

**GOVERNMENT OF THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES RESPONSE TO
MOTION 13-17(5): TRAINING FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKERS**

Motion

NOW THEREFORE I MOVE, that the Department of Education, Culture and Employment be required to ensure that there is at least one fully trained early childhood education worker for every Junior Kindergarten group;

AND FURTHER, that early childhood education workers be recognized as education professionals and paid wages accordingly;

AND FURTHERMORE, that Aurora College immediately implement a training program that graduates fully qualified early childhood education workers who meet federal standards;

AND FURTHERMORE, that the Government of the Northwest Territories provide a comprehensive response to this motion within 90 days.

GNWT Response

“Early childhood education worker” is not a recognized category of employment in the NWT Kindergarten to Grade 12 education system. As such, an “early childhood education worker” cannot be employed to teach in any classroom in the NWT school system, including the new Junior Kindergarten classrooms. Fully qualified teachers teach in all NWT classrooms, including at the Junior Kindergarten level. At the same time, early childhood education workers are employed by licensed day care centres and family day homes across the NWT.

For the new Junior Kindergarten program being rolled out in all NWT communities by 2016, the GNWT’s Department of Education Culture and Employment (ECE) requires that Education Authorities hire teachers to teach the four year old children as they begin school for the first time. Fully trained early childhood education workers do not meet the same high level of academic rigour and discipline involved in teacher education programs. Research shows that the level of education of the program teacher directly impacts the quality of children’s growth and learning.

The standard requirement for teaching in NWT schools, as in every other province and territory in Canada, is a Bachelor of Education degree. In the NWT, Junior Kindergarten teachers are fully qualified, NWT certified educators. In most cases, teachers have earned a four or five year accredited Bachelor of Education degree. These primary teachers are fully trained to design and deliver rich stimulating classroom programming that is developmentally appropriate, culturally relevant, play-based and child-centered as outlined in the NWT *Integrated Kindergarten Curriculum* for four and five year old children.

While ECE is not directly responsible for the hiring NWT teachers, it recommends that, in the screening process for teachers slated to teach the new Junior Kindergarten

classes, Education Authorities ask for specialized early childhood education training as an asset for teaching in Junior Kindergarten classrooms. Before educators can teach in any NWT schools, they have to apply for and receive certification through the NWT Registrar. This ensures all teachers meet set professional teaching standards before teaching in NWT schools.

Ms. Kerry McCuaig, early childhood expert at the Atkinson Centre for Society and Child Development recently reiterated to ECE that “evidence suggests that quality in early childhood settings is associated with educators who are knowledgeable of how young children learn.” For this reason, ECE has provided two in-service training sessions to all NWT Junior Kindergarten and Kindergarten teachers in May and August 2014. These sessions featured national and local early childhood experts who focused on sharing their knowledge and experiences about early childhood education and care. As well, all participants received free access to an online multimedia resource that highlights relevant research and best practices in early education and care.

ECE will continue to offer training opportunities to Junior Kindergarten and Kindergarten teachers as well as providing ongoing information and support through the Junior Kindergarten information hotline, videoconferencing, and wiki sharing of best practices and questions and answers. Moreover, the GNWT’s seven Regional Early Childhood Consultants located throughout the NWT provide additional support to Junior Kindergarten teachers through on-site visits in the communities where Junior Kindergarten programs exist.

Although there are no federal education qualification standards for early childhood education workers who work outside the K-12 education system, each province or territory establishes its own regulations on credentialing. These are the workers that are employed in licensed centre based and day home facilities. ECE recognizes the need to increase the professionalism in the early childhood sector, and will develop a credentialing system as committed to in the *Right from the Start Early Childhood Development Framework and Action Plan*.

Presently, people who work in licensed day care centres possess a range of training from no post-secondary education to an early childhood diploma or degree. To increase NWT licensed day care centre workers’ income levels, ECE is implementing a wage enhancement plan that reflects an employee’s education and experience. This will also create incentives for early childhood workers to continue their education.

Currently, Aurora College delivers an Early Childhood Development (ECD) Certificate program that provides the coursework and training for students interested in beginning their education and training in early childhood. However, it must be emphasized that this is a one-year basic ECD certificate. This certificate meets the federal occupational standards for Early Childhood Educators, established by the federal Child Care Human Resources Sector Council. ECE will continue to work with Aurora College to ensure that these federal standards are maintained. There are no plans to implement an early childhood education program at Aurora College other than what already exists.

Aurora College has also developed a dual credit Senior Secondary ECD course, which it plans to pilot in two Yellowknife high schools beginning in February 2015. Students who complete the course will receive a high school diploma credit and an introductory college level credit.

Most recently, the GNWT has announced 10 new \$5,000 annual scholarships for NWT residents enrolled in full-time post-secondary institutions who are working to complete a diploma or degree in Early Childhood Development.

This Response to Motion 13-17(5) is being provided in accordance with Rule 49(3).