Education Renewal and Innovation Framework:

DIRECTIONS FOR CHANGE

Northwest Territories Education, Culture and Employment

2013

STRONG MIND STRONG NORTH

Message from the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment

The world of education is changing globally, nationally and territorially to meet the needs of students to be knowledgeable and capable people, positively contributing to their communities and possessing the skills needed to participate in the 21st century economy.

Responding to those changing needs is a complex undertaking, one that can only work if we are all pulling in the same direction. Governments, education partners, parents, students and the community at large must all be open to change and have the courage to fundamentally rethink how knowledge and skills are passed on. Over the past 10 months I have witnessed the enthusiasm with which all partners engaged in this initiative. I have every confidence that together we will honour the commitments set out in this 10-year comprehensive Framework which will direct our future actions.

This work does not stand alone. It is supported by other important strategies the Government of the Northwest Territories is undertaking in the areas of Early Childhood Development, Anti-Poverty, Mental Health and Wellbeing, Housing and Economic Development. It will also support the many initiatives undertaken by Aboriginal governments to improve student outcomes for their citizens.

It acknowledges and focuses support on the struggles of small communities while recognizing that regional centres and Yellowknife also have challenges that cannot be ignored.

Above all, it speaks to the fundamental importance of the relationship between the community and school as the foundation for change. It addresses new methods of learning and creative ways to learn while respecting the traditional knowledge and practices which have made our territory strong.

Most of all it embraces students thirst to learn and to be productive, healthy members of their communities and of the Northwest Territories. These ideas were impressed upon us by students at every opportunity.

While I have the pleasure of presenting this document, it is the work of many. I would like to thank the Northwest Territories Teachers' Association, Aboriginal governments, students, elders, district education authorities, colleagues in other jurisdictions both nationally and internationally, representatives from GNWT Departments, healthcare and housing experts, and everyone else who has contributed to this work. It was sometimes uncomfortable, as we had to break the barriers within which we have worked for so long, but I believe that makes it all the more solid and achievable. I thank you for your perseverance. The coming Action Plan will breathe life into this Framework, so your work is not quite over yet!

I believe in years to come we will look back at this moment, with its combination of strategic initiatives, and see it as a turning point in the success of our youth and our territory. The next ten years will be very exciting as improvements in our education system start to take root.
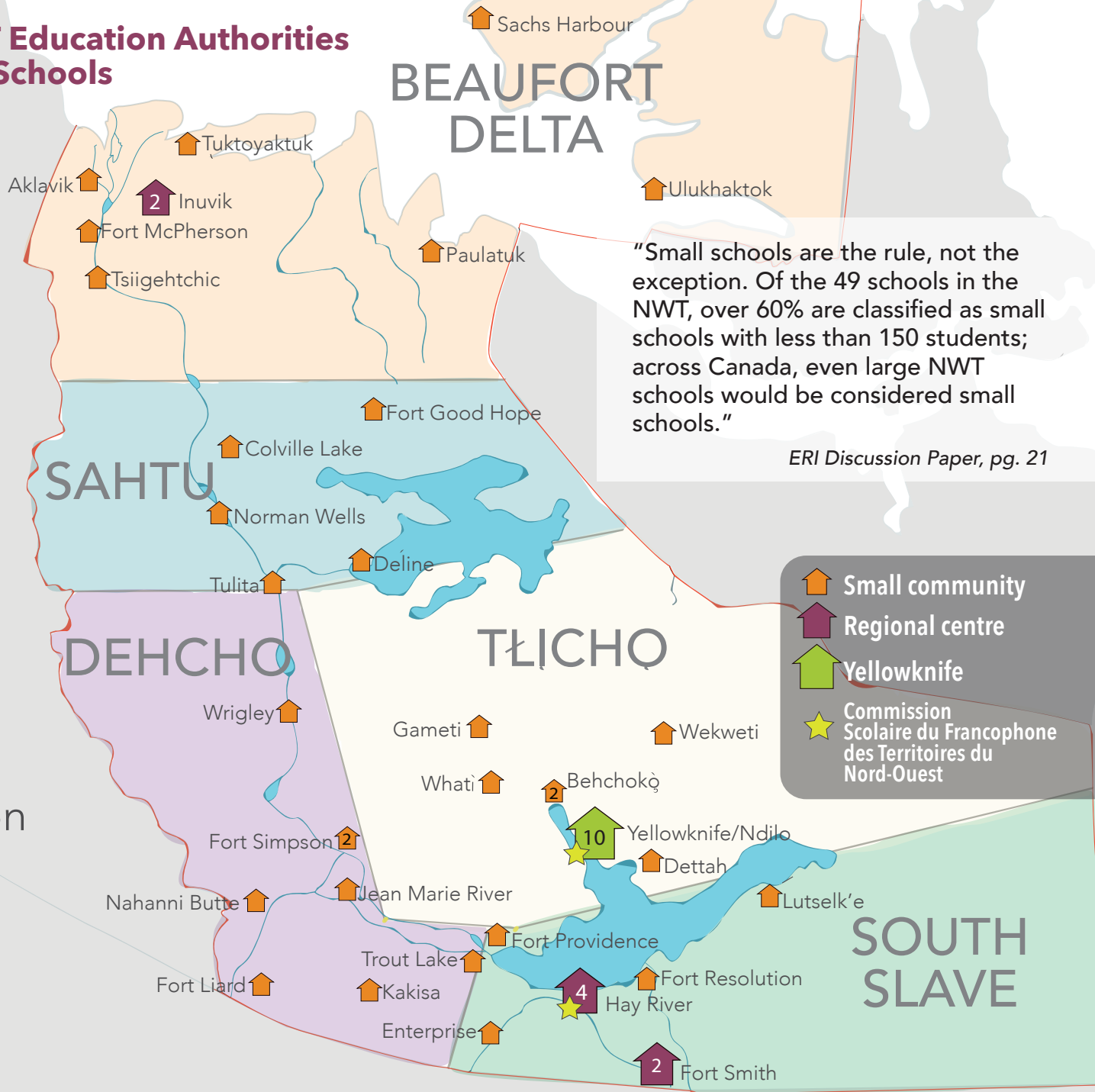
Masì,

Honourable Jackson Lafferty
Minister
Education, Culture and Employment

NWT Education Authorities and Schools

BEAUFORT DELTA

Sachs Harbour

Tuktoyaktuk

Aklavik

2 Inuvik

Fort McPherson

Tsiigehtchic

Ulukhaktok

Paulatuk

"Small schools are the rule, not the exception. Of the 49 schools in the NWT, over 60% are classified as small schools with less than 150 students; across Canada, even large NWT schools would be considered small schools."

ERI Discussion Paper, pg. 21

Fort Good Hope

Colville Lake

SAHTU

Norman Wells

Deline

Tulita

DEHCHO

TŁĮCHǪ

Wrigley

Gameti

Wekweti

Whatì

Behchokǫ̀

2

Yukon

Yellowknife/Ndilo

10

Dettah

Fort Simpson 2

Nahanni Butte

Jean Marie River

Lutselk'e

SOUTH SLAVE

Fort Providence

Trout Lake

Fort Liard

Kakisa

Fort Resolution

Hay River

4

Enterprise

2 Fort Smith

Legend:
- Small community
- Regional centre
- Yellowknife
- Commission Scolaire du Francophone des Territoires du Nord-Ouest

Northwest Territories Education, Culture and Employment

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Chapter 1

Context for Change

The History of Education in the NWT

Education has always been a priority for northern people. One of the first duties of any community was to help their children become *capable*[i] people.[1] Elders were central to teaching, as they helped children learn knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that they, and their community, would need in order to survive.

A different way of teaching children was brought to the North in the 1800's when missionaries arrived and began to teach, in French or English, with a focus on religious instruction. This Euro-Canadian style of teaching became formalized through the creation of residential schools. These new schools often took children from their families and communities, cutting them off from their language, culture, and way of life. The history and legacy of these schools are still strongly felt across the NWT and are at the root of many of the challenges we see in northern communities today, as well as in the relationships between many northern people and formal education.[2]

*Please see Appendix 1 for photo acknowledgements and credits.
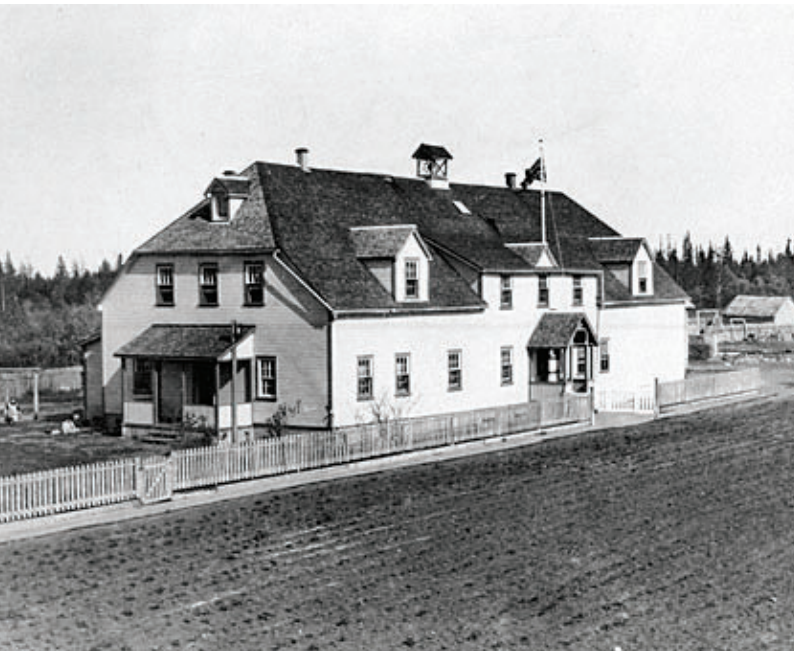
In the 1970's, education was a key focus as the NWT was beginning to define itself as a territory. A Special Committee on Education created a new plan for an improved education system in its final report in 1982, *Learning, Tradition and Change*.[3] This vision began to be carried out in the following years with the creation of School Boards and, in the 1990's, with the addition of District Education Authorities (DEAs) and District Education Councils (DECs) at the community and regional levels. Much of our current education system is based on this report, at the heart of which was an education system that reflected the values of the communities and people of the North.

Over the past 20 years, so much has changed in the world and in education, that it would be surprising if 'school' remained the same as what adults remember from their own childhood. The purpose of the Education Renewal and Innovation (ERI) Initiative, and the goal of this Framework document, is to determine how we can improve the NWT education system for all learners so that they can meet the challenges of today and be successful.

i. The term capable person is being explored worldwide, including in Dene Kede – Education from a Dene Perspective (1993), where it refers to the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values presented by Dene Elders in the hope of helping create people who have integrity in their relationships with themselves, the land, other people, and the spiritual world (p. xiv).

The Global Need for Change

Change in education around the world is being driven in part by exciting new research on how the brain works and how people learn.[4] Learners[ii] must not only develop knowledge, but also skills, attitudes, and values that will help them to be capable people. For that to happen, they need to actively participate in and be motivated by their learning. Research and experience demonstrate that effective learning happens when students direct their own learning and work together, inside and outside the classroom.

Change is also being driven by new technologies that enhance learning. New tools allow students to interact with other learners anywhere in the world.[5] Easy access to endless amounts of online information is shifting the teacher's role from being a holder of information and expertise, to that of a critical coach, showing students how to select, work with, and apply information in meaningful ways, to meaningful questions.[6]

International research and data are pointing to difficulties that many of the world's current education systems' are having in preparing students for the demands of today's fast-changing world. People everywhere are concerned with engaging learners in their learning and helping them develop the knowledge and skills needed for the needs of today's workplace, or for further education or training.[7]

Educational research is also showing that education which considers the well-being of the whole person (cognitive, emotional, social, spiritual, and physical) can improve academic success overall. This includes supporting and teaching self-regulation, resilience, and a positive sense of identity. It is clear that to improve student success, students' environments and experiences must be developed in a holistic way.[8]

ii. The word 'learner' through this document is intended to encompass both students and teachers, and anyone else involved in the school community or specific learning activity. An important fundamental understanding that has evolved out of the ERI research and engagement processes is that what we believe about meeting the needs of students, in order for them to learn best, applies equally for teachers, in order for them to teach best.

