



Minister's office (CM-5)
PO Box 2703, Whitehorse, Yukon Y1A 2C6

October 7, 2022

Sandra Henderson, Chair
Association of Yukon School
Councils, Boards & Committees
P.O. Box 30071
Whitehorse, YT Y1A 5M2

Dear Sandra Henderson:

Re: Follow up from August 9 meeting

Thank you for the opportunity to meet in early August and again in September. I appreciate the candid conversations we had and the opportunity to respond to your letter. I look forward to building our relationship and working together to reimagine and create schools that are safe, inclusive, build on student strengths and ensure that every child feels connected and supported to thrive.

Recruitment and Retention of Teaching Professionals

Effective teachers are one of the most important factors in a student's success at school and we work to attract and retain the best educators. We agree that recruitment and retention of teaching professionals has and continues to be a significant challenge in the territory, particularly post pandemic. This is a priority area for us.

I'm sure you agree that Yukon is a wonderful place to teach and live, and we're pleased to offer some of the highest wages in Canada. As you highlight in your letter, the ongoing national labour shortages, the housing shortage and the pandemic have certainly continued to have impacts on our overall recruitment efforts.

Thank you for your suggestions in respect to initiatives to support recruitment and retention efforts, including targeting university graduates, offering retention bonuses and other incentives, and opportunities for existing staff to be able to upgrade their skills. I will be share these suggestions with the Human Resources unit and those that are responsible for implementing the collective agreement.

I can confirm our Human Resources unit continues out-of-territory recruitment initiatives, including career fairs, including online fairs, and recruitment events (much like before the pandemic) targeted to University students. We have been emailing postings to universities with teaching programs and will continue running targeted digital marketing campaigns. Further, we are working with a local contractor to support recruitment efforts in positioning Yukon as a preferred place for educators to gain experience and make Yukon their home.

I agree that professional learning is vital. Provisions within the Collective Agreement offer unique opportunities for educators to apply for paid leave in support of furthering their education. We will also continue, with the support of Central administration staff, to plan and provide professional learning networks and targeted professional learning to school-based staff on an ongoing basis.

The Department of Education also provides \$475,000 in annual funding to the Yukon Association of Education Professionals (YAEP) to provide for training and development activities related to professional growth, curriculum implementation, and other priorities. We look forward to ongoing work with YAEP in this regard.

Housing

I acknowledge the concerns that have been brought forward in respect to that housing shortage has far reaching impacts beyond staff housing. I recognize that staff housing has a role in supporting the recruitment and retention of teachers in Yukon communities.

We are continuing to work, within available resources, to assist staff in rural communities to meet their housing needs. This is challenging and complex work as housing supply is limited, especially in rural communities.

The government's new approach to house employees aims to decrease the housing cost disparities in communities, further incentivizing private sector investments in housing, and prioritize the government's existing staff housing units to the critical needs for community well-being.

Across government, we are working with stakeholders to develop new land parcels, increase housing stock, and rapidly increasing housing supply while also responding to the findings of the 2022 Office of the Auditor General Report on Housing.

I would be pleased to bring forward your recommendations, to partner more with Yukon First Nations on housing needs and to explore rental agreements in new construction, to my colleague responsible for Yukon Housing Corporation.

Vacancies

The number of teacher vacancies continues to decline and the number of Teachers on Call continues to rise. As a result, the department does not anticipate a long-term need for non-enrolling staff to fill teaching roles. As of October 3, 2022 there are:

- 20 Teacher postings (6 Whitehorse, 14 Rural).
- 8 EA postings (6 Whitehorse, 2 Rural); 6 YFNLT postings (4 Whitehorse, 2 Rural).
- 2 Principal postings which have closed and are at various stages of the recruitment process. There are permanent or temporary Principals in all schools.

Reimagining Special and Inclusive Education (RISE)

Thank you for sharing your support for this important work. I acknowledge both the written submission you provided to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts in January of 2022 as well as your recent letter are seeking real, visible change. I take your feedback to heart about communicating more with school councils on this work.

It took many decades for Yukon's education system to become what it is today and we are committed to doing the hard work, and the right work, to make lasting changes. We remained committed to this path despite responding to the pandemic. As the final report of the Review of Inclusive and Special Education noted there are no quick fixes to the challenges education jurisdictions across the country experience in the delivery of inclusive and special education.

We have heard loud and clear that the Department of Education needs to do a better job of working in partnership with Yukon First Nations and other educational partners and stakeholders, like AYSCBC. We acknowledge action is needed and we are taking action; however, we must balance the inherent tension between getting to action and taking the time needed to create new system structures together.

I can confirm that we are examining how we allocate Education Assistants and other resources to more effectively align budget allocations, funding models and staffing allocations with student needs. We are also developing localized criteria for prioritizing assessments and ensuring student learning needs are being addressed. A key initiative we've launching this fall is Ready-to-Learn Schools, a program to train teachers and staff to create learning environments that are developmentally responsive, in recognition that a child's chronological age may not match their emotional, cognitive or social age.

AYSCBC's role on the Advisory Committee for Yukon Education is vital and new meeting dates will be set soon. Departmental officials have started this work with membership. A key focus of the committee's work will be to continue to provide advice ongoing priorities including pandemic recovery, response to the 2019 audit, Reimagining Inclusive and Special Education, providing opportunities for greater student voice in education, school growth planning, student performance outcomes, and creating safer schools.

Engagement with School Councils

It is our commitment continually improve and ensure the effective operation of schools at the local level, respecting all roles and responsibilities under the Education Act in the governance of schools. We take your feedback seriously and welcome the opportunity to work with AYSCBC to strengthen the working relationship with school councils.

As noted at the meeting on September 16, further conversation is recommended to ensure the fall capital planning engagement with school communities led by the Department of Education, and the parallel work AYSCBC would also like to embark on, is aligned. I have asked Deputy Minister Nicole Morgan to work with Executive Director Elaine Taylor to advance these conversations and to find a good way forward.

I look forward to attending this year's Fall Gathering and speaking to your membership. Thank you for AYSCBC's ongoing work to support school councils.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jeanie McLean". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being more prominent.

Jeanie McLean
Minister of Education