

Department of Education Culture and Employment



N.W.T.
LEGISLATIVE LIBRARY
JUL 30 1999
Yellowknife, N.W.T.

Minister's Response to The Forum on Education



Table of Contents

Introduction	2
Background	3
Our Response	4
Early Childhood Development	5
Literacy and Language Development	7
Language, Culture and Heritage	9
Healthy and Supportive Communities	12
Grade Extensions	14
Inclusive Schooling / Class Size	17
Financing	20
Communication and Partnership Building	22
Other Significant Issues	24
Conclusion	26



Introduction

Over the past year, the Department of Education, Culture and Employment has been doing the groundwork to update the 1994 Strategic Plan. As part of this update, it was important to find out from the public what they thought of the current education system. The Minister's Forum on Education travelled across the NWT to hear what territorial residents had to say. In April 1999, they presented their findings in a report that highlights the key issues raised by the public.

The Minister's Forum confirmed that there are many good things happening in our schools. People think that we have good programs, excellent educational staff and they support the inclusive approach to education that was adopted in 1993 by the government. The Forum also identified where people would like to see improvements.

This document provides an overview of the direct action that the Department will take to address many of the immediate issues raised. In addition to the work that the Department will do, we will also be working with our many partners in education who are actively involved in programs and services in the communities.

We wish to thank the forum members and all those who participated in the community consultations for their insight, feedback and interest.

J. Michael Miltenberger
Minister
Education, Culture and Employment



Background

Our strategic plan, People: Our Focus for the Future, A Strategy to 2010, was developed in 1994. This document provided a comprehensive guide to achieving “a new vision for learning”. We have made significant progress towards achieving its goals as we approach the halfway mark of the term of the document.

Most recently, the Minister's Forum on Education, travelled the NWT and submitted a report of their findings. This report has provided us with a further opportunity to assess our progress and use the public's concerns and ideas to adjust our course. In March 1999 the Department hosted an education conference in Fort Smith – ‘Mapping Our Future’. This conference reviewed the results of the forum and further detailed issues and concerns. But more importantly, it identified direct, concrete and constructive recommendations for action by all partners in the education process.

This document is a specific response to the Minister's Forum on Education. It calls for action and change, developed in response to community input that will adjust our course, while maintaining our vision.

As a means of ensuring constructive and sustained action, based upon the recommendations of the Forum, we will include these directions in our Update of the Strategic Plan, which will be completed in the fall of 1999.



Department of Education Culture and Employment
Minister's Response to
The Forum on Education

Our Response

We have developed “planned actions” for each of the nine areas of concern identified by the Forum. Our response to each area is guided by the recommendations offered in the Forum’s Final Report. We will act on the list of planned actions for each area.

We are re-committing ourselves to working efficiently and effectively “doing the right things” and “doing things right”. While there are limited financial resources, these action plans look towards new partnerships with parents and communities.

To keep the public advised of the status of the noted actions, the Department, in consultation with Divisional Education Councils and District Education authorities, shall publish a regular report on activity.



Early Childhood Development

Forum Recommendations

- Multiyear funding agreements that support and sustain early childhood development programs should be developed to ensure these programs get past the implementation stage and into more effective levels of delivery.
- Agreement between the federal and territorial governments to co-operatively support programs in all interested communities should be secured. At the same time, unnecessary duplication of funding for some communities could be addressed.
- For programs to be eligible for funding, they should be required to demonstrate commitment to parental involvement through a requirement for parent participation in the classroom and an enrollment fee for those children whose parents can afford it.
- Research to determine the benefits of early diagnosis and intervention for learning difficulties should be undertaken in partnership with appropriate government departments. This research should include examining the most appropriate resources and practices that would be helpful in early intervention. The findings of this research should be acted upon immediately to ensure students have sufficient support services when entering early childhood development and school programs.

Early Childhood Development



Minister's Response

Programs such as Aboriginal Head Start, and Healthy Children Initiative, are beginning to produce the results everyone hoped for. The involvement of parents in these programs is an important factor in their success. Now we must develop an integrated approach to providing the programs and services, which support children's development. As well we must build strong community ownership through parental involvement.



