

ORAL QUESTION—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

QUESTION 514-18(2): JUNIOR KINDERGARTEN IMPLEMENTATION

February 6, 2017

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, my questions are for the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment and they are based on a statement that he gave today. I just want to confirm, to start with, that the provision of JK in every school in the Northwest Territories is mandatory as of September of this year. Is that correct? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. ALFRED MOSES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are intending to roll out junior kindergarten in all the schools across the Northwest Territories this fall school year. I just want to emphasize again that it is optional for parents and families to enrol their kids. Thank you.

MS. GREEN: School boards are now developing their budgets for the next school year. One of the tasks that they have is to decide on their staffing component. If they are going to release teachers, they need to be released by the end of March. If they need to hire teachers, they need to know that as well. If the money is not going to be available until the fall, how are school boards going to plan for the implementation of junior kindergarten this fall?

HON. ALFRED MOSES: As I mentioned, it is a really good news story that this government has stepped up to fully fund junior kindergarten. The next step, after we made the announcement from the budget address, was that our department is meeting with superintendents and working with the school boards to look at how we're going to be rolling out junior kindergarten this fall, and also looking at how we're going to be able to utilize that money that was announced in the budget.

MS. GREEN: I did not hear a definitive answer to my question. So schools are now planning. School boards in Yellowknife are holding open houses this month to talk to parents about coming to their schools to access junior kindergarten, and they have a target number of enrollments in mind for each of the school boards, so there are lots of pieces of this puzzle that are known. So can the boards count on having this funding in hand or committed to the penny by the end of March?

HON. ALFRED MOSES: As I mentioned after the Budget Address, we did reach out to the superintendents and we're working with the school boards to see how we're going to roll out this funding, and we did make that commitment to fully fund junior kindergarten, so those are discussions that are happening right now.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Oral questions. Member for Yellowknife Centre.

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, will the Minister commit to making sure that all the money is in place to fund junior kindergarten in every NWT school by the end of March? Thank you.

HON. ALFRED MOSES: Based on enrolments and how many students are going to be into the school system, we are going to be fully funding junior kindergarten this fall. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

QUESTION 519-18(2):
JUNIOR KINDERGARTEN IMPLEMENTATION

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my questions are for the Minister of ECE. Mr. Speaker, in his statement today, the Minister said, and I quote, "we will make the money they need to implement junior kindergarten available to them when it is needed." Could the Minister please tell me what the phrase, "when it is needed" means? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. ALFRED MOSES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Those discussions, we are having right now with the departments and all the boards. If it is needed this fall, we will make sure that that funding is available, as I mentioned in the statement. We could be coming back for a sup to make sure that funding is available. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. GREEN: Is the Minister aware that hiring and layoff plans need to be in place by the end of March? Money will need to be in place to make those decisions. Is the Minister aware of that?

HON. ALFRED MOSES: As I mentioned, staff at the department have been meeting with the superintendents to make sure that it is a smooth transition as we roll out junior kindergarten moving forward. All those are being discussed right now, as I mentioned earlier.

MS. GREEN: The district education authorities and school boards were looking at making a cut of 3.6 per cent to their budget for the next school year in order to fund junior kindergarten from within. Now the government is fully funding junior kindergarten, will this cut be necessary?

HON. ALFRED MOSES: As a government, we fund all our education authorities to the tune of about \$152 million. What they do with that money is decisions based on the board. That is something that the board is going to have to make, that decision, moving forward.

MR. SPEAKER: Masi. Oral questions. Member for Yellowknife Centre.

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I didn't hear an answer to my question. My question is whether the school boards will still be required to use their own resources to implement junior kindergarten as they were required to do prior to the budget being announced last week, including a cut of 3.6 per cent of their K to grade 12

funding. Is this cut still going to be necessary now that full funding for JK is in place?
Thank you.

HON. ALFRED MOSES: As we have all heard here, this government is committed to fully funding junior kindergarten. The reductions that the Member is asking is a decision on the school boards themselves, and that is something that they are going to have to go back and look at. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.