

MEMBER STATEMENT—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

CLASSROOM INSTRUCTIONAL HOURS

March 6, 2017

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, with just one week left in this sitting, I want to look ahead to some important work Regular MLAs will be doing during the break. The Standing Committee on Social Development will be reviewing Bill 6, An Act to Amend the Education Act. Specifically, the members of this committee, including myself, will be looking at the proposed changes to instructional hours.

It has taken close questioning by my colleagues on this side, both in the House and at a public briefing, to understand the rationale for these changes and, specifically, to allay parents' and students' concerns about instructional hours in high school. It is my understanding now that students will continue to receive the same number of hours that Alberta students receive, and the content of the curriculum will remain the same. That is important because NWT students are taught the Alberta curriculum and write the same departmental exams. What is not clear to me is why the department didn't come out with a plan that stated high school instructional hours would be maintained on par. It would have saved parents and the department a lot of grief.

There are still some significant loose ends in this initiative. First, why are reduced instructional hours being piloted in every single NWT school, and why is the change in instructional hours being legislated before the pilot begins? Make no mistake, this change is not a pilot project, but an across-the-board change. Usually, a pilot project is a trial. Strengths and weaknesses are identified, and then the program is rolled out everywhere. That is not what is happening here. Is the department prepared to reverse this change, if the three-year test period isn't successful?

Another important question is: what is success in this context? How will this change be evaluated, in terms of student outcomes? The department's information shows that graduation rates have improved since 2010-11. Looking at the data from other Canadian jurisdictions reveals there isn't a consistent cause and effect between instructional hours and graduation rates. Will graduation rates be the sole measure, or are there others that make sense, such as attendance or Alberta achievement test scores?

Another reason given for this change is to improve teacher well-being. Teachers measured their wellness by reporting on how many hours they work. They said they worked 52 hours a week, but the sample size is very small, because only 15 per cent of teachers took part in the survey.

The teachers said they work 52 hours a week, but the sample size is very small, because only 15 per cent of teachers took part in the survey. Surely there are more effective ways to measure teacher wellness, including their sick days, long-term disability, and retention in the profession. It would also be useful to see data on these points from jurisdictions with fewer instructional hours.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister has yet to produce a solid evidence-based rationale for these

changes to instructional hours. I am challenging him to go back and do his homework before we start reviewing Bill 16. Mahsi.