

Committee of the Whole
Review of Bill 16, An Act to Amend the Education Act
May 31, 2017

HON. ALFRED MOSES: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I am pleased to be here today to introduce Bill 16, An Act to Amend the Education Act.

This bill seeks to change the age of entitlement to access kindergarten programs from five years old to four, as well as reduce the minimum hours of instruction required for grades one through 12 to 945 hours.

The goal of these two major initiatives, also known as junior kindergarten and STIP, is to improve the NWT education system for all learners so that they can meet the challenges of today and into the future, and be successful in whatever they choose to do.

Junior kindergarten will provide all NWT families, regardless of their income or geographic location, the option of enrolling their four-year-old children in a free, play-based, developmentally appropriate program.

As this Legislative Assembly has recognized, early childhood development is critical to a child's future success, and there is a direct link between the quality of early education and care and positive future outcomes.

We also recognize that we need to provide teachers with time to plan and develop their own learning. This government knows that in order to improve our students' academic results, we not only need JK offered in every community, we also need our teachers to have time, during their regular work week and school year, to develop their skills and properly plan, implement, and assess their students' learning.

In order to improve student outcomes, we must ensure educators have access to the experiences, resources, training, and professional development to improve their workload and wellness situations, so they can focus on excellence in teaching. This is what the Strengthening Teacher Instructional Practices initiative is all about.

Before the end of this school year, I will provide the Standing Committee on Social Development with a complete monitoring, evaluation, and accountability framework for the STIP pilot project, where we anticipate seeing improvements in:

- Teacher satisfaction through pre- and post-school year surveys;
- Teacher human resource statistics, such as sick days;
- Use of professional development time;
- Student attendance; and
- Student course completions.

Significant change will take time, and the evaluation will likely evolve as schools try new approaches with their school calendars. As such, the evaluation plan will include a

reporting schedule outlining the appropriate measures, as the initiative evolves over time.

I want to reiterate that I believe the territory-wide implementation of junior kindergarten and the opportunity to build in time during the school year for teachers to complete their professional duties and strengthen the quality of instructional practices will be game changers.

I strongly believe that, in years to come, we will look back at this moment in time to these two strategic initiatives and see them as a vital step on the road to success for our young children, our youth, and our territory.

I will be happy to answer any questions Members may have. Mahsi...

...**MS. GREEN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, when we had our hearing in Yellowknife, the executive director of the NWTTA said that the status quo in education was not the answer to where we are in terms of student achievement and teacher wellness. I agree with that. I agree with that statement. We need to improve student outcomes in every grade, not only in graduation. The process of getting to the point we are at now, reporting on this bill has been made unnecessarily difficult by poor communication by the Department of Education, Culture and Employment.

In the case of JK, the standing committee and our colleagues on this side have worked very hard to ensure that full funding for junior kindergarten is, in fact, full funding. That was not given proactively. It was something that had to be wrangled about, and I think that we do have some good results. But this is a perfect example of what my grandmother would have said was “penny wise and pound foolish.” This could have been a good news story right from the beginning if adequate resources had been pledged willingly and proactively instead of being extracted an inch at a time.

Likewise, with the student instructional -- strengthening teacher instructional practice, this also could have been a good news story but it was not because once again, the major problem with this is that there are not enough teachers in our school system, and the teachers who are there now are too hard-pressed to do anymore, a point which I heard repeatedly, and which I do not doubt at all. But rather than providing a proactive approach from a communications point of view, the Minister left it to the standing committee to explain this initiative to incredulous parents and to supportive teachers. As a result, once again, we have ended up wrangling right up until today about amendments and about support for the bill itself. If there is a takeaway from this entire process, it is that communication between the Department of Education, Culture and Employment, and its stakeholders, and that includes parents, students, teachers, regular MLAs, needs to be improved. We are not your last thought. We need to be your first thought, and that is not what I am seeing here, and the process has been made unduly difficult as a result. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Blake): Thank you, Ms. Green. Would the Minister like to respond?

HON. ALFRED MOSES: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think communication is an issue that we need to work on, but it also needs to be addressed through partnerships with our

education authorities working with our Board chairs to ensure that this message gets out to teachers. I did attend some of the public hearings as well as constituency meetings where we had parents who were just getting this information presented to them. However, I know some of our education authorities did reach out as well, including us, and we did try to get the communication on the radio and in the newspapers, get it out as much as we can to get feedback from parents and other stakeholders, but I do appreciate the Member's comments, from all three Members who have made comments so far. Thank you, Mr. Chair...

...**MS. GREEN:** Mr. Chair, I would like to propose a motion to amend clause 4(b), and I believe that the text will be distributed at this time. The amended subsection will read that paragraph 4(b) of Bill 16 be amended by striking out 945 hours and substituting 1,000 hours.

SPEAKER (Mr. Simpson): Thank you, Ms. Green. Motion is in order and being distributed. To the motion, Ms. Green.

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I am going to refer to the memorandum of understanding that was agreed between the Northwest Territories Teachers' Association and the Government of the Northwest Territories on Strengthening Teacher Instructional Practise, and I am going to quote a segment of the MOU here.