We have achieved significant success in this area over the past few years. We will build upon our best practices and strive to give our children the start they deserve.

Early Childhood Development

Actions

ECE will continue to support programs that address learning and development in childhood by:

- Promoting parental involvement in programs
- Establishing a protocol arrangement with the federal government to improve the coordination of funding for early childhood programs
- Working with Health and Social Services to increase funding and coordination of support services for children with identified needs
- Working with Health and Social Services and with communities to develop a strategy to distribute funds for early childhood programs to children with the greatest need
- Developing early diagnosis and intervention procedures in partnership with Health and Social Services
- Sponsoring research into the effects of early childhood programming on social and cognitive development in the Northwest Territories
- Producing a document that celebrates and shares the successes of early childhood programs in the NWT
- Continuing funding Aurora College to develop and deliver training programs for early childhood professionals





Literacy and Language Development

Forum Recommendations

- More resources should be dedicated for reading specialists in the school system and to support a greater emphasis on remedial reading.
- Special programs for parents who are unable to read should be organized.
- A family literacy campaign that encourages parents to help their children gain a love of reading at an earlier age should be implemented.
- Ways to make interesting reading materials more readily available in all communities should be explored.
- Additional specialized training should be offered to teachers to support them to better meet the diverse needs of students.

Minister's Response

The theme chosen for Education Week 2000 is Literacy, Language and Learning. This reflects the belief that literacy and language represent the foundations for learning. The Forum Report voiced a concern about literacy levels and indicated that a cooperative arrangement between the home and the school is the best remedy for this concern.

We will focus our efforts to support projects that assist children's literacy and language development with parents in the home as well as actions to assist teachers in the classroom.

Our response to the Early Childhood Development issues (previous section) has a direct impact on literacy and language development as well. Some additional measures to improve language readiness and participation are detailed below.





Actions

ECE will support language and literacy by:

- Promoting literacy in the community by:
 - providing literacy grants of up to \$20,000 to DEC's to fund innovative projects in (early) literacy
 - maintaining support to the NWT Literacy Council to promote literacy through community projects
 - providing adult learning centres with copies of the new resource lists to support teaching and learning of ABE English programs
- Working with other jurisdictions and agencies to provide schools/communities with resources to support literacy and language development such as:
 - Manitoba's *Foundation Document for the Implementation of Language Arts*
 - a list of recommended professional and student resources for the English Language Arts curriculum
 - the 'Read to Me' kit developed in conjunction with Health and Social Services and designed to promote family literacy
- Providing support to teachers/schools through:
 - offering regional inservice sessions on teaching language arts
 - providing schools with information on workshops, facilitators and resources in the area of literacy and language development
- Using community libraries as centres to promote family literacy
- Cooperating with Aboriginal and non-government organizations to develop tutoring programs
- Working with District Education Authorities and Councils and the NWT Literacy Council to deliver community literacy activities and workshops that show parents and families how to involve themselves and their children in reading





Language, Culture and Heritage

Forum Recommendations

- Educators need to be supported in developing a better understanding of the role of culture and language in the success of students in school programs.
- Ongoing consultation with Aboriginal organizations on a community by community basis about language and culture programs needs to be a foundation of program design.
- One to two week orientation sessions for the Dene Kede or Inuuqatigiit curricula presented by the community and the District Education Authority (DEA) should be mandatory for all new teachers.
- Communities need to be better informed of the options available to them with regard to the language of instruction.
- Communities that choose to have their Aboriginal language as the language of instruction must be provided with the human and material resources to do so.
- Teachers need additional training in how to work with students who come to school without a good foundation in a first or second language. Research on this issue should be carried out as soon as possible.
- More research and training with respect to cultural foundations of learning for Aboriginal communities are required.
- The possibility of achieving greater flexibility in program delivery and of responding to the need for regional diversity, by contracting language services to Aboriginal organizations, should be explored.
- A multi-faceted recruitment campaign to attract and retain northerners to the teaching profession should be undertaken. This should include career promotion, mentoring, transition support, financial and incentive support, and assurances of employment opportunities.