"Schools should have camps that promote traditional ways, and have students spending more time with the Elders storytelling, and going out on the land. There should be more cultural classes. Older students should guide younger students. Schools need strong school spirit, positive attitudes, and no bullying."

ASA 2010-2011 Forum, Beaufort Delta Youth

The NWT's Need for Change

A need for meaningful and sustainable change in NWT Education has been highlighted by a number of factors. The 2011 Aboriginal Student Achievement (ASA) Education Plan has significantly contributed to this discussion. During the 2010-11 school year, NWT Aboriginal, community, and youth leaders came together at ASA forums to explore how to address the gaps in school achievement between Aboriginal and other students. Four priorities were identified:

1. Early Childhood Development and Care

2. Student and Family Support

3. Aboriginal Language and Culture Curriculum and Resource Development

4. Literacy

The ASA Education Plan has since helped to show the need to do more than simply tweak the existing system; it revealed the need to think differently about the system as a whole.

Unique challenges, such as how to best offer quality education in small NWT communities, signal that change is necessary. Most NWT schools are small schools that deal with distinct realities which larger schools and communities do not face to the same extent, such as limited access to resources, inflated costs, fewer teachers, and classes with multiple grades. Many small schools also end up hiring teachers who are new to teaching, not from the North, and who may choose to stay for only a short period of time. Additionally, it is quite difficult for small schools to offer the wide range of high school courses needed to meet the many interests, abilities, and future goals of their students. Many of these schools also need help to better reflect the culture and values of their community – within their buildings, classrooms and teachings.

In fact, both research world-wide and life experiences support an understanding that genuine education is rooted in place and culture.[9] This idea, perhaps newer to western education, is age-old and fundamental to Aboriginal

people. Culture-based education and programs developed in the NWT allow us to respect the different ways of knowing and learning of students, and better meet their needs by making the language and culture of the land foundational parts of our education system. A focus on connecting education to 'place' needs to be emphasized and reflected in changes to NWT education.

In addition, the people of the NWT want and deserve an education system that is accountable, from the individual student to the entire system. The need for change in this area has been highlighted in the recommendations of the 2010 Office of the Auditor General's (OAG) report, where lack of accountability and of any sustained improvement in student achievement, as well as general lack of oversight in the current system were major areas of focus.[10] The OAG confirmed that in order to demonstrate accountability, we need to develop clear overall goals, ways to monitor our progress, and ways to know when we have reached those goals. In addition, assessment of student learning must be truthful, relevant, fair, and personal. We need careful and continuous guarantees to make sure that spending and program delivery are responsible, practical, and appropriate.

Alberta, one of our major partners in education, has also recognized that its approach to learning and assessment needs to change.[11] In redesigning their education system, Alberta is shifting from a rigid, information-heavy teaching model, where standardized tests have high importance, to a much more flexible, student interest-driven approach to teaching. Within this new model, classroom assessment is deliberately used in the service of student learning. Reporting to parents is becoming an ongoing process rather than a single event. NWT education is in need of a similar change. We need to foster a learning environment where students are engaged in, and motivated by, learning through inquiry and exploration that is directly connected to their lives. Our relationship with partners like Alberta and the Western and Northern Canadian Protocol (WNCP) can offer small jurisdictions like the NWT the opportunity to participate in making major changes that require significantly more capacity than the NWT currently has.

Furthermore, changes to education in the NWT are required if we are to better respond to the various needs of students. Data collected from the fields of education and health both show disturbing differences across the territory between small and larger schools, as well as between the NWT and Canada.[12] This data points to a very strong link between low academic

"Young people who feel connected with their school and have positive experiences with teachers and peers are more likely to develop strong emotional bonds and self-confidence."

Healthy Behaviours of School-aged Children, p.16

achievement and poverty, and signals that the highest levels of poverty in the NWT are found in the smallest communities.

Clearly, some of the needed changes go far beyond what can be done in a school setting alone. Meeting these needs must involve many partners – parents, teachers, community members, as well as the supports that can be offered by various social, health, and recreational resources.[13] In fact, strategies and directions now emerging from the work of many partners point to the need for a collaborative approach. The *Framework for Early Childhood Development in the NWT* (2013) and the anti-poverty strategy, *Building on the Strengths of Northerners* (2013) are a few examples of initiatives that underline the need for this approach. As such, it has become increasingly clear that other government departments will be vital partners in the success of northern learners.

Aboriginal leaders across the territory have continually highlighted the need for improvement of our schools. For decades they have heard the members of their communities asking for an education system that is purposeful and relevant to the real lives and future goals of students.[14] As current and future partners in education, Aboriginal governments are increasingly involved in discussions about education. The NWT is moving into a period where Aboriginal governments, through negotiated agreements, have regained the rights of formal education for their people, and are beginning to negotiate and will ultimately exercise these responsibilities.

The signing of the ASA Partnership Declaration (2011) demonstrated support and commitment to working together, which is welcomed and needed to build a stronger, relevant, NWT education system.

The increased recognition and participation of these partners is essential. Young people need to be healthy and live in safe and healthy environments from their earliest days in order to learn and reach their potential as capable citizens. This can only happen by working together.

The NWT is ready and willing to face the challenges that exist to achieve the vision of education held by the people of the North. It is a vision that is both ancient and new. Significant, sustained change will take determination, collaboration, time, and dedicated hard work from all involved in education and in the lives of northern learners. A shared willingness to work together is part of what makes the NWT unique and the place northern people are proud to call home. Together, the NWT can move toward a bright and proud future.
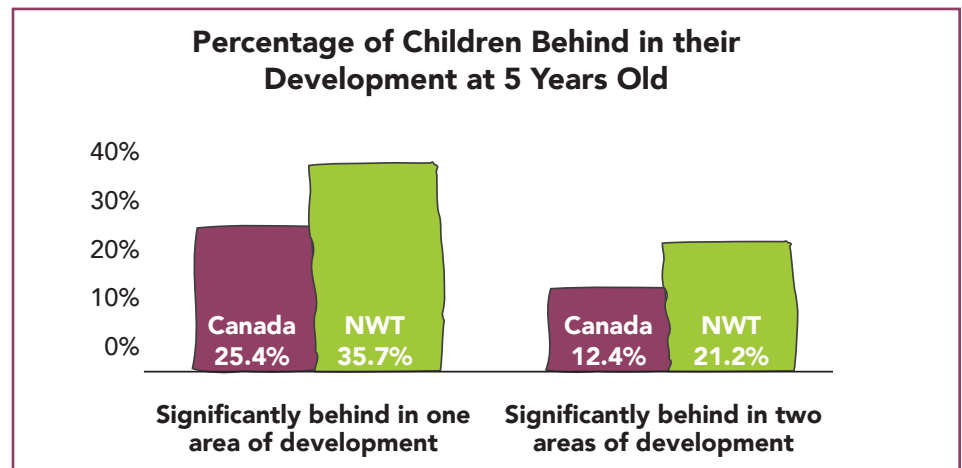
The Current NWT Context

The Current System

The Minister of Education, Culture and Employment (ECE) is responsible for the NWT education system. This system currently consists of the Department (ECE) and nine education authorities responsible for the delivery of K-12 education in 49 schools throughout 33 communities. There are approximately 8,400 students and 800 educators in the NWT.

Early Childhood Development

Almost all Canadian children (95%) are born with a strong potential to grow, learn and thrive. Yet due to environmental challenges, more than 25% of Canadian children are behind in their development when they start school.[15] Readiness for school is not a measure of basic skills as was often thought; rather, it is about a child's social, emotional, physical, cognitive, and language development.

In the NWT, many children are starting school with significant developmental delays. A snapshot of children's development in kindergarten gathered using the Early Development Instrument (EDI) indicates that over 35% of NWT children entering the school system are already significantly behind in their development. Specifically, that means that approximately 400 of the five year olds surveyed have significant delays.[16]

The percentage of five year olds behind in one or more areas of their development (social, emotional, physical, cognitive, or language) is as high as 60% in small communities. The number of children at risk in the area of physical development related to nutrition, sleep, and general wellbeing is over 18%, which is double the national average. The need to put supports in place even before children begin school is evident, and collaboration with other GNWT departments, as well as parents, families and communities is vital.[17]

Percentage of Children Behind in their Development at 5 Years Old

	Significantly behind in one area of development	Significantly behind in two areas of development
Canada	25.4%	12.4%
NWT	35.7%	21.2%

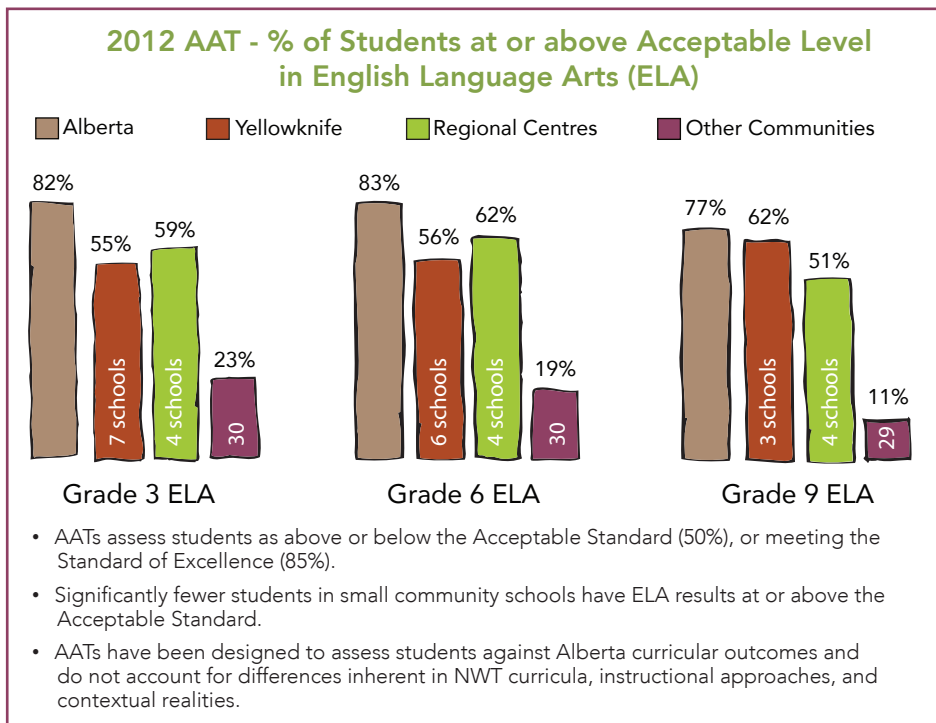Northwest Territories: Education, Culture and Employment

K-12 Schooling

Student support program data for 2010-11 shows that over 25% of NWT students are not at the academic level they should be for their age. In smaller communities, the number of students below grade level is closer to 50%. NWT data indicate a decrease in student achievement as students get older, further demonstrating an urgent need for changes to our current education system, including earlier interventions and support.

Overall, NWT students are not achieving at the same level as the rest of Canada. As measured by Alberta Achievement Tests (AATs), there are students struggling in all NWT communities, including Regional Centres and Yellowknife. A big gap exists, however, between the achievement of Aboriginal students and other students, specifically in small community schools where the student population is close to 100% Aboriginal.

