



Legislative Assembly
Standing Committee on Priorities and Planning
Assemblée législative
Comité permanent des priorités et de la planification

HONOURABLE ALFRED MOSES
MINISTER OF EDUCATION, CULTURE AND EMPLOYMENT

MAR 09 2017

Briefing on Junior Kindergarten Implementation

Thank you for the February 23, 2017 public briefing provided to the Standing Committee on Social Development on junior kindergarten (JK) implementation. As this meeting was shortened to accommodate the sitting of the Legislative Assembly, the Committee seeks the Minister's response to the written comments and questions below. Further, please be advised that the Committee intends to make public both this letter and the department's response. A response is requested by the end of March 2017.

Committee oversight and departmental communications

It is the Committee's responsibility to oversee the government's work, including the review of its budgets and departments' performance, and this responsibility necessitates the government's timely and full provision of clear, accurate information. However, as with STIP, the department's communications with both Members and the public respecting JK have not met this need.

Instead, Members have invested significant time and effort in Committee and in the House to deciphering the department's intentions, including Members' ongoing efforts to secure full and adequate JK funding. To some extent, such work is what we as Members of the 18th Legislative Assembly have collectively committed to; however, Northerners at large, who have a right to transparent and accurate information, have also suffered from this lack of clarity. The department's approach to both projects has restricted the Committee's ability to meaningfully perform its duties.

The Committee continues its review of Bill 16 – *An Act to Amend the Education Act* and again notes its disappointment that the department has put Members in a difficult position by making significant policy changes in advance of supporting legislation.

Funding

JK funding remains inadequate and is the Committee's primary concern. As departmental staff have stated, the department's funding formula is merely an allocation tool, not a tool to determine funding adequacy. Compliance with the letter of the law does not fulfill its spirit.

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The current plan fails to appropriately account for inclusive schooling, Aboriginal language instruction, student transportation (including bus monitors), or childcare impacts. When the department suggests that existing resources may simply be redistributed throughout a given board or authority to cover increased needs, it suggests that schools will not be "fully funded" and indicates an expectation that boards and authorities must make internal reductions to cover shortfalls induced by JK implementation. Further, the Committee is concerned that while the department's intention to fund JK at a staffing ratio of 12:1 falls within the legislated ratio of 16:1, Bill 16 does not propose to enshrine the former in legislation. The Committee expects that the department will continue to meet, or better, this commitment in the years to come.

Specific to inclusive schooling, the department states that it meets its responsibilities by funding schools above the current legislative minimum, while the Minister also suggested in the recent briefing that JK students following a play-based curriculum may naturally be expected to require less support. ECE's data on NWT children's school readiness contradicts this. Further, while JK will be funded at a pupil-teacher ratio of 12:1, this does not necessarily guarantee a JK teacher in each school. The need for specialized support remains.

1. Please provide further detail on the department's research findings regarding support services needs in JK-aged children within the education system.
2. Please provide additional detail on planned new program support teacher positions/funding for the 2017-18 school year, and the source of funding, including how funding is calculated, for this initiative.
3. Please provide further detail on the rationale behind the trigger point for additional mid-year funding to schools (eight-per-cent or 10-student enrolment increase).
4. Please provide the Committee with a copy of, or a link to, the "Day in JK" video. Please identify the cost of the video, including development, production, and distribution.
5. Please provide further detail on how the department is collecting data on current busing costs across the territory. Please indicate the expected completion date for the department and education authorities' review, and upon completion, provide the review's findings to the Committee.

After-school and professional-development-day care

The department has outlined the potential for JK to result in significant savings to families, up to \$12,000 per year in daycare costs. Yet this claim accounts for neither the cost nor availability of childcare, particularly in non-standard hours (e.g., after school) or at random intervals (e.g., to cover professional development days). The *Government of the Northwest*

*Territories Response to Motion 25-18(2): Junior Kindergarten*¹ explicitly states that "JK will... open opportunities for parents to consider entry into the workforce and/or to attend school or training." If JK is indeed intended to enable parents to work outside the home, childcare for hours not spent in school will be, in the absence of universal daycare, an unavoidable expense to be borne by parents. It is then disingenuous to communicate to Northerners that JK is a free program that will bring additional savings to participating NWT families.

6. The Committee recommends that all future departmental communications respecting junior kindergarten reflect this reality.
7. The Committee recommends that the department's universal daycare action plan (expected this fall and in draft to Committee prior to that time) address childcare needs specifically emerging from junior kindergarten implementation.

Existing Programming

8. Please provide an update on the department's engagement with the Aboriginal Head Start program (AHS), including further detail on how the department intends to build from successes in Fort McPherson and Ndilo.

Other

9. Please identify the number of four-year-olds currently enrolled in existing JK programs, where possible, the ratio of those enrolled to those not enrolled.
10. Please identify those communities which during the JK pilot phase either chose not to offer junior kindergarten or implemented, then ended, the program, as well as their reasons for doing so (e.g., insufficient resources, lack of interest/four-year-old children, etc.).



Shane Thompson
Chair
Standing Committee on
Social Development

Distribution List

¹ Tabled Document 288-18(2). February 21, 2017.

cc: Committee Members
Principal Secretary
Secretary to Cabinet
Deputy Minister, Education, Culture and Employment
Committee Staff