



May 23, 2023

LESA SEMMLER  
MLA, INUVIK TWIN LAKES**Oral Question 1353-19(2) - Impacts of COVID-19 on Education**

This letter is in follow-up to the Oral Question you raised on February 13, 2023 regarding the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Junior Kindergarten to Grade 12 (JK-12) education system, and the supports available for high school students that may need more time completing high school or post-secondary preparation courses.

**What is known about high school attendance rates through COVID-19, the attendance rates in small communities versus regional centres, and Indigenous students' attendance?**

The Department of Education, Culture and Employment (ECE) has publicly shared attendance data for 2020-2021 through the [JK-12 Performance Measures Report, which was released](#) in September 2022. In the 2020-2021 school year, many students returned to school only on a part-time basis and a few schools experienced closures due to COVID-19 Public Health Orders announced by the Office of the Chief Public Health Officer.

The Northwest Territories (NWT) school system was able to adjust the collection of attendance data to capture remote learning; however, the effects of the pandemic impacted and continue to impact the ability to compare current attendance rates to pre-pandemic rates.

Additionally, attendance rates for the 2019-2020 school year only reflect the portion of the school year that included face-to-face and in-class instruction (from September 02, 2019 to March 13, 2020, prior to the schools closing). As a result, data for the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years remains incomparable to previous school years.

ECE publishes attendance data by grade, education body and community type, but not ethnicity. Further detail regarding the 2020-2021 attendance data can be found on pages 47 to 49 of the report.

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Overall, attendance in the NWT for the 2020-2021 school year was 79.9 percent:

- Yellowknife: 85.3 percent
- Regional Centres: 75.5 percent
- Small Communities: 76.3 percent

The 2021-2022 attendance data is currently being verified and will be included in the JK-12 Performance Measures Report for 2021-2022, which is tentatively scheduled for release in June 2023.

In October 2022, ECE released the COVID-19 Impact Indicators Report. This report examined available data on the effects of COVID-19 on the NWT JK-12 education system. The report found that attendance was difficult to properly maintain in 2019-2020 through to the 2021-2022 school period and that inferences from this time are therefore difficult to make. ECE will continue to collect, analyze, and report on data related to the impacts of COVID-19 to better understand the pandemic's effects on education and improve student outcomes.

**Does the department identify and support students to complete their high school education that did not graduate and are ineligible for post-secondary studies?**

Once students have entered high school, they begin taking courses and earning credits toward graduation; a total of 100 credits are currently needed to graduate. Although there are generalities around the order in which students take courses, there are no strict rules around courses and years. As such, students can continue to take high school courses year after year until they complete the 100 required credits for graduation. For some students, this can take only two years and for others, this can take upwards of five years.

The Career and Education Advising (CEA) Program exists in schools to assist Grade 9-12 students through a career exploration process. The CEA Program supports them in making career and/or education development and transition choices and accomplishing related tasks (e.g., work experience, career, post-secondary/other training, community living). There are eight Career and Education Advisors with three based in the Yellowknife Region, one in the South Slave, one in the Dehcho, one in the Tłı̄chǫ, one in the Sahtu, and one in the Beaufort Delta.

Full funding is available for students up to 21 years of age, with partial funding available for students older than 21 years of age, to continue taking courses in high school. Students can choose to leave high school before graduating, but they are never removed from high school for not meeting graduation requirements.

If a student contacts the Department or the Divisional Education Council, support will be provided, so long as they are under the age of 21. If they are older than 21, individuals are able to seek supports through Aurora College's Community Learning Centres.

**Is there a funding cap through the SFA program for students who might need multiple years of University PREP?**

The Student Financial Assistance (SFA) Program offers full-time and part-time assistance to Northwest Territories (NWT) residents attending accredited, post-secondary programs at an approved post-secondary institution. The SFA program supports eligible students who attend the Aurora College Occupations and College Access Program (OCAP) or the University and College Access Program (UCAP). There is no funding cap for students who access OCAP or UCAP; as long as a student remains eligible, they are able to access SFA funding for these programs.

While the SFA program offers assistance to students enrolled in OCAP or UCAP at Aurora College, the program does not provide assistance to students enrolled in other academic upgrading at Aurora College or any post-secondary institution.

ECE has completed the SFA program review and is proposing changes that will help to reduce the barriers students face in pursuing post-secondary education, such as removing all semester limits for Northern Indigenous students and expanding remissible loans to all NWT residents. ECE believes these changes will better support students who need additional time to complete their post-secondary studies, including more time completing PREP.

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. Clerk of the Legislative Assembly  
Deputy Minister, Education, Culture and Employment  
Legislative Coordinator, Executive and Indigenous Affairs