

Return to Written Question

THE HONOURABLE ALFRED MOSES
MINISTER OF EDUCATION, CULTURE AND EMPLOYMENT

Funding For Junior Kindergarten

Mr. Speaker, I have a Return to the Written Question asked by Ms. Green on February 14, 2017 regarding funding for Junior Kindergarten.

Under the *Education Act*, the Department of Education, Culture and Employment is obligated to fund Inclusive Schooling at 15% of the overall contributions provided to Education Authorities. Based on projected enrolments, including new Junior Kindergarten students, and accounting for planned contributions and additional funding for Junior Kindergarten, we are currently funding Inclusive Schooling at 17.1%. This amounts to \$3.8 million beyond the current funding requirement for the 2017-2018 school year.

Children entering Junior Kindergarten will have access to existing supports and resources within the school. The specific needs of Junior Kindergarten students will be met through the school-based support teams already in place. Junior Kindergarten students are also funded at a student/teacher ratio of 12:1, taking into account the increased supports that this student population may need.

In order to accommodate concerns associated with Inclusive Schooling, the Department has put on hold the full implementation of the Inclusive Schooling Directive, delaying the hiring of the team of specialists. What this means for Education Authorities is that the \$1.15 million originally planned to be used for this team will remain within the school system and will be allocated to funding for Learning Support Assistants.

School transportation is part of the current School Funding Formula and is calculated based on the number of students, average school size, a community distance factor and the living cost differential. The current formula for student transportation is as follows:

$$\textit{Community enrolment} \times \textit{Northern Cost Index} \times \textit{Weighting Average School Enrolments} \times \\ \$62 \times \textit{Community Distance Factor}$$

Based on information received from the Yellowknife Bussing Company, it is expected that, because younger students will likely mean more expensive support, contract costs will increase. Students that are from communities such as Dettah, Behchokò, Enterprise and Hay River Reserve are also likely to incur a greater additional cost due to the distance of their commute. As a result, the Department is working with the Education Authorities to ascertain the incremental costs of providing transportation for Junior Kindergarten students and will be undertaking a review of the bussing component of the School Funding Formula.

The Department recognizes the importance of investing in quality early childhood programming and currently provides an Early Childhood Program, or ECP, Operating Subsidy for all licensed early childhood programs.

Effective October 01, 2016, the Department introduced a revised ECP funding model that includes increases to the daily subsidy rates. We have also been working with child care providers to help them adapt to the territory-wide implementation of Junior Kindergarten.

Recent changes to the ECP Funding Model include:

- Revised ECP Operating Subsidy model with increased rates;
- Consolidation of licensing and funding applications into a single application form and the possibility of multi-year funding agreements; and
- Increased funding for operators in government buildings.

The Department will also allow Education Authorities to decide whether they will offer half or full-day programs so as to not interfere with existing early childhood programs that may exist.

The current JK-12 education system provides a wide range of supports that extend well beyond the classroom teacher. For example, capital investments, Inclusive Schooling resources, Aboriginal Language Specialists, Education Assistants and Program Support Teachers are all important features of the education system that are funded and administered in different ways. Furthermore, all of these supports are shared between students and classrooms. For these reasons, it is not possible to create a subsidy program that would provide the full scope of JK-12 support on a per-child basis.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.