



# Yukon Legislative Assembly

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35<sup>th</sup> Legislature

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## HANSARD

Monday, November 22, 2021 — 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: The Honourable Jeremy Harper

# YUKON LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

## 2021 Fall Sitting

**SPEAKER — Hon. Jeremy Harper, MLA, Mayo-Tatchun**  
**DEPUTY SPEAKER and CHAIR OF COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE — Annie Blake, MLA, Vuntut Gwitchin**  
**DEPUTY CHAIR OF COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE — Emily Tredger, MLA, Whitehorse Centre**

### CABINET MINISTERS

NAME	CONSTITUENCY	PORTFOLIO
<b>Hon. Sandy Silver</b>	Klondike	Premier Minister of the Executive Council Office; Finance
<b>Hon. Tracy-Anne McPhee</b>	Riverdale South	Deputy Premier Government House Leader* Minister of Health and Social Services; Justice
<b>Hon. Nils Clarke</b>	Riverdale North	Minister of Highways and Public Works; Environment
<b>Hon. John Streicker</b>	Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes	Government House Leader* Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources; Public Service Commission; Minister responsible for the Yukon Development Corporation and the Yukon Energy Corporation; French Language Services Directorate
<b>Hon. Ranj Pillai</b>	Porter Creek South	Minister of Economic Development; Tourism and Culture; Minister responsible for the Yukon Housing Corporation; Yukon Liquor Corporation and the Yukon Lottery Commission
<b>Hon. Richard Mostyn</b>	Whitehorse West	Minister of Community Services; Minister responsible for the Workers' Compensation Health and Safety Board
<b>Hon. Jeanie McLean</b>	Mountainview	Minister of Education; Minister responsible for the Women and Gender Equity Directorate

### OFFICIAL OPPOSITION

#### Yukon Party

<b>Currie Dixon</b>	Leader of the Official Opposition Copperbelt North	<b>Scott Kent</b>	Official Opposition House Leader Copperbelt South
<b>Brad Cathers</b>	Lake Laberge	<b>Patti McLeod</b>	Watson Lake
<b>Yvonne Clarke</b>	Porter Creek Centre	<b>Geraldine Van Bibber</b>	Porter Creek North
<b>Wade Istchenko</b>	Kluane	<b>Stacey Hassard</b>	Pelly-Nisutlin

### THIRD PARTY

#### New Democratic Party

<b>Kate White</b>	Leader of the Third Party Takhini-Kopper King
<b>Emily Tredger</b>	Third Party House Leader Whitehorse Centre
<b>Annie Blake</b>	Vuntut Gwitchin

### LEGISLATIVE STAFF

Clerk of the Assembly	Dan Cable
Deputy Clerk	Linda Kolody
Clerk of Committees	Allison Lloyd
Sergeant-at-Arms	Karina Watson
Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms	Joseph Mewett
Hansard Administrator	Deana Lemke

\*Government House Leader: Hon. Tracy-Anne McPhee to November 4, 2021; Hon. John Streicker from November 5, 2021

**Yukon Legislative Assembly  
Whitehorse, Yukon**

**Monday, November 22, 2021 — 1:00 p.m.**

**Speaker:** I will now call the House to order.  
We will proceed at this time with prayers.

*Prayers*

**Withdrawal of motions**

**Speaker:** The Chair wishes to inform the House of changes made to the Order Paper. The following motions have not been placed on the Notice Paper as they are out of order: Motion No. 232 and Motion No. 233, standing in the name of the Member for Watson Lake.

In addition, the following motion has been removed from the Order Paper as it is outdated: Motion No. 131, standing in the name of the Member for Whitehorse Centre.

**DAILY ROUTINE**

**Speaker:** We will proceed at this time with the Order Paper.

Introduction of visitors.

**INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS**

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** I would like to ask my colleagues in the Assembly today to welcome four individuals who are with us today for our tribute to the Yukon Prize for Visual Arts. With us today is Joseph Tisiga, as well as Marie Pier, Julie Jai, and David Trick.

**Speaker:** Tributes.

**TRIBUTES**

**In recognition of National Housing Day**

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of the Yukon Liberal government to pay tribute to our partners in housing in honour of National Housing Day. It is a day to recognize the important work done by housing partners to improve access to housing for everyone in Canada.

Historically, today is a day for Canadians to remember that the Federation of Canadian Municipalities identified homelessness as a crisis in this country and called on the federal government to develop a national housing strategy.

In 2017, Canada's first national housing strategy was launched. This year, this 10-year, over \$70-billion national plan aims to drive the success of Canada's housing sector by providing more Canadians with the opportunity to have affordable homes. A significant amount of work is already underway to improve housing in all parts of the country, including here in the Yukon, and there is still much more that has to be done.

As such, we are thankful for the continued partnerships across all levels of government. Our federal partners, the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, and our Yukon municipal and First Nation governments are all working

together to find housing solutions based on the identified community needs across the territory.

Building on Yukon's housing action plan, we are working to support the development and maintenance of a robust housing continuum here in the Yukon that captures all types of housing, from housing with services to community housing to private market rental housing to home ownership.

The COVID-19 pandemic has served as a reminder of the importance of access to safe and affordable housing. We are extremely thankful for all of the organizations, businesses, and individuals in our communities who are working hard to ensure that everyone has a roof over their heads.

Non-profit staff and housing navigators work tirelessly to help our most vulnerable citizens gain and maintain housing. Today, we honour their work.

I would also like to recognize the dedication of our partners who make a significant contribution to the housing sector. The Safe at Home Society, the Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition, the Kwanlin Dün First Nation, Ta'an Kwäch'än' Council, Victoria Faulkner Women's Centre, Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in men's shelter, Challenge Disability Resource Group, and Blood Ties Four Directions, just to name a few.

The development of affordable, sustainable, and inclusive housing options that support a better quality of life for all Yukoners is a priority. Partnerships are key to success.

Thank you.

*Applause*

**Ms. Clarke:** I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to recognize November 22 as National Housing Day and November 22 to 26 as National Housing Week in Canada.

National Housing Day highlights the important work being done across the country by housing partners to improve access to housing. There is work being done, but the reality is that housing shortages, rental costs, and the housing process are outpacing that work, and Canadians are feeling it across the country.

The need for housing continues to be at the top of mind for Canadians, especially Yukoners as we face a severe shortage of housing and ever-increasing prices in the territory.

The urgency that we are feeling here in the Yukon to address the housing shortage is not unlike that being experienced across the country. But for us, this is our home. This is where our friends and family, fellow community members, and our children have to fight to afford to live. Every Yukoner or Yukon family is facing their own individual housing concerns. They face concerns about how to pay the rent, concerns about whether they will ever be able to own their own home, concerns about finding a home to buy or rent because neither is easy to find lately.

There is a bigger housing picture that needs to be addressed, and it is going to take action. I would like to recognize those First Nations and community organizations for doing their part to address the challenges that our territory is facing. We are seeing a number of creative solutions to make land and housing available for Yukoners, including those from

Kwanlin Dün First Nation, Da Daghay Develop Corporation, Challenge Disability Resource Group, KBC Developments, Vimy Heritage Housing Society, and others. Yukoners need work to happen on that bigger picture as soon as possible to ensure stable housing, land options, and affordability.

In closing, I encourage all Yukoners to examine how they can help to address the housing issues facing our territory so that we can find solutions together.

*Applause*

**Ms. Tredger:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP to acknowledge National Housing Day.

We all know that the housing crisis is as bad as it has ever been in the Yukon. With last weekend's cold snap, everyone is keenly aware of how much each one of us needs a warm, secure place to call home, yet so many Yukoners don't have that. On a single night in April this year, at least 151 people were homeless and over 20 of them were children.

Yukoners everywhere have been working to find our way out of this housing crisis, and I want to thank them for their amazing work. NGOs, First Nation development corporations, and others have poured so much effort and so many hours into making sure that Yukoners can access affordable housing. They are leading the way toward a new way of thinking about housing, not as a commodity, but as a human right, because if we believe in looking after each other, if we believe in taking care of each other, then we need to make affordable housing a reality for everyone.

I would like to end by quoting a tweet from Naheed Dosani, a palliative care physician and activist. This morning, he wrote — and I quote: “I don't know who needs to hear this but housing is healthcare. Housing is dignity. Housing is mental health. Housing is good economic policy.

“And on this #NationalHousingDay and every day ... let's never forget that access to safe affordable housing is a human right.”

*Applause*

### In recognition of Yukon Prize for Visual Arts

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** I rise on behalf of the Yukon Liberal government to pay tribute to the Yukon Prize for Visual Arts. As Yukoners, we know how incredibly rich in artistic talent and creative energy our territory is. At any time of the year, our arts venues and creative spaces teem with a variety of exhibitions, performances, and programming. The abundance and diversity of artistic experiences available in the Yukon is truly extraordinary. This isn't just in a subjective sense of homegrown pride; there is statistical data to prove it.

The Yukon has the highest per capita number of visual artists in all of Canada. Moved by the artistic creation and talent here in the territory, Julie Jai and David Trick sought to raise its stature throughout Canada and beyond. They envisioned a means to celebrate the skill and unique perspectives of Yukon artists and provide opportunities to enhance artists' creative ability and further their careers. They also wanted to stimulate wider public interest and appreciation of the already thriving arts community in the territory. From this vision came the

Yukon Prize for Visual Arts. Working together with the Yukon Arts Foundation and the Yukon Arts Centre, this biannual award will help to shine a spotlight on Yukon's visual artists. This inaugural rendition of the Yukon prize received submissions from over 100 artists from a diverse array of artistic disciplines.

From these, a jury of esteemed Canadian curators chose six finalists: Ken Anderson; Amy Ball; Krystle Silverfox; Sho Sho Esquiro; Joseph Tisiga; and Veronica Verkley. A selection of their works has been exhibited at the Yukon Arts Centre over the last couple of months. This past Saturday, the winner of the inaugural Yukon Prize for Visual Arts was announced — Kaska Dena artist Joseph Tisiga. A multidisciplinary mix of the dreamlike and the profane, Joseph's explorations of contemporary First Nation identity are incredible prescient in this cultural moment.

Join me in congratulating Joseph Tisiga and each of the incredible artists selected as finalists. Through their work, these artists process a complex and intensely personal range of feelings and experiences, honour traditions, and indulge imagination.

We thank you for sharing your gifts, and I would like to acknowledge the founders, partners, organizers, and volunteers. Julie Jai and David Trick, thank you for your vision, passion, and dedication to the development and broader exposure of Yukon's immense pool of artistic talent. We look forward to the creativity and partnerships that lay ahead.

*Applause*

**Ms. Clarke:** I am pleased to rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition in recognition of the Yukon Prize for Visual Arts. The Yukon Prize for Visual Arts recognizes excellence in visual artists. Co-founders are Julie Jai and Dr. David Trick, a couple who live both in Whitehorse and Toronto and have a vast appreciation for the differences of each place. One of the many things that has impressed them about the Yukon is the quality and diversity of the visual arts. Unfortunately, not many Canadians know anything about Yukon artists or Yukon art, and this important part of Canada's cultural narrative is being overlooked.

This was how it all started. The Yukon Prize for Visual Arts brings artists into the national dialogue and allows them to gain the recognition that they deserve.

I have had the pleasure of knowing Julie Jai and Dr. David Trick as friends for years. I know how much they both appreciate and support visual arts in the Yukon, so it gives me particular pleasure today to introduce them and to pay tribute to the work that they have done in co-founding the Yukon prize. Julie first came to the Yukon 25 years ago to provide legal support to the Yukon's negotiating team and has been involved in the successful land claim negotiations. Seeing self-government become a reality has been a highlight of Julie's career. David is a successful consultant specializing in post-secondary education and has had a distinguished career in the Ontario government as well as in the university sector.

I join in congratulating Joseph Tisiga, who is the 2021 winner of the \$20,000 Yukon Prize for Visual Arts. I also

congratulate the other five finalists: Ken Anderson, Amy Ball, Sho Sho Esquiro, Krystle Silverfox, and Veronica Verkley, who each receive a prize of \$2,000.

The Yukon prize featured three internationally respected arts professionals as jurors for this competition and who came to Whitehorse this past weekend to see the art in person: Ryan Doherty, chief curator of the Contemporary Calgary gallery; Candice Hopkins, an independent curator, writer, and researcher who is a citizen of Carcross/Tagish First Nation and lives in Albuquerque, New Mexico; and Gaëtane Verna, the director of The Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery in Toronto.

The Yukon prize not only promotes Yukon art and Yukon artists nationally and internationally, but also allows for opportunities for Yukon artists to show their work in southern Canada.

So, thank you to Julie and David, and congratulations to all finalists and especially to our 2021 Yukon prize winner, Joseph Tisiga.

*Applause*

**Ms. White:** I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP to celebrate the amazing accomplishments of Joseph Tisiga.

So, Joseph and I first met years ago when we worked together at the Backerei on Main Street. I was baking and he was washing dishes. There were times when I would look over and he would be looking far into space. It was here that I got my first glimpse into his imagination. I remember when he started to open up and share what was in his mind. First it was with small sketches, and then it was with big ideas. So, I was blown away when I first saw his Indian Brand Corporation pieces — his ability to present concepts that are so hard to wrap your mind around, laid out with beautiful watercolour images that challenge you as a viewer.

So, I was a fan of Joseph before this show, but that was the show where I became a fan of his art. If one were to visit my office, they would notice a collage on the wall and, to be honest, it would be hard not to notice because it is a big piece. This collage just happens to be one of the very first collages that he made, so I feel so incredibly lucky to have it hanging on my wall.

Joseph has worked hard to develop a name for himself throughout the art world, and he has been able to do that without ever straying away from his beliefs. He is no stranger to awards and accolades, but I imagine that being recognized on home turf felt pretty good. On Saturday, during the first-ever gala for the Yukon Prize for Visual Arts, Joseph was awarded the top prize by a panel of internationally known judges.

