

REVIEW ON SCHOOL ATTENDANCE IN THE YUKON:

WHAT IS, WHAT COULD BE



MAY 2021





The Yukon Child & Youth Advocate Office (YCAO) respectfully acknowledges that we work and live on the traditional territory of the 14 Yukon First Nations. Government policies have caused violent and long-lasting impacts to Indigenous children and youth, and we commit ourselves to working in partnership with Yukon First Nations by integrating traditional knowledge and culture for the safety and wellbeing of children throughout the territory.

Yukon Demographics

Population: 42,507*

Children & Youth (0-19): 9047*

Indigenous Yukoners: 8195**

*Yukon Bureau of Statistics (2020)

**Statistics Canada (2019)

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WISDOM FROM OUR ELDERS

In our conversations with students, they consistently highlighted how much they value having Elders in the school environment. Indeed, an important step in moving forward is looking back and learning from the knowledge and stories of older generations. Yukon Elders have an enormous amount of wisdom, guidance, and resilience to impart on today's young people; here is a sampling of some of the insights Elders shared with us during this process.

"We have to take that first step and look back to make sure that our children are following."

"We want them to succeed in our way... graduation is not for everyone."

"Keep your eye on your strengths, what you like that will get you through the drudgery of school."

"Education is important. Fitting into two worlds, you can move on, world is changing and evolving."

**"Please tell us what you are doing to our children, because they are breaking our hearts."
- Together Today for Our Children Tomorrow, 1973**

"The sky is high. You decide. You need education to get there."

"They have to use their head and their heart to know where they are going."

"Kids need to feel proud about where they go to school and what they are learning, otherwise, they will gradually overtime disengage and lose interest."

“All children should be loved and cared for but it isn't happening at school.”

MESSAGE FROM THE ADVOCATE



Dear students,

With your voice as the focus, we are providing this report to the Minister of Education and are committed to providing ongoing follow-up to ensure that every one of you gets what you need. My wish for every young person is that schools can be a place where you learn, grow, and are provided with the options and opportunities to reach your full potential. When you miss school, it impacts more than just your report card. We have heard from you that school needs to be a place where you feel connection and belonging, where you feel safe, where you feel capable of succeeding and where you have someone who believes in you. While many young people thrive at school, there are numerous reports that speak to the continued trends of insufficient learning and behavioural supports, as well as a lack of safety and belonging that sometimes makes school seem like the last place some of you might want to be. Our intention with this review was to hear from as many people as possible involved with education - educators, parents and caregivers, youth workers, First Nations leaders, the Department of Education (EDU), and most importantly, you. Over the last year we've spent countless hours in conversations (or on Zoom calls) with different stakeholders across the Yukon, hearing your experiences and ideas on what is and isn't working for you and how the education system can better support *you*. Along the way, we've learned so much about the resilience, creativity, and adaptability of Yukon students, especially in such a challenging time as COVID-19. We hope this review accurately represents the stories you've shared with us, and gets to the heart of the many deep-rooted issues still hindering our education system. Our goal, as it has always been with the Child and Youth Advocate's Office, is to ensure that your perspectives are represented, your voices are heard, and your wellbeing is the top priority in driving meaningful and substantial change.

With respect,

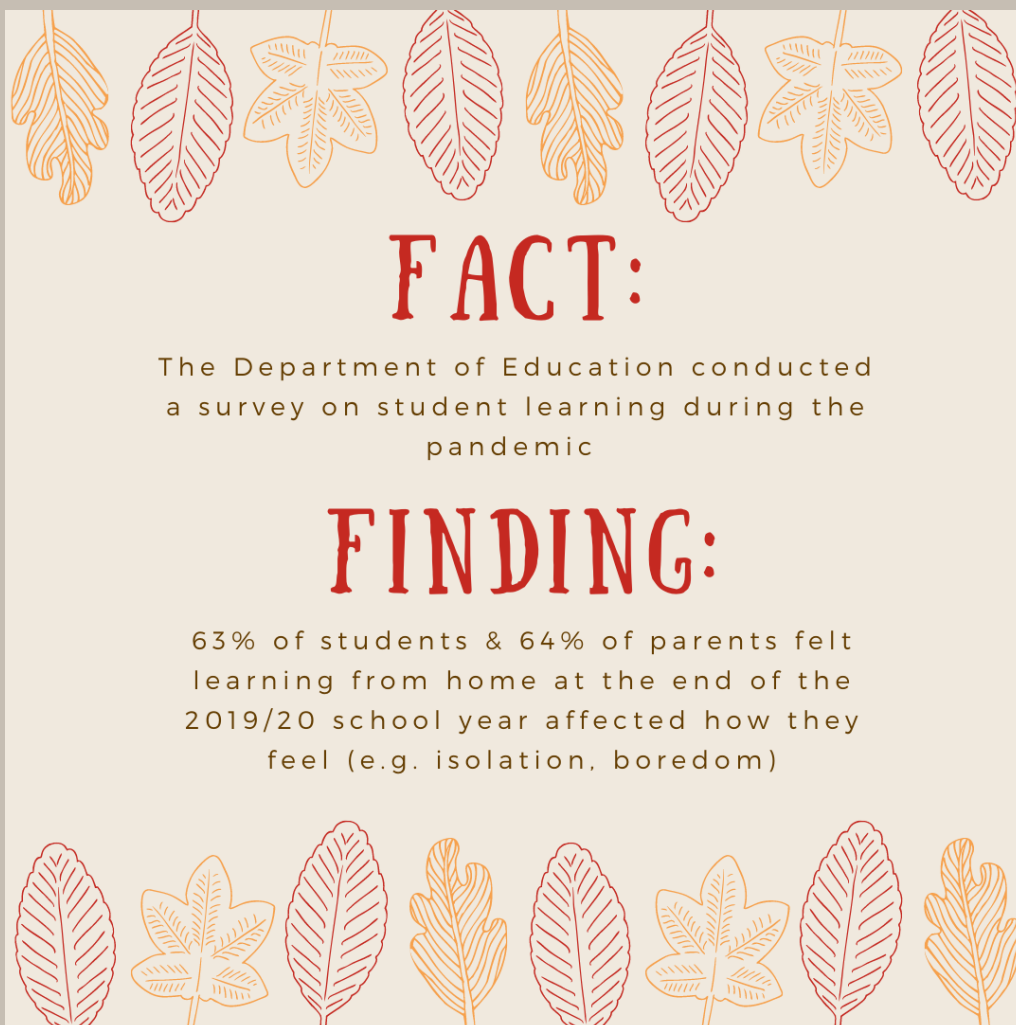
A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Annette King'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end of the last name.

