



What We Heard Report | Rapport sur ce
que nous avons entendu

Education Act Modernization | Modernisation de la Loi sur l'éducation

December 2021 | Décembre 2021



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English

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French

Kĩspin ki nitawih̄tĩn ē nĩh̄yawih̄k ōma ācimōwin, tipwāsīnān.

Cree

Tłjchq yatı k'èè. Dı wegodi newq dè, gots'ō gonede.

Tłjchq

ʔerih̄t'ıs Dēne Sųłıné yatı t'a huts'elkēr xa beyáyatı theʔą ʔat'e, nuwe ts'en yółtı.

Chipewyan

Edı gondı dehgáh got'je zhatıé k'éé edat'éh enahddhę nıde naxets'é edahıı.

South Slavey

K'áhshó got'ıne xadā k'é hederı ʔedıht'é yerıniwę nıde dúle.

North Slavey

Jii gwandak izhii ginjik vat'atr'ıjāhch'uu zhit yinothtan jı', diits'at ginohkhıı.

Gwich'in

Uvanittuaq ilitchurisukupku Inuvialuktun, ququaqłuta.

Inuvialuktun

Ĉ'đđ ɳɳ^{sb}Δ^c ʌɹLJΔɹ^c Δɔ^bɳɳ^cɹLɳɳ^b, ɔ^cɳ^cɳ^cɔ^c ɔ^bɳ^cɹ^aɳ^cɳ^c.

Inuktitut

Hapkua titiqqat pijumagupkit Inuinnaqtun, uvaptinnut hivajarlutit.

Inuinnaqtun

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Minister's Statement

The future of education in the Northwest Territories is a story as much about the future of the people who live here today as it is about future generations. As a government, our role in this story is to listen and build a path forward based on what you want for your families and communities.

Following the 2019 territorial election, the members of the Legislative Assembly made it a priority to increase student education outcomes to the same level as the rest of Canada. One way in which the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) has committed to achieve this is through the modernization of the *Education Act*. This report is a reflection of what we have heard so far about *Education Act* modernization.

Over the course of three and a half months, we have reached out to hear from as many Indigenous governments, stakeholders, and members of the public as possible to gather your thoughts on the future of Junior Kindergarten to Grade 12 education.

During this time, we heard from hundreds of people across the NWT; they shared with us their ideas, values, aspirations, concerns, and warnings about potential changes to the *Education Act*. Together, these reflections have informed this report and will inform the modernization of the *Education Act*.

I feel privileged to have had the chance to listen to your stories, ideas, and hopes for the future of your nations, your communities, your families, and our territory. For each of those minutes and hours you spent speaking with us or documenting your ideas in a survey or written submission, I want to sincerely thank you.

We will never be able to make meaningful change and continue our path of reconciliation without input and involvement from the people who call the Northwest Territories home. You have all contributed to taking these first steps toward ensuring the *Education Act* prepares students for lives as adults proud of their cultures, communities, and work. I invite you now to read this report. I hope you will continue to follow our progress toward modernizing the *Education Act*, lending your voice along the way.

R.J. Simpson
Minister of Education, Culture and Employment



Déclaration du ministre

L'avenir de l'éducation aux Territoires du Nord-Ouest concerne autant l'avenir des gens qui vivent ici aujourd'hui que celui des générations futures. En tant que gouvernement, notre rôle est d'écouter et de tracer la voie en fonction de ce que vous voulez pour vos familles et vos collectivités.

Après l'élection de 2019, les députés se sont donné comme priorité de hausser le taux de réussite des élèves au même niveau que le reste du Canada. Pour y arriver, le gouvernement des Territoires du Nord-Ouest s'est notamment engagé à moderniser la *Loi sur l'éducation*. Ce rapport présente ce que nous avons entendu jusqu'ici sur la modernisation de la *Loi sur l'éducation*.

Pendant trois mois et demi, nous avons consulté le plus grand nombre possible de gouvernements autochtones, d'intervenants et de membres du public afin de connaître leur opinion sur l'avenir de l'enseignement de la maternelle à la 12^e année.

Pendant ces consultations, nous avons entendu des centaines de personnes de l'ensemble des TNO; elles nous ont fait part de leurs idées, de leurs valeurs, de leurs aspirations, de leurs préoccupations et de leurs réserves concernant les changements proposés à la *Loi sur l'éducation*. Ces réflexions ont éclairé le présent rapport et éclaireront les discussions sur la modernisation de la *Loi sur l'éducation*.

Je me sens privilégié d'avoir eu la chance d'écouter vos histoires, vos idées et vos espoirs pour l'avenir des peuples, des collectivités et des familles des TNO. Je vous remercie sincèrement pour chaque minute et chaque heure passées à nous parler ou à documenter vos idées dans un sondage ou une présentation écrite.

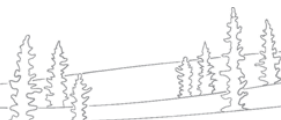
Nous ne serons jamais en mesure d'apporter des changements significatifs et de poursuivre notre chemin sur la voie de la réconciliation sans la contribution et la participation des résidents des Territoires du Nord-Ouest. Vous avez tous contribué à faire les premiers pas pour que la *Loi sur l'éducation* prépare les élèves à devenir des adultes fiers de leur culture, de leur communauté et de leur travail. Je vous invite maintenant à lire ce rapport. J'espère que vous continuerez à suivre le projet de modernisation de la *Loi sur l'éducation* et que vous n'hésitez pas à donner votre opinion.

R. J. Simpson
Ministre de l'Éducation, de la Culture et de la Formation



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Executive Summary

As part of the GNWT commitment to increase student education outcomes to the same level as the rest of Canada, the Department of Education, Culture and Employment (ECE) has undertaken work to modernize the *Education Act*.

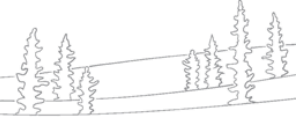
This report details what we heard from Indigenous governments, education bodies, stakeholders, and the public during the first engagement phase of the modernization process, which occurred between March 15 and June 30, 2021. The conversations held during this engagement period were based on the Discussion Paper (March 2021) prepared by ECE outlining the current structure of the *Education Act*, associated challenges with the structure, and considerations for modernization.

During the engagement process we heard from Indigenous governments, education bodies, stakeholders, and the public that while changes are needed to our education system, more conversation and collaboration is needed to develop a path forward together. The conversation has therefore only just begun.

Based on what we heard ECE is establishing a two phase approach for next steps toward modernization. Phase 1 and Phase 2 will occur simultaneously starting in 2022.

Phase 1: In Phase 1 ECE will develop a legislative proposal during the life of the 19th Legislative Assembly that addresses technical challenges in the current education system, like resolving conflicting authorities and enabling timely Ministerial access to information about student outcomes. Phase 1 will address issues that were acknowledged as needing immediate attention or received no significant comments of concern during the engagement period, and that have been identified during past OAG audits as impeding the ability of the current education system to improve student outcomes.

Phase 2: In Phase 2 ECE will continue collaborating with Indigenous governments, education bodies, stakeholders and the public about the future of education system structure and governance. We heard clearly during the first round of engagement that more conversation and collaboration is needed about how Indigenous governments and communities across the NWT can meaningfully lead and participate in the governance of a system that is educating future generations. Phase 2 will take time, and work will continue beyond the 19th Legislative Assembly so that we can together develop and build a modern education system in the NWT. Phase 2 will begin in early 2022 with discussions between the Minister and Indigenous Governments about how to effectively collaborate on the creation of a modern education governance system that increases student education outcomes to the same level as the rest of Canada.



What we heard: Main themes

About the modernization process:

- **Concentrate on student outcomes**; the system is here for them.
- **Do not rush** to modernize. People see modernization as a once in a generation opportunity and do not want to see the legislative decision-making and development process rushed to meet an electoral deadline.
- **Work with Indigenous governments and stakeholders** throughout the modernization process.

About education system structure and governance:

- **Do not centralize** the education system; but
 - **Improve communication** between all levels of the education system.
- **Provide strategic direction** from ECE; but also
 - **Empower local authorities** to make the right decisions for their communities; and
 - **Collaborate** on issues where local authorities need resources and support to implement programs.
- **Enable Indigenous governments** to assume responsibility for education; and also
 - **Recognize varying approaches** to this process as every government has its own aspirations.
 - **Involve Indigenous governments** in the system; do not wait for self-government.
- **Coordinate services across the NWT by collaborating** to maximize economies of scale; but
 - **Stay flexible** and ensure services can adapt to local needs.
- **Adopt needs-based funding** that ensures equity; but
 - **Do not financially penalize** regional centres to achieve this goal.

About language and culture:

- **Improve the availability** of language instruction in Indigenous languages.
- **Improve the availability** of language instruction in French.
- **Support development** of learning materials and resources in all official languages.
- **Foster** thriving communities of Indigenous language speakers.
- **Foster** thriving communities of French language speakers.
- **Revitalize** Indigenous languages and cultures.
- **Infuse** Indigeneity into education; but also
 - **Equip students** with the education they need to succeed no matter where they go or what they choose to do in the future.

About the education program:

- **Make curriculum and curriculum delivery relevant** to northern students.
- **Fund inclusive schooling** so implementation matches the legislative commitment.
- **Remove barriers** to accessing inclusive schooling.
- **Calendars should be set locally** while collaborating territorially.
- **Revise the *Safe Schools Regulations*** so that they meet the realities of today.

About education staff:

- **Update** the process for teacher certification; but
 - **Remember** the challenges of employing educators in the NWT when doing so; and
 - **Ensure** language speakers and knowledge keepers have a place in the classroom.
- **Recognize** Indigenous qualification equivalencies.
- **Support a variety of counselling options** including Child and Youth Care Counsellors (CYCCs) and school-based counsellors.

For more information about *Education Act* modernization or to read *Education Act Modernization: Discussion Paper for Public Engagement*, please go to www.gov.nt.ca/en/edAct or www.gov.nt.ca/fr/loiedu.



Sommaire

Dans le cadre de l'engagement du gouvernement des Territoires du Nord-Ouest (GTNO) à hausser le taux de réussite des élèves pour qu'il atteigne le même niveau que dans le reste du Canada, le ministère de l'Éducation, de la Culture et de la Formation a entrepris de moderniser la *Loi sur l'éducation*.

Ce rapport décrit ce que nous ont dit les gouvernements autochtones, les organismes d'éducation, les intervenants et le public au cours de la première étape de consultation du processus de modernisation, qui s'est déroulée du 15 mars et au 30 juin 2021. Les discussions qui ont eu lieu pendant les consultations s'appuyaient sur un document de travail (mars 2021) préparé par le MÉCF qui décrit la structure actuelle de la *Loi sur l'éducation*, les défis liés à la structure et les facteurs à considérer pour la modernisation.

Au cours du processus de consultation, les gouvernements autochtones, les organismes d'éducation, les intervenants et le public nous ont dit que, même si des changements sont nécessaires dans notre système d'éducation, il faut poursuivre la conversation et la collaboration pour élaborer ensemble une voie à suivre. La conversation ne fait donc que commencer.

Sur la base de ce que nous avons entendu, le MÉCF établit une approche en deux phases pour les prochaines étapes de la modernisation. La phase 1 et la phase 2 se dérouleront simultanément à partir de 2022.

Phase 1 : Au cours de la phase 1, le MÉCF élaborera une proposition législative pendant la durée de la 19^e Assemblée législative, afin de relever les défis techniques du système d'éducation actuel, comme la résolution des conflits d'autorité et l'accès ministériel rapide aux informations sur les résultats des élèves. La phase 1 portera sur les questions qui ont été reconnues comme nécessitant une attention immédiate ou qui n'ont fait l'objet d'aucun commentaire important au cours de la période de consultation, mais qui ont été identifiées lors de vérifications antérieures du BVG comme entravant la capacité du système d'éducation actuel à améliorer les résultats des élèves.

Phase 2 : Dans la phase 2, le MÉCF continuera à collaborer avec les gouvernements autochtones, les organismes d'éducation, les intervenants et le public sur l'avenir de la structure et de la gouvernance du système d'éducation. Nous avons clairement entendu au cours de la première ronde de consultation qu'il faut plus de discussions et une collaboration accrue sur la façon dont les gouvernements et les collectivités autochtones des TNO peuvent diriger le système qui éduque les générations futures et participer à sa gouvernance de façon significative. La phase 2 prendra du temps, et le travail se poursuivra au-delà de la 19^e Assemblée législative afin que nous puissions ensemble développer et

construire un système d'éducation moderne aux TNO. La phase 2 commencera au début de 2022 par des discussions entre le ministre et les gouvernements autochtones sur la manière de collaborer efficacement à la création d'un système moderne de gouvernance de l'éducation qui permette d'améliorer les résultats scolaires des élèves pour qu'ils atteignent le même niveau que ceux du reste du Canada.

Ce que nous avons entendu : thèmes principaux

À propos du processus de modernisation :

- **Se concentrer sur la réussite scolaire;** le système est là pour les élèves.
- **Ne pas précipiter la modernisation.** Les gens voient la modernisation comme une occasion qui se présente une fois dans une génération et ne veulent pas que l'on précipite le processus décisionnel et d'élaboration de la loi à des fins électorales.
- **Travailler avec les gouvernements et les intervenants autochtones** tout au long du processus de modernisation.

À propos de la structure et de la gouvernance du système d'éducation :

- **Ne pas centraliser** le système d'éducation, mais plutôt
 - **Améliorer la communication** entre les intervenants de tous les échelons du système d'éducation.
- **Obtenir une orientation stratégique** de la part du GTNO et du MÉCF, mais aussi
 - **Outils les autorités locales** pour qu'elles puissent prendre les bonnes décisions pour leur collectivité;
 - **Collaborer** sur certains enjeux lorsque les autorités locales ont besoin de ressources et de soutien pour mettre des programmes en place.
- **Permettre aux gouvernements autochtones** d'assumer la responsabilité de l'éducation, et
 - **Reconnaître les différentes approches** de ce processus, car chaque gouvernement a ses propres aspirations;
 - **Impliquer les gouvernements autochtones** dans le système, ne pas attendre l'autonomie gouvernementale.
- **Coordonner les services dans l'ensemble des TNO en collaborant** afin de maximiser les économies d'échelle, mais
 - **Faire preuve de souplesse** et s'assurer que les services puissent être adaptés aux besoins locaux.
- **Adopter un mode de financement en fonction des besoins qui garantit l'équité, mais**
 - **Ne pas pénaliser financièrement** les centres régionaux pour atteindre cet objectif.