This amazing prize would not be possible without the generous support of fellow Yukoners. As we heard, both Julie Jai and David Trick have been committed to the Yukon art scene. According to Julie, it was one small contribution that they could make to a community that has given them so much. This prize, Mr. Speaker, is not just a win for Joseph or the five other finalists, but for arts in the Yukon. There were 107 Yukoners who applied for the first-ever Yukon prize. That's

107 Yukoners ready to show their art on a national or international scale.

So, today I recognize and thank everyone who has been involved to ensure that the art scene we enjoy in the Yukon is thriving and more alive than ever.

*Applause*

**Speaker:** Are there any returns or documents for tabling?

## TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

**Hon. Mr. Mostyn:** I have for tabling the letter that I provided to the Association of Yukon Communities yesterday.

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** I have for tabling a legislative return from debate in Committee of the Whole on Bill No. 202, Vote 18.

**Speaker:** Are there any reports of committees?

Are there any petitions to be presented?

Are there any bills to be introduced?

Are there any notices of motions?

## NOTICES OF MOTIONS

**Mr. Dixon:** I rise to give notice of the following motion: THAT the Government does not have the confidence of this House and the people of the Yukon.

**Ms. Blake:** I rise to give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to establish a publicly funded community clinic staffed by primary care providers, including family physicians and nurse practitioners, who can offer a range of health and social supports.

**Speaker:** Is there a statement by a minister?

## MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

### COVID-19 vaccinations for youth

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** Last Friday, Health Canada announced the approval of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine for children aged five to 11. Throughout this pandemic, we have seen the impacts of COVID-19 on youth in the Yukon and across the country. School disruptions, social isolation, and reduced access to academic and extracurricular activities have put strains on the mental and physical well-being of children and their families across the territory.

In the Yukon alone, currently 30 percent of our cases are happening among the unimmunized and the previously not eligible, under-12-years-of-age group. That is why I know that we are all happy to see Health Canada approve this vaccine for Yukon youth.

While COVID-19 infection in children is often milder than adults, some kids infected with the virus can get severe lung infections, become very sick, and require hospitalization. Immunization will help to protect them from contracting the virus and severe symptoms and sickness if they do. In clinical

trials, the vaccine prevented children ages five to 11 from becoming sick with COVID-19 and from severe illness with 90.7-percent efficacy.

Children between the ages of five to 11 who choose to be vaccinated will receive the Pfizer pediatric COVID-19 vaccine. The vaccine is administered as a two-dose primary series recommended by the National Advisory Committee on Immunization to be given eight weeks apart. It will be given by an injection into the arm muscle at a lower dose of 10 micrograms for children between ages five and 11. Those aged 12 and over receive a larger dose of 30 micrograms. Our team at Health and Social Services has done extensive training and planning in anticipation of vaccine approval for children. They are fully ready to receive these vaccines and open bookings for youth once the vaccines arrive in the territory.

Thank you to all of the immunizers across the Yukon who have been working on the front lines ensuring that our communities are as protected as possible from COVID-19. Appointment dates and times will be available online at [www.yukon.ca/thisisourshot](http://www.yukon.ca/thisisourshot). Clinic information will be posted as soon as it is scheduled. You can also call the COVID-19 info line for information on clinic dates and times at 1-877-374-0425.

Across the Yukon, we have made tremendous progress, and I ask every Yukoner to continue to do their part in getting this pandemic under control.

We know that vaccines are our most valuable tool in stopping the spread of COVID-19. Let's continue to follow the public health measures that we have put in place, as well as treat each other kindly as we shift into this new normal. Collectively, we can ensure that the coming months lead us to a brighter future.

**Mr. Cathers:** I am pleased to rise on behalf of the Official Opposition. We're pleased to hear of the approval of this vaccine last week by Health Canada, as well as to hear that COVID-19 vaccines will be on the way for children aged five to 11. We were glad to read the news that the first shipment of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine for children touched down at a Canadian airport on Sunday afternoon.

The five-to-11 age group represents a vulnerable population and is a significant part of the current outbreak in the Yukon. There have been many exposure notices for schools, daycares, and day homes.

Can the minister tell us when the children's vaccine will arrive in the Yukon? The government has indicated that they are ready to go to immunize children between five and 11 years old, but we haven't heard dates yet.

Can the minister indicate how long it will take after arrival for the shots to be administered? How will the vaccine be administered? Will it be available in the same locations as adult vaccination clinics, at schools, or somewhere else?

Ontario announced that bookings for children aged five to 11 would be available tomorrow with first shots being administered on Thursday. British Columbia has opened up registrations, and the *Vancouver Sun* reports that one-fifth of

five- to 11-year-olds in the province are already registered. Alberta is also expecting to start giving shots this week.

So, parents in the Yukon want to know when and where the shot will be made available, when they will be able to make appointments for their children, and when those first appointments will be available.

There is also a question surrounding those who are about to turn five in the coming weeks and months. Can the minister clarify when exactly a child will be eligible for the vaccine? Will it be when they turn five years old, or is it based on year of birth?

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, we are glad that a children's vaccine has arrived in Canada, and we encourage parents to immunize their children aged five and up against COVID-19 and, if they haven't already, to get vaccinated themselves. As we've noted before, we believe that vaccination is the best way out of this pandemic.

I also want to, in closing, thank all who have been involved in Yukon's immunization efforts for their ongoing work.

**Ms. Blake:** I'm sure that, for so many parents in the Yukon, it's a great relief to hear that their young children are finally able to be vaccinated. For the entirety of this pandemic, parents and children have had their lives flipped. The daily routine of school and work was completely different. The risks of going to school were at an all-time high.

Lately, school-age children are seeing the spread of COVID much more up close than the rest of us. Teachers, educational assistants, school administration, and staff have been working extra hard to protect their students. I am sure that, with the news of this vaccine, all are breathing a little easier, so I am celebrating, like so many parents of children five and up, the chance to get the vaccine. This will absolutely help to manage the current wave of COVID.

What is this government doing to sit down with and encourage parents who are vaccine hesitant for their young children to get the vaccine for their kids?

On another note, children who are under five and too young to go to school are not eligible for the vaccine yet. It is our job to protect our youngest Yukoners. Younger children who go to daycare programs and preschool are often too young to fully follow the "safe six". Without access to the vaccine, it is our responsibility to keep them safe.

On behalf of the Yukon NDP, I am once again urging that this government does the right thing for this vulnerable group. We encourage this government to extend the vaccine mandate to early learning professionals. If this government truly believes in protecting the vulnerable, including young children, they will do the right thing.

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** By working on the guidance of our chief medical officers of health and their teams, our efforts continue to focus on minimizing COVID-19 serious illness and overall deaths while preserving our health care system's capacity. To help us achieve this, we continue to rely on scientific evidence and expert advice on the use of safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines authorized for use in Canada.

The vaccine has been approved by Health Canada for kids, and it is also recommended by Canada's National Advisory Committee on Immunization, also known as NACI. This is an exciting development, and we are adding one more tool to our COVID-19 toolbox.

The benefits of vaccination are clear. Combined with other public health measures, high vaccine rates have allowed us to make significant headway in protecting our population from the severe outcomes of COVID-19. This vaccination will provide added protection for school-age children. We know that children can transmit COVID-19 to others if they are infected, even if they have no symptoms. Vaccination will help our children not spread COVID-19 and safely participate in the activities that matter most to their development.

Though children were under-represented in COVID-19 cases through the first three waves in Canada, this fourth wave and the Yukon's second wave is having a greater impact on those under 12 years of age. This is because this group has not yet been able to be vaccinated and community transmission has continued.

As of mid-November in Canada, children five to 11 years of age have had the highest rate of COVID-19 cases across all age groups, although hospitalization rates have remained low. As members of this House have likely heard, and heard from the member opposite today, the pediatric vaccine arrived in Canada yesterday. If the delivery to respective territories and provinces goes as planned, we will be scheduling vaccine clinics for Yukon children aged five to 11 in early December.

I would like to thank the NACI and Health Canada, Canada's chief medical officers of health, and especially our Yukon medical officers of health for providing recommendations based on the current evidence to inform provincial and territorial public health decisions on how COVID-19 pediatric vaccines are best used.

I would also like to take a moment to thank our front-line vaccine and testing teams here in the Yukon. They will again be responsible for rolling out this system of vaccines for our most vulnerable children and again dealing with families on the front lines and trying to make Yukoners safe.

I ask all Yukoners to continue to do their part in stopping the spread of COVID-19. This means following public health advice as well as seeking information from health authorities to inform their personal decisions.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak about this important initiative today.

**Speaker:** This then brings us to Question Period.

## QUESTION PERIOD

### Question re: Physician recruitment and retention

**Mr. Dixon:** Mr. Speaker, the Liberals, propped up by their NDP partners, have completely ignored the growing doctor shortage in the Yukon. We raised this issue with the Deputy Premier this summer and she wrote back in August to tell us that everything was under control and that the current wait-list for a family doctor was approximately 2,000 individuals. That in and of itself is a complete failure by the

government, but unfortunately for Yukoners, the Deputy Premier, instead of addressing this growing health care crisis, ignored the issue and it has gotten even worse. As of last week, the wait-list has grown by another 500 people.

So, with the Deputy Premier so badly managing this growing crisis, can she tell us why Yukoners should have confidence in her to address the doctor shortage?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** Mr. Speaker, I am again pleased to rise in the Legislative Assembly and speak to Yukoners about this important issue.

The Yukon Medical Association has been working with our government over the last number of years. This is a national shortage. Unfortunately, we are seeing the effects of COVID-19 and the concerns with respect to health care shortages across the country. I think it's important to focus on physicians and the shortage thereof, but I think it is also important to note the important role that physicians have played in the COVID-19 pandemic across the country and thank them for their front-line work and for the opportunities that they have presented to Yukoners, presenting them with acute health care, not only in their offices but through the Yukon Hospital Corporation and the emergency department there. It is also important to recognize the critical role played by nurses and nurse practitioners on the front lines during this COVID-19 pandemic.

Again, I don't think anyone needs reminding, but a world pandemic is certainly not anything that our health professions saw coming or our governments or our communities. As a result, we are all working hard to make sure that everyone is safe.

**Mr. Dixon:** Mr. Speaker, the unfortunate reality for the minister is that their inaction on this file started well before COVID-19. The facts do not paint a pretty picture for the Deputy Premier, the Liberals, and their NDP partners. In fact, instead of addressing this growing health care crisis and doctor shortage, their actions have directly contributed to making it worse. The Liberals got rid of the doctor recruitment program. The Liberals got rid of the doctor recruitment website, and the Liberals have made cuts to the bursary program for new physicians.

Now we have 2,500 people waiting for a family doctor. That's 500 more than three months ago. The Deputy Premier, the Liberals, and their NDP partners should all be deeply concerned about that.

Will the Deputy Premier admit that her inaction has directly contributed to this crisis and do the right thing, step aside, and let someone take over the file who will actually work toward addressing it?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** Unfortunately, if Yukoners continue to be informed by the opposition, it is with inaccurate information. The Yukon Department of Health and Social Services is working very closely with national partners, the Canadian Medical Association. I had a conversation recently with Dr. Katharine Smart, the president of the Canadian Medical Association and our very own northern pediatrician. I have spoken recently to the president of the Yukon Medical

Association, and this is a primary issue for both of those conversations.

I can also indicate that some of the inaccurate information involves facts brought forward by the opposition. We have doubled the bursary program since the last number of years to help with medical professionals and our recruitment and retention of those individuals who are being educated in medical professions. I can indicate that we have not cancelled the recruitment position. We are working with the Department of Health and Social Services and the Yukon Medical Association to determine if that is the right mechanism for us to address this very important issue on behalf of Yukoners.

**Mr. Dixon:** Mr. Speaker, we have heard about the minister's phone calls, but what we haven't heard are any actions that she has actually taken. According to the minister's own numbers, one-fifth of Yukoners are without a family doctor. More and more families are having to go to the emergency room for their basic health care needs. This is a recipe for disaster, as it could quickly overwhelm our hospital resources, yet the Deputy Premier is sitting idly by and not treating this issue with the urgency that it requires.

One NDP MLA even said this about the Deputy Premier — and I quote: "It is not safe for her to be in Cabinet." The Legislature has lost confidence in the Deputy Premier and Yukoners are losing confidence in this government's ability to manage important files.

Will the Liberals respect the expressed will of the Legislature, remove the Deputy Premier from Cabinet, and put in a Health minister who will actually address the growing doctor shortage?

**Hon. Mr. Silver:** In short, absolutely not. Mr. Speaker, with all due respect to the members opposite, I have seen this minister work extremely hard night and day, not only through the pandemic response but also making sure that we can move forward on *Putting People First*. A herculean effort has been put forth by the minister. I would add, as well, as far as other actions under her advice as well, bringing back into conversations at the Council of the Federation — conversations about uniting certification for doctors right across Canada — it was a conversation that we were starting before the pandemic.

**Some Hon. Member:** (Inaudible)

**Hon. Mr. Silver:** There was some work — as the members opposite try to talk off-mic and not listen to the answer, you wonder why they say that they don't hear any answers. We are getting that back on track — those conversations about certification. Nova Scotia and Newfoundland had some work to do to see what we could do based upon some of their initiatives about five years ago. But whether it is working internationally, nationally with our partners, or locally, this minister is doing the herculean effort. I don't know what I would do without this minister, to tell you the honest truth, Mr. Speaker —

**Some Hon. Member:** (Inaudible)

**Speaker:** Order, please. The member has the floor.

**Hon. Mr. Silver:** — because her integrity is impeccable and her work ethic is without question.

### Question re: Midwifery legislation

**Mr. Cathers:** Mr. Speaker, there is a growing list of how the Liberal government, propped up by their NDP partners, are failing Yukoners' health care needs. According to the government's own numbers, over one-fifth of Yukoners don't have a family doctor, which the Minister of Health and Social Services bizarrely told us equals two percent of Yukoners.