Minister's Response

We know that parents have a strong influence on their children and provide the first exposure to language and culture. As a result, the strategic plan for the Department places a strong emphasis on building links between families, community and the education system to support achieving language, culture and heritage goals.

Parents and community residents voiced support for culture and language playing a larger and more important role in the school system. To support this approach we have to develop a lot more materials to support teaching of language and culture. We also have to train and certify more northern teachers of Aboriginal heritage.

We have broadened the curriculum available for use in the areas of language, heritage and culture to better reflect the makeup of our population. More teaching resources, especially in the area of Aboriginal languages, are needed. Our challenge is to deliver cultural curriculum with the help of northern Aboriginal people. By including Aboriginal culture as an integral part of the school system, students will learn how to have pride in their culture and respect for the culture of others.

Actions

ECE will support language, culture, and heritage in schools by:

- Developing a directive on culture-based education
- Working with the Dene Subject Advisory Committee (composed of elders, teachers and Teaching and Learning Centre staff) to make recommendations on the development of teaching resources to support culture-based education
- Consulting closely with Divisional Education Councils and communities on the best ways to implement Dene Kede and Inuuqatigiit framework by:
 - designing and delivering an in-depth orientation for educators (including administrators) on the purpose, value, and content of the Dene Kede and Inuuqatigiit Curricula as culture-based learning resources
 - enhancing the Teacher's Resource and Practices Manual for Dene Kede and Inuuqatigiit Curricula



Department of Education Culture and Employment
Minister's Response to
The Forum on Education



- coordinating the production of resources to support the teaching of Dene Kede / Inuuqatigiit and aboriginal languages with DEC's and Teaching and Learning Centres
- Producing a report on the recommendations of the Culture-Based Education Team
- Ensuring that TEP program students at Aurora College are prepared to meet the needs of northern students
- Consulting on an ongoing basis with communities, Aboriginal groups and teaching staff on the development of a framework for an Aboriginal component for the new (Western Provinces) Social Studies Curriculum
- Designing a comprehensive teacher recruitment and promotion plan in cooperation with DEC's to attract and retain northerners. The plan will include:
 - mentoring opportunities in culture-based education
 - individual career counselling and guidance throughout the TEP program
 - specialized courses in multi-level and inclusive teaching methods
 - promotion of the teaching profession in cooperation with the NWTTA
- Reflecting culture, language and heritage as key elements of Education Leadership Training Programs (Principal Certification)

Language, Culture and Heritage





Healthy and Supportive Communities

Healthy and Supportive Communities

Forum Recommendations

- The Department should play a leadership role within the GNWT and other government agencies to ensure the development of inter-agency and non-proprietary approaches to the education and health of communities.
- The current community development program led by Municipal and Community Affairs should be adapted to include a focus on a community approach to healing and problem solving in collaboration with appropriate government departments as well as Aboriginal and community organizations.
- Workshops on parenting skills should be regularly offered in each community. This should be supplemented by the provision of parenting information in a variety of media.

Minister's Response

Community-based approaches to education are an essential component in building healthy communities. Families play the most important role in supporting learning. When families are supported by their community in the work of helping children learn there is a greater likelihood of producing confident and productive adults.

The creation of Community Learning Networks as described in People: Our Focus for the Future requires partnerships and the integration of services to serve common goals. Learning Networks are formed when educators, libraries, employers, the College and others work together to expand opportunities for students. They are built on strong community support of learning and schools.





Actions

ECE will continue to contribute to the development of healthy and supportive communities by:

- Continuing to play an active role in Interagency actions that promote healthy and supportive communities, including:
 - the Healthy Children Initiative committee
 - the committee to refine and implement the existing Child Abuse Protocol
 - the Suicide Prevention working group
 - the Residential School Interagency Committee
 - the Strategies for Children and Youth working group
- Working with communities to offer assistance in promoting and teaching parenting skills through:
 - assisting communities to initiate Aboriginal Head Start programs
 - promoting parenting courses such as 'Nobody's Perfect'
 - setting up local access to parenting resources
- Supporting on-going community development through:
 - working through Aurora College and with communities and other government departments to develop and deliver courses that contribute to community development
 - producing a document and providing workshops that will assist DEAs in developing school / community plans for education
 - sharing planning initiatives and successes as part of a larger media strategy
- Developing materials and providing workshops to promote safe school environments, including:
 - a guide to dealing with school / community emergencies
 - non violent intervention training





