



## Written responses - Standing Committee on Public Accounts

*January 19, 2022 public hearing on Kindergarten Through Grade 12 Education in Yukon*

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### **20. What initiatives has the Department taken to ensure access to resources and technology is equitable for all students?**

Online and digital learning technologies and resources are a key part of modern learning. They are an important tool for blended learning and continued learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. We have supported students with access to devices if they do not have their own.

We recognize there are challenges and not all families can easily access devices to support their child when a school needs to move to remote learning because of the pressures of the pandemic on school operations.

Last year, to further support equitable learning opportunities for students, we were pleased to partner with Yukon First Nations to purchase devices to support Yukon First Nation students.

This year, we are donating retired Apple classroom computing devices to replenish the Computers for Schools Yukon recycling program for K-12 students, which makes recycled and refurbished computers available to students in K-12 upon request.

Additionally, during a period of remote learning, students who do not have access to personal devices can access support through their school, in-person at study halls or by borrowing a school device as needed for their learning.

We are continually working to improve the integration of technology into school programming to ensure all students have the opportunities to learn these important skills and knowledge for their future learning and careers and that educational technology is secure, reliable and accessible to them for learning.

Increasing a students' access to mobile devices is part of modernizing learning and ensures that online and blended learning can be used in the short and long term as we make every effort to ensure consistent and supportive learning for all students across the pandemic.

Additionally, our school staff have done an incredible job of working with families to meet their unique learning needs and are providing remote learning options in a variety of ways, including

using online and digital tools but also using paper-based learning packages and resources to ensure learning is delivered equitably to all students and families.

**35. Since the 2019 report, what initiatives and programs have been started under the direction of the Department of Education to help address supports for children diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder cited by the audit? What is the goal of these initiatives or programs and how do they enhance the existing supports both in the short and long term?**

**36. What schools are benefiting from these programs, why were they selected?**

The Positive Behavior Interventions and Support Coach (PBIS Coach) works very closely with school staff with students on the Autism Spectrum. They started focusing support more toward school staff who work with children on the Autism Spectrum during the 2018-19 school year. Recognizing the benefit this position provides, it was made a permanent position in July 2019. Starting in September 2021, this role has focused outright on supporting school staff who work with children on the Autism Spectrum, recognizing this as an area where we can most beneficially use our resources to support students. The role of the PBIS Coach is to train staff in the identification of risks of emotional and behavioral needs and implement data driven and evidence-based interventions to support student's development of positive behaviour and wellness.

Although all schools can access this role, the schools that are receiving significant support from the PBIS Coach include:

- Hidden Valley
- Jack Hulland
- Robert Service
- Christ the King
- Grey Mountain Primary
- FH Collins
- Takhini
- Elijah Smith
- Vanier

These schools were selected based on the identified student need and requests through their School-Based Team. In some cases, requests have come directly from parents. The PBIS Coach can, and does, work at other schools when required – the schools listed above do not have exclusive access to this support.

Adding to the support provided by the PBIS Coach, an additional teacher FTE was allocated in the fall for the remainder of the 2021-22 school year and for 2022-23 school years for a pilot program adding an itinerant Autism Spectrum Teacher to work in Yukon schools, especially those with a higher population of students on the Autism Spectrum. We are still in the hiring process for this position and are intent on putting a successful candidate in place for the remainder of this school year and the 2022-23 school year.

To determine the success of this pilot position, it will be evaluated against how successful students are in reaching their learning goals and objectives when supported by the position. For example, we will evaluate whether the position has successfully supported a non-verbal student on the spectrum make progress toward their goal of increased communication through their support, mentorship and training of the classroom teacher and support staff. This evaluation begins with initial observations about where the student is at. As evidence-based interventions are implemented to support the student, we will look at how successful those interventions were in moving students further toward their learning goals.

### **38. How will the Department of Education ensure that documentation of successful work done by support personnel is adequate to enable the continuation of those supports when there is a change in staffing or otherwise?**

We recognize that we need to take steps to improve how we monitor and track supports that are in place for students, including those that are identified through learning plans, outlined in regular student assessment reports and that are recommended through specialized assessments and informal assessments. This was a key finding of the 2019 audit report and the following Review of Inclusive and Special Education.

Currently, adaptations, programming and supports that are put in place for students who have diverse learning needs are outlined in a learning plan, including either a Student Learning Plan, Behavioural Support Plan or an Individual Education Plan (IEP). Every student who is on a

learning plan is flagged in Aspen, our student information system and teachers have access to a student's learning plan to check in on the supports they require to be successful at school.

As part of the regular process in place for assessing and reporting on learning for students on a learning plan, teachers and support staff are required to

- outline the adaptations and supports in place for the student in their informal and formal reports to parents, including how those adaptations or supports are working for the child; and
- for students on IEPs, school staff must meet with parents or guardians at least 3 times each school year to discuss the IEP, including the supports outlined their IEP, and the student's progress in relation to their IEP goals and objectives.

At times, teachers and support staff might find the student is not succeeding at school with the adaptations and supports in place. In this case, they may meet with the school-based team, parents or guardian and with central administration staff of the Student Support Services unit to identify different supports and make adjustments. It is part of our regular practice to try something new when current supports are not working in an effort to make sure the right supports are in place and the student is making progress towards their learning goals outlined in their learning plan. When adjustments are made, they should be outlined in the students learning plan and identified in the next formal or informal report to the parent or guardian.

Teachers and support staff, including learning assistance teachers and school-based teams, with support of staff of Student Support Services, work together to ensure supports that are successful for students remain in place as they transition to working with new staff or through different grade levels. Following the regular tracking, reporting and monitoring in place for students on learning plans, this supports efforts of school staff to support students through the different grade levels. School-based teams help to identify students who need more thorough planning and supports as they transition to a new teacher or support staff or new school. Student Support Services staff also plays a significant role in this process. For example, when students with complex needs start their transition from Grade 7 to Grade 8 and into their high school years, Student Support Services staff attend meetings with the high school's school-based team to review the student's file and the supports that are needed. They put a plan in place to ensure staff who will work with the student have the proper training, the strategies and the ongoing support they need to best support the student.

While these structures are in place to support students with diverse learning needs, we fully acknowledge this is an area that needs further work to create more clarity and consistency at all Yukon schools. As part of our response to the Review of Inclusive and Special Education, we have established eight working groups call Communities of Inquiry to work on specific topics to improve inclusive and special education programs in Yukon. Creating more clarity and consistency around the use of IEPs and learning plans is a key priority and a specific topic driving the work of our Community of Inquiry #5. Community of Inquiry #5 is looking at how we update and implement consistent IEP templates, processes and structures that incorporate student voice and create accountability structures around IEPs.

As we continue on our path to improve Yukon's education system, especially when it comes to students who have diverse or special education needs, we want to ensure parents and guardians know what service they can expect to support their child's learning needs and that if they have a concern about their child's learning and/or supports to contact their teacher or school administration. They may also call a meeting of their school's school-based team to make sure their child is getting the support they need. At the same time, we will also work to support school staff with more training and professional development opportunities, resources and ongoing support from Student Support Services and curriculum consultants to deliver learning in a way that best allows all students to thrive.