À propos de la langue et de la culture :

- **Accroître la disponibilité** de l'enseignement dans les langues autochtones;
- **Accroître la disponibilité** de l'enseignement en français;
- **Appuyer l'élaboration** de matériel et de ressources pédagogiques dans toutes les langues officielles;
- **Favoriser** le développement des communautés de langue autochtone;
- **Favoriser** le développement des communautés de langue française;
- **Revitaliser** les langues et les cultures autochtones;
- **Favoriser l'intégration** de contenu autochtone dans l'enseignement, mais aussi
 - **Offrir l'éducation** dont les élèves ont besoin pour réussir, peu importe où ils décident d'aller et ce qu'ils décident de faire plus tard.

À propos du programme d'enseignement :

- **Assurer la pertinence du programme d'études et de son enseignement** pour les élèves du Nord;
- **Financer l'intégration scolaire** afin que la mise en œuvre corresponde aux engagements législatifs;
- **Supprimer les obstacles** à l'intégration scolaire;
- **Le calendrier scolaire** doit être établi localement, tout en collaborant à l'échelle des TNO;
- **Revoir le Règlement sur la sécurité dans les écoles** afin qu'il reflète les réalités d'aujourd'hui.

À propos du personnel d'éducation :

- **Mettre à jour** le processus de certification des enseignants, mais
 - **Ne pas oublier** les défis liés à l'embauche et au maintien en poste des enseignants aux TNO;
 - **S'assurer** que les locuteurs des différentes langues officielles et les gardiens du savoir ont une place dans les salles de classe.
- **Reconnaître** les équivalences des qualifications autochtones;
- **Soutenir différentes options de counseling**, comme les conseillers en soins à l'enfance et à la jeunesse et les conseillers en milieu scolaire.

Pour en savoir plus sur la modernisation de la *Loi sur l'éducation* ou pour consulter le document *Modernisation de la Loi sur l'éducation : Document de discussion en vue d'un échange avec le public*; visitez le www.gov.nt.ca/fr/loiedu ou le www.gov.nt.ca/en/edAct.



Part I – Introduction

From March 15 to June 30, 2021, the Department of Education, Culture and Employment (ECE) engaged with Indigenous governments, stakeholders in education, as well as the public to hear their ideas, hopes, aspirations, and concerns about the modernization of Junior Kindergarten to Grade 12 (JK-12) education. To give conversations a solid foundation, ECE released *Education Act Modernization: Discussion Paper for Public Engagement* (the Discussion Paper).

The engagement process allowed ECE to hear from the majority of Indigenous governments and education bodies, an array of stakeholders, and members of the public including parents, teachers, recent graduates, and current students. Opportunities for more conversation will be possible as work to modernize the *Education Act* continues.

Part I of this report includes the following information:

- Background on *Education Act* modernization;
- Methodology used to organize and document engagements; and
- Engagement statistics.

Background

Gaps in student outcomes exist between Northwest Territories (NWT) students and the Canadian average; between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in the NWT; and between regional centres and smaller communities.¹ The goal of *Education Act* modernization is to increase opportunities for student success across the territory, while addressing gaps in student outcomes, like those outlined in the Discussion Paper.² Improving educational opportunities for students in every community is also another important step on the journey of reconciliation.



Angela Gzowski Photography

¹ Government of the Northwest Territories [GNWT], *Education Act Modernization: Discussion Paper for Public Engagement* (Department of Education, Culture and Employment, March 2021), 2.

² GNWT, *Discussion Paper*, 2.

To address these differences in student success, the GNWT has made it a priority to improve student outcomes across the NWT to the same level as the rest of Canada.³ ECE has a number of initiatives underway to help improve student outcomes as part of the 10-year *Education Renewal and Innovation* (ERI) Framework, as well as the recently released *Action Plan to Improve Student Outcomes in the NWT* (the Action Plan).

The Action Plan was developed in response to both the midterm 5-year evaluation of the ERI Framework, as well as the February 2020 report of the Office of the Auditor General (OAG) on JK-12 education.⁴ One of the key action items identified within the Action Plan, as well as in the GNWT's 2019-2023 Mandate, is to modernize the *Education Act* to support student success.⁵

The overarching goal of modernizing the *Education Act* is to make sure the legislative framework allows for further improvements to the education system. Another goal is to eliminate confusion about the roles and responsibilities of the different authorities that exist in the current *Education Act*. Creating clarity in the system will in turn create more efficient processes that can be revised and adapted to achieve student success. Clarity will also help to address current issues of inconsistency and a lack of capacity across the education system. The lack of clarity across the education system currently makes it hard for everyone to operate as efficiently as possible toward improving student outcomes.

Modernization of the *Education Act* on its own will not guarantee improved educational outcomes for NWT students. The NWT continues to address intergenerational trauma, including inequitable access to resources and services, resulting from colonialism and the residential school system. Many residents of the NWT also experience challenges associated with poverty, food insecurity, housing, mental health, and addictions. The NWT continues to face challenges with a high cost of living and limited telecommunications infrastructure. All of these create barriers to student learning that cannot alone be overcome through changes to the *Education Act*.

³ GNWT, *Mandate of the Government of the Northwest Territories (2019-2023)* (Department of Executive and Indigenous Affairs, February 2020), 27.

⁴ GNWT, *Action Plan to Improve Student Outcomes in the NWT* (Department of Education, Culture and Employment, December 2020), 3-4.

⁵ GNWT, 28; GNWT, *Mandate*, 27.

Methodology

Phases of Engagement

At the start of this process there were two key engagement phases planned for work to modernize the *Education Act*:

- Phase 1 consisted of a broad public engagement process held between March and June 2021, the results of which are reflected in this *What We Heard* Report. The engagement process for Phase 1 used the Discussion Paper to help facilitate engagement. Phase 1 was purposely open-ended, providing no pre-determined proposals for legislative change so that ECE could collect a diverse array of feedback from all participants on a broad set of topics.
- Phase 2 was planned to take place at a time when a legislative proposal was developed.

As described in the Executive Summary and Next Steps sections of this report this planned process is being amended to respond to what we heard about the need for further engagement with Indigenous governments, education bodies, stakeholders, and the public.

Advertising and communication

Information about the engagement process for *Education Act* modernization was communicated widely. ECE shared information about this public engagement process in the following ways.

Direct outreach

Indigenous governments

The Minister directly contacted Indigenous governments through letters and follow-up phone calls, inviting leaders and officials to participate in the engagement process through meetings with the Minister and/or ECE officials, phone calls, or written submissions. The Minister also asked Indigenous governments to help ECE hear from Elders and community members.



Angela Gzowski Photography



Education bodies and educators

The Minister and ECE officials respectively, communicated directly with education bodies, including Divisional Education Councils (DECs), District Education Authorities (DEAs), and comparable organizations as defined in the *Education Act* and regulations, as well as the NWT Teachers' Association (NWTTA) to welcome their participation and the participation of educators in the discussion. The Minister met directly with Chairpersons and Superintendents of education bodies throughout the process to ensure their views were heard and documented. Chairpersons and Superintendents helped ECE share information with their school communities (students, parents, and educators) about engagement opportunities.

Other stakeholders

ECE also directly communicated by email with, and welcomed feedback from, many organizations, including business representative organizations and public interest organizations with a clear interest in the future of Junior Kindergarten to Grade 12 education.

Advertising

Social media

Facebook advertising, both targeted and organic, was used to promote engagement.

Facebook ads for virtual public engagement events were shared on GNWT Facebook pages as well as on local community Facebook channels across the NWT.

Radio

Advertising and promotion for the engagement process, and to promote public engagement events, occurred through the following channels and in the following languages:

- Advertising in Sahtúq'ıne Yatı (North Slavey), Dene Zhatıé (South Slavey), Tıchq Yatı, Dēne Sıhné Yatıé (Chipewyan), and Dinjii Zhu' Gınjik (Gwich'in) on CKLB
- Advertising in English on Cabin Radio⁶ and CBC North
- Advertising in French on Radio Taiga

Public Service Announcements also ran on CBC North in the days leading up to regional sessions.



Print/Online

Newspaper ads ran across the NWT, advertising public engagement sessions in News North, the Inuvik Drum, Hay River Hub, l'Aquilon, and the Yellowknifer.

In addition to the radio ads on Cabin Radio, online advertising ran on the Cabin Radio website.

An advertisement also ran in the May issue of the NWTTA newsletter, in addition to promotion by the NWTTA as an organization to its members encouraging their participation in engagement sessions.

Other advertisements

Posters advertising public engagement sessions in English and French were posted on community bulletin boards in coordination with Government Service Officers (GSO) across NWT communities.

As the GNWT is the largest employer in the NWT, ECE also advertised information about the engagement process through the GNWT's employee news service, Bear Net. Advertising through Bear Net provided the chance to have information about *Education Act* modernization engagement seen by thousands of parents, educators, and NWT residents.

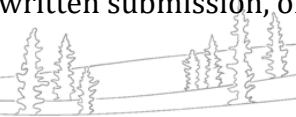
Opportunities for engagement

Due to the impact COVID-19 had on travel during the engagement period, all engagements were held online. As discussed later in this report, this constraint on the engagement process created challenges for reaching some stakeholder groups and members of the public. However, the process also provided new opportunities to engage more efficiently with people across the NWT. On several occasions, meeting virtually allowed ECE to meet with multiple groups and people across different communities at the same time, and on the same day.

To ensure the public had multiple ways of engaging in discussions about *Education Act* modernization, a variety of opportunities were made available to Indigenous governments, education bodies, stakeholders, and the public.

In the event that anyone wanted to contact ECE about this engagement process, they could contact ECE by a project-specific email address, EAM@gov.nt.ca, or by calling ECE's Senior Legislative Advisor for *Education Act* Modernization, whose phone number was available online throughout the engagement period and as part of all engagement presentations.

There were four primary ways to participate in the public engagement on *Education Act* modernization: completing a survey, participating in an in-person conversation online, making a written submission, or having a one-to-one meeting.



Surveys

Five different public engagement surveys⁷ were developed and made available on the engagement webpage.

The surveys targeted different audiences to ensure ECE was able to gather unique perspectives about *Education Act* modernization from key partner and stakeholder groups.

The five surveys were designed to get feedback from:

1. Indigenous governments and organizations
2. Educators and education administrators
3. Parents and guardians
4. Current and former JK-12 students
5. General public

Virtual engagement sessions with Indigenous governments, and stakeholders

Virtual engagement sessions were held with Indigenous governments and education stakeholders who expressed an interest in speaking directly with the Minister and/or ECE officials. ECE also held a series of engagement sessions with GNWT summer students. Sessions with Indigenous governments, education bodies, and stakeholders allowed ECE to hear about the experiences of recent graduates of the NWT education system, while also hearing how those experiences have served them in post-secondary education and employment.

To ensure the process was as transparent and impartial as possible, two northern facilitators external to ECE facilitated meetings with Indigenous governments during the engagement period.

Virtual public engagement sessions⁸

With the restrictions on travel due to COVID-19, it was not possible to arrange and hold in-person public engagement sessions in communities across the territory. To ensure members of the public were able to participate in this engagement process and have their voices heard, ECE scheduled and advertised a series of regional virtual public engagement sessions. Like the sessions with Indigenous governments and education stakeholders, two northern facilitators external to ECE facilitated these meetings to ensure transparency and impartiality.

⁷ The survey questions for each of the 5 surveys can be seen in Appendix A.

⁸ A full list of meetings is available in Appendix B.

Seven regional public engagement sessions were scheduled across the NWT. Participants were required to register for the event in advance. If an event had fewer than 3 registered participants, the event was cancelled and participants were invited to join another meeting or speak with an ECE representative one-to-one to share their views and ideas. The sessions were scheduled according to the following geographic and language criteria:

- Beaufort-Delta region: June 1, 2021
- Sahtu region: June 3, 2021 - Cancelled
- Dehcho region: June 7, 2021 - Cancelled
- North Slave region: June 8, 2021 - Cancelled
- Territory-wide French language session: June 9, 2021
- South Slave region: June 10, 2021
- Yellowknife region: June 14, 2021

Of the seven public engagement events scheduled, four were held. Three were cancelled due to low registration.

Process for meetings

Public engagement sessions and engagement sessions with Indigenous governments and education stakeholders were facilitated to ensure that most of the meeting time was dedicated to hearing from participants. Meetings began with an opening presentation providing an overview of why ECE is working to modernize the *Education Act*, followed by 1 to 2 hours of facilitated conversation, during which comments from meeting participants were documented using a virtual whiteboard and sticky notes. This interactive process allowed meeting participants to see their comments in real time and correct any misunderstandings. This process demonstrated for participants that ECE was accurately hearing and documenting their ideas and opinions in real time.

After an engagement session, meeting participants were given the opportunity to review the notes taken during the meeting and validate, amend for clarity, or add additional information to ensure their ideas and opinions were reflected accurately.





Figure 1 Whiteboard example from online meeting with members of the public in the Beaufort-Delta region. [June 1, 2021]

One-to-one conversations

To ensure everyone had the opportunity to engage in the conversation at a date and time available to them, an option to speak one-to-one with ECE was available and advertised on the engagement webpage and in other engagement advertising.

Written submissions

To ensure Indigenous governments, stakeholders, and the public had the opportunity to document their ideas, values, aspirations and concerns about potential changes to the *Education Act*, ECE accepted written submissions, either in addition to or instead of one-to-one engagements or participation in another conversation.

Who we are still looking to engage

Technology was an effective tool for allowing ECE to meet with and hear from many people in an efficient way. The online engagement process made it possible to schedule more meetings within the engagement period than would have been possible with in-person meetings, as the logistics and time necessary for travel would have inevitably reduced the time available for discussions.