Grade Extensions

Grade Extensions



Forum Recommendations

- More resources to support a broader range of courses in community high schools should be provided. Ideas of learning ways to do this include improving distributed learning options, rotating instructional resources such as teachers and learning modules, and hiring local people with specific expertise.
- Career counseling elements of the Career Pathing Programs must be more strongly adhered to in the grade 7 – 9 levels.
- Schools in the communities should increase their focus on building school spirit and broadening the educational experience of high school students.
- ECE should investigate the need to offer vocational programs and explore options on appropriate methods for offering these programs either at the community, regional or territorial level.
- Ways to enhance or change the courses that are currently delivered by correspondence should be explored. The existing program, essentially print-based courses, should be made more interesting and relevant to northern students by using alternative delivery or support methods.

Minister's Response

Participation in grades 10-12 has increased with the development of community high schools as recommended by the Department's Strategic Plan. High school programming is now offered in almost all communities, and many students can complete high school in their home community.

New concerns focus on the quality and scope of high school programming and the ability of students to obtain all of the social and career development benefits of a high school education in smaller communities. Programs for community high school delivery are being developed and ever increasing supports and resources are improving the quality of programming. We will commit ourselves to

Department of Education Culture and Employment
Minister's Response to
The Forum on Education



continuing to provide greater access for communities and the highest quality of programming.

Actions

ECE will support the development of community high school programs by:

- Supporting District Education Councils with:
 - plans for distributed learning using technology
 - increasing access to teaching expertise to serve more students
 - in-service workshops for teaching staff who need to know how to manage distance learning, tutoring sessions, and career development counselling using the Career Pathing Programs
- Coordinating district and regional enrichment activities for high schools, including summer institutes and camps, field trips and research projects
- Publishing a directive on high school student assessment
- Developing a Career Development Directive to guide career planning for students
- Publishing and distributing the document *Promising Practices in the NWT Secondary Schools*
- Publishing and distributing an updated *Senior Secondary Administrators Handbook*
- Providing information on developing 'community networks' as a strategy for enriching educational programs, to participants of the Leadership Training Program
- Offering workshops and inservice activities that show teachers how to enrich and extend the offering of high school courses in communities
- Enhancing access to career information and increasing career development activities through:
 - completing the revision of the current Career Program Planning program and provide an inservice option to all schools
 - improving links to employees through cooperative and work experience programs
- Delivering the Career Development Certificate Program for Departmental staff and interested northerners
- Completing the development of the *Northern Studies Through Distance Education* package and developing an information and implementation strategy for the course
- Celebrating student and school successes through the media
- Assisting students with the transition between high school and college or university

Grade Extensions



Department of Education Culture and Employment
Minister's Response to
The Forum on Education



- Improving student and teacher access to information on post-secondary education
- Increasing availability of high school program resources to teachers
- Sharing the recently developed strategy on *Enhancing and Expanding the Senior Secondary Programming* and encouraging use of the most appropriate practices
- Promoting exchange of information, resources and course materials between teachers, schools and communities

Grade Extensions





Inclusive Schooling / Class Size

Forum Recommendations

- A major research project should be undertaken to determine the number of children with special needs and to gain a better understanding of the range of needs that are evident in NWT schools.

Contingency funding should be available to ensure the results are addressed within an appropriate timeframe.

- We recommend that, to ensure the needs of all students are met in an equitable way, the number of additional Special Needs Assistants, Program Support Teachers, Reading Specialists, and other support services be increased.
- Resources should be directed toward the training of teachers, program support teachers, and special needs assistants to better prepare them to meet the needs of all students.
- It is very clear from our discussion with communities that the pupil teacher ratio should be decreased overall and classroom sizes maintained at manageable levels.

Inclusive Schooling / Class Size



Minister's Response

For many years, certain children in the Northwest Territories with specialized needs were excluded from regular classroom learning environments. Some of these students were deprived of the opportunity to attend regular schools. Now, the Education Act of the Northwest Territories states that every student is entitled to have access to the education program in a regular school setting in the community in which the student resides (Ed. Act 7.1).

