

**YUKON FIRST NATIONS
Chiefs Committee on Education**

c/o Council of Yukon First Nations
2166-2nd Avenue
Whitehorse, YT Y1A 4P1

**Yukon CCOE Introductory Message to Public Accounts Committee
Chief Dana Tizya-Tramm
January 12, 2022**

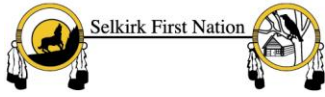
Good morning Honourable Ministers and Delegates.

It is an honour and pleasure to be able to speak as a witness to the Public Accounts Committee. For us, it is essential that you understand and help us act upon our long-standing concerns around the failure of the education system in Yukon to meet the educational needs of our Indigenous students. Our goal is to have ongoing opportunities to solve this problem together with Yukon Education in a genuine respectful government-to-government partnership focused on our children and the future in Yukon.

Today, looking at two Auditor General Reports, the one in 2009 and the most recent one in 2019 which clearly express similar concerns. Both Reports highlight the devastating results for our children as they struggle in the system as it is currently administered and operated. Both reports sound alarm bells indicating the critical need for changes in education for our Indigenous students. Not only do both Reports state in detail that Yukon Education needs to change the way it operates but, the Reports also call for change in the way Yukon Education works with Yukon First Nations to strike a path to the future for our children. We believe that change in the working relationship between Yukon Education and Indigenous peoples is foundational to building a path to the future for our children. We also believe that until the government-to-government relationship is forged and formalized any change will not be sustainable.

I have to tell you that to date, none of the 2019 Auditor General recommendations have resulted in positive changes in classrooms leading to improved success for our Indigenous children.

Before we detail the various challenging facing us, I want us to take a pause to realize what's at stake here. Our children are our future. An education system that fails them, fails not only our First Nations



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communities, but also the very social fabric of the Yukon. Imagine a Yukon where our First Nations people are thriving, healthy, and successful in their life's pursuits. Imagine a Yukon where the education system reaches out to those young people who are struggling and feel broken and discarded and helps them overcome the complex challenges they face. This work can and will benefit not only First Nations but everyone in Yukon.

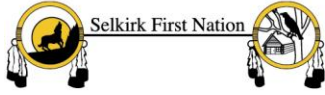
Now imagine if we knew exactly what steps we need to take to create this new system? Imagine if we had all the resources and knowledge at hand to enact the changes needed? I'm telling you: We Do. We know what has to be done. The Auditor General says it. The Review of Special Education says it. Countless reports going back decades have all said it. And yet the monumental weight of the Yukon government's Department of Education appears too heavy to shift on its own. I am asking all of us gathered here today to lend a hand. Together, with each of us championing whatever strength we have to offer, we can start to lift this boulder of a problem into the place it needs to be.

The issues underlying the report are complex, they require significant collective work to remediate. As I said, we, who sit on the CCOE believe that central to all work is the formation of genuine partnership between Yukon First Nations and the Department of Education.

We raised our concerns with Yukon Education in 2020 and we continue to do so, however, we observe that the central issue remains unchanged: that collaboration and transparency based on a respectful government-to-government relationship have not been established.

Collaboration cannot be defined as or limited to mere information sessions about the work of the Department, the superficial gathering of First Nations' opinions about Department-designed initiatives or seeking First Nations approval of work already completed by the Department. It also cannot be last minute invitations to meetings or burying our concerns and unique needs for our children around a table of Department staff and other partners.

For the CCOE, a partnership to address the extensive concerns expressed in the Auditor General's report would have included honest discussion of the findings and recommendations **together**, and the development of a collaborative and mutually agreed upon path forward. To truly address the



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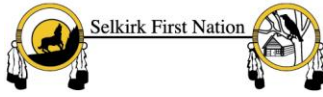
recommendations of the Auditor General's report, the Department of Education must allow Yukon First Nations to co-lead in a position of equal authority.