Limitations to the process are also clear. Not being able to travel and meet in person limited interactions to persons who have a stable internet connection, who can afford to have the technology needed to engage in these conversations, and who have the technical

skills or support needed to participate in online and teleconference engagement sessions. These barriers meant that reaching Elders and people in smaller communities was a challenge.

COVID-19 also affected ECE’s ability to reach current JK-12 students. ECE found that it was not feasible to engage students in the classroom, even virtually, due to COVID-19 restrictions and the existing pressures on teachers and students regarding class time during the final months of the school year.

As work to modernize the *Education Act* continues, ECE will continue our work to ensure the voices of Elders, members of smaller communities, and students are heard in the conversation.

Engagement Statistics

The following infographics provide information about who responded and how they participated in the conversation.



584 surveys completed



40 online engagement meetings



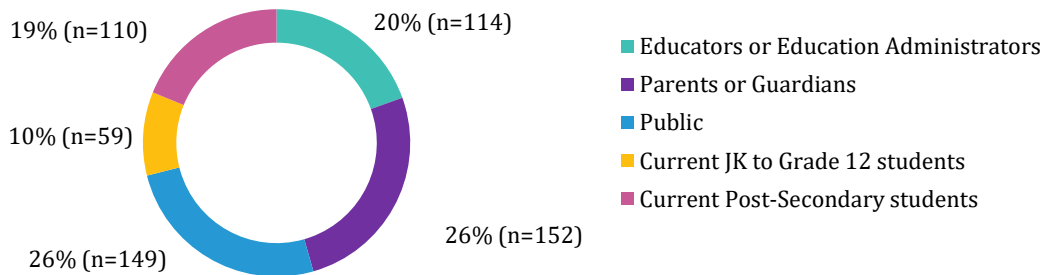
8 written submissions



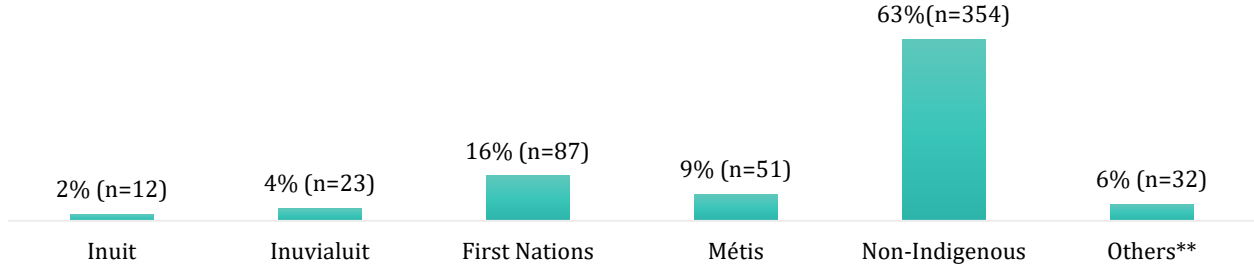
4 one-to-one conversations

Survey demographics

Distribution by Stakeholder Type (N=584)*



Distribution by Ethnicity (N=559)



* Indigenous governments were excluded from the reporting due to the low number of respondents who completed the survey.

** Respondents who selected the response option 'Others' included those who identified as Dene, Indigenous Non-Aboriginal, Caucasian, Vietnamese and Filipino.

Number of Engagement Meetings

40 Engagement Sessions Completed



4 Public



9 Indigenous governments



14 Education bodies



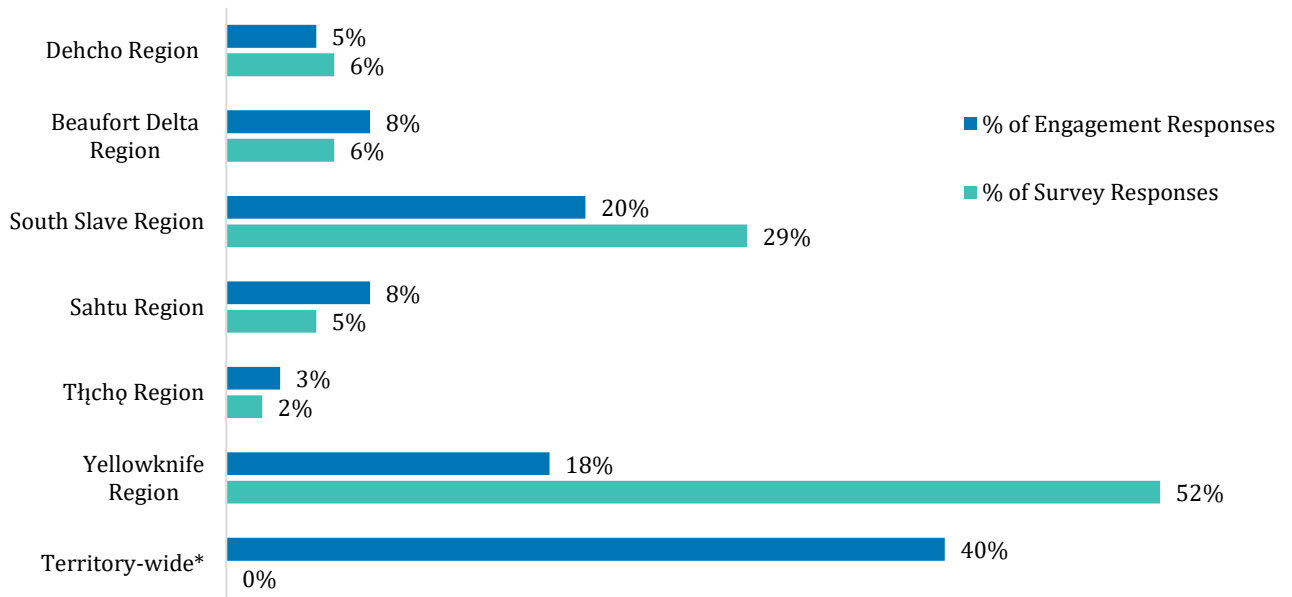
4 Public interest and labour organizations



9 Focus groups, including:
5 GNWT summer student meetings
2 Educator meetings
1 Principal meeting
1 Standing Committee meeting



Distribution of survey responses (N=584) and engagement meetings (N=40) by region



* Territory-wide is defined as engagement meetings that involved participants representing more than one region.



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Part II – What We Heard

Part II of the report highlights what we heard and is organized, as much as possible, using the same headings and subheadings as those used in the Discussion Paper. Key themes or topics in each heading and subheading are then indicated, and context is added. Comments documented during discussions, surveys, or written submissions that do not fit into one of the Discussion Paper headings as seen through the lens of *Education Act* modernization are captured under the section, *Things we heard beyond the Discussion Paper*.

Collaboration and Reconciliation

It was clear throughout conversations that people believe change to the education system is needed. However, many are not sure that legislative change is the primary vehicle for making needed change. Many of the issues that were discussed, such as teacher hiring and retention, curriculum development and implementation, or student attendance, concern areas of policy and program development and implementation that can be improved without legislative change, or are influenced by challenges beyond the scope of the *Education Act*. In many of these instances, what people said they would like to see is an increase to financial and human resources (e.g. education and school staff) that will help implement existing legislative, policy, and program requirements. People also want to see collaboration throughout the system to meet these challenges.

Overall, ECE heard that the education system needs improved human resource capacity to increase student success to the same level as the rest of Canada. Recruiting qualified educators into classrooms and retaining them once they are in communities working with students is critical for improving student outcomes. As discussed throughout this report, the need to develop northern and Indigenous educators through Aurora College or the future polytechnic university, is important for recruiting and retaining educators who make the NWT their home and who will continue to teach children across communities of all sizes in the years and decades to come.

Engagement sessions also highlighted the important role that *Education Act* modernization must have in ongoing reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. In addition to the GNWT's Mandate commitment to implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UN Declaration) in collaboration with Indigenous governments during the life of the 19th Legislative Assembly, respondents noted that education is a space where Indigenous and non-Indigenous children and youth, as well as their communities, can learn from one another.



Respondents noted that to achieve ongoing reconciliation, the education system must collaborate and work with Indigenous governments and communities to respond to current and changing needs. Collaboration was identified as an opportunity to ensure Indigenous governments and communities are given the authority guaranteed in the UN Declaration, while at the same time seeing that everyone is working to achieve the same high-level targets for students. A submission from one Indigenous government recommends the creation of an independent advisory board, in partnership with all Indigenous governments in the NWT, to conduct a comprehensive review of the NWT education system.

The remainder of Part II discusses areas of opportunity for legislative improvement and change. It is important to remember throughout that the primary views of Indigenous governments, educators, education administrators, other stakeholders, and the public is that student outcomes primarily depend on a well-resourced education and social system that supports students, their families, and their communities.

Education System Structure and Governance

Defining and establishing the education system and governance structure is a central part of the *Education Act*. An explanation of how the current education system is structured and governed is available in the Discussion Paper.

The goals of *Education Act* modernization regarding the structure and governance of the education system are to:

- Ensure legislation is clear about the roles and powers of the Minister and Department of ECE, Divisional Education Councils (DEC), District Education Authorities (DEA), Commission scolaire francophone Territoires du Nord-Ouest (CSFTNO), and Public Denominational Education Districts.
- Ensure the *Education Act* reflects the GNWT's commitment to reconciliation and the evolving models of Indigenous governance in the NWT.
 - The *Education Act* should allow for the seamless transition to Indigenous self-governance.
 - The *Education Act* should provide flexibility to allow for innovative Indigenous governance approaches to education through continuous collaboration between the GNWT and Indigenous governments.
- Support a funding system that provides for equitable access to JK-12 education across the NWT.



Roles and powers of the Minister, and education bodies

The Discussion Paper details the current model of locally managed education administration in the NWT, as well as some of the benefits and challenges that arise. The current system is flexible and allows for local autonomy, but also struggles with issues of limited financial and human resources at the local level and difficulties ensuring consistency across the system.

These issues are often compounded due to ambiguity in the Act, leading to confusion about whether certain roles and responsibilities are those of the Minister, or of an education body.

ECE heard substantial feedback about the education system's structure and governance, with these issues being a focus of conversations.

Ministerial authority

During engagement, the dominant view expressed was that the expansion of Ministerial authority should not be the solution to the challenges of ambiguity identified in the Discussion Paper.

Respondents expressed concerns about potential overreach in a modernized *Education Act*. Respondents support solutions focused on greater collaboration between ECE, education bodies, and Indigenous governments to mitigate current structural and governance issues.

When people did provide comments promoting increased Ministerial authority in the Act, they suggested new obligations on the Minister to ensure collaboration occurs between ECE and education bodies, or to require a Ministerial mandate for developing strategies and targets for action across the territory. In other words, support for increased Ministerial authority showed a preference for legislating an increased Ministerial commitment to collaboration and strategic planning, as opposed to increased authority in general.

A repeated sentiment in the engagement sessions was that the Minister and ECE should define **what** the strategies and goals of the education system will be, and then education bodies and schools at the local level should develop **how** those strategies and goals are implemented and achieved.

There was a feeling among respondents working in the education system that more strategic clarity and leadership, rather than an increase in authority, is what is needed from the Minister and ECE in order to lead the path toward increasing student education outcomes.



Local governance and decision-making power

Throughout the engagement process, ECE heard that people want to ensure there is a continued space for local leadership and governance in education. Discussions showed the vast majority of people support the idea that strategy, targets, and learning outcomes for student and system achievement need to be established by the Minister and ECE, and based on data and research. However, these same comments note that local governance structures are best suited to decide how change should be implemented to meet territorial strategies, targets, and learning outcomes within regions, communities, and schools.

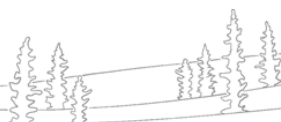
Responses indicated a preference for a blended approach to curriculum development between ECE and local authorities, specifically regarding language and culture programming. These topics are discussed in detail in the following two sections on language and culture, and the education program.

Respondents who supported maintaining local governance noted the NWT is a culturally, geographically, and linguistically diverse place. Although we have a small population, the cultural, geographic and linguistic diversity of the NWT requires local governance structures to exist and be adaptable to the unique elements of communities.

Standard setting and quality assurance

The Discussion Paper discusses the need to consider what authorities and responsibilities should be locally managed or centrally coordinated. Responses to the engagement process from Indigenous governments, education bodies, education staff, and the public indicate that people want to see a continuation of locally managed education service delivery, but with increasing levels of standard setting and quality assurance monitoring from ECE. Respondents noted the lack of effective quality assurance systems or standardized data management systems that could be implemented centrally, ensuring that local action according to local need has desired strategic impacts.

Respondents noted that, historically, the NWT education system has been managed locally in recognition of the diverse cultures, languages, and geography of the NWT. Moving to a system where services are managed centrally would be denying this reality. Respondents are particularly concerned about any potential for central coordination of the education system. Their experience is that centralization means regions and communities lose the ability to respond quickly to the needs of students, as approvals must move through the bureaucracy.



Differing views

While most feedback regarding Ministerial authority, local governance and decision-making power highlighted the need for ensuring local governance and leadership in education, ECE also heard contrary views. People who expressed a preference for a more centralized education structure and governance system said the administration and bureaucracy in the current education system is burdensome for a population the size of the NWT. These comments tended to note that communities are too small to have the expertise needed to administer the education system. People argued that money saved by reducing local and regional administration could be better spent providing education according to a territorially mandated set of strategies, goals, targets, and practices, which are then informed by advisory groups at the community level.

Collaboration

Throughout the engagement period, the topic of collaboration was frequently discussed. Participants saw many of the issues and challenges referenced in the Discussion Paper, like division of powers and ambiguity in the Act, as issues that may be solved through greater collaboration between the Minister, ECE officials, education bodies, and Indigenous governments. People do not want to see centralization of the education system if it results in imposed direction from the Minister without collaboration with Indigenous governments, education bodies, and stakeholders.

Indigenous governments want to collaborate with ECE to develop a model of education governance that allows them to lead in their communities and ensure the success of students from their communities.

