



June 01, 2021

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MLA, FRAME LAKE

Oral Question 510-19(2) Universal Childcare

This letter is in follow-up to the Oral Question you raised on February 5, 2021 regarding an updated report for the cost of implementing universal child care (UCC).

The 2015 *Feasibility Study of Universal Affordable Day Care in the Northwest Territories* (Feasibility Study) provided the Department of Education, Culture and Employment (ECE) with estimated costs and actions associated with moving toward models of universal child care similar to Quebec, as well as Scandinavian systems in Denmark, Norway and Sweden.

We know that any model of UCC is not possible without significant public investments and time to build capacity within the early learning and child care sector. Through the Feasibility Study, we learned several factors require attention and investment to support the early learning and child care sector as it matures; this includes the need for:

- additional licensed early learning and child care spaces;
- qualified early childhood educators;
- additional infrastructure; and,
- financial investment to lower fees charged to families.

To date there have been several incremental investments designed to increase access to early learning and child care for families in the NWT. This most notably includes the implementation of Junior Kindergarten in 2017-2018. Now, all families with four and five-year-old children have the option to access free, high quality, early learning programs within their community school.

Additionally, the June 12, 2017 signing of the *Multilateral Early Learning and Child Care Framework* (Framework) by the federal government and Provincial and Territorial Ministers responsible for early learning and child care signified a commitment and shared long term vision for supporting all children to experience the enriching environment of quality early learning and child care.

This Framework committed over \$7.5 billion over 11 years to flow to provinces and territories through Bilateral Agreements to support actions related to increased quality, accessibility, affordability, flexibility, and inclusivity in child care.

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The federal budget announcement on April 19, 2021 included \$30 billion over five years to support the development of a Canada-wide child care system with the ultimate intention of providing child care at \$10 per day.

ECE is working closely with the federal government, as well as government officials from provinces and territories, toward a revised *Early Learning and Child Care Bilateral Agreement* and *Action Plan* to support important investments that will benefit many families in the NWT.

The Mandate of the 19th Legislative Assembly includes advancing universal child care by increasing availability and affordability, which involves a commitment to develop a strategy to increase availability and reduce the costs of child care in communities. ECE intends for this work to build on current strengths within the sector and focus on initiatives aimed at improving access to sustainable, high quality, affordable, and inclusive early learning and child care options for families in the NWT.

A key aspect of developing this strategy is consultation with Indigenous Governments, as well as non-profit organizations and community members who operate and work at licensed early learning and child care programs. To do this, ECE has developed a discussion paper designed to facilitate meaningful discussions about early learning and child care needs.

ECE does not intend to revise the Feasibility Study. Rather, the focus of advancing UCC in the NWT will entail the amalgamation of a detailed federal *Bilateral Agreement* and *Action Plan*, as well as the *2030 Early Learning and Child Care Strategy*, which will be released in fall 2021.

It is an exciting time for the early learning and child care sector. Now, more than ever in Canada, it is a time to look forward and focus efforts on making these commitments a reality for families with young children in the NWT.

We look forward to sharing more information as it becomes available. Thank you for your questions and interests in this matter.



R.J. Simpson
Minister, Education, Culture
and Employment

- c. A/Clerk of the Legislative Assembly
Deputy Minister, Education, Culture and Employment
Legislative Coordinator, Executive and Indigenous Affairs