Annette King

A NOTE ABOUT COVID-19



We launched this review in January 2020. Since then, the Yukon and the world have been irreversibly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. For the purposes of this review, it is imperative to note that while the barriers to attendance affecting students are not new, they have largely been amplified by COVID-19. Students who were less engaged are now falling further behind, need more supports, and challenges at home have been exacerbated. Necessary COVID-19 protocols in schools have stretched educators past capacity while limiting important social interactions between students. This has been a difficult time. With any challenge, the pandemic has created opportunities to reflect on how things are done, and move forward with creative and effective actions that have children and youth's interests at the centre. What we do now will have significant impacts on future generations in the Yukon.



FACT:

The Department of Education conducted a survey on student learning during the pandemic

FINDING:

63% of students & 64% of parents felt learning from home at the end of the 2019/20 school year affected how they feel (e.g. isolation, boredom)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THESIS STATEMENT

There are numerous obstacles to school attendance that lead to chronic absenteeism, or 20+ days of school missed per year, resulting in unfulfilled academic and social potential (Attendance Works, 2011). The consequences of chronic absenteeism can lead to imbalance in all areas of a child's holistic development, including physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual. This can limit options and opportunities in their future and ultimately, can contribute to cycles of poverty, unemployment, low self-esteem, health issues, and more.

OBSTACLES & BARRIERS TO SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

- **Belonging & Culture** (school environment doesn't reflect the school community)
- **Safety at School** (bullying, racism, traumatizing and otherwise stressful school environment)
- **Mental Health & Trauma** (pandemic-exacerbated anxiety, depression, and isolation, no consistent mental health professionals in schools)
- **Personal Factors** (hunger, homelessness, violence, home instability, no transportation, etc.)
- **Lack of Behavioural Supports** (for challenges including various disabilities, trauma, emotional dysregulation, bullying, etc.)
- **Lack of Educational Supports** (limited access to Educational Assistants, assessments for Individualized Education Plans, illiteracy/innumeracy, inadequate programming options)

FILLING THE GAPS: OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Implement Canada's Rights Respecting Schools to enhance inclusive school environment.
2. Incorporate the Circle of Courage model to recognize children's unmet needs.
3. Increase First Nation representation (staff, educators, culture, curriculum) in all schools.
4. Build experiential learning and cultural values into the curriculum and academic schedules.
5. Honour academic credit for family or community-based learning outside of school.
6. Assign academic credit to pre-existing culture camps when the First Nation is interested.
7. Provide opportunities and options for all students that address individualized learning goals.
8. Standardize and implement policies for managing prolonged absences and chronic absenteeism.
9. Immediately create and fill full-time mental health practitioner roles in every school.
10. Develop and implement alternatives to suspension and expulsion.
11. Implement restorative justice processes in disciplinary cases.
12. Integrate assessments and transition plans from early learning centres at entry to Kindergarten.
13. Implement assessments and track the implementation of educational supports and adaptations.
14. Provide a public response to the review of Inclusive Education, detailing actions EDU will take to provide opportunities and necessary resources for all students to reach their learning potential.



INTRODUCTION

Nessa Oliverio
NEUTRAL PHOTOGRAPHY

ABOUT YCAO



The YCAO is an independent office of the Legislative Assembly. The actions of the YCAO are guided by the *Child and Youth Advocate Act* and the rights of children and youth as outlined in the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UNCRC). YCAO's work is further influenced by the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP) and the Calls to Action outlined by the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* (TRC). The YCAO promotes the rights and interests of young people receiving, or who are

eligible to receive services from the Government of Yukon, a school board or a First Nation service authority. YCAO supports young people by listening and empowering them to have their views considered in decisions being made about them. This role reflects Article 12 of the UNCRC. YCAO is a member of the Canadian Council of Child and Youth Advocates.

What does YCAO do?

Individual Advocacy

YCAO helps young people effectively access government services and have their views heard and rights considered in the decision-making of government service providers.

Public Education

YCAO provides information about the role of the Advocate and children's rights. YCAO hosts or participates in activities and events that engage youth and the community.

Systemic Advocacy

YCAO may review and provide advice regarding systemic or policy issues that arise in the course of individual advocacy and raise a substantial amount of public interest. The Legislative Assembly or a Minister may refer relevant matters to YCAO for review.

What Guides Us?

- ★ *Yukon Child & Youth Advocate Act (2009)*
 - *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*
 - *Truth & Reconciliation Commission 94 Calls to Action (Appendix A)*
 - *CCCYA Declaration of Reconciliation (Appendix B)*
 - *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (Appendix C)*

PRIVACY & INFORMATION

YCAO has the authority to collect information from Yukon Government.

YCAO has the authority to share information with Yukon Government for the purpose of individual advocacy.

The quotes contained in this report have been anonymized to ensure privacy. We found that many of the young people we spoke with echoed the same message. We hope that other young people hear their voices reflected in the sentiments of their peers.

YCAO has the authority to notify First Nations of individual advocacy issues for citizens.

YCAO can provide public education about the role of the Advocate.

YCAO has the authority to provide advice to Yukon Government departments on systemic issues and to be advised of steps taken.

WHY WE DID THIS REVIEW

In the course of providing individual advocacy, the Advocate has learned of numerous children of all ages who do not attend school consistently. Some do not attend at all. This is recognized by Yukon Government and is intensified by the Report of the Auditor General of Canada to the Legislative Assembly of Yukon – Kindergarten Through Grade 12 Education in the Yukon (Auditor General of Canada, 2019). The report highlights many of the same barriers to attendance and achievement for Yukon students as 2009, when the Auditor General report (Auditor General of Canada, 2009) recommended an attendance strategy to address existing attendance issues.

"When children are made responsible for systemic failures, as was identified by the Office of the Auditor General in 2009 and again in 2019 – poor attendance records should be seen as a marker of Departmental negligence, not the other way around." – Parent

It is troubling that Yukon Government and the Department of Education have known about these issues for decades and yet fail to take decisive and sustainable action. In the meantime, children and youth who are facing barriers to consistent school attendance continue to miss out on academic achievement, personal and social development, and cultivating the sense of belonging that can be built in an inclusive and vibrant school community. For the YCAO, this is simply unacceptable. Consistently, education is the area where the YCAO is seeing the second highest number of referrals. Between April 1, 2010 and March 31, 2020 YCAO has opened 232 issues involving the Department of Education. The categorical breakdown of these issues is listed later in the review, but on a whole, highlights glaring gaps in the system that are continuing to fail students throughout the territory. This issue is urgent and requires immediate action.