Survey results

Governance style

Surveys asked respondents to indicate their preference for education system governance on a scale from locally managed to centrally coordinated. Respondents to the Public survey and Educator/Education Administrator survey shared a desire for maintaining the balance between local management and central coordination of the education system. The mean average scores from Educators and Education Administrators (112 responses) and the Public (146 responses) to this question are representative of the comments heard throughout the engagement process. Educators and education administrators seem to desire a slightly more locally managed system, while the public expressed a preference for a slightly more centrally coordinated system.



Overall, people want to see a balanced education system, with strategic leadership and goal setting handled territorially, with the processes and decisions about how to deliver effective education programs made at the local level, according to the local needs of students, parents, and communities.

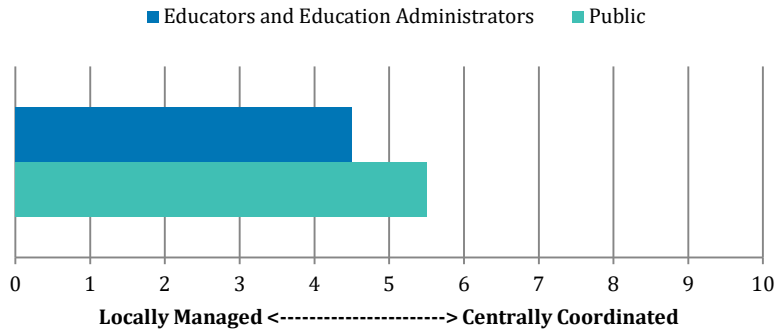


Figure 2 Results of Public and Educator and Education Administrators surveys asking the question: Where on the scale [from 1 to 10 with 1 being very locally managed and 10 being very centrally coordinated] would you suggest placing the NWT education system?

Strengths and weaknesses

Additional survey questions on the Public and Educator/Education Administrators surveys asked respondents to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the current NWT education system’s locally managed structure.

Respondents identified flexibility, local autonomy and community leadership as strengths of the current system. Among the ‘Other’ category, comments highlight factors such as ensuring education is led locally rather than from Yellowknife, and that local management can help to meet the needs of the community.

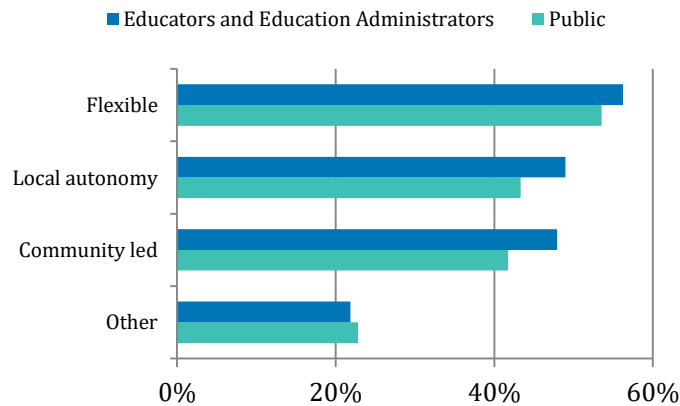


Figure 3 Results of Public and Educator and Education Administrators surveys asking the question: In your opinion, what are the strengths of the current NWT education system’s locally managed structure? Check all that apply.

Respondents identified the difficulty of ensuring consistency, the lack of community capacity, and the difficulty of implementing NWT-wide programming as weaknesses of the current locally managed system.

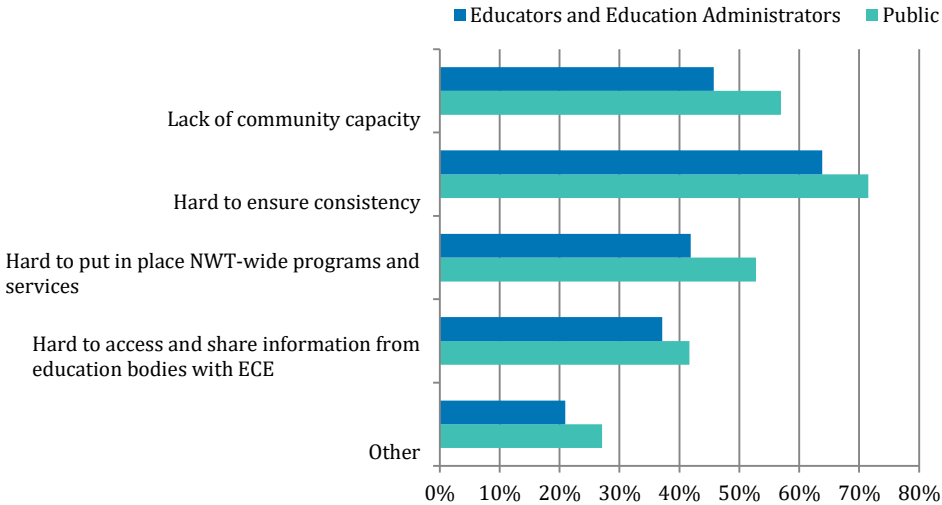


Figure 4 results of Public and Educator and Education Administrators surveys asking the question: In your opinion what are the weaknesses of the current NWT education system's locally managed structure? Check all that apply.

The points identified by survey respondents reflect issues noted in the Discussion Paper. While noting local governance weaknesses, respondents continued to show a preference for a locally managed model of governance over a centrally managed model. Several respondents noted that their concerns were not about whether the system should be locally managed or not, but rather how the system is managed. Respondents noted that Indigenous governments and communities are often not represented in the local governance structures, that there is not enough support from ECE for successful local governance, and that local representation and autonomy are not always respected by ECE.



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Overall, what we have heard indicates a desire for an education system that retains local management and addresses weaknesses through collaboration.

Indigenous Governance

Indigenous government leaders and officials made clear during engagements that they want and anticipate having a greater leadership role in the education of JK-12 students. Through self-government agreements, two Indigenous governments are currently able to assume responsibility for JK-12 education. There is an expectation that with more self-government agreements signed in the coming years, more governments will also soon be able to assume responsibility for JK-12 education. There is also an expectation that even for Indigenous governments without self-government agreements, meaningful ways will be developed to include them in education governance structures.

The Discussion Paper notes that a modern *Education Act* needs to allow for the seamless transition to Indigenous self-government implementation, and provide flexibility for innovative Indigenous governance approaches to take root through ongoing collaboration between governments and the GNWT.⁹ These statements build upon a commitment the GNWT made in *Education Renewal and Innovation Framework: Directions for Change*: to work with Indigenous governments to be successful as they assume jurisdiction over the education of their people.¹⁰

Assuming responsibility for education

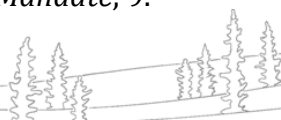
The GNWT made a commitment in its 2019-2023 Mandate to implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UN Declaration).¹¹ Within this commitment, and in recognition of the self-government agreements already signed, as well as the agreements expected to be signed in the coming years, ECE is committed to ensuring there is a process and supports for transition of authority to Indigenous governments for JK-12 education.

During the engagement period, ECE heard that flexibility is needed to implement this commitment in a modern *Education Act*, as the GNWT cannot dictate how individual Indigenous governments assume this authority. Each Indigenous government may choose to assume responsibility for education through different processes and over different lengths of time, according to their peoples' own aspirations.

⁹ GNWT, *Discussion Paper*, 20.

¹⁰ GNWT, *Education Renewal and Innovation Framework: Directions for Change* (Department of Education, Culture and Employment, October 2013), 30.

¹¹ GNWT, *Mandate*, 9.



Indigenous governments made clear that they expect the GNWT to collaborate with them and be flexible and accommodating regarding the education of children in their regions and communities. The future of Indigenous languages and continuation of culture are key motivating factors for Indigenous governments wanting to fully engage in education governance.

Participating in current education governance structures

While the aspirations of Indigenous government representatives and officials is to eventually assume authority for the provision of JK-12 education, discussions also centred on how the system could work to meet the needs of Indigenous children within the current GNWT-led education system.

There is an expectation that the Minister will collaborate with Indigenous governments in the development of programming, funding, and the overall provision of education in their regions and communities. Several articles of the UN Declaration support the right of Indigenous peoples to control their education system and ensure education is available without discrimination, and where possible, in their own culture and language.

During engagement sessions with Indigenous governments, a focus of concern and interest was the quality and availability of culturally appropriate education and education available in Indigenous languages. While the specifics around these issues are documented in the following section on language and culture, several issues were raised about the role of governance structures within the current system.

One issue that came up in several conversations with Indigenous governments was the need for Indigenous government representation on DEC and DEAs. Under the current regulations that establish DEC and DEAs, some education bodies have designated Indigenous government representation, while others do not. For example, within the regulations establishing the Beaufort-Delta Divisional Education Council (BDEC), the Gwich'in Tribal Council and Inuvialuit Regional Corporation have designated seats to which they can each appoint one member. Therefore, in addition to the elected representatives from communities, these two Indigenous governments have a legislated place at the decision-making table in their region. A similar type of Indigenous government representation is also found in some other education bodies across the NWT.

While having a legislated space at the decision-making table may not be what every Indigenous government wants, examples like the BDEC show it is possible for Indigenous governments to be involved in governance within the current education system. Having a distinct and guaranteed voice in education was of great importance to Indigenous governments from whom ECE heard. How the system guarantees the voice of Indigenous



governments in a modern system requires further conversation and collaboration with Indigenous governments.

Funding

Funding was an important point of conversation throughout the engagement process. People commented that the cost of providing education in the NWT is generally very high per student in comparison to the rest of Canada. Most respondents saw these costs as necessary for providing quality education across a large geographical area with a small and culturally diverse population. People also noted that after decades of residential school administration in the North, the education system needs funding to provide new opportunities while bridging social, learning, and qualification gaps created by a colonial system that used education as a weapon for the assimilation and degradation of Indigenous peoples.

Four important themes defined the discussion about funding, both generally and specific to the funding framework:

- Have a funding formula based on the principle of equity;
- Have a funding formula that does not penalize larger education bodies and schools in order to increase funding and resources to smaller education bodies and schools;
- Have a funding formula that is able to respond to changing needs, while holding the GNWT accountable for its funding commitments; and
- The term Pupil-Teacher Ratio (PTR) is confusing. Although in many contexts outside the NWT, PTR refers to class sizes and the number of students per teacher in a classroom, within the NWT legislative context, it refers to a ratio that affects the funding formula.

A funding formula based on the principle of equity

Conversations and submissions emphasized the importance of having a funding framework that supports students' equitable access to education across the system, whether they are living and learning in a large or small community.

The following points summarize concerns and ideas about the current funding framework:

- The current enrolment-based funding framework causes challenges in communities with small populations. Schools in smaller communities feel they are left without the resources to provide what they deem as adequate learning opportunities due to their small student populations. Educators and education administrators noted the challenges of low student attendance due to factors like lack of access to student transportation (bussing), as well as factors beyond administrator control, like community and family history with formal education and negative perceptions of

formal GNWT-led education. These latter points outside administrative school control were noted as contributing to lower enrolment and attendance, which affects funding.

- One option for change that was noted on several occasions is to base funding not on enrolment but on the number children and youth in a school's community. Funding would therefore be based on the potential student population rather than the enrolled population.
- Another point identified as causing challenges is that funding is static even though enrolment can change throughout the year. Schools in larger centres in particular identified this as an issue, as enrolment often increases throughout the school year as new residents to the NWT register, or as students move from smaller to larger communities to access additional learning opportunities not available at home.
- There is the opportunity to outline in the Act or regulations a list of basic resources and necessities that are required for all schools and all students. This list could become a baseline statement for the education system of what must exist for all students and schools, with any enrolment or attendance-based funding coming on top of this baseline of resources.
 - Many costs are base funded in the current system such as costs for Superintendents, Literary Coordinators, and Inclusive Schooling Consultants. During discussions, education administrators often stated that funding support for on-the-ground provision of education, such as meaningful school administration support, janitorial services, and hands-on learning, is also needed to ensure that students have safe and relevant educational opportunities and experiences no matter where they live.
- Funding must be available to support equitable learning opportunities for all students regardless of their unique needs. This issue is one that primarily affects the provision of inclusive schooling and was often discussed from the perspective of systemic funding concerns.
 - Jordan's Principle and Inuit Child First initiative funding is made available by the Government of Canada and provided directly to applicants, which can include schools.¹² ECE heard from educators and education administrators

¹² Jordan's Principle funding aims to ensure that all First Nations children living in Canada can access the products, services and supports they need, when they need them. Funding can help with a wide range of health, social and educational needs. The Inuit Child First Initiative provides the same, with a focus on Inuit children. Although the GNWT collects

that if additional funding were not available through these programs, the system would face additional challenges to provide needed supports. Many educators and education administrators see the estimated \$28 million in Jordan’s Principle funding allocated in 2020-2021 as evidence of a system-wide funding shortfall in funds needed to provide education in the NWT.

A funding formula that doesn’t impact larger communities

During conversations with educators and education administrators in Yellowknife, concerns were raised that a future funding formula based on the principle of equity may result in resources being removed from Yellowknife and other larger regional centres in order to fill funding shortfalls for education services in smaller communities.

Participants agreed that a funding model based on student enrolment does not meet the needs of smaller communities, but emphasized that a modern *Education Act* and funding framework should not take resources from one region and move them to another. Respondents said the funding formula must meet the needs of smaller communities by increasing system funding overall, rather than by shifting funds away from Yellowknife and other larger regional centres where students are collectively achieving outcomes at the same level as the rest of Canada.

A funding formula that holds the GNWT accountable

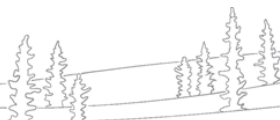
Respondents felt that the funding framework should respond to the needs of the education system, while also holding the GNWT accountable for its funding commitments.

We asked participants if and how details such as the Pupil-Teacher Ratio (PTR) and other parts of the funding formula should be included in a modern *Education Act*. The key question is whether funding should be outlined in the Act itself, or in other ways, such as regulations.



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information provided by schools on resources obtained using Jordan’s Principle and Inuit Child First funding, the GNWT does not have a role in administering or managing these funds.



