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Northwest Territories / Territoires du Nord-Ouest
OF THE NWT

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MAR 31 2017

MR. SHANE THOMPSON
CHAIRPERSON
STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

**Response to Questions Regarding
Strengthening Teachers Instructional Practices Initiative**

Thank you for your letter of March 08, 2017, in response to the public briefing provided on February 21, 2017.

I am pleased to provide the following responses to Committee's questions and recommendations in regards to the three-year Strengthening Teachers Instructional Practices Pilot Initiative (STIP).

- 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.*

The Department of Education, Culture and Employment (ECE) is continuously working with Education Bodies and with the Northwest Territories Teacher's Association (NWTTA) on programming, planning, professional training and development, financial, capital and human resource needs.

Over the past several years, this has included wide-ranging discussion on issues directly related to the STIP including teacher work load and wellness issues and the need for teachers to have on-going professional development, training and collaborative planning opportunities.

As Minister, I meet regularly with Education Board Chairpersons and with NWTTA staff and members. ECE staff meets regularly with Education Superintendents, Board Education Consultants and with NWTTA staff. ECE staff also provide in-service and teacher and principal training to schools throughout the Northwest Territories (NWT).

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I plan to continue this collaborative relationship with both Education Bodies and with the NWTTA so that we can work together as one cohesive system to ensure appropriate and effective support for our NWT teachers, school administrators and support staff.

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. The Committee understands that this particular information may be provided in confidence.*

Negotiating mandates are subject to Cabinet confidence and therefore cannot be shared. However, I wish to assure Committee that ECE engagements with the NWTTA around STIP were not driven by fiscal restraints.

The Department knows that in order to improve our students' academic results, we need our teachers to have the time during their regular work week and school year to plan, implement and assess their students' learning. We also know that teachers need to have proper time to learn new ways of teaching that are required to help our students be highly engaged in their learning and as a result be successful in their studies.

The Education Renewal Framework states that the GNWT will do its part to ensure that our NWT educators have access to experiences and resources that help manage their workload and improve wellness in order for them to focus on excellence in teaching. The rationale behind this is that increasing educator professional capacity and efficacy is key to improved learning environments for JK-12 students. Teachers are the single greatest influence on student achievement and therefore their wellness, professional growth and support are of paramount importance in our education system.

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.*

As was indicated during the presentation to Committee on February 21, 2017, teacher wellness is not impacted by instructional hours alone. A range of other factors also impact teacher wellness, including: classroom complexity, school climate, relationships with administrators and colleagues, student behavioural issues, time allocated for preparation, and total work time. Hence, it is important to not draw overarching conclusions based on correlations between only two variables, such as instructional time and teacher wellness.

Teacher workload and wellness concerns have been identified as part of all workload studies conducted across Canada. In Canada, instructional hours vary somewhat by province, but teachers typically report working 50-55 hours per week. One of the common concerns is the amount of time teachers spend working outside of the instructional day, which negatively impacts work-life balance. This is true in the NWT as well.

Another common concern is an inadequate amount of preparation time allocated within the school day. Most Canadian jurisdictions allot a specified amount of preparation time for teachers during the school day. This varies considerably from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. At the upper end, Quebec and Ontario provide approximately 152 and 252 hours of preparation time, per teacher, per school year, respectively.

However, in the NWT there is no guaranteed minimum prep time for teachers. In the ECE Teacher Time and Workload Study, participating teachers reported working over 17 hours per week outside of the regular teacher instructional days (8:00-4:00 Monday-Friday), namely on evenings and weekends. The teachers in the study reported that most of this time was spent on planning, assessing and reporting. Teachers have voiced concerns around this, and highlighted the need for embedded preparation time.

The three-year STIP pilot initiative is anticipated to address many of the concerns around instructional time and help bring greater equity in teacher preparation time across NWT schools by guaranteeing time to prepare for lessons, to assess student work, and to report student progress by embedding this time into the regular teacher work day, work week and school year. Additionally, STIP focuses on embedding structured time for collaborative professional learning. A significant international report by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (TALIS 2014), amongst others, concluded that ongoing embedded time for professional collaboration and learning is associated with higher job satisfaction and teacher efficacy. The STIP initiative aims to make improvements in these areas by focusing on strengthening teaching practice through professional learning communities.