FACT:



5000+ K-12
public school
students



28 Schools



23% Yukon
First Nations
Students



619 Individual
Education
Plans

were included in the Auditor General of
Canada Report.

FINDING:

"We found that the
Department did not know if
its programs met the needs of
students, particularly those
with special needs and Yukon
First Nations students."

- Auditor General of Canada Report
(2019)



QUICK FACTS

ACCORDING TO THE DATA PROVIDED BY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, 3151 STUDENTS HAVE MISSED MORE THAN 20 DAYS OF SCHOOL IN AT LEAST ONE OF THE PAST THREE YEARS

OF THE STUDENTS WHO EXPERIENCED CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM

76%

CONTINUED TO EXPERIENCE CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM

APPROXIMATELY 225 STUDENTS HAVE MISSED

80+

DAYS OF SCHOOL IN ONE YEAR

43%

55%

29%

OF STUDENTS WHO IDENTIFIED AS:

OTHER FIRST
NATION

YUKON FIRST
NATION

NON
FIRST NATION

EXPERIENCED CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM



Fact:

THERE ARE MANY
REASONS WHY KIDS
DON'T ATTEND SCHOOL

Finding:

OVER THE THREE
YEARS PRIOR TO
2019/20, ON AVERAGE
34% OF YUKON
STUDENTS MISSED 20
OR MORE DAYS OF
SCHOOL

THE REVIEW PROCESS

METHODOLOGY



Surveys



Interviews



Focus Groups

With:

- Children & Youth
- Elders
- Parents & Caregivers
- Educators & Administrators
- First Nations Education Teams
- Community Organizations
- Department of Education

TIMELINE

- | | |
|-----------------------|---|
| May 2019 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Notification to Department of Education (EDU) of the systemic issue of school attendance |
| May 2019 - Feb. 2020 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ongoing review of YCAO education advocacy issues• Review of relevant literature and reports |
| Jan. 2020 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Referral from Minister of Education to conduct a review of inconsistent student attendance in Yukon schools pursuant to s. 15 of the <i>Child and Youth Advocate Act</i>• Notification to Yukon First Nation Chiefs about Review |
| Feb. 2020 - Jan. 2021 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Collection of EDU school attendance data• Minister of Education confirmed Terms of Reference (Appendix D)• Community engagement with First Nations Education teams, Association of Yukon School Councils, Boards & Committees (AYSCBC), community visits*, non-governmental organizations that support children and youth• Youth Engagement (individual cases, summer camps, school visits)• Consultations with Yukon Teachers Association• Communication strategy, media, interviews and social media posts |
| Feb. 2021 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Youth review, legal review, and privacy review |

*Due to COVID-19 travel restrictions we were unable to visit every community, though best efforts were made to gather input from across the territory.

FACTS & FINDINGS



Image by: Christopher Tse

ROOT CAUSES

The YCAO fully recognizes the broad spectrum of systemic barriers contributing to chronic absenteeism and is committed to working towards change in all areas that impact children and youth. Issues such as food insecurity, poverty, lack of transportation, home instability, and more are all serious and valid reasons why students are not getting in the door at school - we've identified these as **personal factors**. While recognizing that all issues are connected and therefore require wraparound solutions, our goal with this review is to emphasize the barriers taking place *within* the educational environment that prevent students from attending or wanting to attend - these are what we call **school-based factors**. By focusing on school-based factors we can provide a more immediate list of recommendations to the Department of Education.



YUKON DATA

30
SCHOOLS

URBAN ELEMENTARY:

Christ the King Elementary
École Whitehorse Elementary
Elijah Smith Elementary
Golden Horn Elementary
Grey Mountain Primary
Hidden Valley Elementary
Holy Family Elementary
Jack Hulland Elementary
Selkirk Elementary
Takhini Elementary
École Émilie-Tremblay

RURAL:

Chief Zzeh Gittlit
Del Van Gorder
Eliza Van Bibber
Ghúch Tlá Community
J.V. Clark
Johnson Elementary
Khàtinàs.àxh Community
Kluane Lake
Nelna Bessie John
Robert Service
Ross River
St. Elias Community
Tantalus Community
Watson Lake Secondary

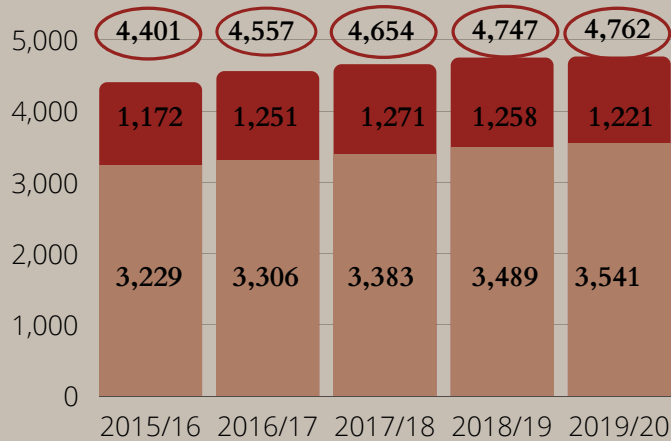
URBAN SECONDARY:

CSSC Mercier
F.H. Collins Secondary
Individual Learning Centre
Porter Creek Secondary
Vanier Catholic Secondary



