



November 22, 2022

Annette King
Office of the Yukon Child and Youth Advocate
2070-2nd Ave, Unit 19
Whitehorse, YT Y1A 1B1

Re: Government of Yukon response to the October 2022 report *Responding to Sexualized Abuse in Yukon Schools: Review of Policies and Governmental Response*

Dear Annette King:

The Government of Yukon is grateful for the thorough and careful work of the Yukon Child and Youth Advocate in conducting your review of the activities that occurred at the Hidden Valley Elementary School and the subsequent response from government.

Your office's work to bring further clarity to the important matters of children's rights is well-received. The review was informed by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and conducted with an interest towards "ensuring that Yukon students feel safe and comfortable in their spaces of learning" (p.3) and the rights of children are upheld. These are our shared interests and mutual priorities.

We accept in principle, all of the recommendations in your October 2022 review, "Responding to Sexualized Abuse in Yukon Schools: Review of Policies and Governmental Response." Below you will find our response to each recommendation. We believe there are a number of opportunities to apply your advice for a child-centred response as we continue to move forward.

The Government of Yukon is committed to timely and system-wide corrective action to ensure the wellbeing of Yukon children is put first and remains at the centre of our decision-making and actions. The roots of these actions and decisions are found in the January 31, 2022, *Hidden Valley Elementary School Independent Review Report*, and the subsequent *Safer Schools Action Plan*. There are also significant links to the Department of Education's work on the *Response to Reimagining Inclusive and Special Education (RISE)*. The close alignment of your recommendations with this work informs the comprehensive nature of our response and reinforces that we are on the right path. We intend to seek feedback from the Hidden Valley Parent Advisory Committee on your recommendations, along with the ongoing work being done to ensure we have the best policies, procedures, and supports in place. This Committee has already met several times this year and has provided feedback on the development of the student protection policy and procedures.

Your findings and specific recommendations have not only validated the work underway, but in a number of instances have helped us re-examine and enhance our commitments to ensure a strengthened student and child-centred approach. We are confident that our new policies, protocols and capabilities for prevention, detection and reporting of serious incidents involving harm to students will better position us to safeguard the wellbeing of Yukon students. Further, examples of this are noted in an addendum to this letter where you will find a summary of our actions and their alignment with each of your recommendations.

As noted, there are a number of opportunities to share information and seek your input as we move forward and we welcome those conversations. We recognize that there is still much work to be done to build back trust and to repair and restore confidence in our ability to respond to serious incidents that may arise in the Yukon's school system.

We are grateful for your partnership and commitment to building a better future together by making our schools safer.

Sincerely,



Minister McLean
Minister of Education

cc.

Minister McPhee - Minister of Health and Social Services

Yukon Child and Youth Advocate Office Report Recommendations – October 2022

The following outlines steps taken and/or underway towards the recommendations:

1. Coordinated Response:

- Confirm best practices for responding to any incident in education where a child is, or is likely to have been, physically, sexually or emotionally harmed.
- Design and implement an interagency response process, which includes competent investigations, child and family-centered approaches to information sharing, protection of privacy, communication with families and coordination of services.

Our work so far (Safer Schools Action Plan):

Action 1: Finalize and implement Yukon School Post-Incident Communication Guidance and Procedures (complete).

Action 2: Develop corporate guidance for inter-departmental communication and coordination in response to serious incidents in schools (complete).

Action 3: Develop corporate guidance for communicating publicly or with stakeholders about serious incidents when a criminal matter is under investigation or before the courts (complete).

Action 4: Develop a victim support plan and identify materials (Mar 2023).

Action 6: Policy and procedures on prevention, responding and reporting harm to students (complete)

- Reporting to Family and Children Services (FCS) or RCMP, including guidance on responding to student disclosure.

Action 7: Create a new inter-agency agreement for the investigation of child abuse between the RCMP, Health and Social Services (HSS), and Education (Dec22-Mar23).