The main difference between these options is that the Act is more difficult to change than regulations. This means that placing funding requirements in the Act results in a more rigid system that is more difficult to change. Putting the PTR into the Act would also make the funding formula less adaptable to changing needs.

In response to this question, people were split about whether the PTR should sit in the Act or regulations, but made clear the need to hold the GNWT accountable for funding commitments it makes to schools and students.

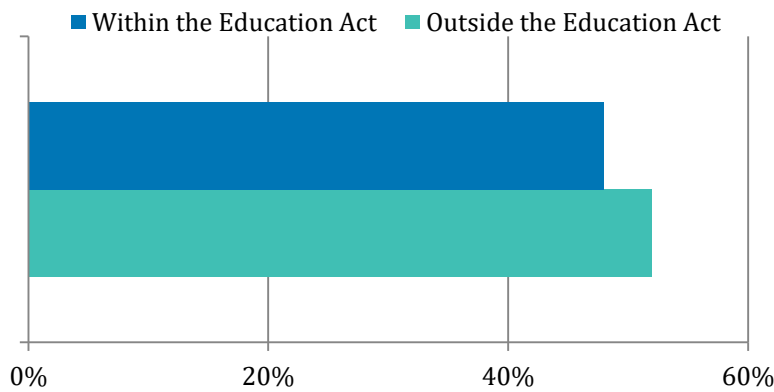


Figure 5 Results of Public and Educators/Education Administrators surveys asking the question: The Pupil-Teacher-Ratio (PTR) helps determine the funding available for schools according to the number of students. Should the NWT outline the funding formula for the education system in all its complexity in a modern *Education Act*, or provide future flexibility by outlining the details of how schools are funded outside legislation?

Clarity needed about the term, ‘Pupil-Teacher Ratio’

While not explicitly stated during the engagement process, it was clear from discussions that respondents were confused about the purpose of the PTR. Participants frequently believed that the PTR concerned the literal teacher-to-student numbers in classroom settings, or class sizes, as opposed to the current legislative meaning, which is about the ratios for funding the education system.

One takeaway from the engagement process is that the term ‘Pupil-Teacher Ratio,’ as it concerns funding of the education system, should be changed as part of modernizing the *Education Act* and regulations.

The issue of class sizes is discussed later in the Education Program section of this *What We Heard Report*.



Language and Culture

The NWT is home to a diverse range of languages and cultures. The current *Education Act* reflects this diversity, allowing for first language, immersion, and/or second language (core) instruction in any of the NWT's 11 official languages. The *Education Act* also allows for the delivery of cultural school programs developed by education bodies.

In practice, however, the education system has many barriers that challenge the implementation of diverse language and cultural learning as aspired to in the current *Education Act*.

The Discussion Paper developed by ECE identified three current challenges and considerations related to the effective development and implementation of language and culture programs in schools. These challenges helped to frame the engagement sessions and the questions asked in surveys.

- **Legislative:** A lack of regulatory guidance to follow in establishing and sustaining immersion programs in Indigenous languages.
- **Program:** A shortage of developed programs and resources in the NWT's nine official Indigenous languages, and a lack of capacity for translating existing curriculum or developing culturally relevant materials.
- **Teaching:** Challenges employing Indigenous language instructors, including availability, training and qualifications.

Language

The current *Education Act* allows for education in any of the 11 official languages. In practice, the first language in most schools is English, with 10 schools offering French immersion, and a further two schools, École Allain St-Cyr in Yellowknife and École Boréale in Hay River, providing first language education in French. An additional 42 schools provide Indigenous language programming as a second language, and four schools offer Indigenous language immersion in the primary grades.¹³

Language was an important topic in many of our conversations, particularly those with Indigenous governments and the Franco-ténoise community. These discussions revealed that many ideas and concerns about the future of language learning are shared across the NWT and across communities.

¹³ Deh Gah Elementary school in Fort Providence, Elizabeth Mackenzie Elementary School in Behchokò, Chief Albert Wright School in Tulita, and Ehtseo Ayha School in Délı̄ne.

Specific considerations are listed below, followed by a breakdown of the broader discussion.

French language instruction

Key considerations regarding French language instruction highlighted during conversations with French language speakers include the desire to:

- Support the development of the Franco-ténoise community and identity.
- Create opportunities for French students to learn Indigenous languages.
- Review regulations for admission to French first language education for non-rights holders.

Regarding language as a supporting element for ongoing development of the Franco-ténoise community and identity, conversations highlighted the central role that language has in the creation of a unique northern French community. People wanted to highlight the important role that French first language education has in the development and maintenance of the Franco-ténoise community in the NWT.

There was also discussion about the current restriction on second language learning for French first language education. Under the current *Education Act*, schools operating in any official language that is not English must teach English as a second language. This requirement means that students in the NWT who attend a French first language school must take English as a second language and forgo learning an Indigenous language or languages. In practice, the inclusion of Indigenous language learning in addition to English language learning would be difficult, considering the amount of available school hours. The requirement for English language learning ahead of learning other NWT official languages was identified as something that needs review during the development of a modern *Education Act*.

Additionally, many rights holders expressed concerns that current regulatory limits on enrolment in French first language education puts pressure on the financial sustainability of their schools, as enrolment (and therefore funding) is limited to the number of people eligible to attend French first language schools. Conversely, many non-rights holders are concerned that relaxing or removing French first language education requirements could threaten the success of the non-French first language education system if there was an increase in enrolment for French first language education at the expense of English first language education.



Instruction of Indigenous languages

There are nine official Indigenous languages in the Northwest Territories: Dëne Sų́hné Yatı́é (Chipewyan), Nēhiyawēwin (Cree), Dinjii Zhu' Ginjik (Gwich'in), Inuinnaqtun, Inuktitut, Inuvialuktun, Sahtúq'ı́ne Yatı́ (North Slavey), Dene Zhatı́é (South Slavey), and Tų́chq Yatı́. Within the education system, all of these languages face a broadly similar situation: a lack of available and/or developed programming, and a shortage of teachers capable of teaching the languages.

During engagement sessions, Indigenous governments and education bodies strongly advocated for the expansion of Indigenous language programming, including for Indigenous languages that are not official languages. Key points brought up during conversations about Indigenous language education include:

- Indigenous language programming needs to be led, developed and implemented locally.
- Development of Indigenous language programming needs to be supported with financial and human resources.
- Language speakers, particularly Elders, need to be able to participate in language instruction.
- Language learning is not separate from cultural learning. The two must coexist and be built into the foundation of education.

Indigenous language programming needs to be led, developed and implemented locally

Throughout all engagement sessions, a consistent statement was that the development of Indigenous language education must be locally led, developed, and implemented.

Throughout the engagement process, participants emphasized that language and culture are connected. The people who know the language, and know how the language connects to the environment and community where the language is used, must lead the development and teaching of languages. Consistent feedback was that ECE should work with Indigenous governments and language experts to develop programming that is current, relevant, updated regularly, and connects to peoples' culture and regions.

Development of Indigenous language programming needs to be supported with financial and human resources

A necessary component of Indigenous language programming development is for the GNWT to ensure that financial and human resources needed for the revitalization of Indigenous languages lost through colonization are available. The goal of respondents, in particular Indigenous governments, is to see Indigenous languages thrive again.



Respondents frequently stated that while it is positive to see policy commitments about revitalizing Indigenous languages, financial resources are needed to support the professional development of human resources. Without human resources, namely educators who are fluent in and can teach Indigenous languages, the commitments to revitalize languages in the JK-12 education system would be difficult to achieve. Educators must be able to connect language learning to the communities in which they live and teach. This connection will be made easier by developing more Indigenous and northern educators, and by working with interested educators who want to learn Indigenous languages and use languages in school.

It was acknowledged throughout engagement sessions that the revitalization of Indigenous languages through JK-12 education is an expensive commitment, but one that is required and to which the GNWT must strive for as part of its commitment to reconciliation and to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Language speakers, particularly Elders, need to be able to participate in language instruction

Conversations note that the future of Indigenous language education and the use of Indigenous languages rests on the knowledge of current speakers. Many current language speakers are Elders who want to share their language, knowledge and experiences, but due to a lack of formal qualifications are unable to work in schools as educators. While some opportunities currently exist for the sharing of language knowledge from Elders and other language speakers, respondents said the system must be more flexible to allow language speakers to participate.

The system also needs to compensate Elders and other language speakers fairly for sharing their knowledge. The system must be designed with the understanding that language speakers will often not want to participate as full or part-time educators. Rather, speakers may only want to share the knowledge of their language and culture. In these cases, the education system should be innovative and consider opportunities for qualified educators to work alongside and learn from language keepers.

Language is not separate from culture. The two must coexist and be built into the foundation of education

A common theme throughout conversations with Indigenous governments and during public engagement sessions was that language learning is not separate from cultural learning. Students must see that their language has value and is connected to the environment and world around them. A student learning a language without also learning that their language is connected to their culture, environment, history, and people, will likely not be successful in learning the language.



Other views

Through survey responses, minority views were documented that raised concerns about classroom time dedicated to Indigenous language education. These views included:

- Time spent on learning Indigenous languages could take away from other school subjects important for a student’s life-long success.
- Focusing on Indigenous languages could limit students’ future opportunities outside the NWT.

People expressing these views stated that many students in the NWT are hoping to one day attend post-secondary school outside of the NWT. They are concerned that time spent learning Indigenous languages that are possibly not valued outside of the NWT will not help these students develop the skills needed to be successful later in life.

While this minority concern about the time spent learning Indigenous languages was present, almost all respondents, including those with the above concerns, were in favour of Indigenous language learning generally. How learning is implemented; to what level of intensity; and whether it is mandatory is a topic for continued conversation.

Survey results

The surveys asked questions about people’s views on Indigenous language learning. Results of these survey questions are presented below.

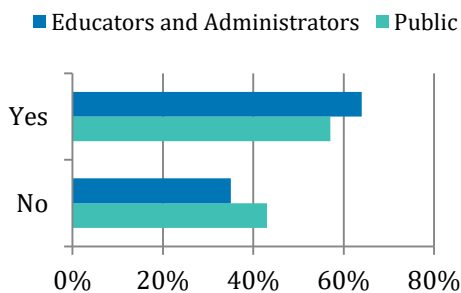


Figure 6 Results of Public and Educator/Administrators survey asking the question: Should students be required to participate in Indigenous language programming?

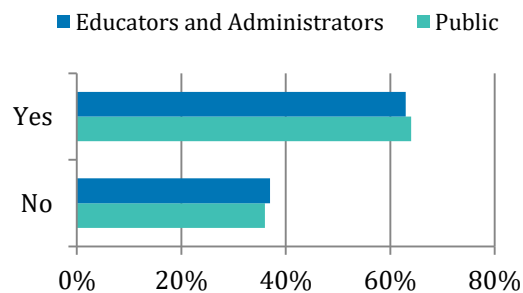


Figure 7 Results of Public and Educator/Administrators survey asking the question: Thinking about modernizing the Education Act, do you think changes should require schools to provide core, second language, or immersion Indigenous language programming in NWT schools?

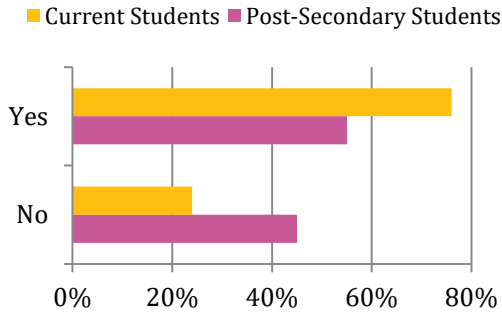


Figure 8 Results from current and post-secondary student survey: I learn/learned about Indigenous languages at school.

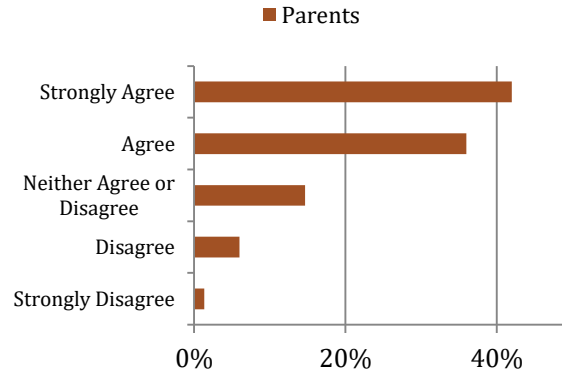
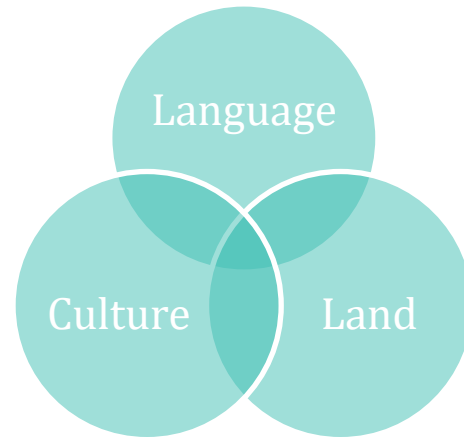


Figure 9 Results from Parent or Guardian survey: Learning about Indigenous languages and cultures from people in my community is important to me and my children's or child's future.

Culture and Land-Based Learning

Throughout the engagement period, ECE heard that learning about Indigenous cultures and land-based learning must overlap with Indigenous language learning. Respondents said it is not possible or effective to try to learn one of these elements without the others. As shown in the Venn diagram, where each element overlaps and meets in the middle is where students will have a full understanding of their language, culture, and being on the land.



The Discussion Paper refers to culture and land-based learning. Early in the engagement period, respondents made clear that the more accurate phrasing is cultural learning and land-based learning.

Cultural learning and land-based learning

Key points heard about cultural learning and land-based learning include:

- Cultural learning and land-based learning curriculum needs to be led, developed, and implemented locally.
- Cultural learning and land-based learning needs to be integrated into the curriculum and not seen as separate from the rest of the curriculum.
- Northern Studies is often not taught in a culturally meaningful or appropriate way.
- Land-based learning is an opportunity for students with different learning abilities to succeed.