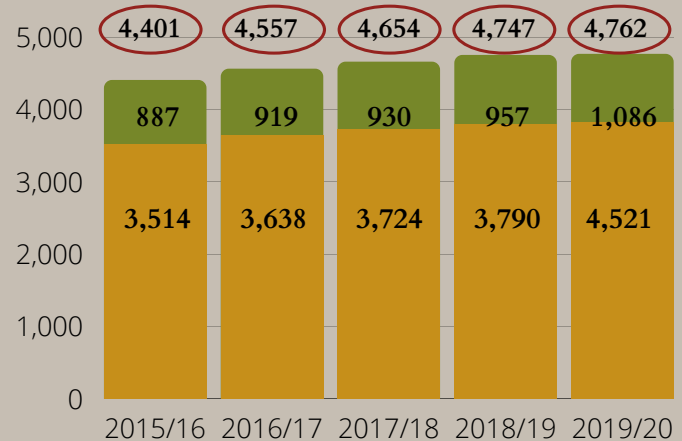
STUDENT DATA

Student Enrollment Over Time by Elementary/Secondary



Secondary
Elementary

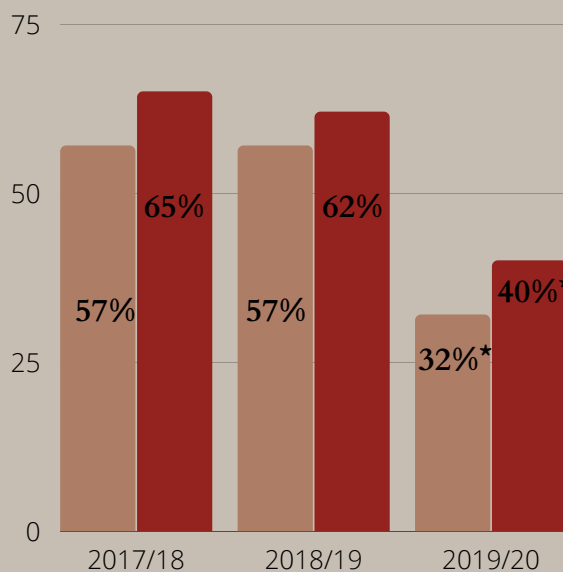
Student Enrollment Over Time by Location



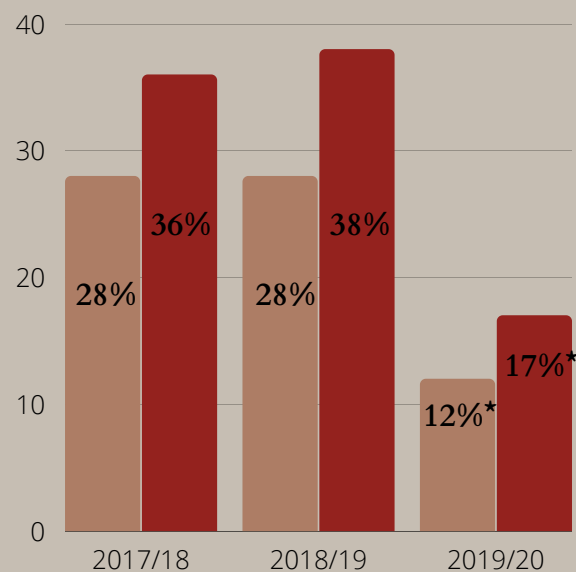
Communities
Whitehorse

*Enrollment numbers from the Department of Education attendance enrollment module.

% of Students Who Have Missed 20+ Days in Community Schools



% of Students Who Have Missed 20+ Days in Whitehorse Schools



*Please note that due to COVID-19, attendance data was only collected until Mar. 17, 2020. Data for the 2019/20 school year is reflective of this.

LEGISLATION: YUKON EDUCATION ACT



FACT:



UNLESS EXCUSED UNDER SUBSECTION (2), EVERY CHILD WHO AT SEPTEMBER 1 IN A YEAR IS 6 YEARS AND 8 MONTHS OF AGE OR OLDER, AND IS YOUNGER THAN 16 YEARS OF AGE SHALL ATTEND A SCHOOL OPERATED BY THE MINISTER OR A SCHOOL BOARD. (S.22 OF THE *EDUCATION ACT*)

ACCEPTABLE EXCUSED ABSENCE:

- SICKNESS OR OTHER UNAVOIDABLE CAUSE
- PARTICIPATION IN RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCES, CELEBRATIONS OR ACTIVITIES RECOGNIZED BY A RELIGIOUS DENOMINATION
- PARTICIPATION IN ABORIGINAL CULTURAL ACTIVITIES OR IN ABORIGINAL HARVESTING ACTIVITIES
- STUDENT IS SUSPENDED BY THE SCHOOL
- STUDENT IS ENROLLED, AND IN REGULAR ATTENDANCE AT A PRIVATE SCHOOL OR HOME EDUCATION PROGRAM
- STUDENT IS ENROLLED IN DISTANCE EDUCATION

FACT: Education Act

27(1) If a child is required to attend school pursuant to this Act and the child's parent neglects or refuses to take reasonable steps to cause the child to attend school, the parent is guilty of an offence and is liable to a fine of not more than \$100 and each day's continuance of the failure or neglect shall constitute a separate offence.

FINDING:

Everybody agrees this is not an effective tool to improve school attendance.

However, alternatives are not applied and very few resources are put in to addressing absenteeism by the government of Yukon.

"WORKING TOGETHER AS A COMMUNITY TO ENCOURAGE REGULAR SCHOOL ATTENDANCE IS ONE OF THE MOST POWERFUL WAYS WE CAN PREPARE OUR CHILDREN FOR SUCCESS – BOTH IN SCHOOL AND IN LIFE."

- EVERY STUDENT, EVERY DAY VICTORIA GOLD YUKON STUDENT ENCOURAGEMENT SOCIETY

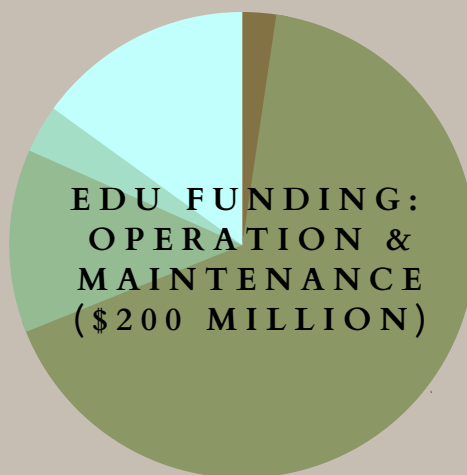


FINANCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY

WHERE IS THE MONEY GOING?

Over the last three years, the Department of Education has had an average budget of \$200 million, partially funded by the Government of Canada. This funding is dependent solely on population numbers, and is not tied to attendance rates or educational outcomes including graduation. In addition, EDU is not mandated to report funding allocation back to the federal government. According to EDU's 2019 annual report, the average spending per student in K-12 is \$20,041 (Department of Education, 2019). This money is given to the school where the student is enrolled regardless of whether they show up or not; as a former First Nation education worker said, "It feels like when kids are not [in school], they're no longer [the school's] problem."

