

**MOTION 26-18(2):
JUNIOR KINDERGARTEN**

**OCTOBER 26, 2016
CARRIED**

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. WHEREAS THE Department of Education, Culture and Employment confirmed plans to introduce junior kindergarten in all 49 NWT schools in the fall of 2017;

AND WHEREAS the goal of junior kindergarten is to promote the development and school readiness of four year olds with free programming;

AND WHEREAS, the importance of early childhood development is a value shared by professional and licensed programs across the territory;

AND WHEREAS, early development instrument testing reveals the greatest need for readiness exists in our smallest communities and these communities often have the fewest resources for preschoolers;

AND WHEREAS, the GNWT tabled report in February that reviewed the first stage of implementation of junior kindergarten in 19 NWT schools;

AND WHEREAS this report recommended that expanded implementation of junior kindergarten must take into account community context, strengths, needs and the existence of quality early childhood learning programs in communities;

AND WHEREAS this report also recommends the government develop a strategy in consultation with each community to address its unique early childhood learning needs;

AND WHEREAS implementation of Junior Kindergarten will jeopardize existing programs by removing four-year-olds from their programs;

NOW THEREFORE I move, seconded by the Honourable Member for Mackenzie Delta, that the Department of Education, Culture and Employment produce a plan to implement junior kindergarten in 2017/2018 along with a fully-costed budget for presentation to the Standing Committee on Social Development;

AND FURTHER that the department implement all the recommendations of the junior kindergarten review tabled in February;

AND FURTHERMORE that in developing an implementation plan the department acknowledge that a one-size-fits-all approach to junior kindergarten is contrary to the report's recommendations;

AND FURTHERMORE that the department tailor the introduction of junior kindergarten to each community with a focus on providing the greatest need to improve school readiness;

AND FURTHERMORE that the department accommodate existing community programs for four-year-olds without jeopardizing their viability;

AND FURTHERMORE that the government provide a comprehensive response to this motion within 120 days.

Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Motion's in order. To the Motion. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

AMENDMENT TO MOTION 26-18(2),
CARRIED

HON. ALFRED MOSES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have a Motion to amend the Motion 26-18(2).

I MOVE, seconded by the Honourable Member for Yellowknife Centre that Motion 26-18(2), Junior Kindergarten, be amended by deleting the words:

"AND WHEREAS implementation of Junior Kindergarten will jeopardize existing programs by removing four-year-olds from their programs."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. With that in mind, amendment is in order. To the amendment. Question has been called. All those in favour? All those opposed? The amendment is carried.

---Carried

Masi. Member for Yellowknife Centre.

MS GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this Motion is not about the value of providing early childhood education to four-year-olds in the Northwest Territories, that is value that we all agree on. Research has shown time and again that investing in the development of preschoolers yields good results for them, not only in terms of school readiness, but in school achievement and in fact in life-long learning.

This motion is about rollout of the program. The rollout of the program, Phase 1, was reviewed independently, and that report was tabled in this House in February. The report included a number of recommendations, and they are not numerous, there are about five of them. The one that I wanted to speak to is accommodating existing programs. Some communities have no choice for early childhood development other than junior kindergarten, and it also turns out that many of those communities that have no choice have the greatest need for it. So it makes sense to have junior kindergarten in those communities.

Some communities, like Yellowknife, have many choices and the implementation of junior kindergarten shouldn't fetter those choices. So I'm talking here about Aboriginal Head Start in Ndilo, about the Montessori School, and about daycares, all very different kinds of programs and all with different educational goals and attainments. It's worth noting of course that Aboriginal Head Start both, here and in Yellowknife and in the other seven communities where it's offered as a free program. Other programs cost money. I recognize that some parents struggle to pay that money, but they make the choice because they are committed to the philosophy of the program that's being offered.

So what I'm trying to point to here, Mr. Speaker, is that there is a different context in each community for the education and development of four-year-olds, different needs for oversight, staffing, costs and curriculum. So for that reason, I really believe that there needs to be a nuanced approach to the introduction of junior kindergarten that takes into account the different contexts in different communities, whether they have Aboriginal Head Start which, as I say, exists in eight communities, or whether they have Montessori, which is unique to Yellowknife.

I know that the department has introduced some new rates for daycares, and certainly that is a very welcome development. It's important to note that it doesn't cover the differences between programs that are currently geared to 0 to 3-year-olds and programs that are geared for 3 to 5-year-olds. So these are two different kinds of programs with different requirements for staffing, for equipment, for curriculum and so on.

