

**Aboriginal Student Achievement Initiative**

Mr. Speaker, the Department of Education, Culture and Employment has undertaken the Aboriginal Student Achievement Initiative to address the achievement gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in the Northwest Territories. This initiative is a long-term commitment that will see a multi-layered plan developed and implemented with Aboriginal, education, government, and corporate partners. There is no magic solution to improving student achievement. The work ahead of us will be difficult and will take the commitment of many people.

Several things have been initiated this year. To engage regions, Education, Culture and Employment is funding a pilot project in each education district that focuses on improving school attendance as a means to improve Aboriginal student achievement. The Department is providing \$25,000 per region, with matching in-kind contributions from the education boards or their regional partners. The Department has received a pilot project application from each education board for projects such as after-school programming like arts and crafts classes and on-the-land activities, counselling and intervention services for parents and students, mentorship and community liaison worker, and student produced promotional videos on attendance.

Increasing literacy rates is a key ingredient in the success of Aboriginal students. The Department has instituted several initiatives to support literacy efforts in schools. Education, Culture and Employment has dedicated approximately \$400,000 towards the purchase of reading materials for school libraries. To ensure equitable funding, the Department, allocated monies based on cost index and freight costs for outlying community schools. The reading material purchased will reach every school and will be grade level appropriate and culturally suitable.

Accessibility to the right tools and resources is another major part of academic success. Due to staffing or financial problems, small community schools are often limited in the optional courses they can offer high school students. To address this, the Department is providing quality laptops for grade 12 students in all small community high schools. Students will be allowed to take their laptops home to use for both academic and personal use. The laptops will be returned to the school when students complete their high school diploma or meet their Individual Education Program objectives. The Department and the school boards are working to make the laptops available to students as soon as possible.

An education system based on Aboriginal languages and cultures leads to greater academic success for Aboriginal students. The Aboriginal Student Achievement Working Group is currently working with the Northwest Territories Teachers' Association to develop culturally sensitive orientation for all new teachers to help meet this goal. This orientation will be partially on-the-land and will be mandated beginning next year.

The Aboriginal Student Achievement initiative also includes an extensive public awareness campaign that promotes the importance of school attendance and provides valuable information on the Northwest Territories education system and parental responsibilities within it. The public awareness campaign was kicked off this summer with staff passing out brochures and speaking to people on National Aboriginal Day in Yellowknife.

The Aboriginal Student Achievement Initiative is an exciting ground-breaking project and the Department looks forward to reporting on the long term achievements of the pilot projects, literacy research, public campaign and culturally appropriate teacher orientation. I mentioned earlier that there is no magic solution. However, I believe that by working together with all our partners, our communities, our students, and everyone interested in student achievement, we will be successful in achieving our goal of improving the education outcomes of our Aboriginal students.

Masi, Mr. Speaker.