“ We are still spinning our wheels. The Yukon Education Act is failing us. We need to redirect the funding to First Nations and get a Yukon-built education system. – First Nation Chief ”



Education Support Services: 2.3%
First Nations Initiatives: 3.3%
Policy & Partnerships: 12.7%
Yukon College: 15%
Schools & Student Services: 66.6%

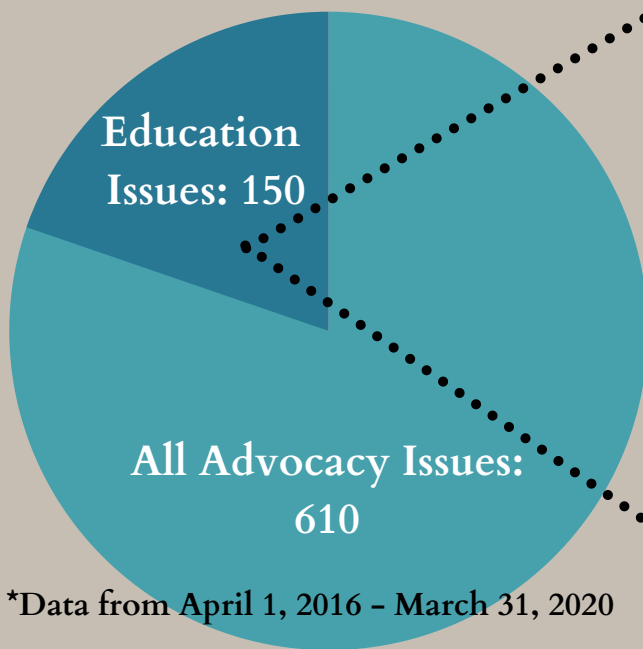
"After awhile [the students] no longer bring their concerns forward because they didn't get the help they needed before. In communities we feel like the poor cousin." – School council member

"The federal government transferred funds and responsibility to Yukon for the education of "Indian students" without the participation of First Nations governments. Further research determined the Yukon government had failed to meet its obligations" (Yukon First Nation Education Directorate, 2021).

YCAO DATA

76%

OF YCAO CASES HAVE MISSED 20 OR MORE DAYS OF SCHOOL IN AT LEAST ONE OF THE LAST THREE YEARS



*Data from April 1, 2016 - March 31, 2020

EDUCATION ISSUES

64

Educational Supports

50

Attendance

19

Safety & Mental Health

17

Behavioural Supports

So many of the children and youth we work with firmly state that achievement is important and valued, and voice a desire for access to education in a way that works for them. Students tell us that sometimes they need more flexible learning environments like the Aurora Virtual School, the Individual Learning Centre, or Wood Street Centre.

Students face a broad range of issues within the school environment. Some examples of advocacy cases the YCAO is working on include:

- Assault by another student
- Severe bullying issues
- Conflicts with educators and other school staff
- Not receiving sufficient or accurate supports in schools (no EA provided, use of restraints for control, lack of academic supports, etc.)
- Wanting to attend a different school or wanting to do home schooling
- Child/youth not attending school
- Child/youth without a school program (ex. indefinite suspension without appropriate alternative)

"A lot of teachers don't know how to approach students, so some students don't feel like doing it." - Grade 11

"Could've given me in-school suspension, be better, so I can still learn and get my work done, instead of getting left behind." - Grade 9

The inability to receive timely and appropriate educational, emotional, and behavioural supports is something we have heard frequently at the YCAO. Students reported having to wait a long time to receive one on one support from their teacher or other school staff, felt there were not enough opportunities to get one on one support, or felt that they had to wait too long to receive this support. This led to students feeling bored, angry, or alienated and becoming disengaged from their academics.

WHAT ARE EDUCATORS SAYING?

The Auditor General's Report on Yukon Education found that half the teachers who responded to their survey did not feel they have adequate supports to deliver inclusive education and meet the needs of all the learners in their classes (Auditor General of Canada, 2019).

"Community school[s], we don't have a third of what Whitehorse gets, in terms of teachers, EAs, overall, resources. It is not fair- although the Department of Education states it is a fair distribution. We need paraprofessional support."
- Administrator

"Prerequisites are not [met] in elementary school and we as teachers are upset because they miss school. What is being offered doesn't meet their needs. Why would they want to come to school? They are way behind, they don't understand the concepts of what is being taught, it's not relevant to real life."
- Educator

"If we cannot find a way to connect with students, they will drop off."
- Administrator

"Allow the student to show you how they learn best."
- Educator

"We need more options for students who don't fit [the] regular school system." - Educator

"When kids do not feel confident about their abilities, they get frustrated and they fall behind... By grade 6, they are skipping classes, it's easy just not to show up. Students have to feel capable, in order to be interested in learning."
- Educator

WHAT ARE EDUCATORS SAYING?

"Protocols should be made by principals or vice principals, not people who don't know what's happening on the ground."

- Administrator

"We're trying to have the kids see themselves at the school. They need to feel welcome and like they belong here."

- Administrator

"Demands on teachers and administration [are] growing each year. Yukon Education has too many initiatives that get in the way of teachers being able to teach and connecting to youth." - Educator

"Teachers need to engage students to supplement academic learning. It can be something small, just be willing to try something different."

- Educator

"If you're struggling at a grade 4 level, it's not because you're dumb, it's because you haven't been [at] school."

- Administrator

"Trust is critical to taking risks in learning."

- Educator

“ Education Assistants are a great help for students and teachers. I don't know how we would manage without them. They build relationship with the students, they learn how the student learns best and how to help them regulate their behavior, or recognize when they are getting disregulated. - Administrator

”

WHAT ARE FIRST NATIONS SAYING?

In 1973, the *Together Today for Our Children Tomorrow* report shone a light on schooling disparities for Indigenous students in the Yukon, and made urgent recommendations for the education system to improve inequities by incorporating both Western and Indigenous school methodologies. 48 years later and much is still to be done.

"Cultural on the land activities are opportunities for learning- it should not be considered an unexcused absence."
- First Nation education worker

"The system is broken, there's no doubt about that in my mind."
- School council member

"We have teachers who aren't involved in community events, every weekend they go to Whitehorse. How are they supposed to build those relationships? To me it appears they are not interested or invested in learning about the community, culture, and the people who live there." - Parent

**"The whole system is set up in an imperialistic perspective. It's not a First Nations way of doing things."
- First Nation education worker**

"Educators look through lens of when they went to school. That way of schooling and teaching curriculum is outdated, its a different world, we need to change, adapt to delivery of education in a different way."
- Elder

"School is the one place where I'm completely lost. It messes up the rest of my life it feels like." - Grade 12

"If there was an Elder in here, that would definitely help." - Grade 10

WHAT ARE FIRST NATIONS SAYING?

