

MEMBER STATEMENT—KEVIN O'REILLY MLA FRAME LAKE

JUNIOR KINDERGARTEN IMPLEMENTATION FUNDING

September 21, 2017

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. Over the last year we have heard the Minister of Education promise that there would be "full funding" for the implementation of junior kindergarten. On May 25, the Education Minister stated that he was "committed to fully funding the ongoing costs for junior kindergarten implementation beginning in the 2017-2018 school year and into the future" in response to the petition calling for full funding of Junior Kindergarten. Furthermore, the Minister said the department "will continue to maintain funding levels for inclusive schooling, and Aboriginal language and culture-based education".

I have heard from all the Yellowknife-based education authorities that full funding for junior kindergarten implementation is not happening. On May 31, in this House, I asked the Minister six times if he would commit to prepare a cost estimate for the incremental costs of including junior kindergarten students in all the funding formulae for the district education authorities. The Minister refused to do so, so I had to resort to a written question on June 2.

Finally, on September 19 the Minister tabled the response to my written question that shows the department is short-changing our district education authorities almost \$1.7 million for junior kindergarten students in 2017-2018. The areas of greatest underfunding are inclusive schooling assistants at \$609,000, school custodians at \$340,000, and Aboriginal language assistants at \$267,000. How can the Minister continue to claim that our government is fully funding the implementation of junior kindergarten?

Everyone in this House will agree that junior kindergarten is a good thing. That is not the issue. The issue is that we have now forced our district education authorities to deliver junior kindergarten but not given them the resources to do it. That is quite frankly shameful and flies in the face of the Minister's commitment to fully fund implementation of junior kindergarten. It is not clear whether the Minister intends to make up this shortfall for 2017-2018 to fully fund the implementation of JK by our district education authorities. The longer-term solution is to fix the funding formulae to fully account for JK students.

I will have questions for the Minister later today on funding for JK implementation. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.