It's also worth noting, and this is important in the context of junior kindergarten, that these rates are only paid when children attend. It's not like school where the schools are funded whether the children attend or not. Daycare and early childhood development programs, the subsidies are only paid when the children attend.

So in the case of Aboriginal Head Start, for example, if the children stop attending Aboriginal Head Start, which is a free program, and they start attending junior kindergarten, which is a free program, then certainly junior kindergarten will be disadvantaged because they will not receive the subsidy because the children aren't attending.

There are issues as well which my colleague, Mr. Blake, has spoken, about very eloquently about how junior kindergarten is provided by teachers and other programs such as Aboriginal Head Start and daycare are provided by early childhood education workers, and they generally tend to be workers from the community who have achieved their degree or diploma in this area and are qualified to work with children at this age on their development issues, but it's important to know they're not teachers. So, as a result, what I can foresee, is what my colleague has spoken about is that early childhood workers will be out of work because their programs will be taken over by teachers. This removes the program from the community from its cultural context, from its parental oversight and so on.

School is definitely a completely different proposition in terms of the way it's delivered than early childhood development is.

I want to talk a little bit about implementation. The government told us: first, that the program would go into all 49 schools; and, second, that it would be introduced in September of 2017, but they haven't yet produced the implementation plan and a budget for what it will cost. So I feel that the government has put the cart before the horse, they have limited the options for tailoring the implementation of this program by saying already where and when it will be introduced.

So coming up with a plan that is nuanced to the individual needs of the communities and the needs of children who need improvement on the early development instrument, those need to be taken into account, and there should be a real focus on assessing the need for school readiness and meeting that where it is demonstrated to exist.

The greatest fear, I guess, is that what this junior kindergarten program will do is that while opening options to some parents, it will limit options for others. I don't see that as a good trade-off. I think that there should be a way to accommodate both kinds of programs in our communities. Those are my comments, Mr. Speaker. Mahsi.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Now I'll turn it over to the seconder of the amended motion, Member for Mackenzie Delta.

MR. BLAKE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I too of course am in support of this motion, as I second it. Mr. Speaker, there's growing concerns in the community of Fort McPherson; it has been for the last couple of years with the roll out of junior kindergarten. One thing for sure is the effect it will have on the Aboriginal Head Start program. As I mentioned earlier, we have three young ladies that recently received their certificates in early childhood development, and, Mr. Speaker, now as they start their career here they've been put in a three-

month contract, whereas before it's never been like this. So already there's some implications as we move forward.

I could see the importance of junior kindergarten, but, as I've always said from the beginning we have to fund it adequately; right now there's no added funds. We're taking on a whole new grade here and yet no funding to go with it.

Mr. Speaker, last year was the first year in Fort McPherson, for example, I've received concerns from the spouse of one of the teachers that was looking after junior kindergarten and they basically said: look, my wife did not sign up to be changing Pampers. That's the case, Mr. Speaker. We have up to three-year-olds that do qualify for junior kindergarten because they turn four within the first couple of months, and that was one of the big concerns we had last year.

Another thing too is we've had 20 years of Aboriginal Head Start in Fort McPherson; a program that was -- you, yourself, Mr. Speaker, when you were in your role as Education Minister, I recall the praise that they've received in Fort McPherson for the programming that they offered in the community, Mr. Speaker, and here we are. I realize the previous federal government was looking to possibly cut Aboriginal Head Start, but we do now have a new government in order here and we are yet to see if they will still provide funding for Aboriginal Head Start, which we are hopeful.

Mr. Speaker, as we move forward it's very important that we provide the necessary tools to move forward for the sake of our four-year-olds, Mr. Speaker. I know it is a huge challenge in our communities, for example, Tsiigehtchic where we have no daycare; you know, that's our junior kindergarten. We have many other communities like this. Yet in Fort McPherson and Aklavik they both have Aboriginal Head Start that is successful. So why are we going to interfere with something that's already working? Mr. Speaker, that is why I am in support of this motion. Mahsi.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. To the motion as amended. Member for Yellowknife North.

MR. VANTHUYNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to support this motion as amended. In December of last year on the first day that I spoke in this Chamber I spoke about junior kindergarten, emphasizing that our entire education system from JK to grade 12 must be adequately funded. We know that the availability of early childhood programs like junior kindergarten free of charge, is essential to Northern families, and we know too that developing options for free play-based care for four-year-olds is part of the government's mandate.

We know that the work of junior kindergarten implementation must be done to best serve future generations of Northerners. However, like many of my colleagues, I do not believe that this programming should come at the expense of choices for families or that diverse array of options currently available in various communities should be flattened to make way for a single program.