2012 AAT - % of Students at or above Acceptable Level in English Language Arts (ELA)

Legend: Alberta | Yellowknife | Regional Centres | Other Communities

Grade 3 ELA
- Alberta: 82%
- Yellowknife: 55% (7 schools)
- Regional Centres: 59% (4 schools)
- Other Communities: 23% (30)

Grade 6 ELA
- Alberta: 83%
- Yellowknife: 56% (6 schools)
- Regional Centres: 62% (4 schools)
- Other Communities: 19% (30)

Grade 9 ELA
- Alberta: 77%
- Yellowknife: 62% (3 schools)
- Regional Centres: 51% (4 schools)
- Other Communities: 11% (29)

- AATs assess students as above or below the Acceptable Standard (50%), or meeting the Standard of Excellence (85%).
- Significantly fewer students in small community schools have ELA results at or above the Acceptable Standard.
- AATs have been designed to assess students against Alberta curricular outcomes and do not account for differences inherent in NWT curricula, instructional approaches, and contextual realities.

High School Graduates (measured as a % of 18 year olds)

Legend: Canadian (to 2010), Non-Aboriginal, NWT, Aboriginal

- Territory-wide graduation rates, low overall across all students, are slowly increasing; however, a gap exists between the graduation rates of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students.
- Graduation rates do not indicate which students graduate with advanced courses, and/ or those who graduate with the minimum 100 credits which is often not enough to access most post-secondary programs.
- Canadian graduation rate data in this graph come from Statistics Canada.

NWT High School Graduates in 2012

In the NWT, on average, only 4 of every 10 Aboriginal students will graduate, compared to 8 of every 10 non-Aboriginal students.
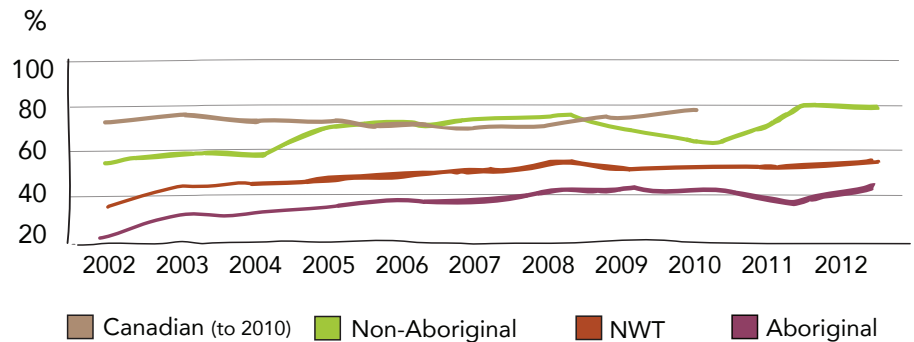
■ Aboriginal

■ Non-Aboriginal

"Low literacy contributes to inequities in education, employment opportunities, income, and by extension, options for good housing and other essentials for healthy living."

Building on the Strengths of Northerners, p.2

These low levels of educational achievement are likely to find some of their roots in the legacy of residential schooling and are linked to bigger challenges which must be overcome in the personal, family, and community lives of the future adults and leaders of the NWT. The recent work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and the development of northern teaching and learning resources addressing this legacy are important parts of a new beginning in the NWT. The *Framework for Early Childhood Development in the NWT* (2013), *Building on the Strengths of Northerners* (2013) and *Healing Voices* (2013) also address these issues, which will be further supported through the ERI process.

Attendance

One of the most important things students can do to achieve academic success is also one of the simplest: *'Be in school every day.'* In the 2011-12 school year, the NWT's average student attendance was 84%. Attendance rates are even lower in small communities.
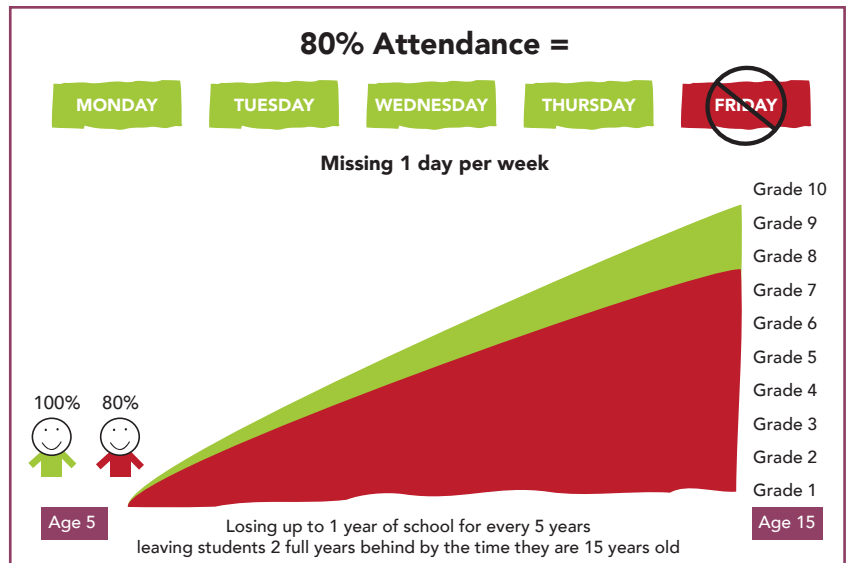
Although 80% on an exam or test may exceed acceptable standards, 80% attendance is very concerning as it is the same as missing one full school day per week. At that rate, by grade 4 the average NWT student has already missed half a year of school, or 2 full years by grade 10. Non-attendance is clearly an urgent concern that must be addressed immediately.

Attendance concerns are not unique to the NWT; the rise in school non-attendance is an issue being actively discussed at national and international levels. The challenge to find effective ways of encouraging students to not only attend, but fully engage in school, is common across countries with compulsory school attendance policies.[18]

Responses to attendance concerns such as offering prizes, visually tracking results, or even fining parents, are not evidence-based, and while they may result in some short-term improvements in attendance, the overall engagement of students in their learning and the positive impact on student achievement and development are still lacking. These kinds of efforts are also largely unsustainable.

So, although the premise is simple, *'students need to attend school daily in order to succeed'*, research indicates that the issue of non-attendance is more complex, as are the reasons underlying it. In fact, non-attendance can be thought of as the symptom to a much deeper condition in an education system that needs renewal and innovation in order to be relevant and motivating to students in the 21st century.

How do students learn best? What are students motivated to learn? What competencies do capable people need? What family, financial, health, personal, and/or academic

80% Attendance =

MONDAY · TUESDAY · WEDNESDAY · THURSDAY · FRIDAY

Missing 1 day per week

Grade 10, Grade 9, Grade 8, Grade 7, Grade 6, Grade 5, Grade 4, Grade 3, Grade 2, Grade 1

100%   80%

Age 5 · Age 15

Losing up to 1 year of school for every 5 years leaving students 2 full years behind by the time they are 15 years old

realities are students dealing with? How is student learning connected to their everyday lives and communities? These are some of the questions that must be addressed in order to get to the heart of attendance issues.

When students are authentically engaged, have their specific needs and interests met, feel they belong and that teacher's care for them, when the curriculum is relevant and teacher's make learning exciting, students will attend school. As such, student attendance is really the product of a strong school, not the reason for a school's strength.

Social Passing

One of the common consequences of poor attendance is having students working at levels below the grade level expected for their age. One response to this scenario is to keep students with their age peers, while providing them with programming and supports that meet their specific needs. Keeping students with age-appropriate peers is a well-researched approach to student learning, and one of the principles underlying inclusive schooling policies in many jurisdictions in Canada and around the world. The other approach is to retain students in the grade at which they are working.

'Social passing' is the term sometimes used to describe this practice of moving students along with their age peers, rather than retaining them, or holding them back, even when they have not satisfied a grade's academic

requirements. This research-based practice is coined 'social' passing because it is usually done in the interest of a student's social and psychological well-being.

This does not prevent students, teachers, schools, and the education system as a whole from pursuing excellence and holding rigorous, developmentally-appropriate expectations for what students should achieve. In fact these conditions are needed in order for peer-group placement to function as it is meant to.

Guided by a Ministerial Directive on Inclusive Schooling, NWT students are generally placed with their age peers from kindergarten to grade 9. It is important to note that current NWT policy does not prevent schools from retaining students in a lower grade if deemed to be in the best interest of the student, and if agreed upon by their parents. However, research signals that holding

> "An enriched learning environment offers challenging, complex curriculum and instruction, provides the lowest-performing students with the most highly qualified teachers, minimizes stressors, boosts participation in physical activity and the arts, ensures that students get good nutrition, and provides students with the support they need to reach high expectations"
>
> *Jensen, 2009*

students back a grade may be damaging to the student, is ineffective at improving long-term student achievement, and is highly correlated with dropping-out in high school.[19] Rather, classrooms need to include a diversity of students, and schools must work to support individual learners and their place in the learning community through early intervention and effective research-based strategies.[20] For teachers, sometimes this is described as 'teaching the student, not the grade'.

Educational research indicates that both social passing and holding students back are ineffective on their own.[21] What is certain is that in order to learn best, all students require conditions and supports that meet their varied needs early on and which recognize and enhance their emotional, social, cognitive, spiritual, and physical development.

Chapter 2

Northwest Territories Education, Culture and Employment

STRONG MIND STRONG NORTH

Vision for the Future

The Path to Change

Highlights of our Research

The initial phase of the ERI process focused on a scan of northern, Canadian, and international educational research which is leading us to a renewed definition of student success and to a new vision for teaching and learning.

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has worked with a wide range of experts to identify the *competencies*[iii] needed within an increasingly diverse, interconnected world, for a successful life and well-functioning society. Interestingly, competencies are more than knowledge and skills; they involve the integration of thinking skills and creative abilities, as well as attitudes, motivations, and values.[22]

Canada's western provinces and northern territories identified the following competencies in their 2011 Guiding Principles for developing curriculum frameworks:

- Innovative, creative and critical ways of thinking and problem solving
- Communication and collaboration
- Information and communication technology (ICT) literacy
- Citizenship and personal and social responsibility including cultural awareness[23]

Furthermore, a fundamental shift in current understandings of education is under way. This shift moves away from being centred on individuals, toward a more understanding of learning where connections and relationships are most important.[24] The individual remains important as a unique member in a web of relations with people, environment, ideas, and self. People learn best when their social, emotional, physical, intellectual, and spiritual needs are met. Learning that helps develop any one of these areas contributes to the development of each of them.[25] For example, research provides evidence that emotional responses have direct effects on the brain, impairing or enhancing function, improving or lowering potential performance.[26] Evidence also confirms that health factors, like physical and social environments, personal health

practices and income, have a considerable impact on academic achievement.[27]

Research indicates that, although basic brain structures are to a large degree established at birth, a child's interactions, relationships, and experiences will actually establish neural circuits and shape the design of their brain.[28] Relationships are, in fact, at the heart of education and are central in present-day understandings of learning.[29] Since children are born with a desire to create and build relationships,[30] and seek to make meaning, all types of relationships have an impact on their learning. As such, trusting relationships between students and teachers have been demonstrated to be more important even than socioeconomic challenges in the life and community of the learner.[31] During the engagement process, this is one of the strongest messages heard from students.

iii. Competencies, which include more than knowledge and skills, involve the integration of cognitive and practical skills, creative abilities, as well as attitudes, motivations, and values. Together, they enable an individual to become a capable person.

Because learning is embedded in the learner's relationships, connecting learning to the place where students live and to their daily lives is vital.[32] *School* cannot be a place set apart from the community. A teacher's job must be to support students in learning as much as possible about and within their own immediate world, the larger world, and the connections between the two.[34] Teachers need to identify meaningful situations as a basis for designing engaging and relevant learning experiences to build and extend student learning.[35]

Research indicates that teaching through a competency-based model of education, rather than in a fragmented way that separates subject areas and is focused on content, works better with how children's brains actually function.[36] Integration of learning across subjects also better reflects the way children learn at home and in the community.[37] It also naturally promotes the application of competencies from one area to another and helps bridge the gap between the concrete and the abstract.[38]

As a result, challenging learning experiences need the collaboration of teachers, students, and others, and are made possible by following the natural curiosity of learners and making connections within and across learning experiences.[39] In order to engage students so they attempt meaningful inquiries, learning environments must be free from fear as trial and error is essential to the creation of knowledge.[40] The quality of teacher questioning can further drive this inquiry-based learning process which engages and motivates learners when made relevant to their lives, interests, and aspirations.