They are also failing women who want access to midwifery services. Women who wanted access to midwifery services this year were left without as, for the first time in decades, the Yukon doesn't have a single practising midwife.

Earlier this year, the Liberals banned unregulated midwifery and promised to hire two midwives this fall. Instead, the Minister of Health and Social Services failed again.

What is the government's excuse this time for failing to deliver on midwifery timelines that they set for themselves yet again?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** Mr. Speaker, again, just because the members opposite are spinning a particular set of facts doesn't mean that those facts are accurate for Yukoners. Our government remains committed to moving forward with the integration of funded and regulated midwifery services into Yukon's health care system, something that the former government never even considered, never mind took steps to do.

This work includes recruitment and is taking more time than we had anticipated to recruit the first two midwives, which we're looking forward to having employed by the Yukon government in early 2022 so that we can launch midwifery services.

While this has been longer than first anticipated, it is a system rollout that has been approved and worked with by the midwifery program that has been set up in Yukon Health and Social Services and additional advice from experts in the midwifery community to determine that this was the appropriate time for the rollout to happen. We had anticipated having midwives in place by the end of this month, and a couple more months will be required for the recruitment. I look forward to that opportunity for Yukoners.

**Mr. Cathers:** Well, Mr. Speaker, this minister has a pattern recently of trying to dismiss the facts as fake news, but the facts are the facts.

Early in the Liberal government's time in office, they made a promise in their throne speech to deliver publicly funded and regulated midwifery by 2018; 2018 was three years ago.

As the *Yukon News* noted a few days ago, the government ran on a commitment in 2016 and included it in their throne speech. In the recent election, midwifery regulations were listed as an accomplishment of the Liberal government. They have regulations but, for the first time in decades, the Yukon doesn't have a single practising midwife.

The Liberals, propped up by their NDP partners, have banned unregulated midwifery and failed to hire a single midwife.



We hear now that it might be months longer until they get that done. They chose to create a structure that doesn't allow midwives to operate in private practice anymore.

Will the minister agree to speed up the hiring of midwives and change the regulations to allow midwives to offer publicly funded service in private practice?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** I suppose that it is one way of putting it. The member opposite says that we have banned unregulated midwifery. The truth is that we have regulated midwifery. That is the requirement for midwives to practise here in the territory. It is what we have been asked to do. It is what we are doing. We are funding and regulating midwifery services here in the territory.

There is a great deal of work underway right now, not only by our internal implementation team, but also with the support of a number of physicians, nurses, midwives, First Nation representatives, and individuals with lived experience. We are working closely with the Yukon Hospital Corporation to ensure that, whether registered midwives are providing services in a home or in the hospital, they are able to work to their full scope of practice. We are looking forward to this option being available for Yukon families here in the territory, something that the opposition never even considered, never mind managed to get done.

**Mr. Cathers:** Well, the minister can congratulate herself on regulating midwifery out of existence.

In the spring, we told the Liberals that their government's approach to midwifery would leave a gap in service that was unnecessary and problematic. They refused to listen.

The Yukon's last formally practising midwife told the *Yukon News* that the government is — and I quote: "... not listening to them. They kept doing things differently." She added, "Midwifery is regulated and funded and integrated in every other province and territory except P.E.I. You don't have to reinvent the wheel."

The article also noted that the current approach will disincentivize midwives working in the territory, as conditions and pay are subpar. Yukon's midwives are on the move to other jurisdictions. Access to care and choices for maternal care for Yukon women have been reduced under the Liberals, and their decision to ban unregulated midwifery while failing to hire midwives is leaving expectant mothers at risk.

Will the minister agree to speed up the hiring of midwives and change the regulations to allow midwives to offer publicly funded service in private practice?

**Hon. Mr. Silver:** Mr. Speaker, some of the words that I heard from the member opposite I heard from the NDP and myself for five years as we tried our best to push the Yukon Party to regulate midwifery, and they did nothing. They did absolutely nothing in that capacity.

We also hear them this time in the Legislative Assembly talking about expanding some of our extended care facilities in rural Yukon where we knew that the 300-bed facility that they were going to build without operation and maintenance planning did not consider rural communities when they were the ministers and ministers of health. We also know that they built an emergency shelter without any plans as well.

Mr. Speaker, we have regulated midwifery. We have done the hard work through Community Services. We have done the hard work through Health and Social Services. The tender went out. We unfortunately didn't get anyone on that tender. The good news is that it's back out and there has been an increase in the category there as well, so we will hopefully see some folks applying for this.

But the main point here, Mr. Speaker, is that the work has been done. A lot of heavy lifting has been done, which we cannot say about the Yukon Party when it comes to midwifery.

#### **Question re: Opioid crisis**

**Ms. White:** Mr. Speaker, the opioid crisis is not just a Whitehorse problem. It is claiming lives in rural communities too. Many NGOs and First Nation governments have adopted harm reduction measures in their communities because they want to do everything they can to protect Yukoners. Last week in this House, the Yukon NDP tabled a petition on behalf of community members in Mayo, urging this government to declare a local state of emergency to combat substance use in their community.

What action is government taking to address the opioid crisis in rural Yukon communities?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be able to speak to this issue today. Again, I have spoken recently to the press to answer their questions with respect to the communities and the issues that are being brought forward by those communities here in the territory. Some of their questions were regarding the petition, and I look forward to being able to provide this Legislative Assembly with a response to that petition.

Prior to that petition being brought — it was actually brought to you, Mr. Speaker. I know that you and I spoke about it, and we presented it to the New Democratic Party and asked them to present it here in the Legislative Assembly because it is not something that could be done through the process with you, as Speaker. I know that one of your communities has sought your guidance and leadership with respect to this matter. I know that we have spoken to them. I have spoken to the mayor and reached out to the chief, and it became an issue recently at the Yukon Forum. It is critical that we address the opioid issue, but it is critical that we do so with community cooperation. I look forward to continuing my response.

**Ms. White:** Several ministers recently spoke at length during debate in this House about the importance of a safe supply of opioids for Yukoners who use drugs. We all agree that safe supply is an important life-saving measure.

Mr. Speaker, since we're all in agreement on the importance of safe supply, what is this government doing to make a safe supply of opioids available in communities outside of Whitehorse?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** It is —

**Some Hon. Member:** (Inaudible)

#### **Speaker's statement**

**Speaker:** Order, please.

Please don't bring the Speaker into the debate.

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** I think that it's incredibly important that Yukoners understand our work with respect to the ability to provide a safe supply of opioids or opioid-like drugs to Yukoners. Like the rest of Canada, the Yukon is currently experiencing an opioid epidemic, and we are expanding access to a medically prescribed safe supply of opioids to help address the opioid crisis in the Yukon Territory.

We have taken significant concrete steps to do that. I'm happy to advise Yukoners of some of the details. We are currently providing continued medical education for physician prescribers who work in the opioid treatment services program to expand their familiarization and comfort with prescribing a safe supply of opioids. This will have effect across the territory; it's not simply a Whitehorse situation. I think that it's important for Yukoners to know and for folks to understand that a medically prescribed safe supply of opioids is the method here in Canada at the moment to provide these kinds of drugs to individuals who are trying to deal with their opioid addiction.

**Ms. White:** The petition out of Mayo called the opioid epidemic a "crisis", and they asked the government to declare a state of emergency. This government has declared several emergencies recently for COVID-19 and for this summer's flooding in the Southern Lakes, so we know that they aren't shy about using these measures.

We are seeing more and more members of our community claimed by opioid overdoses, and the opioid crisis is claiming too many lives, people who are loved — our children, our parents, our friends, cousins, and neighbours — all lost too soon. This is an emergency that requires action.

Will the government declare a state of emergency and deploy all of the resources necessary to support rural communities battling the opioid crisis?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** I think, in fairness, that's the question — or one of the questions — that is asked about in the petition that is currently now before the Legislative Assembly. As a result, I think that it is important to properly consider that and to consider all of the questions brought forward by those petitioners and to respond in due time.

I must note that, to further expand the scope of safe supply, which is the core and the crux of the question being asked here today, we are also working with an addictions medical specialist in British Columbia on developing clinical training and prescribing guidelines for physicians in the Yukon. With the ongoing additional clinical training, support, and consultation, I am pleased to share that clients of the opioid treatment services may now access a safe supply through this program at the Referred Care Clinic on a case-by-case basis and that more medical practitioners across the territory are being encouraged to have this training and develop the skill set to help Yukoners.

#### **Question re: Health care services**

**Ms. Blake:** There are thousands of Yukoners who do not have a primary health care provider. With another wave of COVID, access to primary care is more important than ever. Weeks ago, the minister was asked directly if she would open

up a public walk-in clinic. She said no. Then last week, she said that a walk-in clinic is not off the table. The minister is going back and forth. She won't hire a recruitment officer. She won't let nurse practitioners work in the ER. She won't even make up her mind about funding a public walk-in clinic.

Can the minister tell us why she keeps refusing to do more so that Yukoners have access to primary care?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** I think, again, unfortunately, in an attempt to throw shadow or shade — I'm not sure of the concept or the purpose of these kinds of questions, but they don't serve Yukoners well.

The truth of the matter is that many professionals and individuals in this territory are working very hard to address a national — and perhaps an international — shortage of medical practitioners. At this time, we need to be showing great appreciation for those front-line workers, doctors, nurse practitioners, and nurses who have helped us through this pandemic, will be the ones responsible for continuing to help us through this pandemic, and will also be the guidance and the experts whom we look to in order to determine how to best deal with the shortage of medical professionals. That is a national and international problem. Here in the territory, our front-line workers are working extremely hard to provide Yukoners with the service that they need.

#### *Interruption*

#### **Speaker's statement**

**Speaker:** Order, please. We welcome the public to the gallery, but you are here to observe, not participate. Please do not clap or otherwise participate in the proceedings.

Thank you.

**Ms. Blake:** Everyone agrees that something needs to change. No one should have to wait for hours in an ER with other sick patients just for a prescription, but thousands of Yukoners are. The solution to this crisis has already been laid out for the minister. The *Putting People First* report is clear. Yukoners need a publicly funded community clinic right now. This government has the resources, the power, and an instruction manual in their hands. They even accepted the report in its entirety just last year. All that is missing is political will.

When will the minister listen to the experts and open a public walk-in clinic?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** I thank the member opposite for the reference to the *Putting People First* report. One of the members opposite continues to quote this report with respect to the fact that 21 percent of Yukoners do not have a primary care physician. Unfortunately, taken out of context, the first part of that sentence is: "Although there are more family doctors working in Yukon per person than in most jurisdictions..." — and it goes on to talk about the shortage, which we recognize to be an extremely important factor in the care that individuals here in the territory receive.

According to the Canadian Institute of Health Information National Physician Database, in Canada, there was an average

of 173 resident physicians per 100,000 people in fiscal year 2019-20. Comparatively, in the Yukon, there were 221 resident physicians per 100,000 people during that same fiscal year. Does that solve any issues? No, it doesn't, but it puts in context the situation that we are dealing with here and, almost more critically, the pressures that exist across Canada with respect to this.

Thank you — I appreciate the opportunity and I will continue with my answer.

**Ms. Blake:** Since it was released over a year ago, this government has hardly touched the *Putting People First* commitments. This report was groundbreaking, but we haven't seen a plan or even a timeline for full implementation. Getting a clear answer from this government is like pulling teeth.

Now we find out from the Yukon lobbyist registry that they met with an organization about privatizing health care. The topic of the meeting was — and I quote: “Health privatization and outsourcing”.

Mr. Speaker, Yukoners deserve to know what is going to happen to their health care system. Does the minister have any plans to privatize the Yukon's health care system?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** I am afraid that I am not aware of the agenda that the member opposite is speaking about, but what I can do is speak about *Putting People First* and the importance of that report to this territory and the comprehensive review that it did of Yukon's health and social services system. It was written following a significant engagement between the independent expert panel and Yukoners, Yukon First Nation governments, stakeholders, and health and social care providers. Our government has committed to the 76 recommendations in the report and has formed an implementation committee to oversee the report and report twice annually on the progress made to implement these recommendations.

We are already working on 30 of the recommendations in this report. I am not sure if there was an allegation from the other side that none of them have been worked on — completely untrue. We will continue to collaborate with our partners and stakeholders and report progress as we move forward.

A new director of transformation, innovation, and *Putting People First* was hired at the department, and their primary role is to continue the work on the implementation of *Putting People First* with our partners. To date, we have implemented 11 of the recommendations, and some of these include affordable child care, transferring the Child Care Services unit, and medical travel enhancements, et cetera.

### Question re: Teacher staffing

**Mr. Hassard:** Liberal mismanagement, propped up by their NDP partners, has worsened the doctor shortage. They have worsened the housing shortage, and it is so bad that they have even decimated the profession of midwives entirely, but I would like to talk about the teacher shortage.

Last week, the Minister of Education revealed that the government is scrambling to find 25 teachers to fill vacancies in our schools. We also took note of the disproportionate

number of vacancies in rural Yukon, which include three in Ross River, three in Old Crow, and one in Teslin.

So, can the minister describe one single action that the Liberals are taking to fill these vacancies and address the shortages of teachers in our schools?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** Thank you for the question. I will start out by talking about how having effective teachers is one of the most important factors, of course, in a student's success at school, and we work to attract and retain the best educators that we can.

I want to again thank all of our administrators, educators, and staff who are working hard for the benefit of our students and all Yukoners. This is the third year impacted by COVID-19. We know that there are a lot of stresses on our education system as a result of that. One of them is attracting educators to the Yukon.

Normally, we put out an ad for a teacher in the Yukon and we are flooded with applications. That is not the case this year. This is a national issue, Mr. Speaker. All jurisdictions are struggling with the same issues that we are in the Yukon. I want to say that our numbers are slowly improving. As of today, we have 10 teacher postings now. So, we've filled some of those postings. I talked about that in Committee of the Whole and I will continue to build on my answer as we go forward.