Regular Members have considered the matter of junior kindergarten carefully over the past several months, but these concerns have not necessarily been alleviated. On top of my own reservations, some residents of the Yellowknife North riding have also reached out to me to express their concerns. They are worried that if junior kindergarten proceeds as planned other day homes, daycares and preschool programs and the children who use them may suffer. They are not convinced that ECE has undertaken sufficient consultation or that the potential impacts on other care providers have been fully considered and accounted for.

As we have heard here today, I know too that my colleagues have heard similar concerns in their own communities; concerns that this one-size-fits-all approach may be a detriment not a

service to the children it is meant to serve. With this in mind, I thank my colleagues for bringing this motion forward and I look forward to seeing it passed today as amended. Those are my comments. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. To the motion as amended. Member for Kam Lake.

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I appreciate the hard work that's gone into developing this motion and I certainly appreciate that our colleagues across the way are in support of it as amended as am I.

I've heard from many residents in Kam Lake, as my colleague has said in his own circumstance, expressing similar concerns. My own son has been in two day homes since I was a single parent many years ago, and the care provided to him was topnotch, so I certainly understand the value of these programs and the value of early education, but we have to make sure it's done right.

The department commissioned a very lengthy, thorough report that spoke to many stakeholders, and my concerns with this recent announcement of the roll out of junior kindergarten that that report was not being considered in full, and that causes me concerns when we did all this work and we're moving ahead without considering implications that that report made full. So I'm very pleased to see that this motion seeks to correct that and provide guidance to our government moving forward.

Even as recently as today, Mr. Speaker, a school in my own riding, Ecole St. Joseph's School, is concerned about the expansion of junior kindergarten and the consequences it will have on their capital costs and ability to provide space for the program, and they're looking for resources from the YK1 education district. I'm deeply concerned that if school boards are competing with each other and looking to take resources away from each other to facilitate this then we really need to think about how this plan is rolling out and if it's properly resourced and adequately resourced to make sure that we can give kids the quality early education that they deserve for healthy productive lives. Many of us have had the opportunity of means to provide that for our kids and we need to think about everyone else who can't.

So I do support this program. I think everyone in the Northwest Territories supports this program, but again, we need to make sure it's done right and we can't jeopardize existing programs and we need to make sure that our schools have the resources they need to make space and provide this service to Northerners. So with that I stand in support of this motion and I'm happy to see that this House is fully in support. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. To the motion as amended. Member for Deh Cho.

MR. NADLI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of this motion as well. In August 2016 I was honoured to be present to see students graduate from Deh Gah Elementary and Secondary High School and the Minister was there too and witnessed three students that began their lifelong education quests at the start of the Aboriginal Head Start program, and I wanted to emphasize that.

The Aboriginal Head Start program has been in existence for a long time; it is community-based and it involves the community, parents and elders who incorporate the knowledge, at the same time prepare kids that are four years old into grade school, and so it's been very successful in the communities that I serve in my riding and at the same time on the K'atloodjeeche Reserve and also the whole of the NWT.

It's important to note that this motion recognizes the need for community strategy. There has been, for some time, an adversarial approach in terms of JK versus Aboriginal Head Start program. We need to get beyond that. We need to see how this whole vision of JK is going to work for the benefit of the children that we have in our communities, and to ensure that, you know, we put our best efforts forward to ensure that we have consensus to making this successful.

I'm very encouraged that there were recommendations that were brought forth at community level and that the department is going to work on it and develop an implementation plan associated with the budget in terms of costs and how much could be provided to communities that will make a decision to be involved with JK.

At the same time, I believe that JK and the Aboriginal Head Start Program could coexist and work in parallel. At the same time, I understand that, indeed, we could make it work and this motion sets that seed and that process forward so that we could work at the community level to ensure that we reach a point of success. Mahsi.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. To the motion as amended. Member for Frame Lake.

MR. O'REILLY: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. I will be supporting this motion as well. Earlier in this session we reviewed a capital budget for the Department of Education, Culture and Employment that included some funds for improving schools to make sure we can deliver on JK starting in September of next year. I will also be looking for the same sort of commitment in our O and M budget coming forward, in 2017-2018. We have to make sure that our school boards and district education authorities have the resources to deliver on JK. I don't think it's sufficient to say that they can deliver this with their existing resources, so I, Mr. Speaker, will be looking for additional resources for our school board, district education authorities, to deliver on JK in 2017-2018. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. To the motion as amended. Member for Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh.

MR. BEAULIEU: Marci cho, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I, too, support the motion. I feel that anytime we start to spend money on early childhood development, there are huge returns. I know that it is a known fact that there are no better returns for the money that we spend than there is spending in early childhood development.

