

ABORIGINAL STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Mr. Speaker, the Department of Education, Culture and Employment is pleased to share news about its Aboriginal Student Achievement initiative that focuses on increasing the accomplishments of Aboriginal students across the Northwest Territories.

The success of all students is important for the Northwest Territories. However, Aboriginal students have been lagging behind non-Aboriginal students. While we are making progress on this challenge, we nonetheless want to enhance the improvement.

The Initiative's long-term goal is to develop and implement a territorial plan to help eliminate the achievement gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. We need a plan to ensure all our children have the opportunity to develop the skills, knowledge, and ability needed for the future. I believe this plan will help us achieve a well educated population able to meet the needs for our future economic well-being.

The Aboriginal Student Achievement Working Group was established in April 2009. Partners include Aurora College, District Education Councils, Aboriginal Organizations, the NWT Literacy Council, the NWT Teachers' Association, the Native Womens' Association, and the Departments of Justice and Health and Social Services.

The Working Group helped direct the Initiative's focus and developed the following priorities:

- Early Childhood and Child Care;
- Student and Family Support;
- Literacy; and
- Aboriginal Language Curriculum and Resource Development

Mr. Speaker, with assistance from the Divisional Education Councils, I am holding a Minister's Forum in each region this school year. We are using the Working Group's priorities as the basis to facilitate discussion and partnerships with and between local and regional Aboriginal and education leaders.

The first regional meeting took place in the Sahtu region from September 28 to 30. It went very well and we had a great turnout. Many community and regional leaders attended all three days of discussions, including my colleague, MLA Norman Yakeleya. The level of engagement from participants was outstanding, with support for building community connections as the common theme.

Community forums held on the third day of meetings gave special attention to looking at what we can do at the local level. Aboriginal leaders and educators from the same communities identified education issues and developed plans of action. Attendees made a commitment to start moving on plans and working toward short term goals.

We intend to keep Members informed of our progress as we work towards healthier successful Aboriginal students, and informed, involved parents and community partners. We also want to commend the Aboriginal Student Achievement Working Group for developing the important priorities to improve student success.

I look forward to participating in more discussion on Aboriginal student success over the next several months at the Regional Minister's Forums. We have already made significant progress and I am eager to see our students improve even more in the near future.

Masi, Mr. Speaker.