- Your recommendation to focus on a child and family-centred approach to information sharing and communication is noted and affirms our commitment to ensure this is a principal tenet of our continued work.

2. Duty to Report:

- Provide clear information to educators and families about their mandatory duty to report any incident where a child is, or is likely to have been, physically, sexually or emotionally harmed.
- Provide clear steps on how and who to report incidents to and how to follow up.

Our work so far (Safer Schools Action Plan):

Action 6: Policy and procedures on prevention, responding and reporting harm to students v.1 (complete).

- Reporting to FCS or RCMP, including guidance on responding to student disclosure.

Action 10: Enhance and require training for all school-based staff in the prevention, detection, and obligation to report suspected child abuse / suspicious behaviour (complete)

- Family and Children Services provide training in Duty to Report to school staff.
- Partnership with the Canadian Centre for Child Protection in their Commit to Kids Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Training.

Action 13: Implement summer training for principals, vice-principals and new staff (complete).

Action 14: Explore ways to incorporate training requirements on prevention, detection and reporting of child abuse and on supporting victims and families into certification of teachers. (complete).

3. Developmentally Appropriate Responses:

- Implement best practices to ensure developmentally and culturally appropriate interviews and victim support services for students who have been physically, sexually or emotionally harmed.

Our work so far (Safer Schools Action Plan):

Action 4: Develop a victim support plan and identify materials (Mar 2023).

Action 7: Create a new inter-agency agreement for the investigation of child abuse between the RCMP, HSS, and Education (Dec22-Mar23).

- Your recommendation to ensure a developmentally and culturally appropriate approach to interviews and victim supports is acknowledged, and will be reflected in the work tracking for completion this spring.

4. Sexual Health Information: Provide developmentally appropriate sexual health information throughout the school year to all Yukon students. Sexual health programming should be mandatory and accessible to all students, including those with individualized plans (IEPs, Student Support Plans, etc.). Provide additional guidance to families about how to talk to children about sexual health.

Our work so far (Safer Schools Action Plan):

Action 6: Policy and procedures on prevention, responding and reporting harm to students.

- The Superintendent or Executive Director will ensure that a developmentally appropriate curriculum on abuse and harm prevention is delivered to students in all Yukon schools.

Our work so far (EDU department initiatives):

We are currently gathering ideas on how to improve the delivery of Yukon's required sexual health curriculum in support of ensuring all students, regardless of neurodiversity, are able to access and process this important learning. We would welcome your perspectives and ideas into this process and we will also continue to engage the Hidden Valley Parent Advisory Committee on this work.

Further professional development for teachers is currently being organized to support the understanding and delivery of the revised sexual health resource Better to Know, formerly known as SHARE. This professional development will dig deeper into differentiating the learning to ensure accessibility for all learners.

5. Therapeutic Supports: Immediately determine therapeutic needs of students and families impacted by alleged abuse and ensure low-barrier access to appropriate supports identified by students, families and professionals. Provide accessible therapeutic supports for impacted educators. Develop a plan to create and fill clinical counsellor positions in all Yukon schools.

Our work so far (Safer Schools Action Plan):

Action 4: Develop a victim support plan and identify materials (Mar 2023).

Action 6: Policy and procedures on prevention, responding and reporting harm to students.

- Ensure a timely response to disclosures that is victim-centered (including developing a Victim Support Plan, when appropriate).

Action 7: Create a new inter-agency agreement for the investigation of child abuse between the RCMP, HSS, and Education (Dec22-Mar23).

- Your recommendation to ensure low-barrier access to appropriate supports identified by students, families and professionals is acknowledged, and will be reflected in the work tracking for completion this spring.

