

## MEMBER STATEMENT—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

### STUDENT INSTRUCTIONAL HOURS IN SCHOOLS

February 8, 2017

**MS. GREEN:** Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, when I worked for the CBC, I remember meeting a family in Fort Good Hope and talking to them about education. This conversation happened maybe about 10 years ago. The mom in that family told me that when it came time for high school for their youngest child -- they had maybe four or five kids -- the family decided they would make a special effort for him. They would spend less time on the land and more time in town so that he could attend school every day. They encouraged him to do his best, and he did. He eventually earned a high school diploma and then applied for post-secondary education. I don't recall where he applied, but the response he got was that he needed upgrading. He was shocked, and his family was shocked and disappointed. They had sacrificed and made an investment to get him through high school, but they felt they failed because he needed upgrading even after getting his diploma.

Mr. Speaker, this is a cautionary tale that has some resonance for me because of the agreement between the government and the teachers' union to reduce instructional time by up to 100 hours a year. I don't begrudge the teachers the extra time for preparation, professional development, and writing report cards, not at all. I think the fact they work so many hours speaks to their dedication, but also how thinly resourced the schools are relative to all the demands we now make of teachers to do so much more than teach; but I do worry about the consequences for students, especially those in high school.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, student achievement in the NWT has been gauged by writing the Alberta Achievement Tests in grades 3, 6, and 9. The AATs are a standardized measure of student progress in two areas, language arts and math. The last detailed results I could find are for 2012-13. There's not a lot of difference in results between the regional centres and Yellowknife, but community results are very disappointing. Some of the problem is with low levels of attendance in the small communities, but I also wonder what good reducing instructional hours will do for students who are already struggling, especially in high school. Is there not a way to offset this loss of instruction with supported activities, such as through teaching assistants?

It is in the high school that the reduced hours are most noticeable and will have the most impact. Alberta requires 1,000 hours of instruction a year, while the agreement between the teachers and the government is offering less, a reduction of 50 hours. I worry if that means the NWT high school students will fall behind in their progress through the curriculum, meaning for them, like the student in Fort Good Hope, upgrading will be essential if they want to move on to post-secondary education. I will have questions for the Minister. Mahsi.