on Indigenous views, ensuring that student needs are at the forefront.

Further, ECE is continuing conversations with education bodies, including elected education leaders, Superintendents, District Education Authorities and Principals, about the importance of aligning the calendars of schools offering Northern Distance Learning (NDL) programming. In 2020-2021, schools that did not align their calendars saw some of their NDL students missing up to 25 percent of NDL class periods for some courses during the academic year.

Schools offering NDL programming to their students are encouraged each year to align as much as possible with the territorial NDL calendar. The impact of not aligning with the NDL calendar on student learning opportunities has been shared with education leaders, superintendents and NDL principals on multiple occasions over the last three years.

On days when NDL classes are not scheduled to take place, students at schools with calendars that are not aligned still attend their classes in the NDL classroom and continue to receive support from the In-class Support Person while using the *Moodle* Learning Management System (LMS) to access resources and learning materials in order to continue learning. This helps to ensure students are still progressing when NDL classes are not in session. On opposite days, when NDL schools are not in session but NDL classes are still running, students are able to continue to access the LMS on their own time, with support from their NDL teachers rather than the local In-class Support Person (ISP).

ECE is committed to continuing to work with education bodies to stress the importance of aligned calendars. In addition, ECE is investigating the potential for a second host school that could run on a second NDL schedule, allowing more options for students and schools.

Recommendation 6

The Standing Committee on Government Operations recommends that the GNWT provide a response to the recommendations contained in this report within 120 days.

GNWT Response

The GNWT is tabling a response to the recommendations contained within Committee's report at the earliest possible opportunity during the fall 2021 sitting of the 19th Assembly following the presentation of the report on June 1, 2021.