**Mr. Hassard:** I'm happy to hear that the minister realizes that it's an issue, but it's really unfortunate that she can't provide even one action that her Liberal government is taking to deal with it.

A recent article in *The Globe and Mail* about how the Yukon, under the Liberals and supported by their NDP partners, has become the worst jurisdiction in the country when it comes to COVID. It was pointed out that one of the biggest impacts has been on schools and in particular on rural schools. The Yukon Teachers' Association president was quoted as saying: “Schools are already understaffed. We have uncertified substitute teachers in rural schools. We can't afford to lose anyone.”

Last week, the Liberals surprised everyone, including teachers, when they revealed that teachers were eligible for rapid testing. But that's just for Whitehorse teachers, Mr. Speaker. What are the Liberals doing to ensure that teachers in rural Yukon have access to rapid testing?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** I want to correct the member opposite in terms of some of the information that he just provided to Yukoners. When we talk about rapid testing in schools, when there is an outbreak — and I was clear about this last week. When there is an outbreak, that is one of the methods that the chief medical officer of health deploys. This is not new, Mr. Speaker. We have been in COVID-19 for some 20 months now. When there is an outbreak in a community, rapid testing is one of the methods that is used by the chief medical officer of health and is supported by the Yukon Communicable Disease professionals. When there is an outbreak in a school, rapid testing is also used.

I want to be clear about that. I think that it is our responsibility, as MLAs and ministers in this House, to give

accurate information. That's kind. Clear is kind, Mr. Speaker, and I do not hear that from the members opposite.

I see members across the way shaking their heads. This is a primary focus of lateral violence. Clear is kind. Look it up.

**Mr. Hassard:** Today, we have learned that we have a Premier who doesn't know the definition of "integrity", a Minister of Justice who doesn't know the definition of "fact". Now we have a Minister of Education who clearly doesn't know the definition of "clear".

What is clear, Mr. Speaker, is that the Liberals, propped up by their partners, are scrambling, and unfortunately, whether it is about rapid testing, Hidden Valley, or the teacher shortage, the Minister of Education has been unable to answer direct questions this entire Sitting. When the shortage of teachers is this bad, it puts a burden on specialty teachers like EAs and language assistants as they are forced to fill in.

These vacancies, combined with the increased absenteeism due to COVID-19 isolation requirements, have meant that we are increasingly relying on teachers on call. Last week, we pointed out that Yukon teachers on call are among the lowest paid in the country.

Will the government review the rates they pay —

**Speaker:** Order.

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** I want to again be clear with Yukoners. What is happening in our Legislative Assembly — the fact is that the Yukon Party continues to spin a narrative here. I don't think that it's acceptable and I don't think that this is what Yukoners elected us to do. I think that Yukoners elected us to provide strong, compassionate leadership. That is what we are doing.

I find it very unacceptable for the members opposite to continue to spin a narrative and to cast this doubt and a shadow over the leadership of our territory.

Mr. Speaker, this has been one of the most challenging times in our lifetime, and it continues to be just that.

Do I value teachers on call and substitutes who step in to relieve teachers who are sick or have to care for children at home? Absolutely — absolutely. They are a critical part of our response to our ongoing issues around COVID-19. We are working with the teachers on call to address health and safety concerns and to identify options to ensure that they are supported. I will continue to do that as a minister.

**Speaker:** The time for Question Period has now elapsed. We will now proceed to Orders of the Day.

## ORDERS OF THE DAY

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** I move that the Speaker do now leave the Chair and that the House resolve into Committee of the Whole.

**Speaker:** It has been moved by the Government House Leader that the Speaker do now leave the Chair and that the House resolve into Committee of the Whole.

*Motion agreed to*

*Speaker leaves the Chair*

## COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

**Chair (Ms. Blake):** I will now call Committee of the Whole to order.

The matter before the Committee is continuing general debate on Vote 3, Department of Education, in Bill No. 202, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2021-22*. Do members wish to take a brief recess?

**All Hon. Members:** Agreed.

**Chair:** Committee of the Whole will recess for 15 minutes.

*Recess*

**Chair:** Order, please. Committee of the Whole will now come to order.

### Bill No. 202: *Second Appropriation Act 2021-22*

**Chair:** The matter now before the Committee is continuing general debate on Vote 3, Department of Education, in Bill No. 202, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2021-22*.

Is there any further general debate?

### Department of Education — *continued*

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I want to welcome back our officials who will be here to help us with the Committee of the Whole debate: Deputy Minister Nicole Morgan and Andrea McIntyre, director of finance for the Department of Education. Thank you very much for being here.

I would like to thank, of course, the members opposite for their questions last week. I am wanting to continue on with that discussion. I do have a few interim updates and information to share. If members wish to have me continue on with returning with a legislative return, I am happy to do that, but I will provide you with some information today on some of the questions.

One of the questions last week was the value of Amanda Rogers' contract and also some questions around why it is held with the Department of Justice. The value of Ms. Rogers' contract is not expected to exceed \$50,000; however, it is dependent on the time it will take to conduct a thorough investigation and write a comprehensive report.

I think, as members opposite are aware, I have been very clear that I have asked Ms. Rogers to go where the investigation takes her. So, in light of information that is now becoming available, including the interim findings that were presented at a family meeting by the RCMP, all those factors for sure factor into the review and investigation that Ms. Rogers is conducting.

The Department of Justice is often called upon to hire lawyers and consultants who have special expertise to assist in litigation and other matters. The hiring of these experts often remains confidential. Therefore, the procurement rules that govern Justice hiring of these experts do not require public tender and allow greater flexibility for sole sourcing. This allows Justice to engage specialized experts quickly when a matter is urgent.

The cost of all Justice contracts for outside expertise in relation to departmental matters are always ultimately charged back to the operating department. That is the information regarding the contract for the independent review that I asked to have happen in regard to the Hidden Valley Elementary School matters from 2019, again, asking the reviewer to go where the investigation needs to go.

Regarding the First Nation school board, to date I can confirm that, as of October 31, five school councils — six schools, because Johnson Elementary School and Watson Lake Secondary School are one school council — have passed resolutions to trigger a referendum of the electors within their attendance areas and parents and guardians of any current students in the school.

Further information — I know I did share that last week, as of November 19, the department is aware of four school communities — Robert Service, J.V. Clark, Hidden Valley elementary, and Takhini elementary — where petition packages have been requested.

I'll move into more information — part of the first questions that were asked last week were about the vaccine status before November 30. I have a few more details: As of November 18, 35 percent of Department of Education employees have completed their attestations. The department is closely monitoring whether there may be any potential impacts to operations due to unvaccinated employees. As I stated last week, we are working to look at all of the different scenarios. We are prepared to make operational adjustments as needed to ensure minimal impact to schools.

There was another question — I am just trying to divide it between the two — the opposition and the Third Party. There was a question that came up around children turning 12 and their access to services. I did take this back to my colleagues. We discussed it, and we are moving forward on the Transportation Canada guideline which is 12 years old plus four months to get their vaccination to ensure that they are able to participate and allow for enough time for them to become vaccinated. So, that is the information there.

One of the questions that was posed from the Third Party was around adult — a couple of questions around adult learners. I committed to a written response and more detail to provide amounts and eligibility, but for now, I can bring back this information. Again, we want to provide a more thorough answer back to members in the House regarding examples and just more in-depth information.

Under the Yukon grant, funding support includes \$145 per week to a maximum of 170 weeks, travel of \$1,500 for courses outside of the Yukon, and additional travel for students from communities.

Under student training allowance funding support — this includes \$113 to \$237 per week, depending on individual circumstances. Under the Working Up labour market program, funding is negotiated based on need. Generally, support is available for incremental costs, like course costs, including materials, travel, living supports, disability or accommodation needs.

Again, this is one of our more flexible programs that we have for labour market development. I encourage folks to seek out more information. As I talked about last week, we have redesigned these programs to be accessible to organizations, employers, and individuals seeking workforce development.

Since we didn't really get to any questions around the universal early learning childcare, I just wanted to bring forward some information in this regard. The new Yukon universal early learning childcare funding program reduces parent fees by up to \$700 per child per month for full-time participation in licensed childcare programs and provides a minimum wage of over \$30 an hour to fully qualified educators.

This is a vital program to Yukoners. The Yukon government has made a significant and ongoing financial investment in early learning and childcare and has reached an agreement to access an additional \$54.3 million in federal funding over the next five years to support this investment.

This funding will support start-up costs and help to create new spaces. Since April 1, 2021, three new childcare centres and one family day home have opened, creating more than 100 new spaces for Yukon children. The Early Learning and Child Care unit continues to work with individual communities to ensure current programs meet their unique needs and to support the opening of new centres. I think that this is really important information for Yukoners. The bulk of our supplementary budget is around early learning and early learning and childcare.

I wanted to just bring a bit more information around where we are at in terms of accessibility. While there are enough spaces to meet demand in Whitehorse, some rural communities, of course — particularly Dawson — do not currently have enough spaces to meet demand.

As of September 2021, there are 1,491 children registered in childcare programs among 71 licensed early learning and childcare programs across the Yukon. There are a total of 1,905 licensed childcare spaces. Between April and September 2021, three new childcare centres and one new family day home were licensed and opened in Whitehorse, creating 106 new spaces for Yukon children. Among these new centres are the expansion of a program creating 16 new spaces in early childcare learning and a new childcare centre that opened in September, creating 42 new spaces with eight infant spots. This is the Hummingbirds preschool.

As of August 23, 2021, the Watson Lake childcare centre is licensed for 45 children. It currently has 22 children enrolled and a wait-list of six due to a lack of staff. We are continuing to work with these centres to mitigate the issues that they have. Our units are working really hard with all of our communities.

As of August 23, 2021, in Dawson, the Little Blue Daycare has 20 enrolled children with 30 children on a wait-list. The First Nation childcare centre has 50 children enrolled with 30 on a wait-list. The First Nation is operating below capacity due to a lack of staff. Again, the work and effort that we are taking to ensure that we are supporting educational programs and working toward ensuring that we have many trained childcare workers in the Yukon is essential. We know that this strategy

that we're working toward will have benefits for all Yukon children.

The Little Blue Daycare is working toward the construction a new facility in Dawson that would offer more childcare spaces. The society is working with Education officials to ensure funding for a consultant who will be able to update the feasibility plan for a new centre, look into investment sourcing, make financial projections, and provide capacity assistance. A new private childcare centre is under development, as well, in Dawson.

This centre has recently received funding from the economic development fund for building improvements. The current information that I have now is that we are still without programs in Pelly Crossing, Ross River, and Beaver Creek. A private operator is working to develop and offer a new program in Ross River. The centre is scheduled to open potentially next month.

The Selkirk First Nation is currently constructing a new childcare centre in Pelly Crossing. This is really great news and work that we support. Just last week, on Friday, I was able to have a meeting with Minister Gould, who is now the minister responsible in this area; she takes over from Minister Hussen. We had a great conversation about where we are at with Yukon's early learning and childcare. She very much appreciated Yukon's leadership on this file and the steps and progress that we have made and that we stepped out ahead of even the national program being announced and implemented our program in April rather than waiting, because we know that this is one of the key areas for support to families, particularly during this time of COVID-19. This is essential for women to get back into the workforce and this is certainly one of the key areas around COVID-19 recovery and providing good options for families around affordability and the ever-increasing cost of living in our territory. I know that I have heard for certain that families are very grateful that this program exists and that we stepped out and did the work that was necessary to implement a program.

We are looking forward to sharing our experiences with my colleagues across the country. We anticipate a possible conversation with all ministers responsible for these areas within their jurisdictions throughout Canada and for Yukon to share, on a national stage, our initiatives and how we are moving forward with this childcare and how we will be implementing our program and using the federal funding to enhance opportunities for families in the Yukon.

I will just talk a bit more about the agreement that we signed in the summer. We are working with Canada to build a community-based system that provides Yukon families with access to high-quality, affordable, flexible, and inclusive early learning and childcare. The Government of Yukon has made significant ongoing financial investments in early learning and childcare. We have reached an agreement to access an additional \$54.3 million in federal funding over the next five years to support this investment.

The additional federal funding will help to enhance recruitment, retention, and development of early childcare educators, culturally appropriate learning, early learning and

childcare programs, and inclusive early learning and childcare and to support space creation, including start-up funding wages for early childcare educators. The funding also helps us to support the reduction of parent fees to remain, on average, less than \$10 a day for Yukon universal childcare programs. Yukon and Canada announced, as part of the Canada-wide early learning and childcare agreement, cultural enhancement funding for childcare providers that will enable, over the next two years, licensed programs and early learning educators in Yukon to have access to \$800,000 in funding to develop enhanced, culturally rich early learning programs and environments. I will stop there for now.

**Mr. Kent:** I too would like to welcome the officials back to the Chamber here today to provide support to the minister. I thank the minister for her responses to questions that we raised last week. The Member for Copperbelt North, the Leader of the Official Opposition, handles the critic duties for early learning and childcare, so I'm sure that he'll have some additional questions for the minister at some point during debate.

I have just a couple of topics from last week that I wanted to revisit, and the first one is the First Nation school board. I'm hoping that the minister can clarify for us the — now, I know the candidacy for the initial board of trustees — my understanding is that the eligible candidates have to be descendants of someone who spoke an indigenous Yukon First Nation language.

I think that can change, going forward, depending on what happens, but I know that there is the ability for that to be changed. I am hoping that the minister can give me clarification on one other point, and that's with respect to the ability to vote for the First Nation school board of trustees. So, we will just use Grey Mountain Primary School for the sake of argument because I know they are going through the referendum. If that gets approved and they decide to join the First Nation school board or have the First Nation school board govern them, will all members of that school community have the ability to vote for the board of trustees, whether they are First Nation or non-First Nation citizens?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** I really welcome the opportunity to speak about this particular initiative that is underway. I just want to say that it is very aligned with Yukon's future and that our future really is built through partnerships with First Nations. It is especially true when it comes to education.