The Minister's Forum reported that the majority of northerners who spoke to the Forum supported Inclusive Schooling. However, a concern that the funding for Inclusive Schooling was inadequate was expressed.



Choices at the Departmental, Division and School levels can affect class sizes. Decisions will have to be made at all three levels to ensure that class sizes are reasonable and appropriate.

Suitable training and resources are needed so that the diverse needs of our students are met. Teachers are challenged by the combination of multi-level classes and the inclusion of special needs students. Group learning needs and individual learning needs present competing demands on teaching staff.

Actions

ECE action will feature a coordinated approach to meeting special needs and finding the support services required for inclusive schooling by:

- Conducting a survey of schools and communities to update the *Classroom and School / Community Profile* which was completed in 1993
- Updating data gathered in 1993 on the number of students requiring a variety of supports to enhance their learning
- Gathering substantive data on the supports in place both inside and outside of schools to meet student needs
- Establishing a working committee composed of ECE staff, DEC personnel and representatives of other agencies to review the information from the 'profile'
- Determining the gap, if any, between the level of service being provided and the services identified and making recommendations to address the gap in service delivery
- Identifying the number of students who have individual education plans as well as the supports they require to meet their educational goals
- Working with Aurora College, Divisional Councils and the Northwest Territories Teachers Association to identify or develop and deliver teacher preparation courses that will:
 - provide teachers with additional skills for meeting diverse needs in the classroom
 - provide Inclusive Schooling support staff (Student Support Assistants, Program Support Teachers etc.) additional training in working with special needs students
- Gathering and sharing successes and best practices in meeting diverse student needs
- Contacting other agencies responsible for the health and welfare of the school aged population and identifying resources that can support students in school
- Supporting development at the school level of volunteer programs



Department of Education Culture and Employment
Minister's Response to
The Forum on Education



- Refining the use of individualized education plans to ensure students with special needs have full access to academic, social and vocational activities suited to their growth
- Networking regularly with DEC consultants responsible for student support to share information and resources and to provide training

Inclusive Schooling / Class Size





Financing

Financing



Forum Recommendations

- The GNWT should establish that the education of our children and youth is its highest priority. Attention and funding dedicated to providing the much-needed resources described throughout this document must be considered. These resources should come from a combination of re-investment of current funding into programs of highest priority and through new resources being dedicated to education.
- The current finding formula should be reviewed to ensure the distribution of funding to support schools is provided in a fair and equitable manner and in a way that reflects the diversity of needs within the education system.
- Schools and Early Childhood Development Programs should receive support and guidance for their fundraising efforts. The Department and/or DEC's should consider a centralized role for support of schools in this area. This support could include assistance with proposal writing, financial management, development of a fundraising guide, and ongoing fundraising training.
- The GNWT, in concert with the DEC's, should seek out major funding sources that could support territory-wide programs.
- Amendments to the Education Act ensuring that Aboriginal, Metis Locals, and Municipal Governments have active and meaningful representation on DEC's/DEAs should be profiled and promoted.

Minister's Response

ECE is committed to a review of the current funding formula. We are also prepared to clearly and accurately reflect the educational needs of our children through the GNWT budgetary process. We want to ensure that children are given the highest priority. The education of our children and youth deserves no less.



More money would help but only if it is spent wisely. We will make every effort to ensure that all monies expended have a direct and positive effect on the education of our children and adults.

Actions

ECE will continue to seek out equitable and better ways to support and fund the system of education in the NWT by:

- Establishing a school planning and resource committee composed of ECE and DEC staff to examine and recommend changes to improve the method of funding schools
- Requesting that DEC provide an annual Planning Information Report that contains financial information and a business plan and using that information as a component in their budget development process
- Providing information for DEC on proposal writing, project management, and alternate funding sources to support special initiatives and projects
- Setting goals for funding levels in key aspects of school funding





Communication and Partnership Building

Communication and Partnership Building

Forum Recommendations

- Community leaders and educators should find ways to share information about their aspirations for the education system in their community.
- The Department should survey communities in the NWT to collect information on the ways that community organizations successfully communicate with each other and build community partnerships. These best practices should be celebrated, documented, published, and distributed throughout the NWT.
- Schools should develop innovative ways to get community involvement in all levels of the school system and to make parents comfortable visiting and volunteering in schools.
- Dialogue about what parents expect from schools and what schools expect from parents should be promoted. Differences should be resolved in the most collaborative ways possible.

