



May 25, 2020

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**Oral Question 147-19(2) Day Care at École J.H. Sissons**

This letter is in follow-up to the Oral Question you raised on March 04, 2020 regarding child care options and the use of school space for early learning and child care programming in communities across the Northwest Territories (NWT).

The Department of Education, Culture and Employment (ECE) is committed to enhancing the availability and affordability of early learning and child care programming.

Infrastructure continues to be one of the largest barriers for non-profit organizations, Indigenous governments and community groups attempting to develop licensed early learning and child care programs in many communities and consequently is a barrier for the NWT to introduce some model of universal child care which is a priority for this government and can be found in the mandate.

The work being undertaken by ECE to understand and plan for child care solutions for NWT communities involves a variety of activities, including: looking at solutions that have worked in other jurisdictions, examining whether policy changes could create appropriate opportunities for new spaces to be created where there is a need for them, as well as working towards the development of a new program to address infrastructure challenges or barriers in the sector.

**On-going Jurisdictional Collaboration**

Inter-jurisdictional research to understand what the other provinces and territories are doing to support the child care sector is an important part of developing a strategy for the NWT. This research has helped in the response to the current pandemic crisis in providing information about how jurisdictions (a) had been supporting the child care sector before COVID-19, and (b) what was being done during the pandemic. This has provided us with a wealth of information to inform future policy options and to support the development of the *2030 Early Learning and Child Care Strategy*, as well as other interventions.

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## **Infrastructure in Schools**

We are currently in the process of internally reviewing the existing *Capital Standards and Criteria* to determine if they continue to meet the needs of students and communities. The results of this process may impact the department's approach with respect to the provision of child care space in, near, or concurrently with school projects; however, I wish to caution that no change has yet been approved.

Any changes made to the existing *Capital Standards and Criteria* will be communicated to all Members of the Legislative Assembly. We anticipate any potential changes to be complete in July 2020; however there have been delays with this project due to the COVID-19 response so while we are committed to the project the timeframe may change.

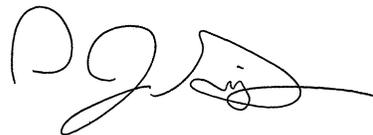
## **2030 Early Learning and Child Care Strategy**

The intent of the development of the *2030 Early Learning and Child Care Strategy* is to provide strategies and proposed solutions, to increase the availability and reduce the costs of child care in NWT communities, over time. This involves working with our partners to tailor early learning and child care programming to meet specific and varied community needs, and collaborating to develop solutions to improve the availability of early learning and child care programming.

The completion of the *2030 Early Learning and Child Care Strategy* will be a focus for ECE over the next year, with a planned release date during the 2021-2022 fiscal year.

As a result of the global COVID-19 pandemic, attention has been focused on responding to emerging needs and ensuring that early learning and child care remains available for families who require it. Once these temporary actions and supports are stabilized, focus will return to the development of the *2030 Early Learning and Child Care Strategy* and the consideration of child care spaces in renovations and/or new builds.

Thank you for your questions and interest in this matter.



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