Our government is very committed to supporting all Yukon learners. Education is a key area of our reconciliation efforts, and I want to take the opportunity to build on the importance of the First Nation school board. We are working with our partners to improve First Nation education and ensure that First Nation perspectives are reflected in Yukon schools.

I know that members opposite are aware that this is an area within my mandate letter and one that I fully welcome. I have been working, and our department has been working, with the Chiefs Committee on Education and also with the Chief Electoral Officer. This is a very complex matter that will, I think, be better served in a legislative return, and I will bring that back to the members opposite in terms of this specific information that they are looking for today.

**Mr. Kent:** I appreciate that from the minister. Perhaps I will also follow up with the Chief Electoral Officer to get a sense of what the voting eligibility is for the First Nation school board of trustees, but I will welcome a legislative return on the matter.

I had a couple more questions with respect to what is happening at Jack Hulland school. I know that we talked about it in Question Period earlier on in this Sitting. There was a commitment made by the Yukon Liberal Party during the last election to review it.

I will just read directly from the press release dated April 5, 2021, during the election campaign. It said — and I will read the entire paragraph for context here: “We know that current supports for students need to be improved, which is why we have commissioned an independent Review of Inclusive and Special Education. The information from this review will help determine how our education system can better support students with diverse learning needs. It will help determine how to use existing supports and what new programs or services are needed.” This is the part that I wanted to ask the minister about. It says: “In particular, we will look at behavioural support programs, such as the Grove Street program, to ensure it is meeting the intended purpose and consider how to offer students on the autism spectrum the best possible learning environments.”

The part that I would like to focus on is: “... we will look at behavioural support programs, such as the Grove Street program, to ensure it is meeting the intended purpose...” What review is planned for the Grove Street program and when can we expect that review to be completed?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** This is absolutely a very, very important topic that we certainly have been working on very intently with all of our partners. It really stems from the 2019 audit and final report — *Review of Inclusive and Special Education in Yukon — Final Report* — that tells us that we have to rethink how we are supporting students and delivering timely, effective supports for their learning needs.

I know that the member is asking specifically about one program — the Grove Street program. There are several other programs that fit in this category. There is one at Vanier, there are two at F.H. Collins, there are two at Porter Creek Secondary School, and then there are the two programs that are at Jack Hulland Elementary School.

I know that the member will recall that I talked last week about inclusive and special education overall and the fact that we did go ahead with our education summit, even despite the current state of emergency and the need then to go into a more virtual format. So, we went ahead with our education summit on November 12, which was very engaging. I know that I talked about this at length last week.

This was such a great conversation and so successful in terms of participation with our educators. We had up in the range of 600 folks participate from all of our schools and our partners. At the summit, we learned about the conditions for success needed in order for us to do this complex work together. We heard about the colonial practices, divisiveness, othering, and of the need to value our diversity and connections to each

other. That was one of the key messages that I know for sure that I went away from that session with — I was very inspired and I know that other folks were. The summit was a critical step in establishing the communities of inquiry or working groups that will be tasked to identify specific actions and our response to the review, which is guided by the First Nations Education Commission and the education partners through the Advisory Committee for Yukon Education, and I think that this is very key.

I want to talk about these communities of inquiry a little bit because this is where it gets to the answer that the member opposite is looking for. They will focus on the following areas: co-constructing definitions of “inclusive and special education”; updating inclusive and special education policies; exploring effective professional development structures; cultivating connections and establishing values and norms to transform the culture of the Department of Education; implementing consistent IEP templates, processes, and structures; creating coordinated and holistic support for students and families; and aligning budgets and funding models. Our intent is to review all of the programs — as I listed them out — from all of the schools. The working groups are getting themselves established. We went through the terms of reference at the education summit, and we have had a really great uptake in folks wanting to populate these working groups. The intent is that each working group will have at least two meetings before the break in December.

So, we want to move forward on all of this work. There is a lot of heavy lifting to be done. We are revising our education system; that is essentially what we’re doing. This work has to be in partnership with all who are involved with education for K to 12 in our territory. I’m very grateful for the partnerships that we have and for those partners — particularly the two that I mentioned with the First Nations Education Commission and the Advisory Committee for Yukon Education. I thank them for all of the work that they have done to work with us to get to this point — very committed to see this through. I believe that the answers really fall within the reviews that we have before us and the steps that we have charted out to take together as partners.

**Mr. Kent:** I guess, for those parents in that school community who were hoping for some more immediate action with respect to what’s happening at Grove Street, it sounds to me like the review that the minister spoke about may take a while. It could take some months or longer to complete. I’m curious what types of actions the minister is considering in the short term or the more immediate term to address the concerns that parents have with Grove Street school. It sounds like, from the minister’s response, Jack Hulland Elementary School is the only elementary school that hosts a program like this. The other ones that I think the minister mentioned were at the Whitehorse area high schools. Obviously, there are some concerns, and I know that the minister knows that from hearing from parents, teachers, and others in that school community.

Just to get back to my questions, what are the more immediate steps that the minister is considering with respect to the Grove Street program at Jack Hulland Elementary School?

Is moving the program out of Jack Hulland an option that she is considering?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** I want to start with some of the statements around what we want our schools to hold up as the primary objective and foundation of our school system. The Department of Education supports healthy, active, safe, and caring learning environments in Yukon schools. The commitment is outlined in our Safe and Caring Schools policy, which applies to students, parents, teachers, and other school staff. This is a sensitive matter and one that I have heard directly about at a number of different meetings. I have heard at the school council, which included not only some administrators, but also, of course, the school council, family members, and staff. Further, I have attended a staff meeting that included about 50 percent of the staff and heard directly the concerns that they have. We have been in receipt of more information from parents, and we talked last week about some of the concerns in the school. I will get to those broader concerns in a moment.

In terms of Grove Street, again, I will just be clear that senior officials of the Schools and Student Services branch are currently determining interim steps for the program while we work to examine all of the shared resource programs. This is underway, and I have already talked about that in terms of how it relates to the whole review of inclusive and special education.

At this moment, we have three children registered in the Grove Street program, all of whom are being supported for their individual program outside of the school. Intake is currently on hold, and there will be more information to come around this.

Again, keeping in mind that core value of what we strive for within all of our schools in the Yukon, we have been working with school administration, school council, staff, and families, and we have heard their concerns around student violence at Jack Hulland school for a number of months. These are serious situations. I have spoken about it in the House to date and with the media.

I want to talk about where we are at today. Information has recently come to light that the use of holds and physical intervention being used to manage student behaviour at Jack Hulland may be in breach of school policies and possibly the *Criminal Code of Canada*. This information has been reported now to the RCMP and Family and Children Services. We understand that an investigation is now underway. To ensure that we provide full and accurate information to support the investigation, the Department of Education is conducting a fact-finding review to look at workplace risk assessments at Jack Hulland, including the Grove Street program, as well as other relevant reports involving the use of holds and isolation rooms over the last five years.

We will continue to work with parents to address their concerns regarding the management of student behaviour, including the recommendations that they have provided for moving forward together.

We are working to confirm who will lead this fact-finding review, and we will share more details as they become available. I want to be clear that the Yukon Teachers' Association has been engaged and that the school council staff

and families are being notified. There is a school council meeting this Wednesday, which I will attend along with senior officials.

As we move forward, we need to support all those who have been willing to have courageous conversations and ask difficult questions around student and staff safety. These are not matters that I take lightly, and we continue to be dedicated to the well-being, safety, and protection of students when they are in our care. We will continue to make this our primary focus.

**Mr. Kent:** I appreciate that information from the minister, and I will look forward to receiving more information as that situation unfolds.

I wanted to jump over now to some questions regarding student transportation. It is always a difficult issue, particularly at the start of each school year as some parents don't have their children registered for the buses and additional routes are planned. I am sure there is some juggling that goes around.

As we are a number of months into the school year, I just wanted to get the minister's comments on a couple of specific issues that have been raised with me. The first one is about students out in Marsh Lake. I think that Judas Creek is the furthest away from Golden Horn school. These are students who attend Golden Horn school. Some of those students are on the bus for 90 minutes each way — so 90 minutes in the morning and 90 minutes after school before they get home. I know that one of the challenges is that the route that comes from Marsh Lake and the south Alaska Highway to go to Golden Horn also loops now into Pineridge and then comes back to the school in the morning. Then, after school, it goes to Pineridge first to drop off those students and then back out to Marsh Lake. I am just wondering if any consideration has been given to potentially adding another route to that so that those students who get on at Judas Creek in the morning aren't on the bus for that length of time in both directions.

Just one other issue that came to me last week from a constituent of mine in the Golden Horn area — their child who is in kindergarten attends Whitehorse Elementary School. By the time they do their bus transfers and the bus drops other students off who are on the route, including, I think, up to Émilie Tremblay and Elijah Smith schools, the student and her classmates are consistently arriving after the initial bell has gone. It is causing quite a bit of anxiety for this particular student and, I'm sure, for some of her classmates. I am curious if any thoughts have been given to adjusting some of these routes now that we're into the school year a little bit further.

Again, the first one was with respect to students coming in on the south Alaska Highway, particularly from Marsh Lake, and the amount of time that they are spending time on the bus both ways, and then the second one is about buses that, due to scheduling and transfers, are arriving at schools after the first bell has gone.

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** The Department of Education — I know that this is a very key part of a child's day in school and spending the least amount of time in a bus is, of course, preferable. We know that there are challenges for some of the outlying routes, and we have certainly heard some of them. The



transportation committee is looking at sort of the broader picture.

I wanted to just start by talking about where we are at in terms of busing and some of the challenges that we have had this year. Like many other jurisdictions, Yukon is facing a driver shortage, and we are working with our contractor, Standard Bus, to support them in their recruitment efforts. Again, this is an area where we are seeing shortages of bus drivers.

Combined with the pandemic, this is a challenging time. In some cases, it's unfortunate that the busing contractor has had to cancel some routes for the day. I know that this is not exactly what you are asking. You are asking about routes, but these are some of the challenges that have contributed to some of the frustrations and some of the issues that parents have had.

We certainly are encouraging, if there is disruption, making it to those that are not really rural areas — because it is more difficult. We know that, for parents who are traveling in to attend work or school or whatever it is that they're doing, it is much more difficult for them to make a quick pivot back out to — whether it would be Hidden Valley or Golden Horn or Marsh Lake — deal with a bus cancellation or route disruption, so we're really working hard around that. I wanted to start by talking about that.

Standard Bus certainly is dealing with the driver shortage as best they can. They are working with them to develop contingency plans to help ensure that cancellations and disruptions do not affect the same route for multiple days in a row. That is one of the mitigation practices. Folks know that Standard Bus is responsible for notifying schools and families when there are bus route cancellations or issues with those routes.

I know that some of the mitigations that they have — they actually brought in drivers from BC at some different points during the year. I know that this hasn't come up in Question Period. There are a lot of issues on the table, for sure, but this one was one that didn't come up. I wanted to just put that on record in terms of how Standard Bus is working to alleviate some of the pressures.

This is the bus route that the member opposite is asking about — bus route 39, with pickup at Judas Creek, and the first stop moved from 7:14 a.m. to 7:24 a.m. The arrival at Golden Horn is to be around 8:20 a.m. We have looked at this issue — the department has, along with the transportation committee and other folks. Making a change would reduce the overall time from 70 minutes to 56 minutes for the first-stop riders.

It would be a difference of 14 minutes, and the change would result in the route being route A and B — so the B run would go to Pineridge after 8:20 a.m., drop off Golden Horn, and arrive back at school at 8:40 a.m. When we looked at making this change, it would actually cause disruption to more students by making a change to this bus route. Of course, we are trying hard to make sure that children have the best experience they can and that we are providing the necessary tools and means to be at school. So, we did look at making that change, but it would cause a lot more disruption for more students so I think that we would be right back here talking

about more students. We estimate that probably 12 children and families will not be in favour of this split option.

We can return with a little bit more information about this route and put it in a legislative return that describes both scenarios. I know that it is hard to describe it. It would be good to get on the bus and see what it feels like for those students to get that experience, and then you have that first-hand knowledge. That's not something that we have the luxury of doing, so I depend on folks who are looking at these issues very closely. We know that there would be more disruption to more students if we make the change that is being discussed here.

**Mr. Kent:** I am just hoping that the minister can touch on that second issue that I raised with the young student at Golden Horn who goes to Whitehorse Elementary School on that bus arrives after the morning bell has already gone. I'm just wondering if there are any service standards with respect to that, if the minister could look into that for us.

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** I would very much like the member opposite to provide a little bit more detail to us outside of the Sitting so that we can get more specifics about this student. I would be happy. We want to look into it and give a more thorough answer and see if there is anything that we can do to ensure that this young child is not having the experience in a negative way that has been described here today. We will return with a legislative return, but we also would really welcome that information so that we can follow up directly with the family.

**Mr. Kent:** I will send the minister a letter. I was just curious if there were service standards around buses arriving after the morning bell had gone and if there could be schedule changes made to accommodate that. Again, I will follow up with the specific situation for the minister so that she and her officials can provide a response to it.

I did want to move on to some questions regarding individualized education plans. On May 31, I submitted Written Question No. 11 to the Minister of Education regarding individualized education plans, or IEPs. It has been on the Order Paper since then — the tail end. I think that might have been the last day of the Spring Sitting and throughout this Fall Sitting so far. It hasn't been responded to, but perhaps what I will do now is just ask these questions of the minister so that I can request that the written question be removed from the Order Paper.

These are questions regarding IEPs. The first one is: How many Yukon students were taken off IEPs as a result of the government's decision to phase them out in 2019 or to adjust the criteria for them? The second one is: When was the minister and Cabinet made aware that students had been taken off of IEPs? The final question was: How many Yukon students have been put back on IEPs since the 2021 confidence and supply agreement between the Yukon Liberal caucus and the Yukon NDP caucus was signed on April 28, 2021? Again, this is Written Question No. 11, which has been on the Order Paper since the end of May.