Minister's Response

Schools and community groups need communication in order to work together. Common goals form the basis for good partnerships. People may be well informed about educational issues and yet not know with whom to discuss the matters.

Community learning networks will benefit students at the community level. As well, we must strengthen the sharing of regional and territorial information between schools and between communities. Partnerships are best supported when people who have similar needs and purposes share information.

ECE believes that a discussion of education issues is a necessary step in planning and goal setting at the community level. Reports to the Forum suggest many people feel that there are not enough opportunities for discussion and the sharing of ideas.





Actions

ECE will support communication and partnership building at the community level by:

- Developing a Community Education Planning guide with suggested strategies for inviting community participation in discussing education issues
- Hosting meetings between DEC chairpersons and the Minister where issues can be addressed and ideas can be shared
- Developing workshop materials and providing workshops on DEC / DEA roles and responsibilities
- Consulting and assisting DECs and DEAs who want to design newsletters and posters illustrating goals and objectives
- Working with District Education Councils, and District Education Authorities to host forums during the school year to clarify the expectations of parents and schools so that differences can be worked out realistically and cooperatively
- Providing an in-service program on volunteers and volunteering for parents
- Increasing community participation in the direction of the school program through support for alternate governance structures
- Increasing information available to parents on school programs and services
- Establishing public accountability for schools and education districts by:
 - having the DEC publish a key accomplishments report (Accountability Framework) which, among other things, will include a statistical report on high school aged students. This report will help communities identify successes and provide a basis for planning changes
- Holding an NWT wide principals' session in October, with discussions on culture-based learning experiences





Other Significant Issues

Other Significant Issues

Forum Recommendations

- We strongly recommend that the Minister and the entire education system highlight, acknowledge, and celebrate the work of northern educators and communities, which support the work of the education system.
- The salary and benefit conditions for teachers should be improved to ensure the NWT offers a competitive compensation package that supports a stable workforce.
- We recommend that the strategic plan anticipate and facilitate the emergence of self-government agreements.
- Public awareness of the DEA and DEC members should be provided to ensure there is a full understanding of roles and responsibilities.
- Board development support for DEA and DEC members should be provided to ensure there is a full understanding of roles and responsibilities.



Minister's Response

Northern educators and communities have done amazing and outstanding things in challenging circumstances. These achievements deserve to be acknowledged, shared, and celebrated.

As land claims are settled and self-government agreements are reached, the education system will be affected. Local DEAs and DEC members will change their roles and responsibilities as the governance of education changes. ECE is committed to maintaining excellence in education by consulting and working with self-governing bodies on their options and opportunities as they fulfill their responsibilities.

Department of Education Culture and Employment
Minister's Response to
The Forum on Education



Actions

- Participating in planning for self-government
- Issuing promotional material to the media highlighting the achievements of students, educators and communities
- Recognizing excellence of teachers and schools
- Delivering board development training to support DEA and DEC members as governance changes and responsibilities are assumed at the community level
- Creating board development materials in partnership with DEAs and DEC members to cover accountability frameworks, human resource management, contracting, and evaluation
- Support in cooperation with Aboriginal groups, Municipal and Community Affairs and others, the establishment of a School of Community Government to build skills and knowledge at the community level

Other Significant Issues





Department of Education Culture and Employment
Minister's Response to
The Forum on Education

Conclusion

The Department of Education Culture and Employment is focused on taking action on the recommendations offered in the Final Report of the Minister's Forum on Education.

We have developed this response to demonstrate our commitment to serious and constructive change. We believe the actions planned in this Response to the Forum on Education are positive and realistic contributions to the progress of our education system.

We live in changing times with many challenges and many opportunities. With leadership, a good plan, effective use of resources and commitment, we will overcome these challenges, take advantage of opportunities and achieve our goals.