- Cultural learning and land-based learning should be open to everyone, not only Indigenous students and educators.

Cultural learning and land-based learning curriculum needs to be led, developed, and implemented locally

As in the conversations about language, the dominant view from respondents is that the development of cultural learning and land-based learning needs to be led, developed, and implemented locally to respect local Indigenous cultures.

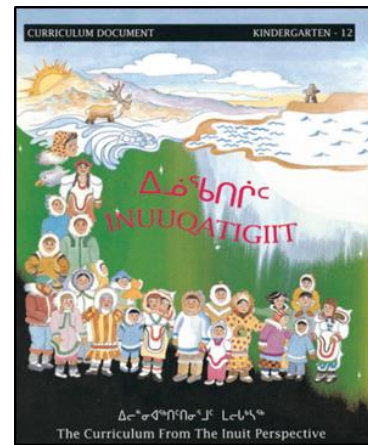
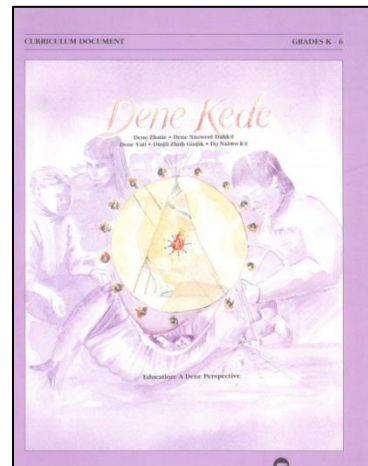
Respondents want to see leadership from ECE in setting the standards for curriculum development and assessment for cultural learning and land-based learning. However, they want to see the development of programs come from the grassroots within communities. Cultural learning and land-based learning are unique to each community, Nation, and environment. People want and expect the education program for cultural learning and land-based learning to respect the NWT's diversity.

Cultural learning and land-based learning need to be integrated into the curriculum and not seen as something separate from the rest of the curriculum

Dene Kede (1993) and Inuuqatigiit (1996) are foundational cultural learning curriculum documents in the NWT. The themes and learning outcomes are meant to be integrated into the core subject areas, rather than act as standalone courses or subject areas like science, math, or social studies.

While respondents were very supportive of these foundational curriculums of Indigenous thinking, they also made clear that cultural learning and land-based learning are not currently integrated into the rest of the curriculum effectively. Respondents discussed opportunities to integrate cultural and land-based learning more fully into the curriculum, like integrating experiential cultural and land-based learning into the core subjects of math, science, and social studies.

Respondents also saw an opportunity to give academic credits for cultural learning and land-based learning, particularly when taught as a stand-alone module through land-based learning opportunities, so that students get recognition for their experiences and knowledge learned outside a traditional classroom setting. While this type of crediting was heard to be happening already in some parts of the



NWT, accreditation, particularly for land-based learning, was not seen as being systemically integrated across the system.

Northern Studies is often not taught in a culturally meaningful or appropriate way

During the engagement conversations, as well as through survey responses, many people expressed concerns about the delivery of the Northern Studies course.

There were two primary concerns with the course. First, respondents did not feel that the history of residential schools and the intergenerational impact of residential schools on Indigenous peoples are given enough attention. Second, people did not feel that Northern Studies was given the respect and prominence they believe it deserves in the curriculum. People expressed a feeling that Northern Studies is often seen as an afterthought, and that teachers who are non-Indigenous and from outside the NWT are often teaching a course without understanding the history they are teaching, and without the tools and supports to teach the content in a culturally meaningful and relevant way.

Respondents noted that the teaching of Northern Studies is an opportunity for schools and educators to work with local Indigenous governments to develop the capacity and knowledge-base of educators. It is also an opportunity to include traditional knowledge by welcoming Elders and other community knowledge keepers into the classroom. As mentioned previously, when inviting Elders and knowledge keepers into the classroom, respondents emphasized that they must be compensated for their time and knowledge.

Land-based learning is an opportunity for students with different learning abilities to succeed

Respondents see land-based learning as an opportunity for students who are not successful academically but who have applied and hands-on skills to succeed. The current education system in the NWT and across Canada prioritizes academic learning. Improving and increasing accessibility to land-based learning will provide opportunities to students who have skills and knowledge outside the traditional classroom. Land-based learning is also an opportunity to blend academic learning with hands-on skills, showing all students the opportunities available to them if they learn traditional land-based knowledge alongside curriculum like math and science.

Effective evaluation of land-based learning is needed, including learning that may occur when on the land with family and community members. Respondents said the education system must have a process for recognizing additional or prior learning that occurs outside of the classroom, and with family and community members outside of the traditional education system. Participants, particularly Indigenous governments and members of the public who identified as Indigenous, stated that if students are harvesting and learning traditional skills on the land, the student should be given credit for these learning experiences.



Cultural learning and land-based learning should be open to everyone, not only Indigenous students and educators

There was a dominant theme that cultural and land-based learning must be open to everyone. As the GNWT and NWT residents continue to work on reconciliation, it is important that all students have the opportunity to learn the culture and land-based knowledge and skills of Indigenous peoples from their respective regions.

To make it possible for all students to have meaningful access to this education, the NWT needs to act now to ensure that current and future educators learn traditional knowledge themselves. It was noted that this transfer of knowledge from Elders to students is very important given the age of Elders and the potential missed opportunity for transferring knowledge.

Other views

While a small minority, ECE did hear views that language, cultural learning, and land-based learning should not be prioritized or available to all students. These respondents tended to say it is important for all students to feel safe and respected when participating in cultural learning and land-based learning.

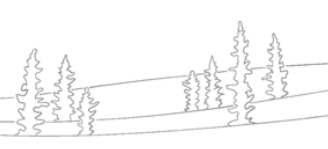
This minority view was expressed in conversations and surveys from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous respondents. Indigenous respondents who did not believe the learning should be open to everyone noted the history of colonialism and residential schools as impacting the real and perceived safety of Indigenous students to express themselves. A small number of non-Indigenous parents also noted that non-Indigenous students currently do not always feel welcome into these cultural learning and land-based learning spaces, though they would like their children to be able to learn from the Indigenous cultures and lands on which they live.

Education Program

The education program is at the heart of the education system itself. This section outlines what we heard about the diverse issues that make up the education program.

Curriculum and Resource Development

Curriculum is a critically important part of the education system. Curriculum and learning resources define what students learn in NWT schools. Currently, ECE sets the curriculum, and education bodies work with ECE to develop learning resources.



Respondents to the curriculum and resource development conversation were concerned that the *Education Act* does not prescribe any requirements about the curriculum. In Nunavut, the Minister sets the curriculum, but is also required to ensure it reflects Inuit values. There is a related desire to ensure that the NWT curriculum reflects the Indigenous values of people in the NWT, specifically Dene and Inuit values.

Frequently stressed was the importance of localized curriculum development. The current Act allows education bodies to develop local curriculum and teaching resources, but limited resource capacities have made this difficult. As mentioned in the Discussion Paper, it was originally envisioned that centres for teaching and learning would be established to support local program development, although they were never created.¹⁴

Options for developing localized curriculum included two similar but slightly different options:

1. The Minister should set the whole curriculum, but allow modification by local authorities to ensure cultural relevance.
2. The Minister should set the curriculum for everything except language and culture curriculum. Local authorities should set language and culture curriculum.

Many respondents stressed the need for collaboration between ECE and local authorities when it comes to setting the curriculum, especially in terms of language and culture. Overall, ECE heard quite clearly that respondents want curriculum that is relevant to their lives and reflects their realities.

Surveys

Surveys asked educators/education administrators and the public who should lead the development of the curriculum, teaching materials, and educational resources. The results show most people think curriculum and learning materials should primarily be developed in collaboration between ECE and education bodies.

Respondents could choose ECE, education bodies, a new independent agency, or 'other,' which gave them the opportunity to elaborate on their position.

¹⁴ GNWT, *Discussion Paper*, 26.

Educators and education administrators

Responsibility for:	ECE	Local education bodies	A new independent agency	Other
Curriculum	61%	16%	10%	13%
Teaching materials	37%	39%	9%	15%
Education resources	46%	31%	12%	11%

The Public

Responsibility for:	ECE	Local education bodies	A new independent agency	Other
Curriculum	54%	14%	14%	18%
Teaching materials	38%	31%	12%	19%
Education resources	51%	22%	10%	17%

Inclusive Schooling

By far the most common feedback heard during conversations about inclusive schooling was that funding is insufficient. Many felt that inclusive schooling policies are not the primary issue, but that they do not have the financial backing needed to be realized as they are written.

Others pointed out needs not currently covered by inclusive schooling policies; for instance, inclusive schooling is intended to support students achieving both above and below their grade level, but it does not often give support to students learning above grade level.

Issues about learning assessments for students with special needs were raised on several occasions. Respondents said there have been difficulties getting or paying for assessments and issues getting necessary accommodations without an assessment.



Respondents raised various concerns about how inclusive schooling policies are implemented in schools. Examples include:

- Students being placed on modified plans without the knowledge of their parents or guardians;
- Teachers reporting difficulties reaching parents and guardians to discuss and develop inclusive schooling plans for children;
- Failure to enact the provisions of support plans; and
- Parents and guardians having to advocate to get their children needed supports.

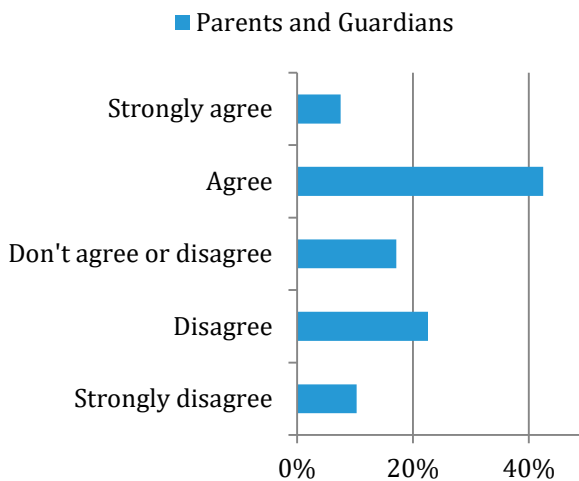


Figure 6 Results of Parent or Guardian survey asking the question: I believe that my child or children receive the supports they need in school to be successful.

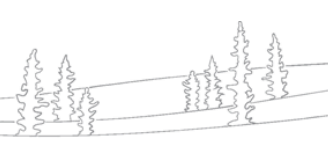
The main takeaway from what we heard about inclusive schooling is that current policies need improvement in certain areas, but the major issue is that these policies are not being executed with the resources necessary. Identified problem areas were:

- Difficulties accessing inclusive schooling supports and accommodations;
- Non-compliance with policy and support plans; and
- Insufficient funding to actualize the promise of inclusive schooling. This point was particularly emphasized

during the public meeting with Yellowknife residents. Participants stated that if a required program is legislated, the GNWT needs to make sure that meaningful funding is in place to properly implement the program.

Information Sharing and Student Records

All respondents agreed that improving the flow of information within the system will be a positive change. Important considerations raised include protecting privacy; being transparent about what information is collected and how it is used; and reducing the administrative burden on teachers.



Several respondents noted that there are communication issues between all levels of the system that need addressing. Addressing information sharing and student records issues was seen as something that requires a combination of legislative change as well as collaboration between ECE and education bodies. Process improvement and collaboration is seen as critical for ensuring the same data is being collected in comparable ways across the NWT and that reduce the current administrative burden on educators, education administrators, and ECE.

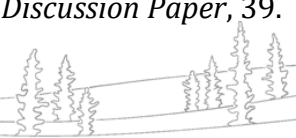
Safe and Caring Schools

As noted in the Discussion Paper, the current *Safe Schools Regulations* are out of date and need revising to include things like violence, sexual abuse, substance abuse, mental health, trauma informed practice, restorative practices, cultural safety, suicide and approaches for students with complex needs.¹⁵ Feedback reflected this, with particular attention paid to mental health, trauma informed practices, and cultural safety.

There was general agreement among respondents that the current Act and regulations are out of date and do not adequately address concerns around bullying and harassment that can take place between students, education staff, parents, and communities. Specifics varied, but many felt that the current *Safe Schools Regulations* do not have real world consequences for bullying and harassment. Others felt that not enough is being done to prevent bullying. Respondents also raised the topic of cyberbullying. People felt that schools are especially unequipped to handle bullying that takes place off school grounds and that a modern Act and regulations must address this reality. Several educators participating in conversations felt that current bullying provisions do not adequately protect teachers from bad-faith accusations, leaving them vulnerable and with no access to due process.

Many respondents expressed concerns that new non-Indigenous and non-NWT teachers are not aware of the unique challenges and context of teaching in the NWT. This can lead to both teachers and students feeling unsafe in school. Respondents suggested a more comprehensive approach be taken to ensure education staff receive training in cultural sensitivity and awareness, in practices informed by mental health and trauma, and in the practical realities of the education system in the NWT. Mandatory and intensive training for new teachers was suggested as a way to ensure that educators can feel confident in their new roles.

¹⁵ GNWT, *Discussion Paper*, 39.



School Calendar

As described in the Discussion Paper, the current locally set school calendars create challenges for scheduling territorial exams, expanding Northern Distance Learning, and implementing an NWT wide teacher-training schedule.

Despite the challenges noted in the Discussion Paper and recognized by respondents, throughout conversations the vast majority of respondents, whether Indigenous governments, educators, education administrators, or members of the public, said they support locally driven calendars. People favour calendars that are set locally as they give priority to the accommodation of local and regional hunting seasons, cultural events, and other community-led initiatives.

People believe there is potential to find a balance between territorial and local scheduling needs. Education bodies believe conversation, collaboration, and working together is the solution for creating school calendars that meet the needs of students, parents, and communities.

A related idea that came up several times was to re-evaluate the notion of starting school in September and ending in June. The precise alternative varied, but respondents typically wanted to see school breaks conform to local needs, such as hunting and cultural seasons, with a focus on spreading learning out over the year so that students do not lose skills during the longer summer breaks between grades.

School Closures

Most respondents felt that local control over school closures should be maintained, particularly if the only alternative is complete central control from ECE.