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** Thank you for the question on the individual learning plans. I would first like to go back and look at some of the background around this and what occurred in the

fall of 2019 while responding to information requests from the Auditor General of Canada during the most recent audit.

Central administration staff identified considerable variables in the use of IEPs, SLPs, and BSPs. These are the three types of plans that we have within Education. As a result, some presentations to school staff were given in the fall of 2019 to review the requirements of the *Education Act* and to clarify the criteria used for different learning plans to ensure consistency across Yukon schools. This included guidance for working with families to ensure that their child is on a plan that best outlines the supports they need to reach their maximum potential. In some cases, this meant that school staff worked with families to shift a student to an SLP or BSP instead of an IEP.

At the same time, the direction given was that students could not be switched from an IEP without agreement from their parent or guardian. This was not about reducing, I think, learning supports available to students. Rather, it was more about providing the students with the specific plans, tools, and services that they need to be successful in school. No changes were made to the supports that students can receive to ensure that they are successful in school.

Now, working with families more recently, the Schools and Student Services branch worked with each school to contact the parents of students who were transitioned to a student learning plan — that is the SLP — or a behaviour support plan — this is the BSP — in 2019 to give them the opportunity to have their child switched back to an individual learning plan if they wished to do so. What we identified the true number to be — 71 plans were identified at that time as moving from a student learning plan. Originally, there were 62 individual learning plans found to have changed in the student learning plans after the fall of 2019. Nine plans were also identified where the data was not clear about when the plan had changed, so those parents and guardians were contacted as well. Schools were provided with the information for their school, with instructions to contact each family by no later than the end of day, Friday, May 28 — again, this aligns with our agreement with the New Democratic Party under the CASA — to determine whether or not they wished to have their child's learning plan switched back.

So, where we are today is this: As a result of the work that we did in the spring, 39 student learning plans have been identified to be reinstated as individualized education plans for implementation at the start of the 2021-22 school year; 22 families affirmed the desire for their child to remain on a student learning plan; 10 plans were identified as students who have moved out of the territory or graduated.

In the work plan for the review of inclusive and special education, we will work with Yukon First Nations, parents, staff, and stakeholders to create greater clarity around the types of learning plans available to students. I talked about this a bit in terms of the work that we did on November 12 to form the working groups. This is one of the areas that was identified as one of the working groups for the communities of inquiry. Terms of reference have been set with those groups. We're populating them now with individuals who will work on this

particular area within inclusive and special education. We have committed to having at least two meetings in every working group before the December break. Moving forward on this has taken a little bit of time — a few months — to get the work plan settled and to get the education summit to happen and to then now work toward all of these areas within inclusive and special education that need more inquiry and more work with all of our partners.

That is where we are at today. I would be happy to answer any more questions if that wasn't clear.

I do want to note that I did hear a member opposite previously from the Official Opposition talk about a number that was much higher than the 71 — almost double. I want to be clear that, when we went back and looked at all of the plans, we identified 71. That's the number that we have and that we have been working with. I have already given the breakdown of those students.

**Mr. Kent:** Just for clarification, the number that we spoke of that was twice as high, I believe, as the 71 that the minister mentioned was actually from the Yukon Teachers' Association and First Nation Education Directorate, Learning Disabilities Association of Yukon, and Autism Yukon — the four organizations that got together and sent a joint letter to the Premier and then did some subsequent media afterward. That's where that number came from. It wasn't something that was from us. It was from those organizations that work directly with the schools.

I will get a chance, hopefully, to review the minister's remarks with respect to the IEPs, and then the five additional questions can come back prior to the end of this Sitting or through a letter or into the Spring Sitting.

One of the questions that I do have, though, is with respect to EA or paraprofessional support for students. I am curious if the department or if the minister keeps records of how many requests for EA support are received. Usually they come in the springtime for the following year. How many are approved? Does the minister have numbers from this past spring on how many applications were received and how many were approved for the fall?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** I want to start by just — how important again, educational — that we strive to ensure that children receive the educational supports that they need to be successful in their learning needs and where they can reach their maximum potential. I want to go back a little bit on this, because this is a key area around the inclusive and special education, and I know I keep coming back to it, because it is so relevant to all of the discussions that we're having. One of the key areas that we'll be exploring more in-depth is creating coordinated and holistic support for students and families. This is one of the working groups, and this fits within that community of inquiry.

But I want to go back in time a bit to the model that we currently work with, where it came from, and when it came into play. So, back in 2015-16, an educational assistant allocation advisory committee recommended the current needs-based allocation process. Each school assesses its needs and submits a request for educational assistants to the Schools and Student

Service branch. The school support services staff review all of the school's requests and use a needs-based formula to initially allocate educational assistants. Educational assistants are allocated to schools in the spring, and the principal assigns them within the school to best meet student needs.

So, at the beginning of the school year, adjustments are made to the allocations, based on the actual student enrolment and needs at each school. The allocation may be further adjusted during the school year, as needs change.

So, school-based allocations: In terms of that, the base allocation for each school is determined by student enrolment and an index of assessments from Yukon's student assessment matrix, which looks at this. So, initial allocation by enrolment — elementary index allocation — is based on kindergarten assessments, including a test on basic concepts, a test on early-year evaluations, as well as the grade 4 foundational skills assessment and the grade 7 foundational skills assessment. Then there's a secondary index, where allocation is based on an average of the elementary index of the feeder schools.

The next area is intensive-needs allocation to provide shared or intensive support for student needs. In addition to the school-based allocation, each school can request EA support to either be shared by groups of students to be assigned to a specific student base or on their intensive support needs, which may require one-to-one support. The Department of Education assesses each school's request in this category, with consideration of student data and criteria, in order to determine the need for student-specific supports.

Again, the educational assistants are one of several resources that a school has to support student learning. These resources include classroom practices implemented by classroom teachers to provide learning activities that accommodate students with diverse abilities and special education needs; school counsellors; educational assistants and learning assistant teachers; the central Student Support Services unit; the Curriculum and Assessment unit; and the First Nation Initiatives branch. First Nation education support workers and community education liaison consultants are also a part of the scenario, as well as community-based supports, such as those provided by Health and Social Services. EAs are one of these supports that are provided. A needs-based model is used to allocate these positions in as fair a way as we can, in an equitable way across Yukon schools. These allocations vary and are adjusted each year as school and student needs, and school enrolments, change.

This is where we move into the review of inclusive and special education. We will be examining how we allocate EAs and other resources to best support students. This was a very big part of our discussion at the education summit recently. I think that, again, this is an area that requires a lot more discussion, which is why we worked it into one of our communities of inquiry, basing — we know that there has been frustration on basing these types of support allocations as a primary foundational need around just the enrolment. We need to be looking at it differently, and so we are. That is what our commitment is going forward.

You wanted to know the actual requests for EAs, as opposed to the actual number that we have. I would have to come back to you with a legislative return on that to give you those accurate numbers. I have in front of me what the allocation is for 2021, based on today's date — 2021-22 — but I do not have in front of me the actual — I have the comparison from last year, but I don't have the request that has been made from each school. I would have to come back with more information around that.

**Mr. Kent:** I thank the minister for that. Yeah, I wasn't sure if she would have those numbers, but I appreciate her commitment to get them back to us.

The minister will probably recall from our PAC hearing this summer on the mental health hubs that I raised a question about the psychoeducational assessments and the wait times. A constituent reached out to me about wait times for their child. Later on, I believe it was sometime in September, on CBC's *Morning Show*, there was another parent who spoke about the wait times being perhaps as long as two to three years.

I am curious what type of action the minister has planned to address those wait times or the length of the wait-list. I understand that it's not a traditional "first come, first served" wait-list. It's prioritized based on needs, but if the minister has an idea that she can share with us on how long the wait-list is for these assessments, how long the time is, and what the plans are to reduce that wait time.

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** I thank you again for the question. This is definitely an area that was pointed out in our review of inclusive and special education. We agree that there is too much of a delay for assessments of children. This goes back to the individualized education plans. It is really hard to develop an individualized education plan for a student who doesn't have a full or complete assessment. We definitely heard loud and clear that these assessments need to be conducted in a more timely manner, which is why it is embedded in one of the working groups that I have talked about already, in terms of working with our partners, working through our next steps here, and taking recommendations and working through this area. It falls into the implementing consistent IEP templates processes and structure. This is a very big part of the work that we are doing around the implementation of the inclusive and special education review and report that we have in hand and that came out of the 2019 audit — that student assessments need to be conducted in a more timely manner.

We are advancing the recommendation in the final report of this review to develop localized criteria around prioritizing assessments and ensuring that student learning needs are being addressed. If a student needs a formal assessment, school staff may still implement many strategies, supports, and accommodations recommended through the school-based teams and informal assessments to address the learning needs of the students so that they can be successful at school now, and not wait, but the length of time to perform an assessment is dependent, of course, on the complexity of the student's needs, the nature of the assessment needed, and the schedule of the professional administering the assessment.

I want to really thank our partners at this point — in terms of how certain partners like the Yukon First Nation Education Directorate are working with us and have filled a few of the gaps in terms of some of the assessments that are needed immediately and in a more timely manner. Again, this is one of the areas that we are addressing together with our partners in the implementation of inclusive and special education.

When an educator and/or a parent has concerns about a student's learning, the first step is for the school-based team to discuss the student's needs and collaborate on what strategies or intervention should be implemented by the school staff to support the student.

If a referral is received from the school-based team, Student Support Services staff determine the type of assessments needed based on the nature of the need presented by the school-based team and a review of the student's file. So, the Department of Education educational psychologists completed 123 assessments last year. This includes academic assessments to determine student ability in relation to the curriculum in addition to complex, multi-faceted assessments. A school may request specific or further support from Student Support Services through a formal assessment of the student's learning needs.

Again, we know that this is a critical area for us to look at in terms of ensuring that we are getting these assessments done in a more timely manner that will then inform the type of learning plan, if a child needs an individual learning plan.

There are a lot of reasons. Of course, because these school-based teams sometimes determine some of the smallest barriers, you think: Oh, well, you know what? There's an actual issue with just getting the consent from the parent to do it. Sometimes it's as easy as just identifying this, getting the consent, and moving it forward in a more timely manner. I know that this is an area of critical concern for Yukoners, particularly those who are waiting for assessments to happen. Again, these need to be identified to the school-based teams so that we can ensure that they are on our radar.

**Mr. Kent:** I wanted to touch on some of the French immersion programming now with the minister, the demand for it, and some of the space concerns that we've heard from Selkirk Elementary School. This next series of questions will be with respect to the French immersion program.

I know that the demand is high for kindergarten registrations every year. So, the past number of years, there have been two French immersion kindergarten classes placed into Selkirk alongside the one English-stream class. It is a dual-track school — French immersion and English.

That is something that is extremely important to the school community and the school council that we've talked to. I know that, with the minister's predecessor, they have asked in the past to go back to just one French immersion kindergarten class. When it was started at Selkirk, it was incremental, so the kindergarten class was started and then moved to grades 1, 2, and 3. I think that some of those initial kindergarten kids are due to graduate from the school perhaps as early as this year, if they haven't already done so.

I am just curious what the minister would say to the Selkirk Elementary School Council and the school community about going back to perhaps one kindergarten class there and looking at potentially expanding the program or diluting the program to different spaces like the Whistle Bend elementary school that is under construction and due to be completed here in the next couple of years. Are there any plans so that Selkirk can remain dual-track and not get to the point where it is too overcrowded? Obviously, there are portables going in there now, but I know that this is something that the school community raised quite a bit with the minister's predecessor, and I'm sure they will raise it with her when she gets a chance to visit that school community and that school council meeting. Again, I'm curious what the plans are for French immersion going forward.

The other question that I have is with respect to high school capacity. F.H. Collins, of course, is the French immersion high school. As I said, we have additional kindergarten classes coming up through Selkirk. There are a number of kindergarten classes at Whitehorse Elementary, and then there are some other feeder schools to F.H. Collins, including Golden Horn, which has seen an uptick in enrolment over the past number of years as well. I am just trying to get a sense for high school capacity and what the plans are for when this rush of students hits high school. Do we have enough capacity at F.H. Collins right now?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** Again, it's a very important question. I've had a chance to meet with École Whitehorse Elementary. I haven't had that opportunity to meet with Selkirk Elementary as a school council, but I did meet with École Whitehorse Elementary.

This was specifically a question around — just commitment around having a broader discussion, in terms of longer term vision. Of course, recruitment and retention and high school capacity — and I know that the French — the advisory committee met on November 17, and they discussed the French immersion subcommittee, and they'll be meeting again in January with the school council chairs. I think that this is a great place for this discussion to happen. We know that this is a very — in terms of — I'll break it out into the two — you are talking first about kindergarten and enrolment. We certainly continue to monitor enrolment and work with our school communities and partners to plan for the long-term needs and delivering French second-language programs in Yukon schools.

This early French immersion is a very popular program in Whitehorse, offered at both École Whitehorse Elementary and Selkirk Elementary. We continue to monitor and plan for enrolment for this program and to recruit qualified French language teachers to support all French second-language programs. We know that these are hard-to-fill positions in our Yukon schools. We're really working to ensure that we do not have these vacancies. They are vitally important to the success of the programs.

Just in terms of some numbers for the 2021-22 school year, we have committed 101 spaces to French immersion kindergarten classes. Government of Yukon plans to continue Selkirk Elementary as a dual-track English-French immersion

school, continuing to have these discussions with the committees that are specifically looking at this, and our department officials are part of that discussion. That is a commitment that I made at the École Whitehorse Elementary School Council, and we'll continue to monitor that discussion as it goes forward.

In terms of high school, we know that it is important that we're able to accommodate the needs of our high school students as they move out of elementary into high school. At this point, the high school enrolment is lower, and we are projecting that we can accommodate the need within the current school. Does that mean we do not need to plan? No. We need to plan, and we need to continue to have that discussion with the committee that is looking at this.