It says, and I quote, "During the life of this collective agreement, the association and the employer agree to work together to explore a range of evidence-based possibilities that may have a positive impact on teacher effectiveness and improved student outcomes. This could include changes to the Education Act and the implementation and subsequent evaluation of structured pilot projects. These pilot projects would include a focus on redirecting up to 100 instructional hours per school year." End of the section that I am quoting there.

Mr. Chair, this is not what happened. We, as a group of MLAs, were not given a range of options. We were given one option, which is Bill 16, the bill in front of us. What we learned through this process is that this initiative does not come from the Education Renewal Initiative. In fact, it is more likely that it came out of negotiations, and that it was an add-on to satisfy legitimate - and I am going to repeat that - legitimate concerns teachers have about their own wellness. We, of course, want teachers to be well and to be ready to do the innumerable tasks which we now require of them in the classroom. But, as I said earlier, we were not presented a range of options. We were given our marching orders, and we were expected to comply with them.

What we need here is more teachers, simply put. We, as I have already said, expect a tremendous amount of our teachers. The classroom has become a much more complex place than it was when I graduated almost 40 years ago. Teachers are required to take into account so many more student needs and to accommodate them in ways that certainly were not acknowledged in my era, and that is not a bad thing, but there is a limit to what they can do.

I want to say that we have had a tremendous amount of input from the teachers on the student instructional practice. I would like to correct the record in saying that there were

27 submissions rather than 230 formal submissions on this bill, but I also have to say that I received at least as many personal e-mails from both teachers and parents on this issue, and I know that many of my colleagues did as well. The people who were least heard from were the parents, and even less than them, the students. They seemed to be running behind afterwards because they did not have the communication in a proactive way, whether that is the responsibility of the school boards or whether that was the responsibility of the department.

Not surprisingly, they were very concerned about the parity of the high school diploma granted by the NWT with that granted by Alberta as the two jurisdictions share a common curriculum as we all know.

The Yellowknife Catholic schools responded to this question about providing certainty to parents by passing a motion at its February board meeting saying that they would not reduce hours at St. Patrick High School here in Yellowknife lower than 1,000 in order to maintain that parity. Their argument was that the students all write the same exams, and that they needed to have equal access to preparation.

The comparison with Alberta is really the only one that matters here because we teach the same curriculum. The comparison to other jurisdictions in Canada is not relevant. When the department came to brief the standing committee on this bill in February, the Deputy Minister confirmed that parity was an important issue, and she pledged that it would be place. In an attempt to find a middle ground between ensuring that teachers are not only well, but they have the time to collaborate and to engage in professional development, and that parents have the certainty that their children in high school will receive the same number of instructional hours as children in Alberta. My proposal is to reduce the instructional hours, not by 100 but by 45. The original Act says, 1045. I am suggesting 1000. That gives teachers an additional 45 hours to spend on ways to improve their own health and their outcomes, and it would provide certainty for parents that there is parity with Alberta.

Now, this MOU is not the collective agreement. It is a pilot project. What the department has done is just moved directly into legislating this change. I do not think that is the right thing to do. I think that we should maintain parity with Alberta for high school, and we should evaluate, and I know the department is coming forward with an evaluation plan. Evaluate how this is rolling out before we reduce the hours any further. And we also need to keep in mind that Alberta is going through this exercise as well. So, they may also decide that they want the change in their current mandatory minimums, and so that may prompt changes further in the future.

Just to summarize, the intention of this motion is to find a middle ground between the certainty that parents told us they wanted for their children's education, and the wellness that the teachers' said that they need in order to find their work satisfying, and the outcomes for their students satisfying as well.

For that reason, I am putting forward this motion. I have already had significant consultation on this motion with my colleagues. It is my understanding that they will not be supporting it, but I think it is important that we acknowledge that we also heard from parents that they have this issue, that it is a valid issue, that we have heard them, and in

the case of this motion by me, that I support them in wanting to have this standard of education for their children. Those are my comments, Mr. Chair.

...**MS. GREEN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Of course, when one applies to university, nobody is interested in how many hours you spend in a classroom. What they're interested in is what your marks are and I continue to believe that in order for NWT students to be competitive in departmental exams and have the best chance to compete with Alberta students for post-secondary education that they need the mandatory minimum instructional hours in high school to be set at 1,000.

The last thing I want today just reflect on is that it is a mystery to me and has been for many months here that the Department is adamant that every school have JK and it be uniform in every school, but when it comes to mandatory minimum instructional hours, every school can make up its own mind. Is it Department setting the standards or is it whimsical? This is not clear to me as a result of this debate on Bill 16. I'd like to request a recorded vote.

RECORDED VOTE

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you, Ms. Green. The Member has requested a recorded vote. To all those in favour, please stand.

CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr. Mercer): Ms. Green.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): All those opposed, please stand.

CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr. Mercer): Mr. Nadli, Mr. Nakimayak, Mr. Moses, Ms. Cochrane, Mr. Abernethy, Mr. McLeod Yellowknife South, Mr. McLeod Inuvik Twin Lakes, Mr. Schumann, Mr. Sebert, Mr. Blake, Mr. McNeely, Mr. Vanthuyne, Mr. Testart, Mr. Thompson, Mr. O' Reilly.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): All those abstaining, please stand. The results of the recorded vote are one in favour, 15 opposed, 0 abstentions. The motion is defeated.

---Defeated...