

TERMS OF REFERENCE

2.1 PROJECT IDENTIFICATION:

Title:	Review of Junior Kindergarten
Location:	Yellowknife
Program Department:	Education, Culture and Employment (ECE)
Program Divisions:	Planning, Research and Evaluation Early Childhood Development and Learning

2.2 PURPOSE:

The purpose of the review is to examine:

1. whether the Department of ECE's 2014-2015 implementation of Junior Kindergarten (JK) in 23 NWT communities is worked as intended;
2. how the implementation of JK in the 23 communities compare to the implementation of JK in other jurisdictions;
3. whether the Department of ECE should incorporate JK into the K-12 school system beyond the 23 communities; and
4. based on the results above, what funding model should be implemented for JK, if applicable?

2.3 PROJECT PERSONNEL:

Three points of contact are being offered to the contractors for the purpose of this review; a contract authority specialized in evaluation and two subject matters authorities specialized in early childhood development and education. The Department of ECE also requires the contractor to include a qualified team of subject matter experts on their team as per the Guiding Principles included on page 4 of these Terms of Reference.

The contract authority identified below will be the main point of contact for the contractor:

1. Jennifer Young
Director, Planning, Research and Evaluation (PRE) Division
Department Education, Culture and Employment

The subject matter authorities identified below will be the main point of contact for the contractor for content information:

2. Rita Mueller
Assistant Deputy Minister, Education and Culture
Department of Education, Culture and Employment
3. Dr. Andre Corriveau
Office of the Chief Public Health Officer
Department of Health and Social Services

As the main points of contact, the contract authority and subject matter authorities will meet with the contractor at regular intervals, review all deliverables, and be available to the contractor as defined in the contractor's work plan, as appropriate.

2.4 BACKGROUND:

In the NWT, baseline data from the Early Development Instrument (EDI) suggests that over 38% of children are vulnerable, meaning that they are behind in their development at 5 years old. Vulnerabilities in development, according to the NWT baseline EDI findings, are significantly higher in small communities where access and quality varies widely. The research consistently shows that high quality education programs for 4 year olds positively impact children's development. High quality early childhood development programs affect everything from graduation rates to health and well-being outcomes. The research also shows that high quality preschool programs, such as Junior Kindergarten, make the most difference for vulnerable children. Considering that many NWT families, most especially those in small communities, do not have adequate and affordable access to early childhood programs, Junior Kindergarten was seen as a safe, free, optional and universally available high quality early childhood development program offered through NWT schools.

The JK program began in 2013-14 with the implementation of a demonstration site in each of the following three NWT communities: Fort Providence, Norman Wells and Tsiigehtchic. The intention of these demonstration sites was for the Department of ECE to learn from the successes and challenges of implementing a JK program in those small communities and for the results to be incorporated into a 3-year roll of JK across the NWT. A review of these demonstration sites was conducted by the PRE Division of the Department of ECE and was completed in the fall of 2014.

In 2014-2015, 23 small communities, including the aforementioned communities, volunteered to offer JK which consists of providing a child-centered, developmentally appropriate, and integrated program of learning to 4 year old children attending JK in 2014-2015. To implement this program teachers are expected to use the NWT *Integrated Kindergarten Curriculum*, a competency based, culturally-appropriate curriculum that should see children learning through play, inquiry and interests.

During the October 2014 session of the Legislative Assembly, the Government of the Northwest Territories reached an agreement with Members of the Legislative Assembly that although JK would continue to be offered voluntarily by the schools currently offering the program, roll out beyond those 23 communities would not occur until a comprehensive review of the current JK implementation was undertaken. Prior to the commitment to conduct the review, it was anticipated the Department of ECE would continue to roll out JK in its three regional centres of Inuvik, Fort Smith, and Hay River in 2015-2016 followed by a roll out in the Yellowknife schools beginning in 2016-2017.

Based on the original intentions of rolling out JK over the next three years, a draft Monitoring, Evaluation and Accountability (MEA) Plan had been developed by the Planning, Research and Evaluation Division with ECE in order to measure the intended activities, outputs and outcomes of the JK program as a commitment under the *Right from the Start Early Childhood Development Framework and Action Plan*. This MEA Plan includes a program description, a monitoring plan (logic model and associated performance measures), a reporting schedule and reporting tools.

Although this review is required outside of the MEA Plan implementation, it is expected that the findings of this review will feed into the implementation of the MEA Plan. The remainder of these Terms of Reference specify the expectations of the review.