The vision of success will vary from one individual to another, but self-worth is essential for success at school for everyone.[41] A feeling of self-worth promotes inquiry and active participation in learning because of a solid sense of identity and the belief that contributing to a group counts. Schools that reflect the children's cultures and communities help stimulate both learning and a sense of identity.[42]

Success in school and in life develops out of, and helps build, a sense of belonging and well-being[43] through genuine engagement in learning. Success is supported by perseverance and resilience,[44] confidence in one's ability to learn, and motivation for learning. In addition, the ability to

self-regulate[45] facilitates the ability to cope with increasingly greater challenges and contributes to success in learning and life. The development of these qualities needs to be a central part of the school experience for all students. In addition, students need education to be fair, where all learners are offered equitable opportunities and conditions. Equitable social and educational opportunities are the foundations of the success of Finland's education system[46]

Finally, teachers have needs that are strikingly similar to those of their students. Studies show that implementing a researched approach to teacher development is central to improved learning for K-12 learners.[47] For instance, both students and teachers prefer to have choice in their learning processes,[48] and benefit more from support and development than from summative evaluations.[49] As such, educators benefit more from small multi-year, phased improvements that help build new professional habits, rather than one-time professional development events.[50] Like students, educators welcome access to expertise that is made increasingly available through technology.[51] Investments in recruitment, retention, and promising practices are protected through orientation programs that sensitize teachers to cultural contexts and to the importance of building relationships,[52] and through access to safe and adequate living and teaching conditions.

These modern ideas, which are at the heart of current educational research, have much in common with Aboriginal beliefs of learning, viewed as a lifelong lived practice that is linked to community, environmental, and individual well-being.

"Heritage Fairs engage students, their families and communities because they provide children with an opportunity to create a presentation of their own interest. Most children select topics relevant to their personal, family, community or territory history and culture."

Elders in Schools Handbook, p. 20

Changing Portrait of Learning

The thinking around teaching and learning is undergoing a major shift. The education system in the past century has focused on Eurocentric views and values within structures similar to the factories of the Industrial Age. Subjects were compartmentalized, students were sorted, and the end goal was production of a very specific set of skills and knowledge. Advancements in research are now leading to a more ecological and holistic understanding of the diverse needs and contributions of learners, and the range of factors that benefit genuine learning.

"We used to believe…"	"And now we believe…"
Human beings generally learn the same way everywhere.	Learning is connected to and influenced by place.
Education involves the delivery of specific ideas in unchanging academic subjects.	Education is working within and contributing to inquiries that are connected to the real, changing world.
Learning theory is influenced by cognitive psychology, with focus on memory and attention.	Learning theory is informed by neuroscience which investigates how the brain actually works.
Knowledge, skills, attitudes and values are seen as separate pieces that all add up to what a proficient person will need.	Competencies, which combine knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values, together allow an individual to become a capable person.
Learning is broken down into skills, objectives or outcomes within a content-driven curriculum.	Competency-based learning is not pre-fixed and broken up, but chosen critically so students are motivated to investigate deeply.
There is emphasis on the individual learner and individual achievement.	There is recognition of the individual's important part to play in the collaboration of groups of learners.
Uniformity is created through grouping and categorizing of students who perform similar tasks. There is a belief that standardization will lead to guaranteed results.	Students learn to make personal contributions to learning experiences; results of those contributions are reported. Teachers track results.
The teacher is most often the content knowledge expert in the classroom.	No one person is considered able to hold all necessary knowledge; learners need to learn how to seek and be critical of information.
Teachers are in the business of "fixing" learners who need constant improvement.	Teachers begin with what learners can do and build on strengths.
Student work is most often evaluated by the teacher when the work is finished.	Students receive regular feedback from the teacher, from classmates, and from others (such as parents and community members).
There is a belief that compliance leads to the best learning.	There is a belief that engagement leads to the best learning.
Classroom behaviour is managed.	Students use strategies and know how to adjust conditions to meet needs that support their learning.
Rigid, timetabled structures are valued; logistics are predictable because they are all similar within schools.	In a flexible structure, teachers work together; logistics are more complicated because possibilities are open. There is recognition that learning can take place outside of school and outside of a rigid timeframe or schedule.
Information and communication technology (ICT) is able to make access, analysis, and delivery of information more efficient.	ICT changes thinking, knowing, creating, contributing and communicating. ICT changes what a reader, writer, and community once was.

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Engagements

The ERI process is based on a model of change that joins three important elements, all working together to make sound recommendations for change. The data highlighted and the summary of research previously outlined represents two of these elements. The insights gained from the perspectives and experience of a wide range of northern education partners and stakeholders is the final element in the first phase of the ERI initiative.
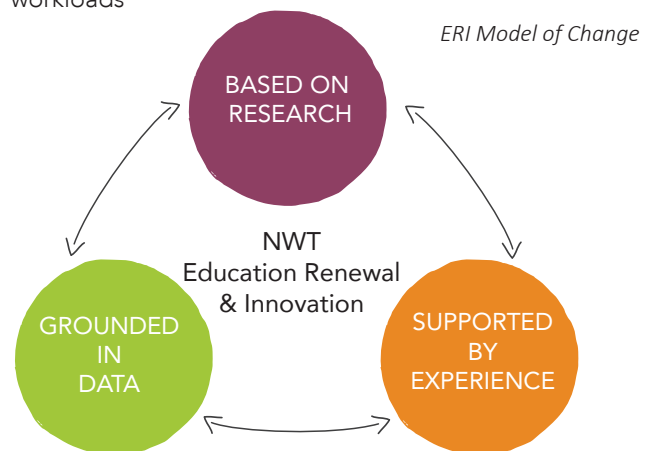
The ERI process has been based on an effort to be as inclusive as possible, offering many opportunities for different individuals and groups to be part of the discussion, and to give their ideas and feedback. There were approximately 30 separate engagements held, with all NWT regions represented.

Multiple government departments influence NWT education – be it in curriculum development, teacher recruitment, professional development, housing, health and well-being, or cultural programming. ECE has intentionally sought extended governmental participation and involvement in the engagement process. Beginning in November 2012, there were several engagements with other government departments, highlighting the strong connections to, and impact of, the ERI areas of focus - in particular NWT Housing priorities, as well as Municipal and Community Affairs (MACA), Human Resources (HR), and Health and Social Services (HSS).
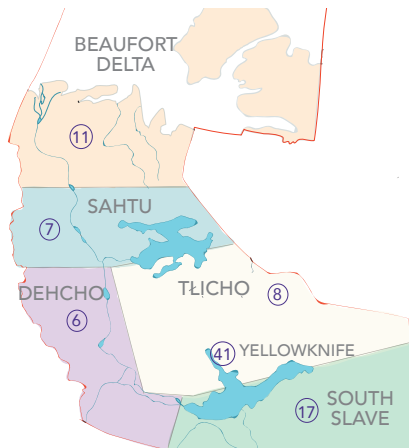
The Minister of ECE launched the engagement phase of the ERI process with the first non-government engagement in December 2012 with the District Education Council (DEC) Chairpersons and Superintendents. During the next seven months, the ERI team was involved in more than 20 engagements with boards and partners, including DECs, District Education Authorities (DEAs), the Northwest Territories Teacher's Association (NWTTA), Aurora College staff and Board of Governors, internal ECE committees and coordinators, students, and Aboriginal governments.

Issues that were most often raised in these engagement events focused on:

- Strengthening school-community relationships and partnerships
- The need to redefine 'student success' for all K-12 learners
- Creation of a wider range of pathway options for high school completion
- Changes to high school graduation requirements
- The need to explore the benefits of high school and post-secondary dual credits
- Improvements to current K-12 student assessment practices
- Increased personalization of the learning process for K-12 students
- Focus on increasing support for quality early childhood development
- Consideration for improved systems to address educator recruitment, orientation, retention, mentorship, wellness, and workloads

ERI Model of Change

BASED ON RESEARCH

GROUNDED IN DATA

SUPPORTED BY EXPERIENCE

NWT Education Renewal & Innovation

One of the most significant ERI engagement events was the ERI Roundtable, which took place on April 30th and May 1st, 2013. The Roundtable included participants from all regions across the territory:

- 11 from the Beaufort Delta
- 6 from the Dehcho
- 8 from the Tłı̨chǫ
- 17 from the South Slave
- 41 from Yellowknife
- 7 from the Sahtu

Keynote speakers and delegates from outside the NWT were also present at the Roundtable.

The voices of various organizations were heard through the many participants offering diverse perspectives on lived experience in the NWT, educational expertise, and professional insight. The Roundtable produced recommended directions for change. A high level of consensus around some of these areas was achieved, while new thinking continued to emerge in other areas.

Aboriginal Leaders' Roundtable Meeting June 27, 2013

The ERI team recognized that although there had been many engagements with field experts and important education partners, some of the most influential recommendations might come from those currently involved in the education system itself. This prompted the facilitation of engagements with students. Beginning in May 2013, student engagements were held in Fort Smith, Hay River, and Yellowknife with students of all ages representing 20 communities from across the territory, including francophone students.

The desire for more positive, open, respectful and trusting relationships with teachers who care about them and their success was the most notable theme raised in all student engagements. Also raised was the need for more culture and language related opportunities in school, and the importance of eliminating bullying in schools and ensuring a more positive, safe environment for all.

Aboriginal governments are integral partners in the ERI process. To ensure their awareness of, and involvement in, the ERI process, Aboriginal government leaders were invited to an Aboriginal Leaders' ERI Roundtable in June 2013. The meeting highlighted agreement for the need for education change in a wide range of areas. The Minister described ECE's interest in pursuing new power-sharing agreements and new roles and responsibilities for Aboriginal governments in areas of education. The desire for greater involvement was voiced by the leaders present.

Emerging Themes

By combining what we heard during the engagements with research and NWT data, a number of themes emerged that point to exciting possible directions for change. The following ten major themes summarize this consolidation.

Enhancing and supporting the school-community relationship

- Tools and programs to help educators build strong community and cultural understanding
- Increasing meaningful community/parent involvement in the school
- Support for further development of positive and respectful student-teacher trust relationships

Embedding local culture, language, history and natural environment into student learning in order to make it more relevant and meaningful

Redefining student success in 21st century NWT

- Embedding authentic literacy and numeracy development in all learning activities
- Implementation of competency-based curriculum (appropriate for multi-age classes)

- Focus on learning through student-driven inquiry and collaboration

Increasing learner outcomes by meeting the needs of all parts of the student - social, emotional, spiritual, intellectual, and physical

- Providing a range of learning opportunities and experiences with both community and school-based teachers

Make learning personal – Increasing student ownership/engagement through choice and autonomy

- Purposeful development of students' sense of identity/voice/resiliency

Increasing flexibility within the system (structures, time frames…)

- Development of flexible and equitable quality programming

for high school students, with different pathway options towards graduation
- Revisiting the requirements for graduation

Focusing on early years (0-5) programming

Integrating interdepartmental and community services within schools

Embedding local culture, language, history and natural environment into student learning in order to make it more relevant and meaningful

Creating an NWT Student Assessment & System Accountability Framework

- Greater system accountability between government & school boards
- Rethinking the roles & responsibilities of education authorities and school boards
- Identifying rigorous, relevant, and fair student success indicators
- Developing consistent assessment practices and tools across the NWT
- Facilitating the development of strong school improvement plans
- Evidence-based academic interventions/programs
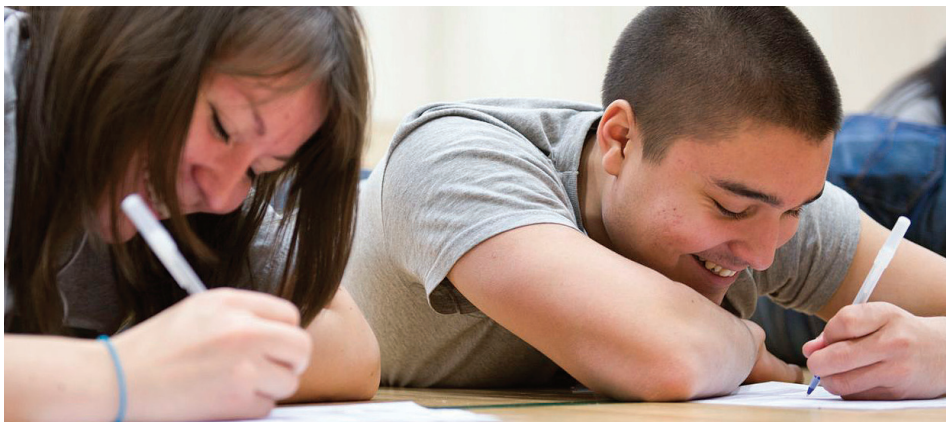
A New Direction

Vision

For northern learners to receive a quality education, to live fulfilled lives as capable people and contribute to strong, healthy communities.