With regard to the connection between graduation rates and instructional time, our analyses, based on data from Statistics Canada, show that the six provinces that reduced instructional time from the early 2000s to the current period all had improved graduation rates, with the exception of British Columbia. For the two jurisdictions that made a small increase to their instructional hours, one had a substantial decrease in their graduation rate (Saskatchewan) and the other a steady increase (Nova Scotia).

As the Standing Committee is aware, there are a wide range of factors in each jurisdiction that may contribute to changes in graduation rates. We do not expect our experience in the NWT to be any different. Instructional time alone will not make graduation rates increase dramatically in the NWT. Student performance in school is a result of many factors including quality, relevance and engaging high quality teaching strategies and instruction, and ensuring the provision of a safe and supportive learning environment.

The best studies apply statistical procedures to account for many of the potential factors that influence student achievement, such as school characteristics and socio-economic status, amongst others. These studies largely conclude that there is no correlation between total instructional time and student achievement, where instructional time falls within ranges typically found world-wide (~650-1200 hours per year) (Baker et al., 2004; Long, 2014). The main conclusions drawn in the research literature state that jurisdictions should not focus on instructional time to improve student outcomes; rather that the focus should be on improving the quality of instruction and the curriculum (OECD, 2014; Noonan, 2007; Hattie, 2015; Hattie, 2009; Baker et al., 2004; Long, 2014, etc.).

Research further suggests that improving teaching quality through collaborative practice, such as professional learning communities, shows promise in improving student outcomes (Hattie, 2015; Vescio et al. 2008, Darling-Hammond et al., 2009). The three-year STIP initiative is centered on this evidence-based research and is focused on the use of the new available time to develop teachers' instructional practice through professional learning communities and dedicated planning time (areas that research has shown to show great promise).

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.

A major difference between the NWT and Alberta education systems is that Alberta funds their schools on a 'credit acquisition' basis, with these credits tied directly to 25 hours of instructional time per credit (often referred to as 'Carnegie Units'). The NWT has never used this approach for funding schools.

In 2008 Alberta began a pilot project (the 'High School Flex Project') which allowed a small number of schools to re-organize instructional time to meet the needs of students and to continue to be funded without a direct connection to the number of Carnegie Units delivered or credits acquired. Schools could organize instructional time in ways that provided differentiated time for students (some could access less than 125 hours for a 5 credit course, some might require more than that amount). Timetables in these schools began to reflect these differences. ECE along with several NWT Education Authorities' staff participated in professional development sessions where schools were developing and sharing their plans and experiences of this renewed approach to meeting students learning needs.

By 2016 approximately two-thirds of Alberta high schools were participating in this pilot project, now called the High School Flexibility Enhancement Project. The 1000 hours of instruction described in Alberta's Guide to Education, therefore, does not apply to the majority of high schools in that province. Even after several years of this pilot, Alberta is hesitant to draw conclusions in relation to the impact the modified timetabling may be having on things like graduation rates. They do, however, feel confident that by allowing schools to implement these measures there have been positive qualitative impacts on their schools such as improved school climate, student engagement, collaborative practice, guidance, tutoring, etc.

Alberta is aware that some of the shift they need to pursue in their schools is not just a redirection of instructional hours, but a shift in *how* instruction and learning are happening. A focus in professional development for teachers that explores 21st century competencies and how teachers can effectively engage in new ways of teaching has been central to the *Alberta K-12 Education Redesign* work that Alberta is undertaking. ECE and NWT Education Authorities have participated in several of these workshops, and the experience of Alberta schools is informing the work of schools in the NWT. Yellowknife Catholic Schools, for example, are re-structuring their school timetables in ways that build on the experience of Alberta schools.

A major step in supporting the shift in teaching and learning reflected in Alberta's *Education Redesign* and their revision of instructional time is the renewal of curriculum that supports these changes. In October 2016, Alberta began renewing all of their K-12 curricula. The draft Framework for these curricula is nearing completion and the development of student learning outcomes for K-4 in all subjects will begin in the fall of 2017. The NWT is a partner in this renewal work, and is participating in all K-12 subject area Expert Working Groups.

