

MEMBER STATEMENT—KEVIN O'REILLY, MLA FRAME LAKE

ECOLE ALLAIN ST-CYR

February 25, 2016

MR. O'REILLY: [Translation] Ecole Allain St-Cyr is located in the Frame Lake riding. It started in 1989 in a portable near J.H. Sissons School as the first francophone school in the NWT under constitutionally-protected language rights. Following a court challenge by francophone parents, a separate school was opened in 1999 that soon included high school. Ecole Allain St-Cyr was expanded in 2008 following another court challenge. A further court challenge has resulted in a decision requiring the GNWT to add a gymnasium and access to the small spaces for specialized activities. This has been a long and tragically, an often bitter struggle for francophone families and their children.

I can speak from personal experience as our two children went through Ecole Allain St-Cyr, up to the end of high school. They saw their classes dwindle to two students in grade 12 as their friends left for other Yellowknife schools with better facilities. We have to put the interests of the students first to ensure there are more equitable school programs and facilities for all our Yellowknife students.

Parents and students are losing patience and are leaving the Ecole Allain St-Cyr due to this unfair treatment compared to other students in Yellowknife. New parents moving to Yellowknife consider Ecole Allain St-Cyr incomplete, and register their children elsewhere. Space-sharing agreements with other schools have not worked.

Transportation by buses or by taxis to have access to other areas is a waste of time which could be better spent in the classroom. Three classrooms are currently used at William McDonald School, but students don't want to go into that school as the culture and climate is very, very different. School enrolment at the primary level continues to grow, but the school is losing students in its high school program, which is in crisis.

In 2015-16, nine of 42 students left for other Yellowknife high schools. This is a vicious circle. At Ecole Allain St-Cyr students are leaving because of a perceived lack of facilities and programs, which leads to the school not being able to offer programs and courses because of a lack of students.

I commend the Minister of Education, Culture and Education for his commitment to work cooperatively on the issue of the ministerial directive that currently restricts enrolment in NWT francophone schools. I understand that the Minister is prepared to work collaboratively with the Francophone school board of the NWT and parents in Yellowknife to resolve the current issues at Ecole Allain St-Cyr.

I will have questions about this for the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment later today.