* Adapted from the ECE Vision Statement

Primary Goals

The two primary goals of this initiative when it began were to establish:

1. An effective, relevant NWT education system for all learners, and
2. An associated, practical reporting, management, and accountability framework.

Northwest Territories Education, Culture and Employment

Secondary Goals

The secondary goals in the development of a strategic and comprehensive territory wide plan to improve our overall education system and fall broadly under the following seven areas of focus:

Student Success

- A shared, relevant, and flexible definition of NWT student success, enacted through engaging and relevant practices with strong embedded literacy and numeracy skills

Small Community Schools

- Support for the realities of small community schools through increased school-community partnership, resource equity, program development and accessibility, and system flexibility

Assessment Practices

- Common accurate, relevant and practical assessment tools and indicators of student success

- Assessment for learning including the involvement of students in the assessment process

Early Childhood Development

- Equitable access to quality supports for the development of all aspects of the healthy development of young children in order to ensure readiness and success in the K-12 system

"People made it clear they want on-the-land programming, and lots of it. Reconnecting with their spiritual and cultural identities – so closely tied to nature – was for many communities a necessary component to…healing."

Healing Voices – Minister's Forum on Addictions and Community Wellness, p. 2

Professional Capacity

- Strengthened professional capacity among NWT educators through enhanced recruitment, retention and orientation measures, as well as relevant professional development experiences that are respectful of location, context, and workloads

Culture, Identity, and Well-being

- Development and alignment of services and resources within the education system to support all

areas that contribute to the well-being of students, educators, and community

System Accountability

- An increase in accountability measures at all levels of the system, including a review of the roles and responsibilities of boards, DEAs, and DECs in light of the evolving role of Aboriginal governments in education

Foundational Statements

A fundamental understanding within ERI work is that all people, inside or outside of the school, are learning, growing, and contributing. As such, the term 'learner' is used throughout this document to include students, educators, Elders, family, and community members who make up a learning community.

These foundational statements emerged from our research and engagement processes, and now guide the ERI initiative:

Relationships:

Meaningful relationships with self, others, ideas, and the land are the foundation for all learning.

The school and community are connected. The active involvement and roles of all partners – students, family, community, school staff, educators, Aboriginal Governments, business, etc. -- are highly valued in the learning that occurs inside and outside school walls. Learning involves relationships with ideas, people, life experiences, languages, spirituality, and culture. All are rooted in the place where we live and learn, thus making it essential to connect to the land and people of that place. Through meaningful and respectful relationships, people can talk openly, develop a shared vision, and make decisions together on the directions of students' learning. Students contribute to their community and to their own life-long learning when their relationship with learning is one of true inquiry and discovery.

Ecological Understanding:

Education in the NWT is a living system of connections, each affecting an individual's relationships and well-being.

Education in the NWT can be compared to an ecosystem. The education system is a central and complex part of the North. Every action within the living system impacts more than just the school or its students; it impacts parents, educators, communities, and the wider territory. An ecosystem succeeds only when it is sustainable, with all parts respected and taken care of. The health of any single part of the system impacts others through the complex web of connections between them. To ensure system strength, all connections and their impacts on each other and the whole must be considered.

Identity:

A positive sense of identity is actively supported.

A person's sense of identity is formed and transformed by their relationships and their understandings of the world around them. In the NWT, the land has a great influence on peoples' identity. Northern languages, cultures, and values must be recognized by the education system so that learning connects with life experiences, spirituality, and identity, not just to facts and skills. The NWT education system must create opportunities for individuals and groups to express themselves, to feel empowered, and to apply both independence and choice in their learning.

Northwest Territories Education, Culture and Employment

Development of Self:

Each person has multiple needs that must be met in order to grow as a capable, contributing person.

People learn best when their social, emotional, physical, intellectual, and spiritual needs are met. The NWT education system must provide safe, caring, and stimulating environments to allow all learners to explore and meet their different needs. This environment will impact each person's development of well-being, resiliency, self-worth, and ability to contribute.

Learning Together:

People construct knowledge and learn individually and together.

Every person and group makes unique and necessary contributions to learning. Ideas are created and grow through the different experiences, thoughts, and ways of knowing and doing contributed by each person. The NWT education system must ensure authentic and meaningful connections between learning and life and meaning and values. Learners co-construct knowledge as they inquire and problem-solve, wrestling with real-life challenges, issues, and questions that impact their community and themselves.

Diversity:

Diversity is recognized and valued in the education system.

When people have different social, cultural, historical, linguistic, geographic, economic, spiritual, and political backgrounds, they carry different world views, ways of learning, and ways of doing. Relationships in which people feel free to think and express uniqueness support meaningful learning and working environments. Diversity is essential, as it provides a more complete picture for understanding, constructing knowledge, and moving forward. By using the strength of these different world views, the NWT education system can meet the diverse needs of learners and communities with flexibility, equity, and respect.

Strengths and Growth:

The ongoing growth of learners is nurtured.

The NWT education system recognizes and respects that each person has defined experiences and strengths. The same respect for uniqueness applies to educators, groups, and communities. All learning environments, processes, and initiatives must begin with this in mind and serve to foster personal growth. We must help learners to self-evaluate and set personal challenges. We must encourage efforts and risk-taking since they generate ideas and creative solutions to problems, and foster resilience.

Competencies:

The development of competencies is supported in all learners.

Capable people have the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values to work through any situation. When learners explore real life situations that push them to think, work together, and act creatively, they use and further develop these competencies. By doing so, they shape their brain's activity and strengthen their neural connections. In an NWT education system that embraces competency-based learning, learners have ownership over learning choices and decisions. They are supported as they take responsibility for their learning and progress. In this environment disciplines are no longer fixed bodies of knowledge; they become something in which to experiment, venture into, and contribute. The teacher becomes a facilitator, a guide to the learning venture at hand.
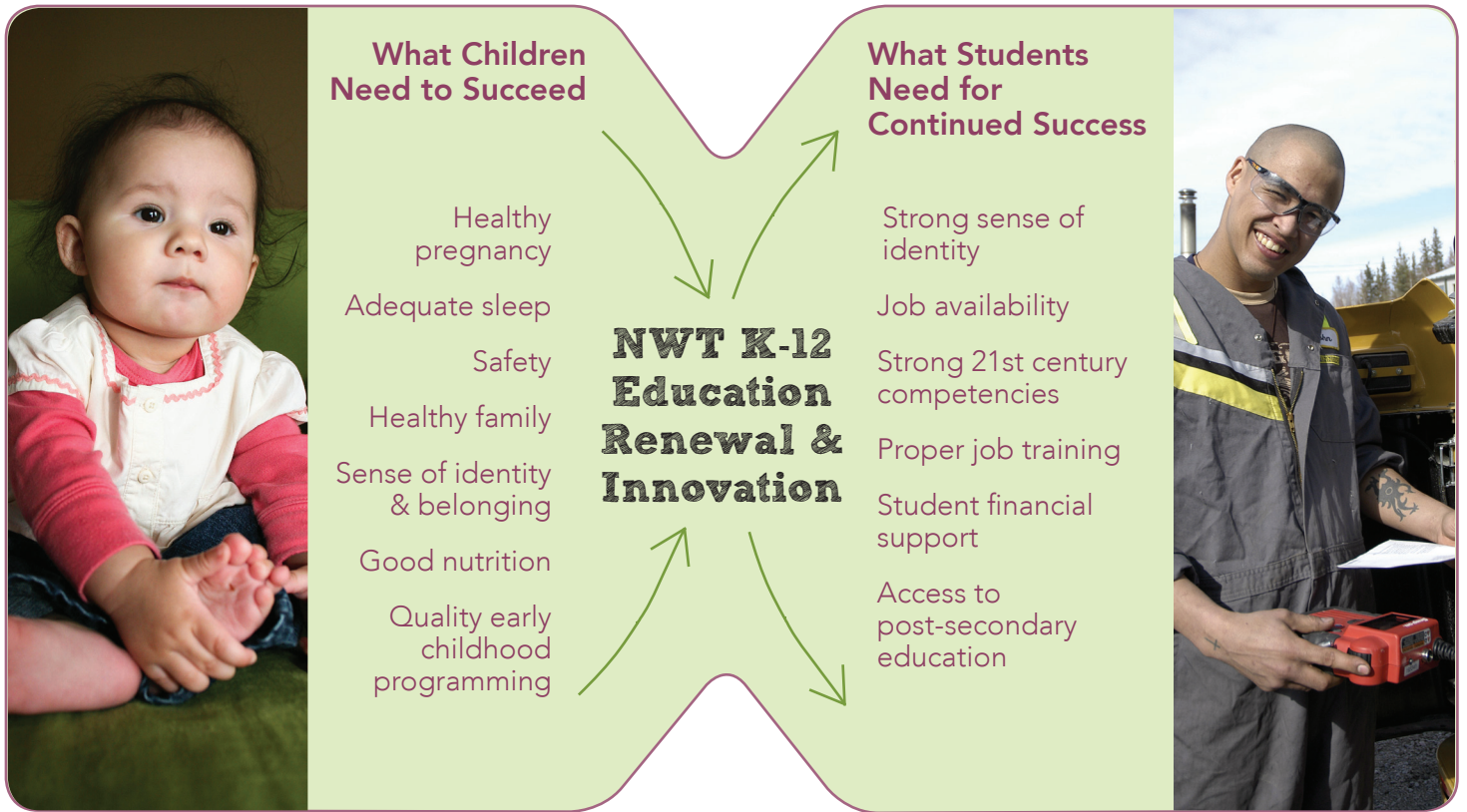
Chapter 3

Northwest Territories Education, Culture and Employment

STRONG MIND ▶ STRONG NORTH

Commitments

1. The GNWT will do its part to ensure that the school and community work together to build and renew positive relationships.

2. The GNWT will do its part to ensure that student wellness and the development of a positive sense of identity are promoted and embedded in school experiences, programming, and environments.

3. The GNWT will do its part to ensure that educators have access to experiences and resources that enhance their wellness in order for them to focus on excellence in teaching.

4. The GNWT will do its part to ensure that learners experience supported and personalized quality education.

5. The GNWT will do its part to ensure that the strengths and realities of small communities are recognized and built upon in order to ensure equitable, quality education in all NWT communities.

6. The GNWT will do its part to renew the K-12 curriculum and ensure it is taught in relevant, research-based, innovative ways.

7. The GNWT will do its part to ensure that assessment of learning and actions taken in response to systemic data are comprehensive, strength-based, and growth-oriented.

8. The GNWT will do its part to ensure that the education system is monitored, measured and reported on to provide transparency and accountability in order to best support student success.

9. The GNWT will continue to work with Aboriginal governments to be successful as they draw down jurisdiction over the education of their people.

Northwest Territories Education, Culture and Employment

What Children Need to Succeed

What Students Need for Continued Success

NWT K-12 Education Renewal & Innovation

What Children Need to Succeed

Healthy pregnancy

Adequate sleep

Safety

Healthy family

Sense of identity & belonging

Good nutrition

Quality early childhood programming

What Students Need for Continued Success

Strong sense of identity

Job availability

Strong 21st century competencies

Proper job training

Student financial support

Access to post-secondary education

NWT Student Centred Life Long Learning

The exciting, timely changes to come to the NWT K-12 education system are describe in this third chapter. Each section is headed with one of the nine GNWT commitments followed with a description of its specific context. On the opposite page, a general objective is stated along with a range of possible actions. Finally, some potential upcoming initiatives are highlighted.