2.5 LIMITATIONS:

There are five limitations facing this review which the contractor will have to implement mitigation measures for:

1. This project will require the contractor to manage this review in a short timeframe.
2. Implementation of JK in the 23 communities began in September 2014, and as such some administrative data related to student enrollment and/or key competency outcomes (as examples) may not be available in a timely manner to appropriately analyse in the timeframe that the review is expected to be completed.
3. The timing of this review will not allow for full measurement of children's school readiness for Grade 1 as a result of the limited population that participated in the demonstration sites, and only having less than one year of implementation to examine JK across the 23 communities in 2014-2015.
4. The stakeholder engagement expected of this review is both comprehensive and complex in terms of the breadth of stakeholders to be consulted and the challenges that will exist to be able to fully reach out to them.
5. It may be difficult to reach some key audiences.

2.6 GNWT RESOURCES:

The successful contractor will be in contact with both the contract and content authorities identified earlier as well as the Early Childhood Development Learning staff within the Department of ECE. Additional resources will include:

- Electronic Copies of:
 - Early Development Instrument Summary and Technical Reports for NWT
 - *Right from the Start: Early Childhood Development Framework and Action Plan*
 - *NWT Education Act*
 - *NWT Child Day Care Act* and Child Day Care Standards and Regulations
 - *NWT Integrated Kindergarten Curriculum*
 - Draft Monitoring, Evaluation, and Accountability Plan
 - Rourke Baby Record findings for NWT
 - Media outputs relevant to JK (newspaper articles, press releases, fact sheets, parent information package, Frequently Asked Questions related to JK in-servicing, etc.)
 - Applicable ministerial statements delivered in the Legislative Assembly
 - Applicable Hansard summaries
 - Applicable briefing notes
 - Applicable correspondence
 - Various communication outputs (example: newspaper ads, parent information kits, etc.)
 - Chronology of consultation with Aboriginal Head Start (AHS)
 - Applicable financial records
 - Aboriginal Head Start Achievement focus group summaries
 - Early Childhood Development Roundtable Summary
 - Tracking/chronology related to Junior Kindergarten events and communication
 - Technical and Summary reports for the JK Demonstration review
 - Administrative and qualitative data collected by the Department of ECE as part of JK implementation (example: 23 Small Community School Principal's survey completed in October 2014, focus group data with Junior Kindergarten teachers and administrative staff completed in October 2014)
- Any other relevant resources deemed appropriate by the contractor, dependent on availability.

2.7 SCOPE OF WORK:

The scope of the work is driven by a set of guiding principles, a list of questions that at the minimum must be answered through the review, and a listing of the stakeholders to be engaged.

Guiding Principles

The Department of ECE strongly believes that the review should be guided by the *Program Evaluation Standards*, which will include the need for the review to:

1. Stay within the confines of the scope of the review.
2. Be conducted by qualified people, including at least one:
 - a. credentialed evaluator who establishes and maintains credibility in the field of evaluation;
 - b. qualified early childhood educator who establishes credibility in the field of early education, particularly in play based, inquiry and self-regulation; and
 - c. one credentialed financial analyst.
3. Be responsive to individuals and groups who have a stake in the review, while being able to recognize, monitor and guard against their political or individual interests, misconceptions, biases, distortions, and errors.
4. Employ methodologically sound designs and analysis that are comprehensive, reliable, valid, and appropriate for the review's purpose.
5. Provide complete transparency and disclosure related to the limitations, description of findings, and recommendations/conclusions to all stakeholders.
6. Provide findings and recommendations/conclusions that are clear, evidence-based and fair.

Evaluation Questions

At a minimum, the review must provide findings specific to each of the questions below, which are categorized by the purpose of the review stated earlier:

1. Is the roll-out of JK in the 23 communities working as intended?

- a. What is the level of communication and engagement with parents, educators, other early childhood education programs, and communities?
- b. What have been the complaints and responses related to the program?
- c. What are the benefits and limitations of the program?
- d. Are there ways to improve the program?