The Department of Education submitted their *Response Report – Audit 2019 Recommendations to the Standing Committee of Public Accounts* on September 29, 2021. This report only confirms our assertion by falsely leading the reader to believe that the Department is working in meaningful partnership with Yukon First Nations, when, the Department continues to unilaterally control and minimize efforts from Yukon First Nations to contribute to solutions.

Some examples. The Department of Education has launched several, potentially positive initiatives, that have raised concerns for the CCOE, which the Department sometimes perceives as complaining. The issues could and should have been easily remedied if a partnership with the Department of Education and the Yukon First Nations were in place. The appointment of an ADM of First Nation Initiatives and the development of a data-sharing MOU are two such examples.

The Auditor General's report recommended that the Department of Education complete and implement its draft policy to collaborate with Yukon First Nations to meet the Education Act's requirements and develop a strategic action plan with specific and measurable actions and timelines to support its work with Yukon First Nations. The Department of Education agreed to create a policy in 2019-2020 which at this time is not complete. Under the direction of the First Nation Education Commission (FNEC), YFNED is undertaking the work to develop a first draft of the Collaborative Policy Framework and with Yukon government with respect to education.

Then there is the issue of the abysmal achievement of Indigenous students. In both the 2009 and the 2019 Auditor General reports, the longstanding gaps in the achievement of Indigenous students were highlighted as being of grave concern. Indigenous students represent about 31% of the Yukon student population, and they are consistently failing in significantly higher numbers than non-Indigenous students as is indicated on all grade levels of standard assessments. In the 2019-2020 school year, of the 148 Indigenous students enrolled in grade 12, only 73 graduated. This doesn't include the many dozens who left school before they got to grade 12.



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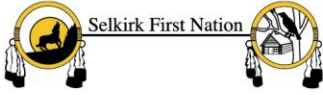
Also referenced was the gap between rural and urban achievement. The Auditor's 2019 recommendation was for the Department of Education to develop and implement a strategy to address the long-standing gaps in student performance and improve student outcomes, particularly those of Yukon First Nations and rural students. The Auditor's recommendation is that the strategy should include:

- analyzing the root causes of poor student outcomes,
- defining performance targets,
- developing and implementing actions to reach these targets, and
- evaluating the effectiveness of these actions to improve student outcomes."

The Department of Education agreed with the recommendations, but little has been done to address the strategy outlined above. They have focused instead on the Review of Inclusive Education, which only raised more concerns with the education system rather than present a definable strategy – and did not directly address Yukon First Nations and rural student outcomes.

Yukon Education attempted to draft a First Nation student outcome strategy, but YFNED had to intervene and halt progress as they were planning to carry out the strategy without consultation from FNEC. Looking for direction, the Department of Education brought the subject to the table at the FNEC meeting on January 25, 2021, and the First Nations Education Commissioners directed them to engage Yukon First Nations and First Nations youth. We are pleased that Tosh Southwick with IRP Consulting will be undertaking the consultation with each of the Yukon First Nations. The next important piece to this process will be how the consultation information will be brought back to the decision-makers in a collaborative process.

Yukon First Nations have the capacity to jointly lead the work ahead with the Department to benefit First Nation student and all students in Yukon. I must acknowledge that there has been some success through the work to create the First Nation School Board. But so much more is needed. The School Board does not begin to solve all the problems. Other organizational capacity is ready and available to work on other education-based initiatives. From staff at the Yukon First Nation Education Directorate, to the skilled and devoted members of the First Nation Education Commission, to the CCOE and its



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technicians, we are urgently awaiting the opportunity to truly collaborate with the Department of Education.

I want to thank the Public Accounts Committee for inviting the Chiefs Committee on Education to speak about the state of progress made on the 2019 Auditor General Recommendations. This call to action comes with great risk. If we do not make the necessary changes to education, we risk failing yet another generation of Indigenous students, and Yukon society as a whole. Thank-You.