Each commitment area will be linked to a developing collection of specific promising practices, suggested by education partners from across the territory. Further research into these and other promising practices will be part of the next phases of ERI work. This growing collection of practices will become accessible online as the ERI process advances.

The commitments found in this final chapter of this 10-year Framework will shape the development of a detailed Action Plan which will again involve collaboration among a wide range of educational, government, community, and other partners throughout the territory and beyond. The commitments in this chapter echo both the voices of the many residents of the NWT who have shared in the ERI process to date, as well as the most current educational research findings and promising practices of the 21st century.

1 Ensure that the school and community work together to build and renew positive relationships.

Why make this a commitment?

A strong relationship between school and community is essential for the development of capable northern students. Both school and community need to foster this relationship. Often one or both partners may not feel comfortable reaching out to the other.

For example:

- Many parents and community members may not feel the school is a safe place due to the legacy of residential schools.
- Elders and parents were stripped of their role as primary educators of children as a part of colonization.
- Some parents are intimidated by the school environment and may feel they do not have a role or voice in the education of their children.
- Many students do not see school as relevant or connected to their lives.
- Many teachers are at the beginning of their careers and may not have the experience or the skills to balance excellence in teaching and building relationships.
- Many teachers have difficulty building relationships across cultural differences.
- Some teachers and principals see the community as an intimidating place.
- Many teachers and principals only stay in the North a few years; therefore, community and students may not trust or invest in them.
- Both school and community may conform to old, formal schooling roles since building relationship and genuine partnership is new and challenging.

Northwest Territories Education, Culture and Employment

What are we proposing?

Improving understanding and meaningful partnership between the school and community

How will we achieve this?

- Restructuring the school to be a friendlier, more welcoming and culturally appropriate environment (e.g. integrating local art and tributes to local heroes in the school; inviting family, Elders and community members to join learning activities)

- Offering increased opportunities for community members and organizations to work in, and utilize the school infrastructure, including during periods outside of regular school hours.

- Ensuring staff members are welcomed to the community and are invited to community events such as feasts

- Offering thorough teacher orientation (e.g. cultural orientation, inviting community leaders to speak at in-services, actively creating opportunities for community mentorship for school principals and school staff)

- Having the school informally reach out to the community (e.g. visiting Elders)

- Creating opportunities for students and school staff to learn about the community from community leaders in such areas as Aboriginal rights and the history of the place (e.g. engaging students and teachers in local leadership, interagency meetings)

- Providing school staff with opportunities to go out on the land with community members

- Providing accurate information about the community in question before teachers accept job offers

- Having the physical infrastructure of schools changed whenever possible to make spaces inviting and useful to students and the community

- Having multiple interagency services available in the school for students, families, and community members

- Establishing day cares within schools to assist parents to continue their studies, especially in communities where there is no childcare available

Some potential initiatives

1.1 Individual school improvement planning focused on school-community relationships

1.2 Enhanced teacher mentorship programming involving community (e.g. Adopt-a-Teacher program)

1.3 Elders in Schools

1.4 In-servicing of all NWT school staff on residential schools

1.5 Creation of community and school online profiles with input from Aboriginal governments to provide regional content

1.6 Active promotion and use of the GNWT Human Resources' online cultural orientation

1.7 Review directive and policy on multi-use of school buildings

2 Ensure that student wellness and the development of a positive sense of identity are promoted and embedded in school experiences, programming, and environments.

Why make this a commitment?

Student achievement is influenced by many factors outside of academics. In order to learn best, a learner's needs in all areas of life must be met: social, emotional, cognitive, spiritual, and physical. Supports to healthy development in any one area will also benefit the healthy development of the others, as well as the overall well-being of the learner and his/her ability to contribute.

Various circumstances are challenging the school success of NWT students:

• Some students are coming to school tired, hungry, and/or anxious.

• Some students struggle with peer pressure around involvement in unhealthy or risky behaviours.

• Some students are dealing with abuse; some are facing addiction issues.

• Some students lack access to role models who value reading and learning; others do not have an adequate space to do homework outside of school.

• Some students are overwhelmed by the gaps in their learning and feel they do not have the supports to meet the challenge.

• Many students do not have a trusting relationship with an adult they can talk to about their personal problems.

• For many students, poor performance reflects people's low expectations of their achievement potential.

• Much of the curriculum is not relevant to the students' lives, interests, and aspirations.

• Many students have not had opportunities to discover what inspires and interests them.

• Some parents and students are not taking the responsibility for consistent attendance at school and readiness to learn.

• Limited opportunities in the local workforce affect the motivation of some students.

• Some students are ridiculed or shunned by their peers if perceived to want to do well at school.

• Some students do not get enough physical activity, which research shows is associated with improved mental well-being, reduced bullying, and improved self-esteem.

What are we proposing?

Creating flexible structures, learning environments, programs and resources that best support the needs of students and the development of their sense of identity

How will we achieve this?

- Enhancing the relationships of, and around, students in the learning environment
- Improving the natural and physical environment of students to foster a sense of belonging
- Supporting learning environments that enhance the development of the student's sense of ownership, empowerment, and responsibility over themselves and their learning
- Developing policies designed to create common understanding and best approaches toward safe, inclusive, and learner-centered educational environments
- Creating flexible school structures to meet the needs of students (e.g. school day and school year timetables)

- Increasing rigour and supports for all students, ensuring that students placed with their age peers also receive adequate, personalized academic programming
- Supporting initiatives for gifted programming
- Designing competency-based curriculum grounded in the learner's local context (e.g. region, culture, local business)
- Providing students various ways and opportunities to learn and to demonstrate their learning (e.g. on the land learning)
- Honouring the cultural context of a school and community by ensuring it is embedded in all aspects of teaching and learning
- Providing students access to qualified counselors and to wrap around services where needed

- Supporting language and culture initiatives that enhance students' sense of identity (e.g. providing increased opportunities for Aboriginal language instruction)
- Addressing the needs of students who require complex and coordinated services through increased cooperation among education partners and service providers
- Supporting the development of holistic school wellness plans linked to community wellness plans (ex. focusing on nutrition, physical fitness, healthy sexuality, accident prevention, tobacco-free living, mental health first aid)
- Creating greater opportunities for students to explore and express themselves through the arts

Some potential initiatives

2.1 Safe Schools Strategy (e.g. anti-bullying campaign and legislation)

2.2 A renewed approach with greater accountabilities for Inclusive Schooling (including for gifted students)

2.3 Renewed approach with greater accountabilities for Aboriginal language and culture based education programming

2.4 Renewed approach with greater accountabilities for language nest programs

2.5 Support the use of wrap-around services

2.6 Supports to self-regulation, resiliency, and student leadership development initiatives (e.g. Do Edaezhe)

2.7 Development of a culturally relevant Health Curriculum focusing on student capacity to select positive and responsible actions (e.g. sex ed., child development, nutrition)

2.8 Supports to arts and physical fitness initiatives

2.9 Development of an in-school food program, building on existing programs

3 **Ensure that educators have access to experiences and resources that enhance their wellness in order for them to focus on excellence in teaching.**

Why make this a commitment?

A strong relationship exists between student achievement and teacher wellness and professional capacity. Current challenges must be addressed in order to support more equitable, high quality teaching across the NWT. For example:

- In addition to being very costly, the high teacher and principal turn-over rate makes relationship and expertise building difficult.

- A small number of teachers in small communities share many responsibilities due to lack of overall capacity.

- Teachers can feel isolated and out of place, especially when they arrive alone in a community.

- It is sometimes hard to retain teachers due to the lack of reasonably priced, adequate, and safe housing.

- The majority of teachers in the NWT come from elsewhere in Canada; many do not stay in their community long-term.

- Many teachers who come to the NWT are in the beginning of their career and require more supports than have been offered.

- Some teachers are less experienced with, qualified for, or interested in teaching students in challenging contexts.

- Some teachers lack the skills and adaptability required for excellent teaching.

- Within schools, southern and northern teachers sometimes find it challenging to reach out to each other.

- Some principals and teachers struggle to manage the many different roles and responsibilities expected of them.

Northwest Territories Education, Culture and Employment

What are we proposing?

Supporting conditions for excellence in teaching by enhancing professional supports, accountability, and evidence-based practices

How will we achieve this?

- Supporting availability of housing for teachers and principals, especially in small communities
- Supporting teachers' efforts to use innovative, research-based practices and programs that are motivating and relevant to students
- Providing information and training for teachers that support high expectations for student achievement
- Providing teachers and principals training around the factors that impact student success and students' ability to respond positively to adversity (e.g. intergenerational trauma)
- Setting higher and clearer expectations for excellence in teaching
- Providing equitable, flexible, quality in-servicing and professional development opportunities to teachers, relevant to their particular contexts and respectful of their workloads

- Enhancing hiring, recruitment, and retention practices to ensure the most qualified and suitable teachers are chosen and stay for longer terms (e.g. including community members and Aboriginal governments in the selection process)
- Offering strong principal training in key areas such as community relationship building, staff growth and evaluation, conflict resolution, and instructional leadership
- Providing training to superintendents and education authorities to assist them in better understanding their roles and responsibilities

- Supporting measures to enhance relationships at all levels of the system: between student and teacher, teacher and principal, principal and superintendent, superintendent and ECE
- Providing supports to address educator workload
- Developing conditions to help supervisors establish and model standards of excellence for those under their leadership: principals/teachers, superintendents/principals, and ECE/ superintendents
- Working with local leadership to increase the availability of quality substitute teachers

Some potential initiatives

3.1   Connection to the GNWT's Housing Strategy for teacher recruitment and retention objectives

3.2   Teacher and principal mentorship programs

3.3   Creation of a principal support team

3.4   Review of the Educational Leadership Program (ELP)

3.5   Bi-annual, territory-wide teacher in-service

3.6   Review of teacher recertification requirements

3.7   Research into administrator and teacher workload realities to address teacher wellness and retention (partner with NWTTA)

3.8   Creation of an accountability framework around educator evaluation and research-based teaching and learning practices

4 Ensure that learners experience supported and personalized quality education.

Why make this a commitment?

Learning occurs naturally throughout life. The GNWT's objective to facilitate lifelong learning needs to be supported by structures, programs, and services which meet the needs of diverse learners and which support their progression within the system. Student achievement is currently challenged by various factors including:

- Many families in the NWT cannot access high quality early childhood education opportunities.

- Many Kindergarten students across the Territory exhibit poor learning readiness and are significantly behind in their development.

- School success and completion is only attainable through a single, specific pathway.

- Many students do not reach an academic level upon graduation that gets them into the post-secondary program or field of work of their choice.

- Graduation diplomas do not all represent comparable courses of study due to broad graduation requirements.

- High school diplomas are often mistaken as complete qualifications for post-secondary programs.

- Schools are not always clear in explaining the post-secondary limitations of some students' high school courses of study.

- Capacity issues in small community schools limit the number and variety of high school courses offered, thereby restricting avenues students can take upon graduation.

- Courses offered in small community high schools are often not academically rigorous.

- Many students have difficulty getting through grade 10 since the Inclusive Schooling supports available in K-9 are replaced by high school courses streamed by ability levels.

- Many students experience difficulty as they are (sometimes repeatedly) promoted with their age group peers to the next grade without proper, consistent supports.

Northwest Territories Education, Culture and Employment

What are we proposing?

