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# Play straight on class time changes, say Nihtat Gwich'in

*Indigenous reps bristle at process of amending the Education Act to give teachers more time out of classroom*

Stewart Burnett  
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## INUVIK

Not everyone is satisfied with the Government of the Northwest Territories' consultation on Bill 16, which would amend the Education Act.

The Northwest Territories Teachers' Association (NWTTA) is pushing for a reduction in classroom teaching time by up to 100 hours per year.

It claims the time will allow teachers to communicate with each other and work more collaboratively to improve student outcomes.

Opponents to the change worry fewer classroom hours will only reduce student achievement, which is already low in the Beaufort Delta.

For Jozef Carnogursky, president of the Nihtat Gwich'in Council, the debate isn't so much about whether students should lose up to 100 hours per year of class time or not, but about the process.

He pointed to the fact the NWTTA and GNWT have already signed a memorandum of understanding outlining that the two organizations would work to develop "options for legislative change that redirect up to 100 hours of instructional time per school year."



Deh Cho MLA Michael Nadli, Yellowknife Centre MLA Julie Green, Nahendeh MLA Shane Thompson and Mackenzie Delta MLA Frederick Blake Jr. listen to delegations during a public hearing on changes to the Education Act Monday, April 10. - Stewart Burnett/NNSL photo

Carnogursky claims collective bargaining between the teachers' organization and

the territorial government is dictating legislative changes.

"This is not what we consider open, transparent and accountable government," he said.

He spoke at a public meeting in Inuvik about the proposed changes Monday, April 10.

"The process is only giving the illusion that our input and the input of the public matters," he said.

"The process is bigger than the actual issue of reduction of teaching hours in my view. Democratic processes need to be protected. If government won't protect them, we are heading down the wrong road."

Matthew Miller, president of the Beaufort Delta teachers association, spoke in favour of the changes.

He believed reducing classroom hours would lead to improvements for both students and teachers.

"This reduction in instructional hours is not a holiday for teachers," said Miller.

"It is redirected time to complete tasks and collaborate. We will still be reporting to work, looking to improve the education of our students."

Research defends this move, he continued.

"There are those that may say let them do it on their own time after school," said Miller. "I would say teachers are already doing many things for their students, schools and communities at that time, not to mention we have families of our own we would like to spend time with."

Yellowknife Centre MLA Julie Green, part of the GNWT panel hosting the public hearing, pointed to already low attendance rates.

"This seems counterintuitive in that students are already choosing to miss a number of days and now they will miss some more time because that will be going to teacher preparation," she said.

Lorne Guy, vice-principal of East Three Secondary School, spoke in favour of the changes.

He referenced a pilot project this year to give teachers three days off classroom time to prepare report cards.

"Many of our staff spoke of their appreciation for the time they were granted to thoroughly report on each child, that they did not feel rushed and therefore the quality of their reporting had improved from previous years," said Guy.

"I can only see this initiative improving teacher instruction in the next school year as well."

Everyone wants to see student outcomes improve, he continued.

Guy argued that building time into teachers' regular school schedules for professional duties, collaborative learning and professional development training is long overdue and a step in the right direction.

Lesla Semmler, chair of the Inuvik District Education Authority, related the process of bringing in these changes to junior kindergarten, saying there was a lack of consultation beforehand.

"This is being strong-armed again," in a sense, she said.

Semmler pointed to low achievement results.

"We don't need hours taken away from our students," she said. "We need more teachers in the system."

Carolyn Lennie, chief operating officer for the Gwich'in Tribal Council, also took issue with the consultation process.

"The Gwich'in Tribal Council does not support the changes to the legislation," she said.

"Grade levels are inadequate. So the answer today that is presented is (reducing) the hours is going to fix the problem? I don't think so."

She asked where the aboriginal consultation was and why aboriginal groups weren't at the table with the teachers' association and GNWT.

"On behalf of the tribal council, we expect consultation," said Lennie.

"We may disagree with what is presented but that doesn't mean we don't respect our teachers."

The Standing Committee on Social Development, which also met in Yellowknife and Hay River, will take feedback to the GNWT.



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