



Autism Yukon
108 Copper Rd.
Whitehorse, YT
Y1A 2Z6

January 3, 2022

The Standing Committee on Public Accounts
Yukon Legislative Assembly
P. O. Box 2703, Whitehorse, YT, Y1A 2C6

To the standing committee:

The Board of Directors of Autism Yukon has asked me to respond to the letter received by Autism Yukon from the standing committee dated December 1, 2021, signed by Currie Dixon. In the letter, we were requested to comment on what we have observed in relation to commitments made by the Department of Education in response to recommendations from the Auditor General as a result of the *Report of the Auditor General of Canada to the Legislative Assembly of Yukon – Kindergarten Through Grade 12 Education in Yukon –Department of Education*.

This Auditor General's report clarified that the recommendations in the previous Auditor's report had not been rectified. As the 2019 report was fairly critical in its approach, the Department of Education asked for extra time to respond to the report. An independent consultant, Dr. Nikki Yee, was hired to do another review, and the Department of Education released her report with considerable fanfare in Spring, 2021. During this celebration many promises were made to collaborate with stakeholder organizations to explore report findings in an effort to move positively forward and work together.

Although it seemed movement in the right direction was about to begin, it has since failed to materialize. A Summit was promised this past Fall that would start the process of addressing the issues outlined in the report. The Summit happened, but, rather than being the action group we had expected, it was instead a simple online workshop for all Department of Education staff and other invitees, with the option to join committees presented at the end.

These committees do not address the pressing elements of the Auditor General's report which are urgent and require immediate attention and action. The urgency of these suggestions is currently being lost in the development of committees who are discussing and debating terms of reference and definitions for said committees. As an example, the Auditor General recommended that data collection begin because at this time the Department of Education has no concrete way of measuring the effectiveness of their approach to inclusive and special

education or concrete proof that data-based decisions are being made. This could and should start immediately. **Autism Yukon strongly believes that these very concrete suggestions do not need any more discussion. They simply need action.** Processes can be tweaked or revised as time goes on. We advocate that it is time to stop considering and discussing, and to start “doing.” If the required level of knowledge or expertise is not deemed to exist within the current Department of Education then it is time to take action to make this available. This long-standing problem cannot be attached to any political party. This is a responsibility of the Department of Education, and it should have been happening: it needs to start now.

We have heard that there is a work plan but have neither been consulted on it or seen it. When the query was made as to how we were to be involved, the comment was made that we were not official stakeholders in the process. This came as a surprise, especially after our involvement in the June meeting. Therefore, we cannot make an official comment as to concrete progress on this workplan as we have been prevented from the knowledge to do so.

The second point that we would like to emphasize is our disappointment with the lack of action concerning the reinstatement of IEPs. An agreement was made allowing families that had been pressured to have their children removed from IEPs to have their IEPs reinstated.

Unfortunately, most of our members did not receive a phone call or letter inviting them to a reinstated IEP meeting. Only the ones who were aware politically knew to call and ask to have an IEP reinstated. Many families with children with a disability have overwhelmingly busy schedules and don't know when they need to call and request their rights. We had hoped that the Department of Education would put considerable effort into reinstating these IEPs, starting with making direct contact all families impacted.

Furthermore, for those IEPs that were reinstated, it seems that there may be a faulty perception that they are simply a piece of paper that is to be filed in a filing cabinet and signed twice per year. In reality, IEPs should be dynamic, living documents that are acted upon and implemented daily in the students' classroom life. Many teachers are not familiar with their students' IEPs and cannot answer questions about how they are being implemented. These IEPs should be documents that teachers, therapists, paraprofessionals and parents have at their fingertips and at the forefront each day the child is in the classroom. For us and the families that we support this was the most disappointing change that did not happen.

Please know that we are aware that most of the Yukon's teachers are well-intended, dedicated professionals. Along with the Auditor General and Dr. Yee, it is our belief that our front-line school professionals (teachers, resource-room teachers and EAs) do not receive the proper training and support to do the job that they would like to do. Immediate action must be taken to implement a formal training program for those who work with the system's most vulnerable: children with neurodiversities and those who are at risk for emotional and behavioural problems.

In order to assist the Department of Education in moving forward on the recommendations in the report and to address some of the immediate issues, we would like to work with the Department of Education on a workplan with dates and a concrete path forward that addresses each point in the Auditor General's report. As an organization that works on a daily basis with

children and families that are impacted by the issues addressed in the report, we strongly feel we are important stakeholders in this process and have knowledge, information and expertise to share.

Thank you for asking for our input.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Leslie Peters', written in a cursive style.

Leslie Peters
Managing Consultant, Autism Yukon