Developing programs, structures, and processes to best support student success and the diverse needs of life-long learners
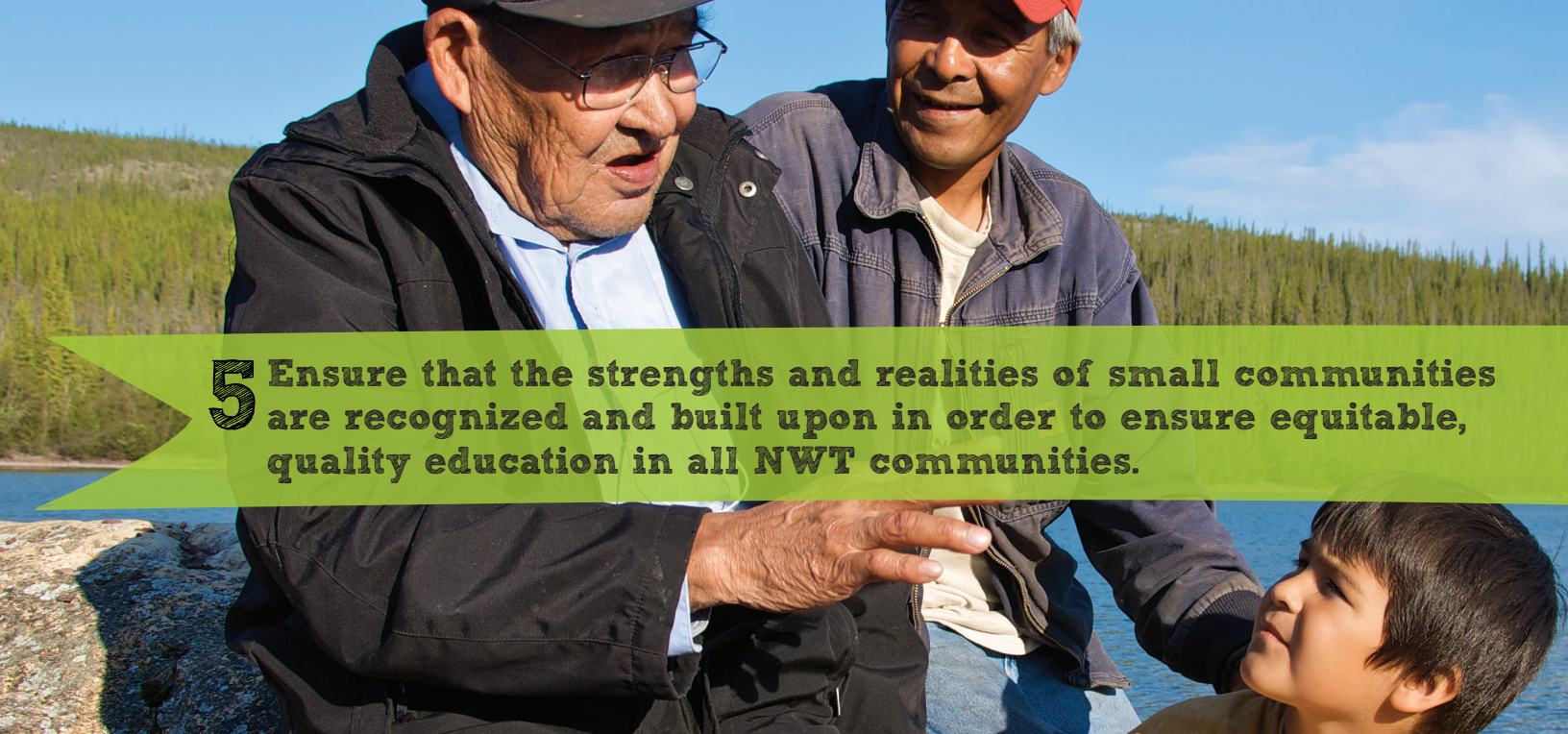
How will we achieve this?

- Developing a renewed, shared definition of student success across the NWT
- Providing NWT families ongoing quality early education opportunities connected to the K-12 system
- Developing programs, practices, and initiatives that address all learning style preferences, gender differences, and student interests
- Placing strong, experienced teachers trained in early childhood development and learning in K-3 classrooms
- Supporting initiatives that provide opportunities for students to acquire advanced post-secondary credits (e.g. dual credits)
- Promoting the credits available for out of school learning (e.g. piano, dance, volunteer work)
- Enhancing structures and programs that provide work experience and mentorship to junior and senior high school students
- Supporting measures to enhance the development of practical life skills in all high school students (e.g. budgeting, skills required for living in the city, on the land skills)

- Providing all students with quality Career Focusing programming
- Developing partnerships with local business and other GNWT departments in order to provide students with a wide range of learning and career related opportunities
- Creating and supporting diverse pathways to success at the high school level (e.g. alternative exit points and graduation requirements, expanded use of Career Focusing and Career Program Plans (CPP))
- Creating a communication strategy to develop shared understanding of high school, post-secondary, and work force requirements and opportunities
- Providing equitable student access to, and possible pursuit of, a career in the trades with continued strong emphasis on embedded literacy and numeracy skills
- Increasing the emphasis on and capacity for the arts, media, and physical activity
- Promoting opportunities and participation in the NWT's work force, including opportunities in the cultural and creative arts industries

Some potential initiatives

4.1 Development of communications strategy around social passing and attendance

4.2 Early Childhood Development Framework and Action Plan

4.3 Junior and Senior Kindergarten program implementation

4.4 Development of a high school dual credit system

4.5 Development of diverse high school pathways

4.6 Review of graduation requirements

4.7 Improved communication in high school about the types of jobs available now and in the future economy (e.g. inventory, brochures, Career Cruising website)

4.8 Improved communication with parents and students clarifying the pathway, courses, and marks required for entry into post-secondary programs

4.9 Development of regional trade centres

5 Ensure that the strengths and realities of small communities are recognized and built upon in order to ensure equitable, quality education in all NWT communities.

Why make this a commitment?

More than half of NWT schools are small community schools of no more than 150 students. These schools face particular challenges related to capacity. They include:

- The highest school drop-out rates, non-attendance rates, lowest graduation rates, and lowest literacy and numeracy rates all occur in small community schools.
- The highest teacher turn-over in the NWT occurs in small community schools.
- Small school staff members must play multiple roles in an effort to offer a variety of programs and services to their students.
- Principals of small schools juggle many heavy responsibilities, often in isolation, and usually while maintaining teaching duties.
- Small school teachers often have to teach many grade levels within the same classroom.
- The curriculum and most resources are not easily adaptable to multi-grade classrooms.

- Small schools are unable to offer a range of high school courses comparable to those in bigger centers.
- Some small schools face substantial infrastructure challenges.
- There are fewer opportunities for junior and high school students in small communities to explore local business and industry work placements.
- Many high school students must leave their community in order to access courses and programs they need for their career plans.
- Those students who go to larger centers often do not have the supports they need to be successful.
- Determinants of health and well-being such as income and health services and practices are more compromised in small communities and affect student readiness to learn.
- Lack of stable access to the Internet can impede the delivery of programming and learning opportunities and hamper educators' ability to access online record management systems.

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What are we proposing?

Providing equitable and specific supports to enhance learning in small school contexts

How will we achieve this?

- Creating supports to increase the administrative, program, and service capacities of small schools
- Providing specific and relevant supports for teachers in multi-grade classrooms
- Developing policies to help provide equitable learning conditions in small schools
- Developing measures to ensure equitable access to diverse, quality courses for all high school students
- Balancing the role of principals in small schools to ensure they have time to lead instructional practice and change, and to relieve them from some of their administrative burden
- Working with partners to increase the technology infrastructure, Internet access, and bandwidth issues of all NWT communities

- Readjusting funds to provide equitable conditions for student success and teaching excellence across the territory
- Supporting student access to health, employment, recreation, and education services
- Reviewing and seeking out partnerships around shared resources and facility possibilities (e.g. school access to community recreation facilities)
- Partnering with other departments, local agencies, and community volunteers to provide a range of recreation options for students
- Working with local leadership, Aboriginal governments, and education authorities to offer supports to students going to school outside their community

Some potential initiatives

5.1 Interdepartmental Small School Support Teams led by ECE

5.2 Review of the workload of principals, especially in communities where they have teaching duties

5.3 Increased, equitable capacity for E-learning throughout the territory

5.4 A renewed approach to how schools and school boards are funded to achieve greater equity and more accountability

6 **Renew the K-12 curriculum and ensure it is taught in relevant, research-based, innovative ways.**

Why make this a commitment?

Advances in science and technology have allowed us to better understand how the brain works and how people learn best. A flexible curriculum is needed which develops student competencies and taps into their interests, their natural tendency toward inquiry, and their sense of identity and belonging. Present NWT teaching and learning practices, and resources, need to be updated and improved.

- Certain aspects of the curriculum are not relevant to northern students.
- Most of the present curriculum was developed for single grade classrooms which are not the reality in many NWT schools.

- The current curriculum involves too many learning outcomes.
- The division of curricular subject areas impedes students from seeing the connections in the world and in their learning.
- Curricular structures do not facilitate the integration of literacy and numeracy in all learning.
- Many NWT teachers lack the experience to know how to deliver curriculum to maximize student learning.
- Current curricular structures promote an out-of-date understanding of the role of the teacher as the holder and deliverer of information.
- Students do not often have opportunities to engage in learning activities with a wide range of people.

- Present roles and practices do not develop the students' feeling of empowerment, control, and responsibility for their own learning.
- Student learning is restricted by certain rigid school structures that are not respectful of natural child development (e.g. mandatory entry into kindergarten at 5 years of age).
- Many schools and education authorities do not implement Inclusive Schooling supports effectively.
- Many teachers feel limited in the innovation they can pursue in their teaching due to the complex needs of their students and the heavy curriculum.
- Ineffective teaching styles and curriculum that is perceived to be irrelevant both contribute to low attendance rates.

What are we proposing?

Developing and redesigning curricula, teaching and learning practices, and resources to support a renewed definition of student success in the NWT

How will we achieve this?

- Ensuring strong literacy and numeracy throughout all subject area curricula, programming, and teaching, with targeted early interventions
- Redesigning teaching and learning practices and structures in the primary grades to better reflect child development
- Providing teachers and principals opportunities to learn and apply the pedagogy of student-driven inquiry into their practice
- Developing competency-based curricula with various partners
- Shifting the focus of teaching from learning content to developing processes
- Redefining the role of the teacher and principal from delivering information, to coaching students in the accessing and application of the vast information now available
- Strengthening key competency development and the meeting of the individual learning needs through developmentally appropriate, evidenced-based teaching and learning practices
- Maintaining academic rigour while meeting student needs
- Grounding curricula selection and development to reflect the communities of the NWT
- Communicating with each board to explain curricula and curricular changes
- Developing and supporting teaching which grounds student learning in the place where students live
- Expanding the learning community to include activities and experiences outside of the school
- Supporting measures to involve different people in the learning community of the school in order for students to share, create, learn from, and construct knowledge with people of diverse experiences (e.g. Elders, workers, family members)
- Supporting the sharing of promising practices and programs between boards and education partners across the territory
- Overcoming the teacher in-servicing problem of distance by making all curricular documents understandable through use of technology-supported in-servicing
- Ensuring better support, implementation, and monitoring of Inclusive Schooling
- Developing and consistently communicating a renewed, shared vision of student success which reflects the people of the NWT, their values, and aspirations for the future
- Supporting the alignment of GNWT departments under the renewed definition of student success, and facilitating their collaboration

Some potential initiatives

6.1 NWT comprehensive literacy plan

6.2 Changes to current school organization (e.g. subject minutes, school day and school year)

6.3 Development of competency-based curricula (prototyping NWT Northern Studies 20, 30 and new health curriculum)

6.4 Participation in the development of Alberta curriculum prototypes

6.5 Creation of an online database of all NWT curriculum and supporting documents, with online tutorials

6.6 NWT-wide Learning Fairs

6.7 Creation of an on-line inventory of best practices in NWT, Canada, and world-wide.

7 **Ensure that assessment of learning and actions taken in response to systemic data are comprehensive and growth-oriented.**

Why make this a commitment?