"So many teachers come in with their stereotypes. No amount of training in First Nations 101 is going to deal with that underlying bias."

- First Nation education worker

"Teachers in the school treat me and other Native kids like we're nothing."

- Grade 9

"I'm pretty smart. I know I'm not stupid. Well, is it possible to be both smart and stupid?"

- Grade 12

"There's been lots of reviews and reports on education for First Nations kids, but things never change." - First Nation education worker

"Right now the Education Act's only way to address truancy is fining parents. Fines do not address the barriers."

- First Nation representative

“ [We need] First Nations presence in the school, including staff and Elders. Show it is a community school, involve the parents and grandparents in school activities, give them an active role if they're interested, create that sense of ownership. - Elder ”

WHAT ARE YOUNG PEOPLE SAYING?

"...Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child" (UNICEF, 2010).

"Schools could do a much better job of building community. In school you need to build on relationships."
- Grade 9

"People deal with trauma differently; we don't all come from stable homes."
- Grade 11

"He didn't know anything about my student support plan. Nobody knew anything about that and it's so frustrating."
- Grade 10

"[I] don't want to go to school anymore due to being bullied at school." - Age 8

"If they do not have First Nation experience, it is insulting to us that they tell us we are acting irrational."
- Grade 11

"If a kid needs a brain walk, a mental break, they should be allowed. It's hard for me to focus the whole class so being able to go get water, that would help. I think that would help a lot of kids."
- Grade 10

"My teacher recognized I had a learning issue; he helped me get an Ed Psych Assessment." - Age 16

WHAT ARE YOUNG PEOPLE SAYING?

"We need more [cultural] teaching, more activities, and more First Nations teachers instead of just having the Southern Tutchone teacher because obviously we'd have that, but the others too." - Age 15

"Teachers don't respect our space and I hate that so much."
- Grade 10

"I can't go home right now. I want to turn over a new leaf and start [at] a new school." - Age 15

"Feels like [I] am always doing wrong and feeling bad."
- Age 12

"To me, education is the great equalizer. Not necessarily education received in a facility but more so, events or places in life that have changed the way we think."
- Grade 12

“
In careers we are building our dream house, but we should be learning how to do our taxes and stuff, how to cook. [The dream house is] never gonna happen unless we learn stuff like that first.
- Grade 9
”

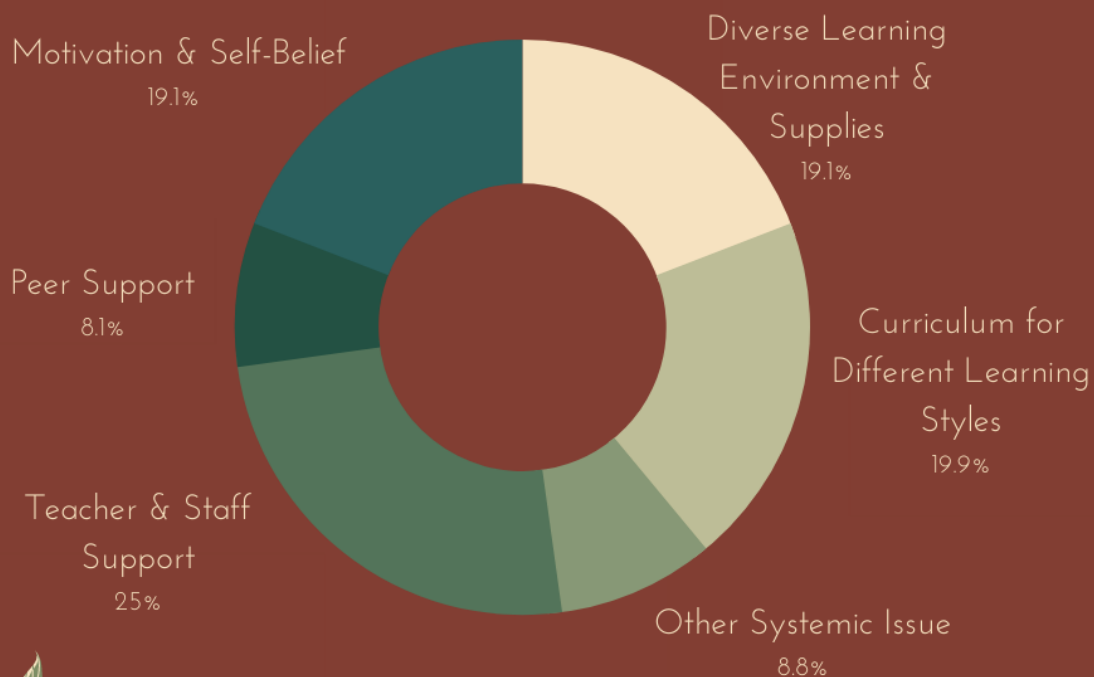
FACT:

The role of YCAO is to highlight the view and rights of young people in Yukon Government services.



FINDING:

Here is what young people have been saying they need to do their best in school:



