



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 08 2017

## **Briefing on Strengthening Teacher Instructional Practices Pilot Initiative**

Thank you for the February 21, 2017 public briefing provided to the Standing Committee on Social Development on the Strengthening Teacher Instructional Practices Pilot Initiative (STIP). 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

First, while departmental communications suggest that STIP has been introduced to address low graduation rates, the recent briefing instead indicated that the focus on teacher wellness emerged during collective bargaining, itself driven by reduction targets set by the Government of the Northwest Territories. Indeed, overall communications have caused significant confusion, further complicated by negative public reactions and the circulation of incorrect information, as was predicted in the department's initial legislative proposal. Without clear departmental messaging, members of the public questioned our education system's ability to fulfill graduation requirements, sought the research that the department held but was not made easily accessible, wondered how STIP would be evaluated, and questioned boards and authorities whose teaching staff had negotiated in good faith with the government. Members, who do not oppose targeted initiatives to improve teacher wellness, have dedicated significant time and effort to clarifying these matters.

Second, the department's planning with respect to the Committee's role and authority has been inadequate. Either the department finds tolerable the risk of being able to deliver only a fraction of the "up to 100 hours" committed to during its negotiations with the Northwest Territories Teachers' Association, or it presumes the Committee will accommodate the legislative changes required to fulfill the government's bargaining commitments. Neither is acceptable to the Committee.

The Committee continues its review of Bill 16 – *An Act to Amend the Education Act*, but again notes its disappointment with the difficult position in which the department has placed Members by acting on policy changes in advance of supporting legislation.

Page 1 of 3

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## **Additional comments and questions**

The Committee seeks the Minister's response to the recommendations and questions below.

1. The Committee recommends that in future the department take a leadership role in communications, deferring to the boards and authorities only where matters are distinctly within the latter's purview. While the boards and authorities are responsible for implementing finalized plans according to their available resources, the Minister is accountable for the actions and decisions of the department. If the government is willing to propose a project such as STIP during collective bargaining, the Minister alone must be prepared to explain and defend that decision.
2. As discussed during the recent briefing, please provide the Committee with the department's negotiating mandate as it led to the memorandum of understanding addressing STIP.<sup>1</sup> The Committee understands that this particular information may be provided in confidence.
3. Please provide further detail on the department's research findings respecting connections between instructional hours and teacher wellness, and instructional hours and student achievement (particularly graduation rates), including data-based rationales for linking such measures.
4. Please provide further detail on how the Government of Alberta's work with a similar pilot project has informed the department's work on STIP.
5. Please provide further detail on the current instructional hours and hours of operation for each of the territorial boards and authorities (or individual schools, where these vary).
6. Please provide further detail on the department's plan for ongoing evaluation of STIP, including the committees reviewing STIP project proposals. How will the department measure STIP's success?

How will the department track changes in teacher workload and wellness, and against what baseline(s)? The Committee does not agree that comparison between a teacher's workload (identified as 52 hours per week) and the formal

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<sup>1</sup> *Memorandum of Understanding between the Northwest Territories Teachers' Association and the Government of the Northwest Territories: Strengthening Teacher Instructional Practices.*  
[https://www.ece.gov.nt.ca/sites/www.ece.gov.nt.ca/files/resources/mou\\_stip\\_reference.pdf](https://www.ece.gov.nt.ca/sites/www.ece.gov.nt.ca/files/resources/mou_stip_reference.pdf)

working hours of a full-time government employee (37.5 hours per week) yields useful conclusions.

Does the department currently track teachers' sick days, long-term disability rates, and retention rates, or identified grade levels in NWT schools? If not the, the Committee recommends that it do so. What other performance measures will be tracked?

7. The department has referred to evaluating STIP at the end of each year. If after the first year, or later, data indicates that STIP is not delivering improvements as expected, both in teacher wellness and in student outcomes, how would the department respond? Are the proposed changes reversible if STIP is ineffective?
8. Please provide further detail on how the department would proceed in the 2017-18 school year in the absence of the necessary amendments to the *Education Act*.

The Committee looks forward to receiving your timely response.



Shane Thompson  
Chair  
Standing Committee on  
Social Development

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