- e. To what extent has the implementation of JK financially impacted K-12 programming in the 23 communities, taking enrollments into consideration?
 - f. What have been the impacts that JK has on existing licensed early learning programming in small communities (example: family day cares and AHS)? (This will include the need to inventory of the types of early learning programming offered in each community.)
 - g. What are the impacts that JK has on parents and families?
 - h. Are teachers with a Bachelor of Education qualified to teach JK?
 - i. Are there other forms of credentials that are also qualified to teach JK?
 - i. Is the curriculum being implemented as intended?
 - j. Were schools and classroom structurally prepared for the program (i.e. in terms of infrastructure and materials)?
- 2. How does the implementation of JK in the 23 communities compare to the implementation of JK in other jurisdictions in terms of:**
- a. Child-to-staff ratio
 - b. Levels of staffing required to implement JK
 - c. Qualifications required of each staffing level; and
 - d. Infrastructure needs?
- 3. Should the GNWT incorporate JK into the K-12 school system beyond the pilot implementation of the 23 communities?**
- a. What are the anticipated impacts that JK has on existing and comparable early learning programming in the regional centres and Yellowknife? (example: day cares and AHS)? (This will include the need to inventory the types of early learning programming offered in each community.)
 - b. What impacts of JK can be observed on the students that were enrolled in the demonstration sites in terms of their level of preparedness for Grade 1?
 - c. If we did have JK in all of our schools, what are the anticipated financial impacts on K-12 programming, taking enrollments into consideration?
 - d. What are the anticipated impacts on three year olds and four year olds who have the potential to enter JK?
- 4. Dependent on the results above, how should JK be funded, if applicable?**
- a. Does the current funding approach work?
 - b. Are there alternative ways to fund the program?

Stakeholders to be consulted

The breadth of engagement expected of the review is categorized by the three main questions listed above.

- **For question number 1, the contractor will reach out to all those involved in the delivery of JK in the 23 communities, including:**
 - The parents of the 135 four year olds in enrolled in JK as of September 2014
 - The parents of three and four year olds who were eligible for the JK program as of September 2014 but did not enroll their children into the program
 - The principals and teachers of the 23 school currently offering JK
 - The four year olds who are enrolled in JK, through in-class observation
 - Beaufort Delta Education Council (BDEC)
 - BDEC District Education Authority (DEA)'s in Aklavik, Fort McPherson, Tsiigehtchic, Tuktoyaktuk, Ulukhaktok
 - Sahtu Divisional Education Council (DEC)
 - Sahtu DEA's in Colville Lake, Deline, Fort Good Hope, Norman Wells, Tulita
 - Dehcho DEC
 - Dehcho DEA's in Fort Liard, Fort Providence, Fort Simpson, Kakisa, Nahanni Butte
 - Dettah DEA
 - Ndilo DEA
 - South Slave DEC
 - South Slave DEA's in Fort Resolution, Hay River Reserve and Lutselk'e
 - The licensed day cares and family day home operators in the 23 communities offering JK
 - AHS in those communities where JK is being offered now
 - Appropriate staff within the Department of ECE
- **For questions number 2 and 3 the contractor will reach out to the above stakeholders AND a much broader audience, including:**
 - All DEC's in all regions
 - Parents of three and four year olds in all 33 communities
 - Western Arctic Aboriginal Head Start Council and their programs
 - All licensed day care and family day home operators
 - Aboriginal Governments
 - Tłı̨chǫ Government pursuant to the Tłı̨chǫ *Community Services Act*
 - Northwest Territories Teachers' Association
 - General public

2.8 DELIVERABLES:

The following deliverables will be required of the contractor:

- a. A Review Plan that at a minimum incorporates an approach for the review, a detailed work plan, and mitigation measures for the limitations identified above that incorporate the JK MEA requirements to the extent possible.
- b. A jurisdictional scan of other JK programs that in the least includes information related to: child-to-staff ratios; levels of staffing required to implement JK; qualifications required of each staffing level; and infrastructure needs.
- c. Monthly Status Updates from Contractor.
- d. Presentations (including appropriate communication materials) at key stages in the contract.
- e. A draft and final technical report, including:
 - i. Purpose
 - ii. Background information
 - iii. Methodology
 - iv. Data Findings
 - v. Data Analysis
 - vi. Conclusion and Recommendations.
- f. A draft and final summary report.

2.9 SCHEDULE:

The commitment was to conclude the review within 8 months; that means:

- The review will be concluded by the end of July 2015.
- A final report will be developed shortly thereafter.
- The final report will summarize the findings to each of the questions above, based on the data available and utilizing the guiding principles.
- Recommendations on next steps will be provided to the incoming 18th Legislative Assembly in October 2015 as part of transition to the new GNWT.

2.10 BUDGET:

The available budget identified for this project is \$100,000 to \$150,000.