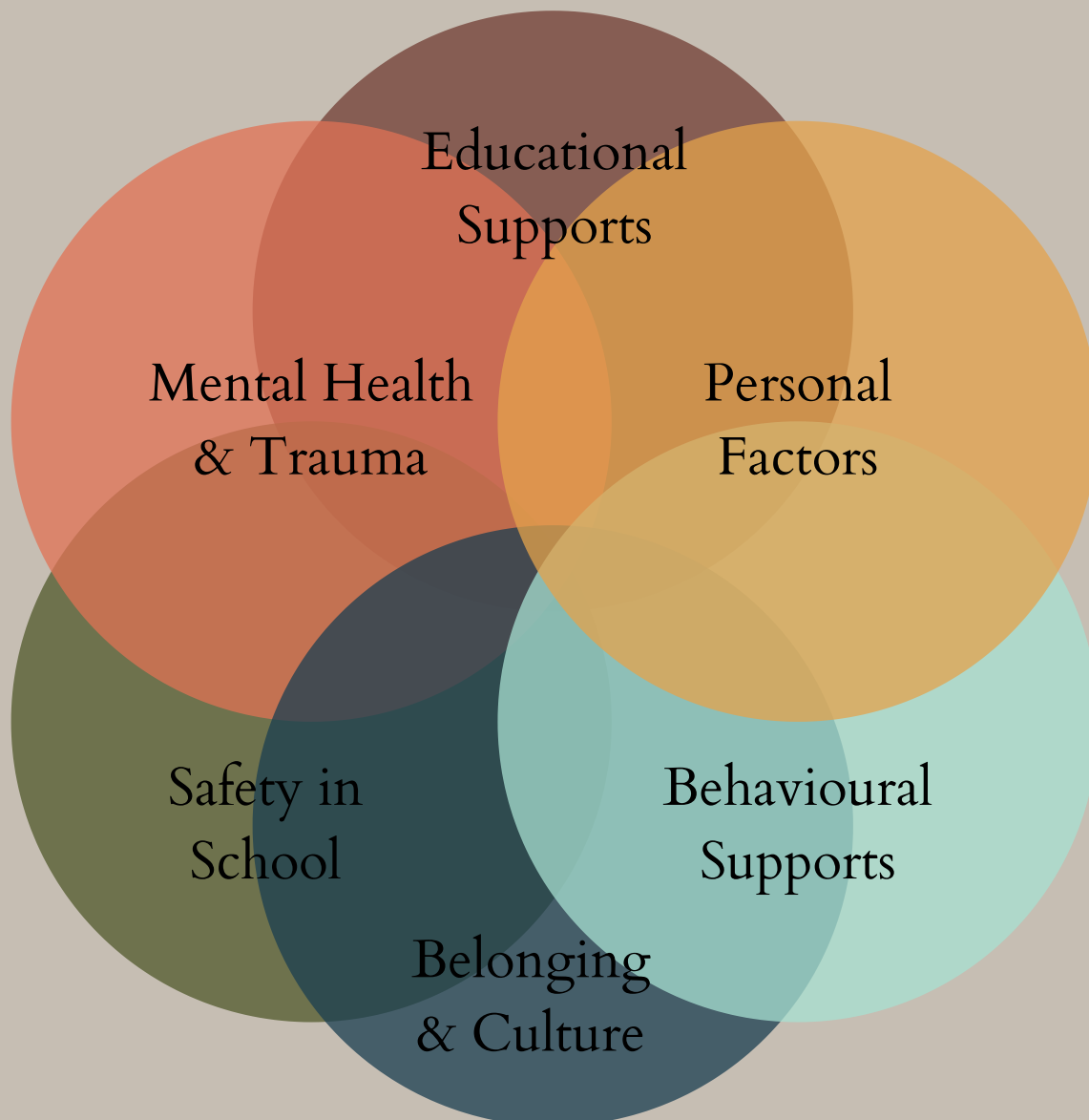


MAKING SENSE OF
THE BARRIERS

Nessa Oliverio
NEUTRAL PHOTOGRAPHY

AREAS OF CONCERN

By compiling data on attendance figures from the Department of Education and analyzing it alongside the many stories the YCAO was gifted from countless hours of conversations with students, families, educators, and Elders, we were able to identify certain key trends in the experiences of students who have faced and/or are facing barriers to school attendance. Those trends are identified into six unique Areas of Concern that are listed below. While we recognize most students with attendance issues usually face multiple barriers at once, categorizing the barriers helps to better understand how we might strategize prospective solutions. Each Area of Concern includes a breakdown of the current landscape (What Is) and a vision of what a better-case scenario might look like for students (What Could Be). The YCAO's concrete recommendations are listed in the final section of this report.



THE LENSES WE SEE THROUGH

In making sense of the data to determine our findings, the YCAO used two theoretical frameworks to guide our analysis. These are the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (herein referred to as UNCRC), and the Circle of Courage model of youth development co-authored by Larry Brendtro, Martin Brokenleg, and Steve Van Bockern (Reclaiming Youth At Risk, 1990).



The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is one of the core documents that informs the YCAO's work. It is the most widely-ratified international human rights treaty in history and outlines 42 articles that explicitly state the rights of children and young people aged 0-19. The Child Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA) is a tool that helps organizations and governing bodies comply with the UNCRC.

The Circle of Courage model is rooted in Indigenous philosophies of raising children and also includes influences from early pioneers' youth work principles and current theories on resilience. With its emphasis on belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity as the four needs of all children, the Circle of Courage promotes a holistic approach to the overall wellness and development of young people.

UNCRC

Article 12

Every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously.

Article 30

Every child has the right to learn & use the language, customs & religion of their family, whether or not these are shared by the majority of the people in the country where they live.

Article 31

Every child has the right to relax, play & take part in a wide range of cultural & artistic activities.

Article 29

Education must develop every child's personality, talents & abilities to the full. It must encourage the child's respect for human rights, as well as respect for their parents, their own and other cultures, & the environment.

Article 28

Every child has the right to an education. Primary education must be free and different forms of secondary education must be available to every child. Discipline in schools must respect children's dignity and their rights.

Article 23

A child with a disability has the right to live a full & decent life with dignity &, as far as possible, independence & to play an active part in the community. Governments must do all they can to support disabled children & their families.

Article 5

Governments must respect the rights and responsibilities of parents and carers to provide guidance and direction to their child as they grow up, so that they fully enjoy their rights. This must be done in a way that recognizes the child's increasing capacity to make their own choices.

BELONGING

MASTERY

INDEPENDENCE

GENEROSITY

FACT:

Children who have an unmet developmental need are unable to move on to the next stage of development

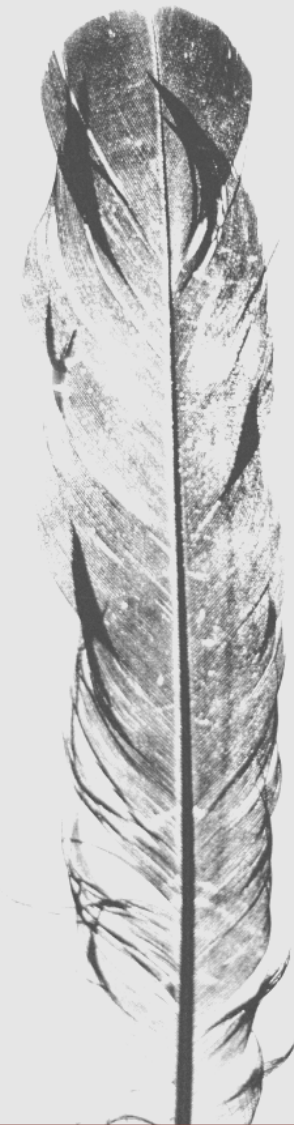
- STARR Commonwealth, Circle of Courage

FINDING:

Schools provide access to some of children's developmental needs

"I really like my one teacher,
she checks in on me. She
makes me feel quite happy."

