

January 4, 2022

Honorable Jeanie McLean
Minister of Education
Government of Yukon
P.O. Box 2703
Whitehorse, Yukon
Y1A 2C6

Dear Minister McLean:

Re: Status of Review into Inclusive and Special Education

As a group committed to the success of all Yukon students, we feel we must share our thoughts and ongoing concerns with you. We all interact daily with the school communities, including students, parents, and staff. We are basing our feedback, questions, and comments on what we now see and hear in the system.

We hoped the alarms raised in the 2019 Auditor General's (AG) Report would result in some immediate positive changes for students, schools, and parents as well as with interactions with partner groups. We are disappointed that in the 2 years since the Department of Education (DOE) received the Report, we see no substantive changes for our students.

The work of the DOE, including the "Review of Inclusive and Special Education in the Yukon" (Review) completed by Nikki Yee, and the recent Summit, outlines a long-term policy driven approach that may have the potential, over time, to be positive. We also see possibilities in the four themes identified at the recent Summit. However, the working groups under each theme will take time to identify issues and develop responsive plans for the required changes on how education is resourced and provided in the Yukon. Even more time will be required to effectively implement those changes to make a practical difference for our students. More than 10 years ago, DOE responded with a similar, high level, public approach to the 2009 AG's Report (and others). The ineffectiveness, and lack of practical results, from that high level public approach was further condemned by the AG in 2019 as it did not result in meaningful changes or improved student outcomes in the Yukon education system. In 2019, DOE agreed to the AG's recommendations to:

- determine whether sufficient resources are in place to support inclusive education;
- prioritize students for specialized assessment;
- assess and track specialist recommendations; and,
- assess and track teachers use of recommended strategies.

No substantive action has been taken in the last 2 years and, in fact, it appears the current approach seems to be at the expense of addressing the current well documented needs of many students in the system.

Since the Review by Ms. Yee, and the approach determined by the Deputy Minister to focus on inquiry questions or a “cycle of inquiry”, we are sharing our concerns as brief statements followed by our inquiry questions.

Genuine Involvement /Collaboration

Partners need to feel they are included in the often difficult work of designing and implementing a positive road ahead. If we are to be supportive of the DOE’s work to respond to the Review, and make the changes recommended in the AG Report, we must be meaningfully involved. The Summit reiterated for us that the DOE is seeking superficial approval for directions already determined internally. We believe that collaboration is a genuine opportunity to dialogue, debate, understand research, and help in charting the course forward. To us, it is what is required to ensure the credibility and sustainability of decisions and actions.

We ask:

- Does the DOE agree that genuine collaboration is important for the road ahead?
- If so, how does the DOE intend to develop and implement a meaningful and fair approach to collaboration with education partners, and staff, students, and parents in the schools?

Accountability

In education, accountability is the demonstration of open and transparent responsibility for success and failures. DOE utilized the Summit as an opportunity to acknowledge what is going well, but there was little, or no, acknowledgement of what is not being done or not going well. We believe recognizing these challenges provides an opportunity for growth and improvement. We understand the DOE has accumulated an immeasurable amount of achievement data over many years which should provide a clear picture of how students are doing. However, this available information has not led to any decisive and immediate action to improve student outcomes.

We ask:

- How has the DOE responded to, or been accountable for, actions taken in response to the achievement gaps (clearly identified in the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 data), to change or attempt to meaningfully improve the experience, outcomes, and achievement of struggling students?
- What accountability mechanism has been put in place for current program changes for students so the required opportunities, or interventions, are adequately implemented, and tracked, for effectiveness in improving outcomes? We understand this question applies to programs such as the First Nations Academy, student support plans, behaviour plans or IEPs.
- How will the DOE be transparently accountable for the implementation, and effectiveness, of any planned changes as a result of the work on the themes identified above?
- How will the DOE be accountable for required changes that are currently part of the DOE data set? For example, progress related to decolonization, or racism, and progress related to addressing social and cultural issues.

Now and later

We have other questions that are best shared within the collaborative approach described above. In the interim, we suggest that a two-pronged approach to support our students is required. There must be clearly articulated strategies to address issues in support of all students in the immediately and short term. In the longer term, the course of action that the DOE has embarked on as described at the Summit, with a more collaborative approach, could help all of us map the way to the future of education in the Yukon.

In spirit and respect,



Ted Hupé
President
Yukon Association of Education Professionals



Karen Macklon
President
Autism Yukon



Stephanie Hammond
Executive Director
LDAY Centre for Learning



Sandra Henderson
Chair
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CC: Deputy Minister of Education
Assistant Deputy Minister of Education
Kate White, Leader of New Democratic Party
Currie Dixon, Leader of Official Opposition