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).*

Please see the attached table of all NWT schools' 2016-2017 school year instructional hours. You will note that all schools meet and exceed the respective minimum hours of instruction with the exception of the Commission scolaire francophone, who are 20 minutes below for grades 1 to 6, and YK1, who are 1.5 hours below for grades 1 to 6 and 4.2 hours below at each school for grades 7-12 except for École Sir John Franklin High School.

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

A joint committee made up of representatives from ECE, the NWT Superintendents Association (NWTSA) and the NWTTA reviews each STIP proposal submitted by NWT schools for the 2017-2018 school year. The committee's approval is required before any change can be made to a school calendar.

This joint committee is also developing an evaluation plan that will identify appropriate ways to measure the success of the STIP initiative. This planning process includes defining what success for STIP will look like taking into consideration the multitude of variables that could be considered, recognizing that any significant change will take time and that the actual evaluation itself will likely evolve as schools try new approaches.

The STIP committee has noted that each school may have slightly, or significantly, different numbers of redirected instructional hours, and a range of ways that this redirected time will be used. All redirected time in every STIP proposal must nevertheless fall within the parameters set out in the initiative and be divided between the categories of 'individual' and 'collaborative' planning, learning, assessment, reporting and training.

Similar to Alberta's experience with their High School Redesign project, we would not expect STIP evaluation tools to look for immediate changes in graduation rates or some other equivalent measure, though over the length of the ten year Education Renewal Framework timelines, these might legitimately be used.

The draft evaluation plan will be completed by the end of the 2016-2017 school year and I will share it with Committee at that time.

7. *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?*

Yes. GNWT teacher's sick days and long-term disability are tracked through the Department of Human Resources administrative records. Retention rates are tracked through the Office of the Registrar of Teacher Certification within ECE.

The joint STIP committee will identify a variety of performance measures which will be outlined in the evaluation plan to be completed by the end of the current 2016-2017 school year.

8. *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?*

As noted above, a joint committee is developing an evaluation plan for the three-year STIP pilot. The evaluation plan will include a reporting schedule that will outline what appropriate and reasonable measures will be collected and reported on, and when those reports will take place.

The focus of the three-year evaluation will be on continuous learning and improving overall teaching practice in the NWT through the collection of promising practices. STIP is only one initiative of many in Education Renewal that we envision will impact teacher wellness and student outcomes in the long term.

Results from STIP will be carefully looked at to determine whether the pilot is having the impacts expected and adjustments will be made based on the evidence collected.

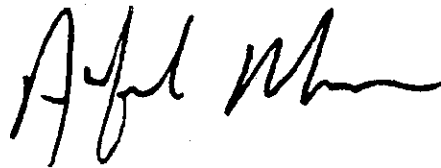
9. *Please provide further detail on how the department would proceed in the 2017-18 school year in the absence of the necessary amendments to the Education Act.*

ECE, the NWTTA, the NWTSA and Education Bodies will continue to work together to ensure that teachers and students are given the best opportunities for professional development and training and provided the resources and opportunities to be successful.

The Memorandum of Understanding between the GNWT and NWTTA commits the parties to work together over the life of the Collective Agreement to explore a range of evidence-based possibilities that may have a positive impact on teacher effectiveness and improved student outcomes. The GNWT and the NWTTA will continue to be committed to working together to honour the commitments made within the GNWT/NWTTA Collective Agreement.

Additionally, it should be noted that the *Education Act* sets the minimum annual hours of instruction and maximum daily hours of instruction for students. ECE has determined that there is sufficient flexibility between these existing limits to implement the pilot. The proposed amendments to the *Education Act* will create greater flexibility in implementing the pilot while at the same time, bring the NWT more in line with the average minimum hours of instruction in Canada.

I wish to take this opportunity to again thank the Committee for its interest in this very important initiative.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alfred Moses', with a stylized, flowing script.