During discussions, it was understood that local decision-making can result in inconsistent approaches to addressing the same issue, as has been the case on occasion throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. However, people felt that such inconsistencies do not outweigh the benefit of schools being able to react quickly to an emergency while taking local factors and community concerns into consideration. In contrast, people felt that if decision-making was centralized, the process to take action in an emergency would be too slow.

Understanding the challenges of having different responses to the same emergency across the NWT, many respondents suggested that authority should be split between ECE and DEAs. Broadly speaking, people saw DEAs as best suited to make quick decisions that account for local factors, while ECE is best suited to making decisions related to NWT-wide emergencies.



Pupil-Teacher Ratio

The pupil-teacher ratio (PTR) is a mechanism used by ECE to allocate resources to NWT schools for the JK-12 program. It does not directly refer to class size and is determined by dividing the number of full-time equivalent students by the number of funded educators in all schools.¹⁶

Many participants thought the PTR was related to class sizes and not funding.

For a detailed look at the discussion about funding, please see page 16.



Class Sizes

Many respondents, particularly in regional centres, feel class sizes are too large and that, as a result, teachers are overworked and unable to support students adequately.

Respondents in smaller communities noted similar issues caused not by the number of students but by the number of disparate grades and subjects taught simultaneously by one teacher.

Solutions proposed by respondents included:

- Legislating maximum class sizes.
- Using distance learning and blended in class/distance learning to reduce the workload on teachers responsible for a wide variety of classes.
- Increasing the number of classroom assistants.

¹⁶ GNWT, *Discussion Paper*, 42.

Education Staff

Education staff – teachers, principals, counsellors, and others who support student learning – are critical to the success of the education system. The effect that a teacher can have on a student’s life is immeasurable, as was noted throughout engagement. Likewise, access to quality counselling services can determine whether students have the confidence, skills, and emotional strength to continue with their education.

With respect to education staff, the goals of *Education Act* modernization as described in the Discussion Paper are to:

- Address concerns by updating teacher certification regulations to national standards. Bringing the NWT in line with other jurisdictions, and instituting a clear process for issuing, suspending and cancelling teaching certificates will help ensure quality of education in the NWT while also facilitating labour mobility.
- Define the role of school counsellors and Child and Youth Care Counsellors (CYCC).

Teacher Certification

Engagement participants expressed support for updating the teaching certification processes, as outlined in the Discussion Paper, to ensure the NWT maintains consistency with certification processes in other Canadian jurisdictions.

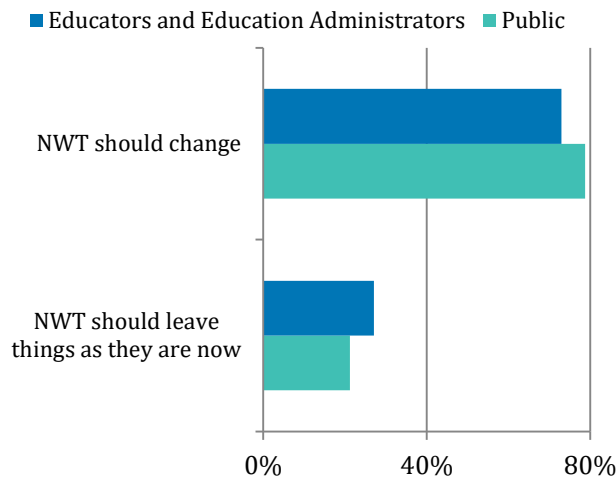


Figure 7 Results of Public and Educator and Education Administrators surveys asking the question: The NWT *Education Act* is currently not consistent with other provinces and territories in how teaching certificates are issued, cancelled, or suspended. Should the *Education Act* make the NWT consistent with other provinces and territories or leave things as they are now?

The most common sentiment among stakeholders about teacher certification beyond what is in the Discussion Paper, is that current certification processes need greater flexibility to allow Indigenous language speakers and traditional knowledge keepers to pass their knowledge on to the next generation.

In general, people want to ensure the *Education Act* will:

- Make certification accessible and flexible to adapt to the unique needs of the NWT.
 - Those with the knowledge to teach language and culture are often not certifiable as teachers in the current system.

- There are a small number of northern and Indigenous educators in the system and there is a need to develop talent and capacity locally. We need a certification system that supports and certifies on-the-job professional development of northern educators.
- Make the certification process as simple to navigate as possible.
- Uphold modern education standards while understanding the challenges of hiring and retaining teachers in the NWT. Many respondents noted that what works in southern Canada does not always work in the NWT. Teacher certification in the NWT needs to blend the qualification requirements idealized by regulations in southern Canada with the need to employ language and cultural knowledge keepers who may or may not want to become certified teachers.

School Counsellors and Child and Youth Care Counsellors

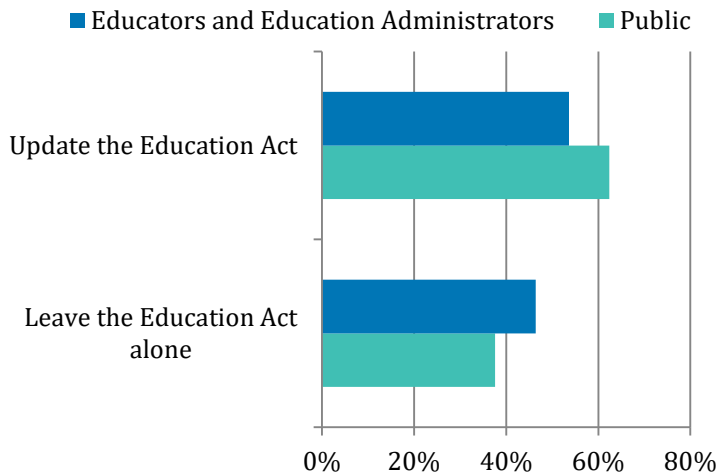


Figure 8 Results of Public and Educator and Education Administrators surveys asking the question: The NWT has started to provide school counselling services to students and their families through the GNWT as a partnership with health authorities. Should the new *Education Act* reflect this change in policy, or should the *Education Act* continue to allow the option for schools to manage their own counselling services through school-based counselling?

Respondents raised several concerns about the implementation of Child and Youth Care Counsellors (CYCCs). The quality of care and support from CYCCs was not in question and their expertise was supported by many positive comments. However, issues of accessibility and administration were often mentioned as critiques of the system. CYCCs were often identified as being more difficult to access than counselling support previously available in schools. It was also widely reported that since CYCCs exist outside of the education system (being employees of the

NWT Health and Social Services Authority, or NTHSSA), confusion exists about supervision and reporting structures between the NTHSSA and education bodies. Some parents and students perceive a connection between CYCCs and Child and Family Services. This has led some people to be cautious of, or avoid speaking to, CYCCs due to the perception that this outreach may result in the involvement of the RCMP, social services, or other such authorities in the lives of their children or families, against their wishes. These perceived



factors can make it difficult for CYCCs to build trust and relationships within the school community.

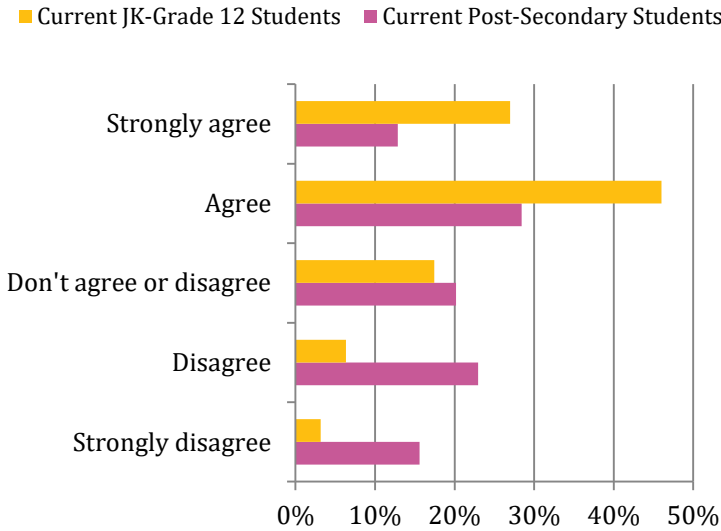


Figure 9 Results of Current JK-Grade 12 Student and Current Post-Secondary Student survey asking the question: I can/could access mental health counselling services at my school if I want(ed) and/or need(ed) them.

Regarding the qualifications of CYCCs, people were supportive in principle of the high standard that is required for CYCC employment, which is typically a Master’s Degree in Child and Youth Care Counselling, Clinical Social Work, or Education with a focus on therapeutic counselling. The challenge noted is that this high qualification excludes many community residents from employment, including people who, prior to the implementation of the CYCC program, had been working as counsellors in schools for many years and had the trust of the community, parents, and students. CYCCs and community-based counsellors both provide unique

services that are not mutually exclusive. Respondents stated that a balance needs to be found to allow for the therapeutic role of CYCCs to coexist with the role of school and community-based counsellors providing guidance to students.

During engagement, former students reported being unable to access counselling services at school. Some students were not told about counselling or how to access counselling. Other students simply did not have a counsellor in their school or faced administrative barriers to access counselling services.

Survey results showed that current JK-12 students are more likely to say they have access to mental health counselling than former students. This is a positive finding that shows counselling services are more available today than in past years.



Elders as educators

Related to both discussions about teacher certification, school counsellors and CYCCs, respondents said Elders need to have a more prominent role in schools. From counselling to cultural teaching, classroom support, and language instruction, participants identified many areas in which Elders could support the education and wellbeing of children. Current obstacles to greater Elder participation in education include lack of formal qualifications, lack of standard compensation for Elders' time and expertise, and the availability of Elders to participate in youth education.



Part III – Things we heard beyond the Discussion Paper

Throughout the engagement period, ECE often heard about issues that are outside the scope of the Discussion Paper or do not have a direct impact on potential legislative change, but which have direct impacts on the success of students and the education system as a whole. To ensure these ideas from Indigenous governments, stakeholders, and the public are reflected in this report, Part III includes the things we heard beyond the Discussion Paper.

Developing northern educators

A common view expressed during conversations with Indigenous governments and the public is that Aurora College needs to reinstate the former Teacher Education Program (TEP). The GNWT cannot expect to develop Indigenous and northern educators in large enough numbers to overcome the long-term hiring and retention challenges that currently exist, without providing professional learning opportunities in the NWT. Similarly, the GNWT cannot expect people to leave the NWT to become educators and then return home to their communities when the financial and personal costs are so significant.

Documented earlier in this report is the critical role that teachers have in the successful education of students, and the corresponding challenge of hiring and retaining teachers in the North. Respondents to engagement note that if the GNWT wants to develop more Indigenous and northern educators, then the GNWT needs to invest in them by providing post-secondary learning in the NWT, and a defined path to employment.

Technology and high-speed internet

A goal of *Education Act* modernization is the creation of a more equitable education system that provides opportunities to all students across the NWT regardless of what school they attend and in what community. During engagement sessions in communities outside of Yellowknife and regional centres, residents and education bodies often discussed the issue of limited access to technology and high-speed internet as a barrier to increasing student outcomes.

The world requires connectivity, and students in the NWT will not have the same opportunities as students in larger centres or southern Canada without access to technology and high-speed internet.



Attendance

Attendance was discussed both from the perspective that poor attendance in communities is evidence the system is failing some students, and as it relates to the impact of enrolment on the school funding framework. To achieve the GNWT Mandate commitment to increase student education outcomes to the same level as the rest of Canada, the NWT needs to start by ensuring that school-aged children are attending school.

Discussions about why students are not attending school hit on numerous issues, including the intergenerational impact of residential schools, which can lead to parents and students being distrustful of the education system. Other reasons discussed include the lack of economic opportunity in many communities, which can lead some students to a feeling of hopelessness. In these instances, students can feel that their participation in formal school-based learning is not relevant when apprenticeships and/or employment opportunities are not available to them where they live. To convince children and youth in smaller communities of the value of school-based education, the GNWT must work with Indigenous governments and community leaders to develop economic opportunities, and show students that learning can lead to positive outcomes for themselves, their families, and their communities.

An opportunity mentioned during several engagement sessions with Indigenous governments, education bodies and the public is fully funding bussing costs in communities across the NWT. Parents, educators, and administrators noted that for students less motivated to attend class, a bus stopping near their home would increase the chance of attendance. People in smaller communities believe there is a misconception that just because a community is small, children should be able to walk to school. They argued that distance requirements for funding bus services do not make sense. Respondents noted that at -40°, or in remote communities where wildlife regularly wander, safety is an issue for young children walking to school. Finally, respondents noted that student transportation options could go beyond a big yellow bus. For example, one Indigenous government said they were purchasing several vans that will act as buses to ensure the Indigenous students they represent are able to have transportation to and from school and thereby improve attendance. This Indigenous government said they were taking this action, as they did not believe the public system is meeting their peoples' transportation needs.



Indigenous language learning for adults

A primary focus of conversation with Indigenous governments, education bodies, and the public was about the future of Indigenous language learning and the revitalization of Indigenous languages. This report has documented many of the challenges and opportunities for Indigenous language learning in schools. In addition to the classroom-based education program, respondents discussed the importance of integrating language into the culture and everyday life of students for them to effectively learn their language(s).

During conversations, ECE often heard that a barrier to student success in language learning is that languages are only taught in school, and that when students go home they speak English. The lack of real-world connection to their language was identified as a barrier to successful teaching and learning. Opportunities for providing Indigenous language education in innovative ways were discussed on several occasions. One Indigenous government identified the opportunity to include adults in language learning. By developing and encouraging participation in existing opportunities for language learning among adults, students can begin to see a real-world application of their language. An intensive adult learning example already in practice in the NWT is the Mentor-Apprentice Program (MAP), where a fluent speaker of the language (a Mentor) teaches a language learner (an Apprentice) through immersion learning.

Staff housing

Discussed on several occasions with Indigenous governments, educators, education administrators, and members of the public in smaller communities, the lack of staff housing in smaller communities is a significant challenge for hiring and retaining teachers. Respondents noted that the quality of housing is often poor and can result in teachers leaving their positions more quickly than otherwise might be the case.