Our commitments (EDU Response to Reimagining Inclusive and Special Education (RISE))

Under Reimagining Inclusive and Special Education we are working to develop a Yukon Schools Mental Health and Wellbeing Approach that includes preventions as well as developmental and clinical responses, creates connections to mental health and wellbeing activities provided by partners and stakeholders and aligns with Yukon's Mental Health Strategy. We share the Child and

Youth Advocate's view that the Youth Calls to Action - Summit 2021 which stem from the most recent Yukon Youth Summit Millennial Town Hall are critical, especially in respect to taking a child- and youth-centred approach to ensure appropriate supports, and we are working with the BGC Yukon (former Boys and Girls Club) to implement these recommendations. We will also reach out to the Child and Youth Advocate to discuss our approach and seek advice and input into next steps.

6. Educational Supports: Provide specialized educational supports for all children with special needs. Programs should include input and oversight by Learning Assistance Teachers, Student Support Services and, if needed, external specialists. Guidance and oversight by specialists should be thorough and long-lasting with the goal of creating educational programs that have clear and measurable goals and help students reach their full potential.

Our work so far (EDU Response to Reimagining Inclusive and Special Education (RISE))

Under Reimagining Inclusive and Special Education we are working with our partners and stakeholders to reimagine and realize schools that are safe, inclusive, built on student strengths and driven to ensure that every child feels connected and supported to thrive. Some of the work we have undertaken to date:

- With support and input of Learning Assistance Teachers, we reviewed and updated the position's roles and qualifications. Further work is needed to implement these changes.
- We are currently working with our partners to co-develop criteria for student specialized assessments. We would welcome your advice and input into this process.
- A Community of Inquiry, comprised of community members, recently reviewed the Response to Intervention Model which outlines Yukon's approach to addressing diverse student needs. The group focused on whether the Response to Intervention model is the right model for the Yukon. Through their work the model was deemed appropriate for the Yukon and needs to be updated to reflect the Yukon Student Outcome Strategy currently under development. More work is required to implement the model and we would welcome your participation and advice on next steps.

7. Accountability and Oversight for Educators: Develop structures for training, monitoring and supervising educators, particularly 1:1 EAs working with vulnerable students. Ensure learning environments are inclusive and promote safety and belonging.

Our work so far (Safer Schools Action Plan)

Action 6: Policy and procedures on prevention, responding and reporting harm to students.

- Orientation and training, student education, school environments, response and reporting, plus roles and responsibilities for updating the policy and procedures.

Action 10: Enhance and require training for all school-based staff in the prevention, detection, and obligation to report suspected child abuse / suspicious behaviour (complete).

Action 13: Implement summer training for principals, vice-principals and new staff (complete).

Action 14: Explore ways to incorporate training requirements on prevention, detection and reporting of child abuse and on supporting victims and families into certification of teachers. (complete).

Action 16: Review existing incident reporting and tracking system across YG (Jan 2023)

Action 17. Develop a process for ongoing review and monitoring of policies and procedures and best practices for higher risk educational settings, such as individual learning, field trips, etc.

- This is an area of interest for the Hidden Valley Parent Advisory Committee and we welcome their involvement in this work.

Our commitments (EDU Response to Reimagining Inclusive and Special Education (RISE))

Since last summer, we've been advancing initiatives under the Reimagining Inclusive and Special Education work plan which was developed in partnership with First Nation Education Commission and the Advisory Committee on Yukon Education. This year's priorities are:

- Ready to Learn - this program is a developmentally responsive approach to managing student behaviour and supporting social emotional growth. It is grounded in the understanding that children can only be ready to learn when they feel safe and calm.
- Criteria for specialized student Assessments.
- Implement updated Response to Intervention Model.
- Develop a Yukon Schools Mental Health and Wellbeing Approach.

8. YG Response: Provide a public report outlining YG's response to the Advocate's review by November 22, 2022 and a subsequent progress report within twelve months.

This letter constitutes our response to the Advocate's review. We will be pleased to provide a subsequent report on or before October 12, 2023, which will confirm how your recommendations have been applied and implemented.