

**MEMBER STATEMENT—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE**  
**IMPACTS OF JUNIOR KINDERGARTEN ON EARLY CHILDHOOD LEARNING PROGRAMS**  
**June 28, 2016**

**MS. GREEN:** Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to talk about junior kindergarten, specifically the impact implementing junior kindergarten will have on existing early childhood learning programs for four-year-olds. There is no question that there is an urgent need for early childhood learning programs in the NWT to stimulate the development of children and set them up for a positive school experience.

Mr. Speaker, several communities already have early childhood learning programs in place, including eight communities with Aboriginal Head Start and a number of programs in Yellowknife such as the Montessori School. All of these programs include four-year-olds. All of them have a stake in junior kindergarten because the implementation of junior kindergarten may put them out of business, whether their programs are free or fee-based.

The review of junior kindergarten released earlier this year addressed this point. It said, "there is a need to address confusion over why ECE, which funds and supports early childhood learning programs, including Head Start and Montessori, now appears to be competing with itself."

The federally funded Aboriginal Head Start Program has operated in the NWT for 17 years. It is community-driven, play-based, and culturally connected. The programs are well-staffed and resourced. Evaluations are positive of the language and skill development the programs provide.

But what happens to the Head Start program when the four-year-olds move to junior kindergarten? In small communities like Fort McPherson and Paulatuk, there aren't enough children to make two programs viable. What happens to the Aboriginal Head Start staff if their program closes? Most likely they will be laid off, because junior kindergarten will be staffed by school teachers. These concerns are shared by the Montessori School in Yellowknife, which has operated for over 40 years. The loss of four-year-olds will lead the organization with no choice but to cut jobs and increase costs to families.

The point, Mr. Speaker, is that it's time for ECE to engage the current providers of early childhood learning programs and consult with them to provide cost-effective community options for early childhood learning. What they're offering isn't broken and doesn't need to be fixed.