Differing views about the solution for solving staff housing were heard. One view is that the GNWT needs to look at educator housing the same way the RCMP looks at housing, which is to provide housing to those living and working in smaller communities. The contrary view was that the GNWT should not subsidize housing for educators if we want teachers to become long-term residents who see the NWT as their home.



Part IV – Next Steps

The public engagement process highlighted that people across the NWT have a strong interest and passion about the future of the NWT education system. Respondents in the *Education Act* modernization conversation noted that they want and expect an education system that matches the quality of learning and opportunity available to students in southern Canada. While people recognize the challenges of providing education across our large geography and small population, they see opportunities to do things in innovative ways that meet the unique needs of northern students.

A key objective of this engagement process has been to provide information to the public about work to modernize the *Education Act* and to gather the ideas, values, aspirations, and concerns of the public. We heard there is a need to further work with Indigenous governments and communities to ensure the education system's structure and governance meets the needs of students and the NWT broadly. We have heard from Indigenous governments, education bodies, stakeholders and the public that while changes are needed to our education system, more discussions are needed among all of these respondents to develop a path forward together.

Based on what we heard ECE is establishing a two phase approach for next steps toward modernization. Phase 1 and Phase 2 will occur simultaneously starting in 2022.

Phase 1: In Phase 1 ECE will develop a legislative proposal during the life of the 19th Legislative Assembly that addresses technical challenges in the current education system, like resolving conflicting authorities and enabling timely Ministerial access to information about student outcomes. Phase 1 will address issues that were acknowledged as needing immediate attention or received no significant comments of concern during the engagement period, and that have been identified during past OAG audits as impeding the ability of the current education system to improve student outcomes.

Phase 2: In Phase 2 ECE will continue collaborating with Indigenous governments, education bodies, stakeholders and the public about the future of education system structure and governance. We heard clearly during the first round of engagement that more conversation and collaboration is needed about how Indigenous governments and communities across the NWT can meaningfully lead and participate in the governance of a system that is educating future generations. Phase 2 will take time, and work will continue beyond the 19th Legislative Assembly so that we can together develop and build a modern education system in the NWT. Phase 2 will begin in early 2022 with discussions between the Minister and Indigenous Governments about how to effectively collaborate on the

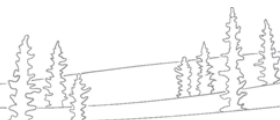


creation of a modern education governance system that increases student education outcomes to the same level as the rest of Canada.

A modern education system that ensures students have access to opportunities wherever they live in the NWT is possible. Working together will allow us to create the modern *Education Act* we need as a foundation for a modern education system.

Thank you everyone for your time, interest, and ideas to date, and for your ongoing participation in this conversation going forward.

For more information contact ecepublicaffairs@gov.nt.ca.



Appendix A – Survey Questions

The five surveys were open and targeted toward:

1. Indigenous governments and organizations
2. Educators and education administrators
3. Parents and guardians
4. Current and former JK-12 students
5. General public

Many of the survey questions were asked in more than one or all of the surveys. In order to be brief, the questions are numbered and colour-coded in this report to show which questions were asked to one or more target groups. Each question below starts with a colour-coded number that shows in which survey(s) the question was asked. If there is variation in the question between surveys, the variation is also colour-coded in the body of the question.

1 2 3 4

Q. Are you a member of an Indigenous government or organization / an educator or education administrator / a parent or guardian of a student or students in the Northwest Territories / or a current student in JK-12 or current post-secondary student?

- Yes
- No
- Current student in JK-12
- Current post-secondary student

1

Q. What Indigenous government and/or organization are you a member of?

1 2 3 4 5

Q. What NWT community do you normally call home, even if you are not living there right now? Select one [Question provided a dropdown list of all NWT communities]

3

Q. What grade(s) is your child or children in? Select all that apply
[Question provided a dropdown list of all elementary and high school grades]

3

Q. What school(s) does your child or children attend? Select all that apply.
[Question provided a dropdown list of all elementary and high schools in the Northwest Territories]

4

Q. What school(s) do/did you go to? Select all that apply.

[Question provided a dropdown list of all elementary and high schools in the Northwest Territories]

1 2 3 4 5

Q. How would you describe yourself? Please check all that apply.

Inuit	Inuvialuit	First Nations	Métis
Non-Indigenous	Prefer not to say	Other (Please specify)	

Education system structure and governance

1 2 5

Q. An important part of creating an education system is deciding how locally managed or centrally coordinated it is. Where on the scale would you suggest placing the NWT education system?

- Locally managed
- Centrally coordinated

1 2 5

Q. If you would like to explain your answer to the question about how locally managed or centrally coordinated the education system should be, please provide any comments here. Skip this question if you do not want to provide any comments.

1 2 5

Q. In your opinion, what are the strengths of the NWT's locally managed model of education delivery? Check all that apply.

- Flexible
- Local autonomy
- Community led
- Other, please specify

1 2 5

Q. In your opinion, what are the weaknesses of the NWT's locally managed model of education delivery? Check all that apply.

- Lack of community capacity
- Hard to ensure consistency
- Hard to put in place NWT-wide programs and services
- Hard to access and share information from education bodies and schools with ECE

- Other, please specify

1

Thinking about structural or governance models, how could a new *Education Act* best support Indigenous government involvement in the education system and Indigenous self-government implementation?

1

Thinking about future years as new self-government agreements are signed and existing agreements mature...

What supports are needed most for Indigenous governments to take responsibility for the delivery of education in your communities? You can provide a list of ideas, or a statement to answer this question.

3

Q. Your children's or child's education is giving them the skills they need to be successful.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Don't Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Please provide any comments you want to explain your answer. No comment is required

3

Q. Your children or child gets support from your family to be successful.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Don't Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Please provide any comments you want to explain your answer. No comment is required

3

Q. Your children or child gets support from your community to be successful.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Don't Agree or Disagree
- Disagree

- Strongly Disagree
- Please provide any comments you want to explain your answer. No comment is required

4

Q. My education is giving/gave me the skills I need to be successful.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Don't Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Please provide any comments you want to explain your answer. No comment is required

4

Q. My family is/was involved and supports/supported my success as a student.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Don't Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Please provide any comments you want to explain your answer. No comment is required

4

Q. My community is/was involved and supports/supported my success as a student.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Don't Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Please provide any comments you want to explain your answer. No comment is required

Language and Culture

1 2 5

Q. Should students be required to participate in Indigenous languages programming?

- Yes
- No
- Please provide any comments you want to explain your answer. No comment is required.

1 2 5

Q. Thinking about modernizing the *Education Act*, do you think changes should require schools to provide core, second language, or immersion Indigenous language programming in NWT schools?

- Yes
- No
- Please explain your answer

1 2 5

Q. Thinking about equal access to culture and land-based learning; should a new *Education Act* outline supports, resources, and course requirements to ensure equal access to culture and land-based learning across the NWT?

- Support and course requirements should not be outlined by a new *Education Act*
- Support and course requirements should be outlined by a new *Education Act*
- Please explain your answer

4

Q. What language do/did you speak most often at school?

3 4

Q. What language do you speak most often at home? [Drop down list of Northwest Territories official languages]

- If other, please specify

3

Q. Do your child or children learn a second language at school?

- Yes
- No

3

Q. What languages do your children or child learn at school? Check all that apply. [Drop down list of Northwest Territories official languages]

4

Q. What other languages if any do/did you speak or learn at school? Check all that apply.
[Drop down list of Northwest Territories official languages]

3

Q. My children or child learns about Indigenous languages and cultures at school.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Don't Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Please provide any comments you want to explain your answer. No comment is required

3

Q. Learning about Indigenous languages and culture from people in my community is important to me and my children or child's future.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Don't Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Please provide any comments you want to explain your answer. No comment is required

4

Q. I learn/learned about Indigenous languages at school.

- Yes
- No
- Please provide any comments you want to explain your answer. No comment is required

4

Q. I learn/learned about Indigenous cultures at school.

- Yes
- No
- Please provide any comments you want to explain your answer. No comment is required

Education Program

1 2 5

Q. The Minister is responsible for setting curriculum for students. Currently students in the NWT primarily follow JK-12 curriculum from Alberta alongside some made-in-the-NWT curriculum and teaching resources.

There are many challenges to developing curriculum in the NWT, including cost and capacity. Over the past decades there have been different ideas about how to develop NWT curriculum, teaching materials and education resources.

Using the matrix below, please identify who you think should have the responsibility for developing curriculum, teaching materials, and education resources in the NWT and why?

	Department of ECE	Local Education Bodies	A new independent agency	Other
Curriculum				
Teaching materials				
Education resources				

If you have selected 'Other' as the person or organization who should develop, curriculum, teaching materials, or education resources, please tell us who you are thinking of.

1 2 5

Q. Currently school calendars are set by local education bodies. What factors should be considered by education bodies and/or ECE when creating school calendars?

1 2 5

Q. The Pupil-Teacher Ratio (PTR) helps determine the funding available for schools according to the number of students. Should the NWT outline the funding formula for the education system in all its complexity in a modern *Education Act*, or provide future flexibility by outlining the details of how schools are funded outside legislation?

- Outline how schools are funded in a new *Education Act*
- Outline how schools are funded outside a new *Education Act*
- Please provide any comments you want to explain your answer. No comment is required

1 2 5

Q. District Education Authorities (DEA) currently have responsibility for closing schools in emergency situations. Who should have the authority to open or close a school in the event of an emergency?

- The local school
- The District Education Authority (DEA)
- The Department of Education, Culture and Employment (ECE)
- Other
- If Other, please explain

3

Q. Using this scale, is your child's or children's education program preparing them for their current and future life?

- Not preparing them at all
- Preparing them for their current and future life
- Please provide any comments you want to explain your answer. You do not have to provide a comment

4

Q. Using this scale, do you think your education program is preparing/prepared you for your current and future life?

- My education is not preparing me at all for my current and future life
- My education is definitely preparing me for my current and future life

3

Q. I believe that my child or children receive the supports they need in school to be successful.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Don't Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Please provide any comments you want to explain your answer. No comment is required

3

Q. My child or children's school makes them feel safe and respected.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Don't Agree or Disagree

- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Please provide any comments you want to explain your answer. No comment is required

4

Q. I have/had enough time in school to learn what my teachers are teaching.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Don't Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

4

Q. My school makes/made me feel safe and respected.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Don't Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Please provide any comments you want to explain your answer. No comment is required

4

Q. I can/could access mental health counselling at my school if I want and/or need them.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Don't Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Please provide any comments you want to explain your answer. No comment is required

Education Staff

1 2 5

The NWT *Education Act* is currently not consistent with other provinces and territories in how teaching certificates are issued, cancelled, or suspended. Should the *Education Act* make the NWT consistent with other provinces and territories or leave things as they are now?

- NWT should change to be consistent with other provinces and territories

- NWT should leave things as they are now
- Please provide any comments you want to explain your answer. No comment is required

1 2 5

The NWT has started to provide school counselling services to students and their families through the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) as a partnership with health authorities.

Should the new *Education Act* reflect this change in policy, or should the *Education Act* continue to allow the option for schools to manage their own counselling services through school-based counselling?

- Update the *Education Act* to reflect the policy change for school counselling services
- Leave the *Education Act* alone and continue to allow the option for school counselling services managed by schools
- Please provide any comments you want to explain your answer. No comment is required

Final question

1 2 3 4 5

Please take this opportunity to provide any final thoughts or ideas you have regarding the future of the education system in the Northwest Territories. No comment is required if you do not have any final thoughts or ideas you want to share with the Department of Education, Culture and Employment (ECE).

Appendix B – Meeting List

Appendix B provides information about the different Indigenous government, partner, and stakeholder groups that ECE held meetings with during the engagement process. In addition to the meetings held, ECE worked throughout the engagement period to ensure as many Indigenous governments, stakeholders, and members of the public as possible were able to participate.

Names of specific Indigenous governments, stakeholders, and members of the public have been withheld to ensure their privacy and to respect the views and ideas shared during this process. ECE welcomes Indigenous governments, stakeholders, or members of the public to share their views outside of this report.

Indigenous governments

Nine meetings were held with different Indigenous governments. Meeting representation differed depending on the government. Some meetings were held with only elected representatives, others with only officials, and some with both elected representatives and officials, as decided by the Indigenous government.

Education bodies (Divisional Education Councils and District Education Authorities)

Fourteen meetings were held with education bodies and education body representatives. Meetings were held with all Divisional Education Councils (DECs) and several District Education Authorities (DEAs), as well as additional meetings between the Minister and DEC Chairpersons, and between ECE and Superintendents.

Public interest and labour organizations

Four meetings were held with public interest and labour organizations.

Focus groups

Eight focus groups were held throughout the process. Focus groups were created following conversations with specific Indigenous governments, stakeholders, and individuals. Focus groups allowed ECE to engage with specific people who expressed interest in digging deeper into issues identified during previous meetings.

Five focus groups were composed of sets of GNWT summer students as a platform for engaging recent graduates of the JK-12 education system.

Two focus groups were composed of educators, including one meeting of educators from small communities and regional centres, and one with educators from across the territory.

One focus group was held with principals of schools from one of the regions.

Public Meetings

Of the seven virtual public engagement town hall events scheduled, four were held (listed below) and three were cancelled due to low registration. If an event had fewer than three registered participants it was cancelled and registrants were invited to join another meeting or to speak with an ECE representative one-to-one to share their views and ideas.

- Beaufort-Delta region: June 1, 2021
- Territory-wide French language session: June 9, 2021
- South Slave region: June 10, 2021
- Yellowknife region: June 14, 2021

Cancelled meetings

Throughout the engagement process, participants cancelled 11 meetings due to reasons unknown to ECE. One meeting was rescheduled. ECE remained available to all parties throughout the process.

Standing Committee on Social Development

A presentation to the Legislative Assembly's Standing Committee on Social Development took place on April 13, 2021. This was an opportunity for members of the Standing Committee to ask the Minister questions about the Discussion Paper and process for engagement.

One-to-One Conversations

Four one-to-one conversations were held privately with members of the public.