I have a good Aboriginal Head Start Program in Ndilo, as mentioned by my colleague earlier. I wish for that program to continue, the viability of that program. We have many students there, children in that program, and I've witnessed it. I've seen the curriculum for the four-year-olds that are in Aboriginal Head Start Program. I believe it's very, very similar to the curriculum that is being used with junior kindergarten across the street, for example, from that program. I think also throughout most of the junior kindergarten programs in the communities where there are Aboriginal Head Start and then in communities where they've had no daycare, no Aboriginal Head Start, no programs, I think we will see huge benefits from junior kindergarten and I know that teachers are looking forward to seeing all of the spending in early childhood development resulting in higher graduation rates a few years down the road. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. To the motion as amended. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. ALFRED MOSES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the Members for bringing this motion forward as amended. I appreciate all the Members who spoke to the motion and all the comments, concerns from the small communities, communities that have Aboriginal Head Start, and the regional centres here in Yellowknife as well.

Mr. Speaker, the government believes that we owe it to the children of the Northwest Territories to give them the best start in life. To achieve this, it's going to take some changes from all of us. The early development instrument shows that the status quo isn't working, and junior kindergarten is one of the ways to fix the status quo. We need to bring it to all kids and all families in the Northwest Territories.

The government is on the record as having accepted all the recommendations of the Junior Kindergarten Review released earlier this year and have incorporated them into our planning. We have been meeting actively with stakeholders, including teachers, principals, the NWT Teachers' Association, board chairs, superintendents, the Tlicho government, the Tlicho Community Service Agency, many licensed child care centres and family day home operators, Aboriginal Head Start managers, the NWT Montessori Society, and the Children First Society. We continue to engage with stakeholders to make sure that we know what each community needs, and the best way to implement junior kindergarten across the Northwest Territories.

We have significantly increased rates for entrance to the Early Childhood Program Operating Subsidy to help minimize the impact of junior kindergarten on licensed daycare providers.

Mr. Speaker, 19 communities have already benefitted from free, play-based junior kindergarten and the government wants to make sure kids and families in the rest of the NWT get that same opportunity. We've made a commitment in the mandate to work with the stakeholders and the communities to ensure that the Territory has free, play-based care for four-year-olds, and to develop an action plan for universal child daycare.

Full implementation of junior kindergarten is one of the ways we are fulfilling those commitments. Mr. Speaker, Cabinet will be supporting this motion. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. To the motion as amended. I'll allow the mover to provide closing remarks. Member for Yellowknife Centre.

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, there is no question among the people on this side of the House that money invested in early childhood development yields fantastic returns. We want people to have good school readiness, to graduate from high school, to attain the skills they need to realize their full potential, whatever that looks like for them. We want them to have as many opportunities as possible.

Mr. Speaker, junior kindergarten is not the only way to achieve this goal. There are other ways, and I've mentioned some of them. Aboriginal Head Start is one that has a proven track record and is offered free of charge, so it makes no sense whatever to replace it. I think it's worth reminding the Minister that consultation means that not only are you listening, but you're willing to change the outcome, and so I recommend that the Minister consider whether, in fact, all 49 schools need the same thing, or whether only some of them need the program that he's offering.

I'd like to draw the attention of the Minister to the comments on this side about the need for adequate funding for school boards and district education authorities who are taking on a whole new year of education programming. I've already heard stories about a lack of resources in the schools that are limiting extra-curricular activities, and I think it would be a crying shame to do that at the expense, to have the older children pay for JK, so to speak, to have it at their expense.

I would like to echo my colleague Mr. Nadli's recommendation that we find a way for cooperation and coexistence. That is what I would like to see. I would like to thank all my

colleagues who have spoken in support of this motion and request a recorded vote. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Member has requested a recorded vote. All those in favour of the motion as amended, please stand.

RECORDED VOTE

CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr. Mercer): Ms. Green, Mr. Nadli, Mr. Nakimayak, Mr. Moses, Ms. Cochrane, Mr. Abernethy, Mr. McLeod - Yellowknife South, Mr. McLeod - Inuvik Twin Lakes, Mr. Schumann, Mr. Sebert, Mr. Simpson, Mr. Blake, Mr. McNeely, Mr. Vanthuyne, Mr. Testart, Mr. Beaulieu, Mr. Thompson, and Mr. O'Reilly.

MR. SPEAKER: All those opposed, please stand. All those abstaining, please stand. Masi. The results of the recorded vote are 18 in favour, zero opposed, zero abstained. The motion is carried. The motion as amended has been carried.

---Carried

---Carried