

MEMBER STATEMENT—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

BUSING FOR JUNIOR KINDERGARTEN STUDENTS

May 25, 2017

MS. GREEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this month, some of the Yellowknife MLAs and I have met with the three school boards to hear their concerns, and it is a long list of concerns. Today, I want to highlight just one that is common to them all, and that is busing junior kindergarten students to school.

During the last session, the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment said his department was, “Working with education authorities to ascertain the incremental costs of providing transportation for junior kindergarten students, and will be undertaking a review of the busing component of the School Funding Formula.”

The education authorities have preliminary numbers of both the students who need busing and the costs of the buses. About 20 percent of students will require busing, and the cost estimate is a mind-boggling \$10,000 each per year. Just as a reminder, these are students who may be as young as three years, eight months.

The school boards receive money for busing from the territorial government, but about two weeks ago, the department informed the boards that busing JK students was not mandatory. It’s at the discretion of the boards, and so the cost is theirs. To put some numbers to this, JK1 and YCS are together looking at spending upwards of \$500,000 on additional busing costs out of owned source funds. This, Mr. Speaker, is for a program that is “fully funded.”

The school boards are apparently going to have to make a difficult choice: either make additional cuts to come up with the money, or don’t provide busing. They shouldn’t have to make this choice at all. JK is billed as a grade of school. It should be fully funded, including busing. If busing isn’t funded, the program isn’t universal and low income families are barred.

It has long been apparent that JK has been grafted on to the school system as an extra grade without the necessary resources. There are no dedicated resources for inclusive schooling, none for Aboriginal and cultural education, and none for busing. This situation is unacceptable. I will have questions for the Minister. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.