Alfred Moses
Minister, Education, Culture
and Employment

Attachment

- c. Principal Secretary
Secretary to Cabinet
Deputy Minister, Education, Culture and Employment
Committee Clerk

**SCHOOL YEAR CALENDARS, 2016-2017
INSTRUCTION HOURS FOR STUDENT**

Legislated Requirement	485.0	997.0	1045.0
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Community	School	K	1 to 6	7 to 12
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BEAUFORT-DELTA				
Aklavik	Moose Kerr	933.0	997.0	1083.0
Fort McPherson	Chief Julius	859.2	1013.0	1063.4
Ulukhaktok	Helen Kalvak Elihakvik	1001.0	1001.0	1046.5
Inuvik	East Three Elementary	1059.0	1030.0	n/a
Inuvik	East Three Secondary	n/a	n/a	1068.0
Paulatuk	Angik	986.0	1006.0	1066.5
Sachs Harbour	Inualthuyak	1041.0	1041.0	1079.0
Tsiigehtchic	Chief Paul Niditchie	760.5	1021.0	1082.3
Tuktoyaktuk	Mangilaluk	1020.0	1020.0	1080.0

DEHCHO				
Fort Providence	Deh Gáh Elem. & Sec.	1002.5	1002.5	1048.8
Fort Simpson	Thomas Simpson Secondary	n/a	n/a	1065.0
Fort Simpson	Bompas Elementary	971.3	1016.3	n/a
Jean Marie River	Louie Norwegian	760.0	1062.5	1062.5
Nahanni Butte	Charles Yohin	1037.5	1062.5	1093.3
Fort Liard	Echo Dene	1007.0	1032.0	1078.0
Wrigley	Chief Julian Yendo	831.3	1016.3	1062.5
Trout Lake	Charles Tetchio	755.0	1032.0	1063.0
Kakisa	Kakisa School	760.0	1000.0	1047.0

TLICHO				
Behchoko	Elizabeth Mackenzie Elem.	1018.0	1018.0	n/a
Behchoko	Chief Jimmy Bruneau	1018.0	1018.0	1064.0
Gameti	Jean Wetrade Gameti	1018.0	1018.0	1064.0
Wekweeti	Alexis Arrowmaker	1018.0	1018.0	1064.0
Whati	Mezi Community	1018.0	1018.0	1064.0

SAHTU				
Colville Lake	Colville Lake	894.0	1018.0	1064.0
Deline	?ehtseo Ayha	1018.0	1018.0	1064.0
Fort Good Hope	Chief T'Selehye	1064.0	1064.0	1095.0
Norman Wells	Mackenzie Mountain	1015.0	1015.0	1061.0
Tulita	Chief Albert Wright	1018.0	1018.0	1110.0

SOUTH SLAVE				
Fort Resolution	Deninu	938.0	1009.0	1055.0
Fort Smith	JB Tyrrell	1009.3	1009.3	n/a
Fort Smith	PW Kaeser	n/a	n/a	1055.5
Hay River	Harry Camsell Elementary	952.0	1009.0	n/a
Hay River	Princess Alexandra	952.0	1009.0	n/a
Hay River	Diamond Jenness	n/a	n/a	1055.1
Hay River	Chief Sunrise Education	1015.0	1015.0	1061.0
Lutsel K'e	Lutsel K'e Dene	1009.3	1009.3	1055.0

Yk #1				
Yellowknife	École J.H. Sisson	995.5	995.5	1040.8
	Mildred Hall	995.5	995.5	1040.8
	N.J. Macpherson	995.5	995.5	1040.8
	Range Lake North	995.5	995.5	1040.8
	William McDonald	995.5	995.5	1040.8
	Sir John Franklin High	995.5	995.5	1046.5
Ndilo	K'àlemi Dene	995.5	995.5	1040.8
Detah	Kaw Tay Whee	995.5	995.5	1040.8

YCS				
Yellowknife	Weledah Catholic	1010.2	1010.2	1046.5
	École St. Joseph	1000.5	1000.5	1052.0
	St. Patrick High School	n/a	n/a	1049.4

CSFTN				
Yellowknife	École Allain St-Cyr	828.0	996.7	1073.0
Hay River	École Boreale	828.0	996.7	1073.0