Again, I note that they met on November 17. They discussed these areas around long-term vision, recruitment and retention, and F.H. Collins capacity. We anticipate the next meeting to happen in January, and I will be closely monitoring that discussion to ensure that we are effectively supporting this work to happen — which is a commitment I made — to ensure that we are working with all our partners around that longer term vision for this very important and highly popular program in Whitehorse right now.

**Deputy Chair (Ms. Tredger):** Do members wish to take a brief recess?

**All Hon. Members:** Agreed.

**Deputy Chair:** Committee of the Whole will recess for 15 minutes.

*Recess*

**Deputy Chair:** Committee of the Whole will now come to order. The matter now before the Committee is continuing general debate on Vote 3, Department of Education, in Bill No. 202, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2021-22*.

Is there any further general debate?

**Ms. White:** I thank my colleague again for the thorough questions that were asked.

I want to ask the minister a question about a response, or a letter, that the department sent out on November 4 to SOVA — so the School of Visual Arts, the governance chair, in Dawson City. It said that: “The Department of Education has supported SOVA since its inception in 2007 through the existing transfer payment agreement with Yukon University as a Strategic Initiative. I want to assure you that SOVA remains a priority and we will be supporting the one time \$36,794.25 bridge funding request.”

It goes on to say: “I have forwarded your submission, which requests additional core funding, to the Joint Agreement Management Committee (JAM). This committee meets monthly and includes officials from both Yukon University and the Department of Education. JAM handles all funding requests for the agreement, including requests for budget increases from any of the Strategic Initiatives.

“I understand the next meeting of the JAM is scheduled for November 18, 2021. The SOVA governance council should

expect a response to your submission and advice on next steps from JAM by Friday, November 26.”

So, my question is if the minister knows what the next steps will be toward SOVA.

They are looking for additional funding to continue to build their organization. My understanding is that they are looking for funding for an additional staff person — so, if the minister wants to talk a little bit about SOVA and SOVA funding.

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** Thank you very much for the question. I very much support the School of Visual Arts. I really believe in the work that they are doing at a community level. We are committed to, of course, supporting and fostering vibrant arts and culture in Yukon. I spent four years as the minister responsible for culture and heritage in the Yukon and had a lot of chances to interact with SOVA and actually have met with them personally about their needs and the need particularly around some of the bridge funding, but also some of the needs going forward.

The Government of Yukon continues to provide funding to Yukon University to deliver the School of Visual Arts program in Dawson City. The arts program provides formative artists with industry-transferrable skills and foundational art requirements for academic arts programs in partner universities. So, we provide right now \$504,000 annually to fund SOVA programming.

I certainly have heard from them about the pressure that they have and the popularity of the program. I am happy that we were able to provide that bridge funding of \$36,794 to cover the current year shortfalls. We are working with Yukon University and the SOVA governance council to determine how an indigenous arts component can be part of SOVA's programming. I am really excited about that possibility. It's one that is definitely near and dear to a lot of folks in the Yukon.

I want to just pivot a little bit to the Yukon University transition and the work around moving toward this transition that we are currently in. The act provides that the Minister of Education must establish accountability and performance measures for Yukon University in consultation with each Yukon First Nation and the university. This work is underway. The department is now planning an engagement process, which will take some months, but it will also include the work around strategic initiatives and how we fund strategic initiatives. This is certainly one of those areas. I am very committed to continuing to work with SOVA and with Yukon University around the needs for this important community-based program and the pressures that they currently have. I was able to go a few times, but in my capacity now as the Minister of Education — having that lens going through the facility and looking at what their current needs are and how they want to expand and meet the objectives of Yukon —

I am very excited about the discussions that are happening now around the indigenous arts component and other program areas. I certainly know lots of individuals who have gone through SOVA and have gone on to higher learning and have gone all the way to achieving a master's degree in arts and who are a very big part of our vibrant art community.

We just did the tribute today. We have, in our territory, the largest number of artists per capita in the country. We want to support them. I think that Yukon is certainly on the map for providing unique programming that helps to move into higher learning.

**Ms. White:** Just to confirm then, we will be hearing back on November 26 as was highlighted in the letter.

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** Thank you very much for the question and the clarifying question as well.

The committee has met and has issued the bridge funding. I will commit that SOVA will be contacted prior to November 26 to discuss the additional request that they have before us and for the university to work toward. I will definitely commit to having that response back to them before November 26.

**Ms. White:** I am going to veer quite a bit, actually, to a letter that was sent two years ago, just about, November 5, 2019. The reason why it's relevant is it's about the SOGI policy, the sexual orientation and gender identity policy that came into effect in 2012. If you were to go onto Google right now and you were to google "SOGI Yukon", it comes up on the yukon.ca website as a draft from 2012.

I know that, when students of Porter Creek Secondary School Gender and Sexuality Alliance, as we know, were working really hard to bring the perspectives of rainbow students forward, they sent a letter in 2019. It's relevant because there is a *Yukon News* article at the time that actually quotes both the minister opposite and myself talking about it. So, I can quote back myself. I said — and I quote: "What we're finding right now is that the SOGI policy isn't being enacted and that (the discrimination is) systemic ... It's across all Yukon schools."

And then it goes on to say that the Acting Minister of Education — so, that's the current Minister of Education — said that some of these concerns have been captured in a survey intended to better include LGBTQ2S+ people in legislation, policies, and services, among other things. And now I'm going to quote her from the news article; she said — and I quote: "We have taken it as a high, high priority," she told reporters. "Young people in our schools are facing discrimination and LGBTQ2S+ people are facing that across this territory and, really, Canada-wide, so we know this is an area we need to focus on, which is what we've been doing."

The article goes on to say that, when asked by reporters whether the Liberal government would commit to updating the SOGI policy in order to protect queer students, the minister said — and again, I quote: "We will work closely with them. I believe there will be changes. It's a very high priority for our government."

So, the reason why I am bringing forward this news article from November 8, 2019, is that, when I looked for the SOGI policy on the Yukon government's website, it comes up from 2012, and then I'm just going to reference a letter from students.

I am just going to quote from this, and I am happy to send it across to whomever. I am quoting from the middle of it: "Having read through the SOGI Policy, our group has serious

concerns about its implementation in Yukon schools and the degree to which it is being adhered. They are as follows:

"The department maintains that it will not permit or tolerate (zero tolerance) any homophobic behavior or bullying, yet these discriminatory and hateful acts take place every day in our schools. We feel staff and administrators in Yukon schools do not know how to appropriately respond to these incidents nor do they sufficiently know how to provide the necessary support for those who are intended or unintended targets of such behaviors."

So, they asked the question: "How are school administrators ensuring that students and staff practice appropriate behaviour and actions to prevent homophobic discrimination and harassment?"

So, that is my first question: How is the Department of Education supporting school administrators to ensure that students and staff practise appropriate behaviour and actions to prevent homophobic discrimination and harassment?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** As the member pointed out, I was acting at the time of those quotes being taken. I stand by them. We have made huge strides, but we still have a long way to go, not only in our territory, but in our country.

I was just looking to the reference within the LGBTQ2S+ action plan that we launched this past summer. The Government of Yukon's *LGBTQ2S+ Inclusion Action Plan* represents a commitment across government to make programs and services more inclusive to LGBTQ2S+ Yukoners. The action plan is divided into nine sections with more than 100 actions: health care; education and youth; community and culture; inclusive governance; public facilities; Yukon government as a workplace; gender data; and tourism and culture. Many of the actions are definitely underway — this being one of them.

Of course, we are continuing always to work closely with LGBTQ2S+ organizations as this plan is implemented to ensure that we're on the right track. We have committed to releasing progress reports as we go forward and to keep an evergreen type of action plan that is able to adapt when needed.

Specifically under education, there are a few. In the way that the action plan is designed — "What will we do..." is the caption on the top, but it goes into some description around Government of Yukon acknowledging that LGBTQ2S+ students and staff face difficulties in the education system that can be a barrier to accessing and providing education.

All youth and staff deserve a safe and supportive school environment. The Department of Education will not permit or tolerate any homophobic or transphobic behaviour or bullying in the schools. That is easier said than done. In terms of where we're at around inclusive education, we know for sure that this is an area within special education — inclusive and special education — that we must address, and it's definitely included in our work in the implementation of inclusive and special education.

When we talk about inclusivity, we talk about it in a number of different ways. What our system has done to date is to put all those who are different somewhere else. They don't

fit. If they don't fit the norm that our society has constructed, then they go somewhere else.

I think that, right now, our move is to move away from that. Again, going back to our action plan that we launched this summer, what will we do? We will implement the sexual orientation and gender identity policies and encourage schools to support gender and sexuality alliances — GSAs — or similar clubs and, in the next year, update the SOGI policy to address such issues as: use of student correct gender pronouns; updating terminology to be trans-inclusive; addressing gender-identity inclusion in sports; clarifying points of contact and responsibility at the department and school levels; and work with the student's family, central administration, school staff, Yukon First Nation partners, and school communities to develop and implement a plan to improve and modernize the department's inclusive education programs. That is the work that is underway under inclusive and special education.

I am really excited about that. I am excited to be the Minister of Education because I know that this is an area that I have wanted to focus on directly. Again, another area — what will we do? We will provide education and training for teachers and school administrators in LGBTQ2S+ cultural competency. That is so key. There are a number of steps that we will do this year that we are in. These are things that we are moving toward.

Again, what will we do? We will improve anti-bullying initiatives in Yukon schools, especially for LGBTQ2S+ youth. Again, how will we do it? There are a number of actions that identify what we will do.

What will we do? We will encourage extracurricular programming that is more inclusive of queer relationships and diverse gender identities — so very concrete actions. We did not construct these in any other way than in an inclusive way — “nothing about us without us” as the foundation and principle behind how we worked to develop this plan. I embrace these areas of action. That is why we developed an action plan like this, so that people can see that these are the things — and keeping it evergreen — what's next?

This is a tremendous amount of work. It's a culture shift — so very committed. Thank you very much for the question. I appreciate that. I am always super excited when portfolios touch, and this is where it touches for me — from Education to Women and Gender Equity.

**Ms. White:** I thank the minister for that. I guess that one of my concerns is that this policy was drafted in 2012. It has been highlighted by a group of children that it is inadequate. That was highlighted in 2019, keeping in mind, of course, that it was the same group of rad humans who brought forward the need to ban conversion therapy. These young people were activated.

I can say right now, with a fair amount of confidence, that the people who wrote this letter in 2019 — some of them have graduated from high school and moved on. It is still relevant, because I search on the Yukon government website and it comes out from 2012.

Other issues highlighted by students were things like: school-based policies should be posted in a physical location in every school and not just posted on school websites. They have

a long list of things that they believe will make it easier for them, and it's important to recognize that rainbow students exist from early learning straight through. So, making sure that folks have support is critical. One of the things that was also highlighted is that sex education for rainbow students is non-existent. That was in 2019, so I am hopeful that maybe things have changed.

Is there a sex education curriculum now that reflects rainbow students?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** I thank the member for the question — a very good question. Again, I refer to our action plan around the work that is underway there, but I think that some definite steps have been made. Yukon's curriculum resources and professional learning for teachers follow the department's sexual orientation and gender identity policy, which promotes appropriate, respectful behaviour and prevents discrimination against LGBTQ2S+ students. A review of the SHARE resources — it is an acronym for the resources that are used — has now been completed and was done by certified sexual health educators — trained through Options for Sexual Health, OPT, in BC — in order to provide feedback to ensure that language used around gender inclusivity is reflective of current best practices and aligned with BC learning standards. The revised SHARE resources are currently in a design stage — more to come on this.

I'm happy to bring back more information as it becomes available. I thank the member very much for the question. Again, there is a huge commitment here in terms of ensuring that we meet the expectations that are outlined in our action plan.

**Ms. White:** I do thank the minister for that.

Last week, in a conversation with my colleague, the minister made a commitment to actually come back to the House with some information. The question was: Does the minister have the value of the contract with Ms. Rogers at this point? The minister committed to returning with the information. I was wondering if the minister has that information about the cost of the independent investigation being led by Ms. Rogers.

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** I did, at the top of our discussion today, talk about the value of Amanda Rogers' contract. Right at this point, it is not expected to exceed \$50,000. It is dependent, of course, on the time that it will take to conduct a thorough investigation and write a comprehensive report. So, that is where it stands now.

I did also just talk about the role of the Department of Justice and their role in terms of managing this contract and that the Department of Justice is often called upon to hire lawyers and consultants who have special expertise to assist in litigation and other legal matters, and the hiring of these experts often remains confidential. Therefore, the procurement rules that govern Justice hiring these experts do not require public tender, which allows greater flexibility for sole-sourcing and allows Justice to engage specialized experts quickly when a matter is urgent.

Again, it is very standard that the costs of all Justice contracts for outside expertise in relation to departmental

matters are always ultimately charged back to the operating department.

That's the information that I reported on earlier today and I can provide more information if the member requires it.

**Ms. White:** I thank the minister for going back so generously to something that was already said today. I do thank the minister for that.

The opposition was able to have a briefing with the acting — I don't know if it is the acting chief medical officer of health, but Dr. Corriveau — last week. We were seeking clarification on vulnerable populations. Recently, the Department of Education sent a letter to early childhood education centres informing them that, although they receive government funding, they do not work with vulnerable populations and thus do not fall under the Government of Yukon's vaccine mandate. So, what I'm seeking right now is clarification if children under six are viewed as "vulnerable" by the government.

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** I am happy to speak about our childcare centres in relation to COVID-19. The health and safety of our children and families is always our first priority. Licensed childcare centres continue to provide valued, high-quality service to our community, especially to essential workers, during this challenging time.

