

## MEMBER STATEMENT—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

### REFLECTIONS ON INTRODUCTION OF JUNIOR KINDERGARTEN

March 13, 2018

**MS. GREEN:** Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I want to reflect on the debate we had a year ago about the introduction of junior kindergarten. Much of the discussion at that time concerned funding, but I also talked about the impact junior kindergarten would have on existing early childhood development programs. I was concerned that parents would have fewer choices for their four-year-olds. In fact, a year later, that is the case here in Yellowknife. I'm also concerned that pouring resources into JK has diminished what's available for children up to three years old.

Mr. Speaker, the introduction of junior kindergarten has pushed Ecole St. Joseph School to maximum classroom capacity within their school, and Weledeh isn't far behind. ECE has agreed to increase capacity at St. Joe's by investing \$1.5 million in portable classrooms. This isn't counted as a cost of JK, but it is.

The uptake in junior kindergarten has resulted in the loss of one classroom of 16 children at the Montessori School in Yellowknife, and they may lose another one in the fall. They are trying to stay viable by offering after-school and full-day care on professional development days.

There have also been changes at the Yellowknife Play School. Children are a lower average age, and that's resulted in adjustments, including a new focus on toilet training and purchasing age-appropriate play resources. Mornings are well attended, but afternoons have been harder to fill, resulting in an overall drop in income, the board says.

Mr. Speaker, there have also been significant changes at the Aboriginal Head Start programs. They have lost most of their four-year-olds, so their total numbers are down, and their funding is down as a result. Some programs have had challenges, but they continue as community-based language and culture programs for children ages zero to three. It's worth noting, in this context, that JK is still not fully funded for Aboriginal language and culture, with an overall shortfall of \$300,000 across the NWT. Until that's resourced, Mr. Speaker, the Minister has not met his promise to fully fund JK.

Mr. Speaker, it is by no means all bad news. ECE reports that 85 per cent of four-year-olds across the NWT are enrolled in JK, and they attend eight days out of 10. That gives parents an opportunity to set children up for success at school.

What parents don't have is as much choice in programming for their four-year-olds. JK is rapidly becoming the only option. I'm also concerned that it may be using up resources that used to be ear-marked for early childhood development programs for children up to three years old. I'll have questions for the Minister. Mahsi.