ORAL QUESTION—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

IMPACTS OF JUNIOR KINDERGARTEN ON OTHER PRE-SCHOOL PROGRAMS

February 9, 2017

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in my Member's statement, I spoke about parents who want to maintain the current range of choices for early childhood development and I asked the Minister in writing to provide an analysis of how the implementation of JK will accommodate the existing programs. Unfortunately, I didn't get an answer. My question is: can the Minister say whether this analysis has ever been done, and if not, will he undertake it? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. ALFRED MOSES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through our program, we run a lot of subsidy programs with our early childhood partners. As for the analysis, I would have to check with the department to see if something has been done. In terms of moving JK forward, this government has committed to fully funding junior kindergarten, and it was agreed on by this House when we passed the budget earlier this week. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. GREEN: I appreciate the Minister's commitment to check with the department to see whether there has ever been an analysis done about the financial viability of the programs. It is my understanding that ECE offers a subsidy to existing programs like Montessori because they meet the department's licensing requirements. Does the Minister believe his department has any responsibility to ensure these programs remain viable?

HON. ALFRED MOSES: Providing early childhood quality programs and services throughout the Northwest Territories is a mandate of this government. On October 1, 2016, we made a commitment to all early childhood providers across the Northwest Territories by making changes to our early childhood programs, the way we fund them. I also want to assure to the Member, as well as families with four-year-olds, that JK is an option for families and a choice for families where they want to have their four-year-olds get the early childhood program services that they need.

MS. GREEN: It is my understanding that ECE increased its subsidy for the first time in eight years last fall, but that no further increases are being planned, and yet these programs are going to lose their four-year-olds, or some of them, come this fall. How is the Minister going to offset the loss of those children in the fee-based programs?

HON. ALFRED MOSES: I can't look into the future and say how many students are going to be in early childhood programs throughout Yellowknife and our regional centres. We are dealing with what we need to do today. We want to provide services to all families across the Northwest Territories, give families in Yellowknife, in Hay River, in Inuvik, the same options and opportunities that we have in our small communities by providing quality early childhood programming through junior kindergarten in the

schools.

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

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Minister's plan is going to provide the lowest common denominator of early childhood education, where there will only be junior kindergarten and plain daycare. An alternative to this would be to provide a subsidy for each child of four years of age rather than to a whole program. I asked him if he would examine this option, which on the face of it would save a lot of money -- it is less than half the cost of having a child in a school classroom -- and report on his research, but I haven't heard back. Does this research exist? Thank you.

HON. ALFRED MOSES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the Minister responsible for Public Education, we have to provide the same programs and services to all communities across the Northwest Territories. As I mentioned, I can't look into the future and see where parents are going to put their children in terms of early childhood programming. What we are doing is we are addressing the needs of four-year-olds right across the territory, and we are going to continue to do that.