



Minister's office (CM-3)  
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December 18, 2020

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Dear Melanie Bennett, Ted Hupé, Karen Macklon and Stephanie Hammond:

**Re: Review of Inclusive and Special Education**

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Thank you for your letter dated December 3, 2020 to Premier Silver. He has asked me to respond.

I appreciate your acknowledgement of the Government of Yukon's commitment to undertaking the Review. Further, we are unwavering in our commitment to working openly with educational partners and stakeholders to ensure our collective action is student-centred – above all else. Accepting the recommendations of the 2019 report from the Office of the Auditor General and undertaking the Review during this challenging time, is a strong signal that we know there is important work ahead of us to ensure the delivery of inclusive and special education is timely and effective, consistently approached across the system, and aligned with modernized learning.

As you are all aware, Dr. Nikki Yee, a specialist in the field of inclusive and special education, has been leading the Review, which initially launched in February 2020. To start, focus groups were held with central administration staff and school administrators to gather information about the department's

current practices, procedures and legislated responsibilities. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the review has been extended throughout the 2020-21 school year to allow for more time to safely gather experiences and perspectives from across the education system. I'm pleased to hear you've reviewed Dr. Yee's [interim update](#) in September 2020 on work completed.

A foundational element of the Review, from the outset, is hearing the diverse experiences and perspectives from those who receive and provide K-12 programming services in Yukon, in particular those with diverse learning needs. This is to better understand how learners and families are navigating the educational system and accessing the supports currently available. As described in Dr. Yee's Interim Report the Review is collaborative in nature and will follow a disciplined inquiry approach, which involves an initial information gathering phase (underway). Ms. Yee will then share her final report from this initial phase and a summary of what we heard from students, families, educators, school communities, partners and Yukon First Nations in March 2021. Her report will include identifying recommended areas for further inquiry and considerations for the department about inclusive and special education as we continue to work with partners.

To facilitate the aforementioned, Dr. Yee has been conducting focus groups to hear from school staff, school councils, Yukon First Nations and education partners. This included a recent focus group session on November 18 with the Advisory Committee for Yukon Education partners and opportunities for participation from learning advocates in the community, including the LDAY Centre for Learning and Autism Yukon. Dr. Yee will continue to conduct focus group sessions into the New Year.

Additionally, as you've noted, to support broader engagement from teachers, parents, students, specialists and others who are connected to the education system, an online tool to gather input was recently launched on December 10, 2020. The online tool will remain open until January 24 to invite students, families, school staff, Yukon First Nations, education partners and community members to safely (and confidentially) share their experiences with inclusive and special education. The experiences shared will support Dr. Yee to gather information and learn about the different and varying viewpoints with respect to inclusive and special education in Yukon's K-12 public education system. Although you may have already participated in some of the focus group opportunities as part of this work, we also encourage you to contribute your experiences and stories via the online tool.

We appreciate the support given by partners of the Advisory Committee for Yukon Education to develop the online tool. Through this committee, a working group was established to support this work. Two workshops offered opportunities to provide input on the feedback-gathering tool. Follow-up pilot tests were also completed with members of the working group, as well as students, parents and educators and Yukon First Nations representatives. This has been a valuable part of our work together on this initial information gathering portion of the overall review.

Working together collaboratively, as you've noted, is key moving forward for the benefit of Yukon students and teachers. To support ongoing collaboration, we look forward to inviting members of the Advisory Committee for Yukon Education working group to participate in reviewing the data collected through the online tool together with Dr. Yee in February. Additionally, following Dr. Yee's final report,

which will be shared publicly, we will work with the Yukon First Nation Education Commission and partners through the Advisory Committee for Yukon Education to determine the next steps and actions we will need to take to improve and modernize inclusive and special education in Yukon with an eye to effectively supporting student learning needs and outcomes. Our goal is to identify some initial actions for the 2021-22 school year.

We agree that, to make meaningful change and improvement to these programs for students, input by partners and stakeholders throughout this Review is essential. Next steps and actions moving forward will include opportunities for ongoing discussion and collaboration, and consideration of some of the points you have raised, such as accountability to students, supports and training for staff, and resources for families to better understand how together we can best support all students to succeed at school. Our success in determining actions together is dependent on beginning with a deep understanding of what is going for learners. We need your support in gathering as many perspectives and experiences as we can in this initial phase of the Review.

In respect to your concerns noted about Individualized Learning Plans (IEPs), there has been no changes to the governing legislation (*Education Act*) regarding a student's eligibility for an IEP. I understand a policy grievance has been filed by the Yukon Teachers' Association related to concerns about the process for assigning and withdrawing students to an IEP. Through this policy grievance process, I trust clarity will be provided in respect to the assertions outlined in the letter including ongoing actions taken to support students as well as educators to deliver programming that best meets students' needs.

Our government remains committed to supporting the success of all Yukon students and providing ongoing support to educators to effectively deliver inclusive and special education programming. We welcome further conversations on how we can work together to provide the appropriate training for our teachers and school staff to deliver personalized, flexible learning as part of Yukon's modernized curriculum. This is especially paramount as we navigate uncharted territory in respect to responding to COVID-19.

I am pleased to have this opportunity to respond to your letter to reaffirm our commitment to the Review and to maximize all students' learning success. I look forward to our ongoing work together as this important Review advances and we take action together for the benefit of our students – today and into the future.

Sincerely,



Tracy-Anne McPhee  
Minister of Education