To better understand the strengths, growth and development of students, student learning and achievement is a primary goal of education in the NWT. Effective assessment begins by determining a baseline of performance and examining improvement over time, which is true of both individual learners and the system as a whole. The success of learners suggests how the system itself is doing. Canada-wide, large-scale assessment programs are being redesigned to better assess today's learning goals. In the NWT, gaps exist in the collection, usefulness, and accuracy of student achievement data. Improved assessment practices and tools are needed.

- NWT student data does not provide teachers and principals with useful indicators for improving educational practice.

- Current assessment tools do not measure the knowledge, skills, and competencies that students need in today's world.

- Alberta Achievement Tests (AAT) results offer limited information about individual student learning and are only a snapshot of student abilities and memory.

- Many current assessment tools focus on where students are struggling, instead of indicating their strengths and growth.

- Many NWT graduates do not have the knowledge, skills, and competencies to meet post-secondary program requirements.

- Not enough relevant assessment tools are presently used to provide an accurate picture of student learning.

- Individual school boards use a range of different assessments making it difficult to gather system-wide data and offer support in this area.

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What are we proposing?

Gathering, interpreting, and sharing meaningful data about the progress of learners and their environments, in relation to authentic indicators of success, in order to inform education planning and decision making
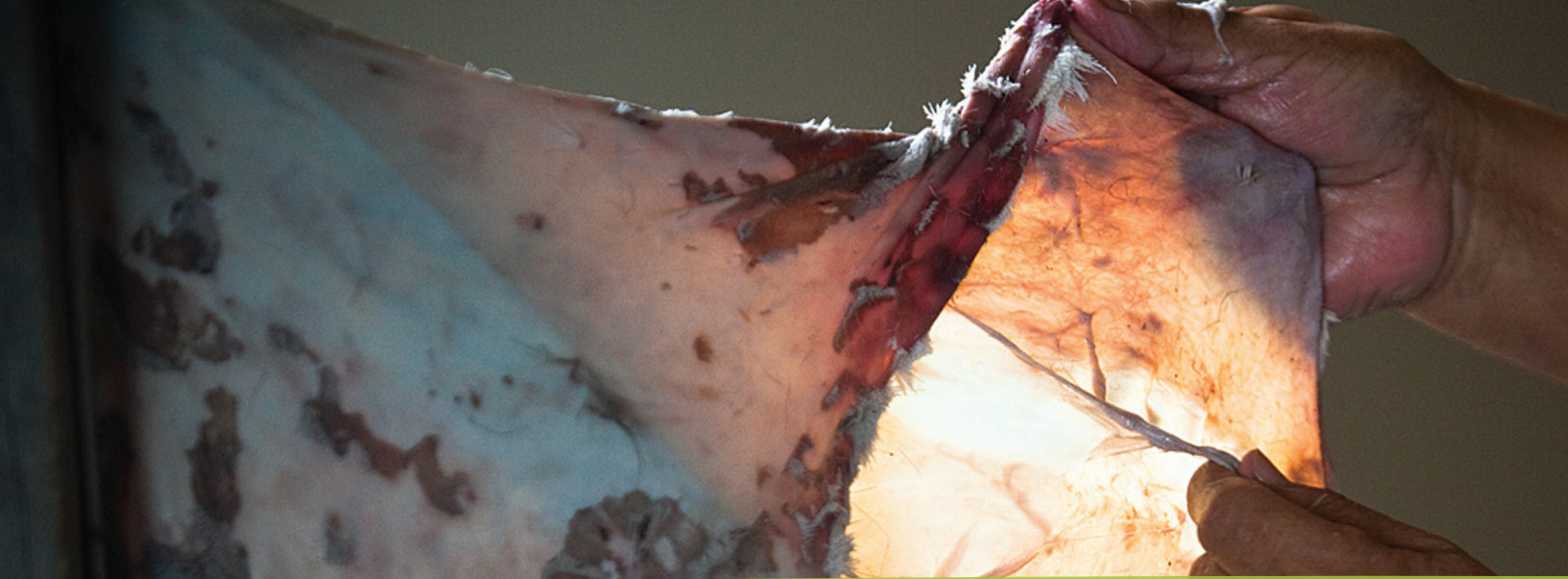
How will we achieve this?

- Undertaking a complete review of systemic assessment programs to better account for learning and achievement in NWT schools
- Undertaking the development and collection of examples related to literacy and numeracy so as to inform classroom assessment and evaluation and support systemic assessment
- Requiring the use of certain common assessment tools across the NWT in order to gather data about the whole system
- Ensuring systemic assessments are culturally relevant to students in the NWT
- Ensuring that assessment reports are understandable by a wide audience, including the students themselves

- Ensuring that interventions based on assessment results target the right areas and benefit the system as a whole
- Ensuring that students, parents, and caregivers are provided with meaningful and timely feedback about the student's progress
- Considering environmental and social factors that may affect student's academic outcomes
- Developing authentic assessments of student performance with community members in order to deepen understanding of student learning
- Celebrating student success with the community - including family, Elders, local business and community leaders and members

- Identifying and implementing assessments that will effectively replace AATs
- Continuing and expanding the use of population-based measures to gather information about the different areas of learner development - social, emotional, cognitive, language, and physical (e.g. Early Development Instrument [EDI])
- Developing and implementing competency-based reporting involving students in personal goal setting and in the design and use of assessments
- Informed professional judgement is a cornerstone of an effective assessment and evaluation system

Some potential initiatives

7.1   Complete an inventory of current NWT and regional assessment practices and tools

7.2   Development of common growth-oriented assessment and reporting tools

7.3   Continued use of Early Development Instrument (EDI)

7.4   Implementation of Middle Years Development Instrument (MDI)

7.5   Continued use of Health Behaviours in School-aged Children (HBSC) survey

7.6   Development of NWT disciplinary competencies and key competencies for assessment and reporting

8 Ensure that the education system is monitored, measured, and reported on to provide transparency and accountability in order to best support student success.

Why make this a commitment?

Any system needs performance measures and outcomes, as well as regular monitoring and evaluation in order to ensure it is meeting objectives. Although ECE has many directives and much data that provide good accountability for the NWT education system, it is clear that some areas require more information, and many areas require better monitoring, analysis, and feedback to education authorities and schools. ECE is following through on the recommendation of the Office of the Auditor General (2010) around the need for improvement of various aspects of planning, monitoring, and reporting.

- The 2010 Office of the Auditor General (OAG) report recommended improvements of various aspects of planning, monitoring, and reporting.

- The OAG also recommended the development of measures to ensure education authorities and Aurora College comply with relevant education legislation, policies, standards, and directives.

- Data and information currently collected are not always used effectively to assist education authorities and schools to realign their practices to achieve better results.

- In some areas, ECE does not have sufficient information to determine if funds are being used effectively, or what supports might assist in achieving better outcomes (e.g. Inclusive Schooling).

- Education authorities and school administrators are not currently aware of or in-serviced on ECE directives and on their duties and responsibilities.

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What are we proposing?

Developing clear and appropriate monitoring and accountability processes to ensure K-12 programs support the needs of NWT learners, staff, teachers, schools, communities and to clarify roles and responsibilities within the education system

How will we achieve this?

- Ensuring that the planning, monitoring, and reporting of all new programs and initiatives are built-in

- Ensuring that all programs and initiatives are built around measurable goals

- Strengthening the accountability structure for both the K-12 education program and the school funding framework in the NWT

- Supporting excellence of educational services, supports, and programming

- Providing an understandable, and accessible inventory of all ECE directives and guiding documents

- Ensuring superintendents and education authorities are held accountable for regular growth-oriented teacher and principal supervision and evaluation, and are themselves evaluated

- Ensuring all education partners have the capacity to effectively implement the initiatives adopted in the Action Plan supporting this Framework

- Ensuring that the roles and responsibilities of ECE, the education authorities, and other education partners are clearly defined, supported, and monitored

- Providing increased in-servicing to school and education authority staff about directives and shared roles and responsibilities out shared roles and responsibilities

Some potential initiatives

8.1   Development of a comprehensive Accountability Framework

8.2   Joint in-servicing for school staff, education boards, and community on the roles and responsibilities, the values of each group, effective communication, and conflict resolution.

9 Work with Aboriginal governments to be successful as they draw down jurisdiction over the education of their people.

Why make this a commitment?

Aboriginal governments, through self-government negotiations, will have law-making authority over K-12 education. While not all self-government agreements have been finalized, ECE is interested in pursuing new power-sharing arrangements and new roles and responsibilities for Aboriginal governments in education. A standing invitation to Aboriginal governments to begin working together on these arrangements for the education of their people has been extended.

What are we proposing?

Maintaining the willingness to enter into formal or informal arrangements with Aboriginal governments to facilitate a greater role for them in the education system

How will we achieve this?

- Developing collaborative Intergovernmental Program and Service Delivery Arrangements (ISAs) between Aboriginal governments and the GNWT to deliver government services in a coordinated and cost effective manner

- Creating a range of informal arrangements with Aboriginal governments

- Initiating conversations with various departments and partners to discuss implications, considerations, standards of service, and possible research in support of any collaborative efforts with Aboriginal governments

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- Pg. 1, Father and son cutting fish, Dave Brosha Photography, Department of HSS.
- Pg. 2, Girl and Elder cutting meat, Stephanie Yuill, Department of ENR.
- Pg. 3, Anglican Residential School – Hay River, NWT Archives.
- Pg. 3, Inuvik Super School Opening, Department of ECE.
- Pg. 4, Camp, Pat Kane Photography.
- Pg. 5, Ben Kaufman (Inuvik) in baking contest 2013, Skills Canada.
- Pg. 6, Jean Wetrade Gameti School Graduation 2013, Department of ECE.
- Pg. 7, Student holding trout with friends, Jessica Schmidt.
- Pg. 8, Mom and baby, Department of ECE.
- Pg. 8, Girl on play phone, Department of ECE.
- Pg. 9, Boy playing outside, Department of ECE.
- Pg. 10, Birch tree, Laura MacNeill.
- Pg. 11, Boy in trades competition, Skills Canada.
- Pg. 12, École Boréale, Department of ECE
- Pg. 13, Boy with guitar, Stephanie Yuill, Department of ENR.
- Pg. 15, Boy in riverboat with caribou meat, Peter Mather Photography.
- Pg. 16, Aerial of Mackenzie Delta, Terry Parker.
- Pg. 17, Girls at École Alain St-Cyr, Department of ECE.
- Pg. 18, Girls measuring, Pat Kane Photography.
- Pg. 19, Teachers ready for the trip, Stephanie Yuill, Department of ENR.
- Pg. 21, Girl on iPad, Department of ECE.
- Pg. 22, Aboriginal Leader's Roundtable Meeting, Department of ECE.
- Pg. 23, Students writing, Pat Kane Photography.
- Pg. 24, Elder and teacher educating students, Department of ECE.
- Pg. 25, Fish scale art by the late Janet Grandjambe, Department of Industry, Tourism and Investment.
- Pg. 29, Boy with furs, Pat Kane Photography.
- Pg. 30, Fireweed, Stephanie Yuill – Department of ENR.
- Pg. 31, Baby, Department of ECE.
- Pg. 31, Boy in trades competition, Skills Canada
- Pg. 32 Girl and Elder talking, Stephanie Yuill, Department of ENR.
- Pg. 34, Boy learning traditional dance in school gymnasium, Pat Kane Photography.
- Pg. 36, Elder teaching how to cut meat, Stephanie Yuill, Department of ENR.
- Pg. 38, Three Aboriginal children, Kevin Laframboise.
- Pg. 40, The late Elder Pierre Catholique telling stories, Tessa Macintosh Photography.
- Pg. 42, Boys getting lures ready, Pat Kane Photography.
- Pg. 44, Four Paulatuk graduates, Jessica Schmidt.
- Pg. 46, Woman treating and measuring hide, Dave Brosha Photography.
- Pg. 48, Tlicho Government/GNWT Intergovernmental MOU signing on June 29, 2012, Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Intergovernmental Relations.
- Pg. 49, Northern sunset, Laura MacNeill.

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