At the onset of my comments today, I spoke about the universal childcare and the work toward ensuring we have even more quality childcare spaces available and where our funding is going. I am really encouraging that to happen throughout the territory. We are working with our most rural communities now to establish centres. The chief medical officer of health has provided clear guidance for Yukon-licensed childcare centres, school-aged programs, and family day homes for COVID-19. This has been in place for some time. The director of the Early Learning and Child Care unit made the guidance compulsory for all of our licensed facilities. This was communicated to licensed operators at the end of August.

COVID-19 — well, maybe I won't even go into that, in terms of the steps that are taken, because I think they are definitely aligned with the Department of Education. Early learning and childcare programs, and family day homes, were notified that the vaccine mandate does not apply to staff of early learning and childcare programs or family day homes, unless they are operating in a Yukon government workplace, such as a school.

While there is no legal requirement, one of the things I want to emphasize is that daycares and family day home staff — we're really encouraging them, as businesses, to choose to develop and implement their own vaccine-related policies. We continue to encourage that.

I will go back to my colleagues who are directly responsible for working in a direct relationship with the chief medical officer of health to bring back that specific information about the vulnerability of those under five.

**Ms. White:** I do thank the minister for that. I guess it is fortuitous that the acting chief medical officer of health will be appearing as a witness next Monday — that is my impression. But based on that briefing that we had on Friday, there was the assertion that children under five were vulnerable. There was a

bit of confusion even in that briefing as to why childcare centres and others that took care of children were not included in the vaccine mandate.

Again on Thursday of last week, my colleague asked the question: Will the minister include all early-years professionals in the vaccine mandate? The response was — I am quoting from Hansard on Thursday of last week, November 18 — and I quote the minister: "... again, we will continue working to clarify how the mandatory vaccination policy may apply to licensed daycares and other settings, and we will share more information as it's available with operators."

I guess the reason why I am asking that question is because we know that the mandate, as it's set out right now, references November 30. There is all sorts of information that says that if it is an entity — an NGO — that gets money from the government as a transfer, they are included in the mandate. It's important to say right now that I absolutely support universal childcare. I do. I would like to see it extended, broadened, and supported across the board. This isn't about challenging the cost of it. This isn't challenging those things.

I am just looking for clarification from what the minister said last Thursday and what the acting chief medical officer told us on Friday. How was that decision reached? Why is a child who is under five not vulnerable, but a child in kindergarten is vulnerable once they reach kindergarten? I am just trying to get an understanding and clarification.

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** I thank the member for the comments. Right now, we have clear guidance from the chief medical officer of health, as it applies to Yukon licensed childcare centres. That is what we are following. That is what we have communicated. I stand by the comments that I made last week in the Legislative Assembly — that if further guidance is provided to us from the chief medical officer of health regarding childcare centres, as we have throughout this pandemic, we will take that recommendation and we will make a decision within our government. We have followed the direction for the past 20 months and made those decisions based on the advice given.

As I have stated, this has been clearly communicated — what we have in front of us currently in terms of the guidance. All of the early learning and childcare programs and family day homes were notified on November 10 that the vaccine mandate, at this point, does not apply to staff in early learning and childcare programs. We will continue to follow the guidance given, as we have in this latest version of the recommendations as it applies to schools.

We have adjusted our guidelines for operational plans, including masking for those schools. That was guidance given by the chief medical officer of health. We have also cancelled all activities between schools, and we continue to work on a day-to-day basis with the chief medical officer of health around keeping schools open if they are safe to do so. This is similar to that. If further guidance is given around these centres, we will take that advice and move forward on it.

I am also happy that we have the witnesses coming into the Legislative Assembly next week to discuss and take direct questions from all Members of the Legislative Assembly.



**Ms. White:** I thank the minister for that and I do look forward to that opportunity next week in a more public fashion.

So, there are many different reasons why parents decide to send their children to childcare or keep them home or send them to part-time programs such as, in the City of Whitehorse, I would say Chickadees or Purple Stew. Purple Stew has been running — I would actually hazard a guess that there may be some members in this Assembly now who attended Purple Stew back when they were of that age. But there are some part-time programs that are really valuable. They have been around in the community, not just in Whitehorse, but in communities for, in some cases, decades.

So, while it's great that the government has implemented universal childcare, why are our part-time childcare programs not included in the childcare subsidy? By not being included, parents enrolling their children in these part-time programs end up paying more than parents with children in full-time care. In some cases, it would be more beneficial to register your child for full-time even though they weren't attending full-time childcare.

Can the minister walk us through why part-time childcare programs are not included in the childcare subsidy?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** The government provides licensed operators who have opted into the new program with \$700 per month for each child in full-time childcare, which must be fully and immediately applied to reduce the monthly payments made by parents. This is pro-rated for children in part-time childcare, so it does apply to part-time for licensed programs. The new program also includes fee increase limits to ensure that fees charged to parents remain both sustainable and affordable and in line with rates charged by other local providers delivering the same type of childcare.

In terms of the reference that you made, for non-licensed programs, like Chickadees Playschool — it is a non-licensed parent-participation early learning program which has requested funding for operational expenses. Non-licensed programs are not eligible for funding currently under the ELCC funding model.

The unit has engaged with Chickadees Playschool in discussion to determine whether licensing their program is an appropriate approach in order to access funding under this funding model. At this time, the program has determined that they prefer not to pursue the licensing option, so that is their choice. But, as a registered non-profit, there are a variety of other funding streams that Chickadees Playschool may be able to access. Officials have informed the organization about what other funding options may be available to them. Again, this is definitely a requirement in order to maintain the oversight of the programs — and we have an incredible team at the department that is working to ensure that we are aware of all of these issues, for one, and that we are working with them.

So, this is a decision that they have made, but other part-time licensed daycares or afterschool programs — if they are licensed, parents are eligible for pro-rated rates. I would be happy to talk to any parent. Again, within the department, we have a branch ready and willing to have those discussions, led by Betty Burns, director of Early Learning and Child Care. She

has been doing a fantastic job, and I am really happy that she is leading the branch in the way that she is.

**Ms. White:** I thank the minister for that.

Now that early learning has moved from Health and Social Services to the Department of Education, will the department be making sure — or ensuring or allowing — that there is mandatory professional development for early childhood educators as there is for teachers? Professional development is a real asset. It allows school communities to choose what they want to learn and what they want to work on. I know that earlier this year, this was definitely discussed with early childhood educators — that they would like to be able to direct their own professional development. Is that going to be a thing now that early childhood education has gone from Health and Social Services to Education?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** It is fantastic that we're talking about early learning and childcare today. We invest in high-quality early learning and childcare in order to provide rich early learning experiences and environments for children. We recognize the importance of qualification and training for the early childhood workforce. This is an area that we are very committed to. We have committed to demonstrate meaningful progress on improving quality by increasing the percentage of early childhood educators providing regulated childcare in the territory who fully meet the Yukon certification requirements.

We are certainly working with post-secondary partners and First Nations to ensure that all educators have access to training programs in order to become fully qualified. Under new agreements signed with Canada, substantial new investments will be directed toward post-secondary institutions to recruit, retain, and train early childhood educators for Yukon's universal childcare system.

Directly to the question, for those who are already working within our childcare centres, we have built into their transfer payment agreements — understanding to work with them and provide opportunity.

I think the big opportunity here is that, under the new agreement signed with Canada, federal funding will be directed toward post-secondary institutions to offer additional courses in order to train more early childcare educators, with the goal of at least 40 additional students enrolled in early childcare education courses by the end of 2022-23.

Discussions with the university are certainly underway around proposed actions. These actions will address the training needs of level 3 in order to bring them toward full qualification. Among the proposed actions are: rural course offerings tailored to individual community needs; flexible practicum offerings to support educators working in the field; a new flexible cohort designed to train level 3 with exemption educators; the Yukon University ELCC learning lab continued funding for the student financial assistance program; and offering First Nation-developed ELCC courses in partnership with the First Nation Education Directorate. A lot of work is underway, and I think that there are a lot of entry points for those who are wanting to seek further certification and to better their education.

We are supporting this. We want to see this happen, and we want to be able to ensure that folks who are working in our early learning and childcare are paid what they deserve. That is a really big part of our commitment to not only providing that financial assistance through universal childcare, but also really shoring up this side of things and ensuring that we have support for those who are entering into this field of work and encouraging them to do so and then also, on that other side, building more spaces for our children — childcare spaces throughout our entire territory.

So, there is really great work on the part of the branch led by a really great experienced director who has a fantastic team around her. Again, I'm excited to see how this evolves. Last week, I had the opportunity to meet with the new minister, Minister Gould, who is responsible for this entire program in Canada. She really was grateful for the leadership that Yukon has had and is practically leading the country in this particular area of early learning and childcare and access to universal childcare.

So, I'm very excited about the work that we're going to do with our federal partners, and I am looking forward to sharing best practices that we are developing in the Yukon.

**Ms. White:** I do appreciate the minister for that answer, but what I was looking for was the assurance that — again, different programs and different collections of teachers teach different things, and they are looking more for self-directed professional development, not an overarching, community-based — or being directed as it is right now.

I know that, for example, folks said that they were interested in trauma-informed practices and being able to access that, for example, from the University of British Columbia. This isn't about it being directed by government but about self-direction. Again, schools for professional development are able to make decisions about what they want to learn and how they want to learn it. I was hoping that it would be similar for early childhood education.

I'll leave that for now and move on.

One of the things that I think has been highlighted around the Hidden Valley issues — well, there are a lot. To be fair, there are a lot.

There was the online meeting with parents of students from Hidden Valley Elementary School, and the RCMP released a timeline of known abuses of students. The timeline refers to an abuse that occurred in the 2015-16 school year — and I'm quoting — that it was “handled internally” and never referred to the RCMP.

The reason why I bring that forward is that it highlights a systemic issue within the Department of Education, and that's a concern, which the Yukon NDP have highlighted in different ways.

What steps are being taken to make sure that systemic changes are made within the Department of Education to ensure that future abuses are prevented? What internal workings — how will each administrator know what steps have to be taken so that no issues are ever handled internally again?

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** This is important. All of the questions today have been important. This is a highly sensitive

topic that we've been talking about since the beginning of the Sitting and will be talking about for some time to come, I think — rightfully so.

Yes, we did have a virtual meeting, which occurred about a week or so ago, I think. Days are just rolling into each other. The RCMP did release a preliminary finding. It was distributed to all Hidden Valley parents and guardians, current and former, following that meeting. That happened on November 13.

We are currently still reviewing that information and timeline provided, and the department will be responding in more detail soon. That being said, I have been clear since day one that we feel that there are a lot of questions that need answering. I launched an independent review by Amanda Rogers, and I have been clear since day one and have said it many times in response to questions — I have asked Ms. Rogers to go where she needs to go. This timeline has been released that refers to an incident that was dealt with internally and was never reported to the RCMP in 2015-16. Well, that is where the investigation will go.

I have been clear around that since day one. We are really looking to that broad review to provide us with very clear fact-finding and clear recommendations of where we will go next.

I know that we don't have a lot of time, and I did talk a little bit earlier — and I am not sure if the member opposite was able to hear where things are at with one of our other schools. I talked about the issues that are unfolding, as we speak, at Jack Hulland and that, very recently, issues have come to light of the use of holds and physical interventions to manage student behaviour at Jack Hulland and that this may be a breach of school policy and the *Criminal Code of Canada*. This information has now been reported to the RCMP and Family and Children's Services. We understand that an investigation is now underway to ensure that we provide full and accurate information to support the investigation.

The department is conducting a fact-finding review to look at workplace risk assessments at Jack Hulland, including the Grove Street program, as well as other relevant reports involving the use of holds and isolation rooms over the past five years.

So, we have been working with the school administration, school council, staff, and families and have heard their concerns around student violence over the last couple of months, so all of this is unfolding as we speak.

I think that this is directly related in terms of the way in which we are responding. There is a lot more to come on this. The Yukon Teachers' Association has been engaged, as has the school council. Staff and families have been notified. There is a school council meeting on Wednesday that I will attend with senior officials. As we move forward, we need to support all of those who have been willing to have courageous conversations and ask these difficult questions around student and staff safety. I am committed to ensuring that this is how we move forward in dealing with very difficult situations in our schools.

Deputy Chair, seeing the time, I move that you report progress.

**Deputy Chair:** It has been moved by the Member for Mountainview that the Chair report progress.

*Motion agreed to*

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** I move that the Speaker do now resume the Chair.

**Deputy Chair:** It has been moved by the Government House Leader that the Speaker do now resume the Chair.

*Motion agreed to*

*Speaker resumes the Chair*

**Speaker:** I will now call the House to order.

May the House have a report from the Deputy Chair of Committee of the Whole?

### **Chair's report**

**Ms. Tredger:** Mr. Speaker, Committee of the Whole has considered Bill No. 202, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2021-22*, and directed me to report progress.

**Speaker:** You have heard the report from the Deputy Chair of Committee of the Whole.

Are you agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** Agreed.

**Speaker:** I declare the report carried.

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** I move that the House do now adjourn.

**Speaker:** It has been moved by the Government House Leader that the House do now adjourn.

*Motion agreed to*

**Speaker:** This House now stands adjourned until 1:00 p.m. tomorrow.

*The House adjourned at 5:28 p.m.*

### **The following legislative return was tabled November 22, 2021:**

35-1-14

Response to matter outstanding from discussion with Ms. Tredger related to general debate on Vote 18, Yukon Housing Corporation, in Bill No. 202, *Second Appropriation Act 2021-22* — carbon tax tracking (Pillai)

### **The following document was filed November 22, 2021:**

35-1-28

Formation of Working Group on the Better Building Program, letter re (dated November 21, 2021) from Hon. Richard Mostyn, Minister of Community Services, to Gord Curran, President, Association of Yukon Communities (Mostyn)

### **Written notice was given of the following motions November 22, 2021:**

Motion No. 238

Re: improving midwifery in Yukon (White)

Motion No. 239

Re: establishing a publicly funded community walk-in clinic (White)