

# Strengthening Teacher Instructional Practices BACKGROUND

## The Need for Change

- The world has changed substantially over the last half of a century. Many developing countries have seen a shift from an industrial or agricultural-based economy to a knowledge-based economy. Likewise, labour market requirements have changed. To address these societal and economic shifts, education systems must change to ensure students have the competencies and skills to thrive in an ever-changing world. In the last decade, many jurisdictions have implemented renewal initiatives to ensure both students and teachers are prepared for the 21st century.
- We all want to improve student outcomes in the NWT. While the factors that influence student outcomes are complex, there is strong evidence to show that giving teachers more time to prepare, assess student work, collaborate, and develop their teaching practice is critically important.
- The NWT and Nunavut have the highest number of required instructional hours in Canada (1045 hours for High School). They are also the two jurisdictions in Canada with the lowest student achievement levels.

## What works in education? What improves student learning?

- The research concludes that the focus should be on improving teaching quality and curriculum rather than increasing instructional time. In fact, the culmination of decades of research has concluded that the teacher has the greatest impact on student learning; research also suggests that the giving teachers opportunities for structured collaborative professional learning (such as Professional Learning Communities), and embedding planning and professional development within the school day are some of the most effective means to improve teaching.
- A significant factor contributing to student success is knowledgeable and skilled teachers with strong and diverse instructional practices who are able to dedicate the necessary time to focus on the delivery of relevant, high quality and engaging education to our JK-Grade 12 students.
- Contrary to what might intuitively be thought by those hoping to improve student results, comprehensive research suggests that increasing instructional time produces little or no improvement in student learning. In contrast, increasing a teacher's professional learning and strengthening a teacher's instructional practices is one of the most powerful factors in improving student outcomes.

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## Teacher workload and wellness

- Over the last decade or so almost all jurisdictions in Canada have conducted teacher workload studies.
- In 2015, ECE conducted a Teacher Time and Workload Study that gathered extensive data on the number of hours NWT teachers are dedicating to their professional work. In line with other provincial and national studies, this research indicated that NWT teachers are working on average 52 hours a week, which is much higher than other public sector workers.
- Teachers in the NWT noted that there was a lack of planning time during the instructional day, and highlighted the importance of peer relationships and collaboration. These findings from the NWT studies were similar to those found across Canada.
- A shift to 21st century learning and teaching requires more time for planning (e.g. for project or inquiry-based learning), as well as time and support for teachers to work collaboratively within the school day. Evidence from studies in Alberta noted that these shifts resulted in increased workload for teachers. Hence, without system level changes, it is unrealistic for ECE's Education Renewal initiative to bring forth the much needed changes in education without jeopardizing teacher wellness.

## Working Towards Improved Student Outcomes in the NWT

- ECE, the NWTTA and the NWTSA are working together to develop a pilot project to re-direct up to 100 instructional hours to support teacher lesson planning, reporting of student progress, as well as individual and collaborative professional learning.
- By supporting these school-driven pilots, administrators, the NWTTA and the GNWT are creating an opportunity based on research and best practices to create conditions for stronger school teams, and better educational outcomes for NWT children.
- Results from the pilots will provide valuable information that will help us determine how we structure and use teacher time in the NWT so that we can support student success and improve educational outcomes.
- The re-directed hours do not represent 'time off' for teachers. All time must be used for professional duties and learning. The mandatory components of how the redirected time must be used include:
  - individual professional duties (such as lesson planning and reporting of student progress, meeting with parents and families of students and developing student support or individual education plans)
  - individual professional development, learning and training the takes place during the Monday through Friday work week
  - collaborative professional learning communities led by the School Principal and/or the Superintendent of Education