- age 9



BELONGING & CULTURE

"Kids who skip out or don't attend, probably aren't connecting with the teachers, and if teachers don't take time to make those connections, then why are they there? There are too many "old school" teachers who just want to teach the subject and not the kids." - Parent

"How do we identify and foster community education champions? People that will take a special interest in students, be the people to cheer them along, be role models, and will guide them in ways that maybe because of intergenerational trauma, they aren't accessing in the ways successful students are." - School council member

"All educators and teachers should have on the land and culture orientation for 2 days or at least 1 day. Before school starts, get to know the people in your community, talk to them, learn from their experiences. You might need their help one day." - Elder

"YTA only wants trained teachers in the school. What about the Elders, the knowledge keepers, tutors; they have much to share. Barriers need to be brought down." - Educator

"I want to go to [another school] because the teacher don't like me." - age 13

"I love our Southern Tutchone class. It's our culture and I'd rather learn about that than anything else." - Grade 10

"Counsellors don't have qualifications to work with First Nation kids; they don't understand our cultural values." - Grade 11

"We've been trying family nights to do events like movies, glassblowing, and we started to see some kids who we hadn't seen for a while. Building those relationships is key." - Administrator

"Traditional knowledge and skills need to be considered as credits in school." - First Nation representative

"I think that it is amazing that my non-First Nation youth has the opportunity to be here and receive and have the benefit of understanding another culture- and being immersed in such a rich culture." - Parent

"Culture, language, and on the land experiences; that is very important. As [a] teacher be open to the experience. You will learn something that will help you down the road." - Elder

"CELCs, they get tired of being the truancy officer... that's a horrible responsibility. CELCs should be able to offer a space at school where students can come and chat, have hot chocolate, build relationship, so they can open up to this person when they are having a bad day." - First Nation education worker

What Is

Schools are in and of themselves communities and as such, when some members of the community don't feel like they belong and consequently don't want to be there, it is a community issue. Conversations with some students made school seem like the best place in the world - they talked about seeing their friends, playing fun games in class, and enjoying school activities. However, the stories we heard from other students painted a far less cheerful picture. Young people shared about feeling alienated or disengaged in school, that it is not relevant or useful in their daily lives, that they didn't have positive relationships with their educators, and that academic success was prioritized over everything else. Additionally, many First Nations students have shared that schools don't reflect their culture and traditional values in curriculum, pedagogy, and representation among educators and school staff.

**"We should rename the school. I think we should name it after one of our Elders."
- Grade 10**

**"Our First Nation hosted a 2-day orientation out on the land for educators, teachers and other government employees... They get to meet the people, hear their experience, immerse themselves in our culture, language, and food. We tell them why that is important to have in the school."
- Elder**

**"Being able to connect with young people at their level is often deeply connected to their cultural identity."
- School council member**



FACT:

"culture, language, relationships and society contribute to the way that individuals understand their identities and problems and make meaning in their lives." -

(Phillips, 2017)

FINDING:

In many schools, when a student misses time for activities, including cultural activities, they are marked as absent.



" I went to muskrat camp and on my next report card I had a lot of absences" - age 8

What Could Be

Every student deserves to feel connected to their school community, from the art on the walls to the curriculum in the classrooms, to the representations of culture and values practiced by both staff and students.

A vision of what could be includes every student feeling like they have an educator, or at the very least an adult, in the school that they can rely on or look to for guidance in times of difficulty. Different ways of knowing, learning, teaching, and being are emphasized so that every student knows they are just as vital to the fabric of the school community as their classmates. As such, students do not feel like they are recognized solely for academic achievement but instead for the many diverse and incredible ways that they contribute to the school community. Through the Circle of Courage framework, this addresses the elements of Belonging and Generosity.



"The preservation, revitalization, and strengthening of Aboriginal languages and cultures are best managed by Aboriginal people and communities" (TRC Call to Action 14.4, 2015).

SAFETY IN SCHOOLS

"It's these larger systemic issues related to students not wanting to participate in the school including the attitudes and the behaviours - racism, prejudice, and discrimination. Just being frank of what we've seen and heard over the years."

- School council member

"There is a lot of bullying and name calling amongst some of the students and also with teachers. Teachers hollering at students, in front of other students, that reduces their self esteem, that's not right. [It's] no wonder they don't want to go to school, they feel ashamed."

- Elder

"Let's deal with it. Tell me when you don't feel safe."

- Educator

"I am very concerned when my grandchildren are facing lateral violence, especially when suicide comes into the picture."

- Grandparent

"When we bring issues forward, the administration/teachers/department of education have a head in the sand approach... We have no recourse! Except to keep them in or pull our children out of the broken system. Either way our children feel even more isolated, and less included, and underlines the fact they don't feel heard/acknowledged."

"I wish they would not talk bad about people. Maybe they should think about what is going on in that person's life."

- Age 18

"Any time I ask for help, teachers will roll their eyes or won't help as much as they would help someone who's not Indigenous. [It feels] like we're in the background, where it's not an equal playing field."

"I felt like my personal space was invaded... I got scared when she called the cops."

"When children are getting bullied at school and nothing is done about it, they feel unworthy because no one cares enough to do anything to address the issue."

- Elder

"When I tried to advocate for his safety, I was told to put myself in the shoes of the bully and that I should educate the class on my son's special needs, Perhaps that would generate more empathy."

- Parent

"My [grandchild] responded to racial slurs, got suspended for a week. There was no discipline for the student who said the racial remarks."

- Grandparent

"Schools need to accept that bullying happens and they need to do something about it. Take it seriously, take action. Show this behaviour will not be tolerated."

- Parent

"I would like to see more restorative practices used especially making my child talk to the student that is bothering him."

- Parent

What Is

One of the most sobering discoveries from this review has been how many students have disclosed not feeling safe in schools because of bullying. Bullying at a peer-to-peer level through violence, cyberbullying, racism, ableism, name-calling, and repeated targeting, are major factors in students missing school. Indeed, bullying remains an urgent and prevalent issue for the vast majority of students we spoke to, and when not dealt with effectively in the school environment, can bubble over into the community.

When students don't feel safe in school, it's difficult for them to be present in class and concentrate on learning. Many students have shared they don't want to come to school only to be harassed, and do all they can to avoid putting themselves in those spaces. This is itself an act of resistance from students that speaks to their ability to keep themselves safe. It is concerning that we've heard reports of how this stems not only from peers but from educators as well. In particular, many First Nations students continue to feel discriminated against by a colonial education system that is reflected in the comments and attitudes of educators and staff.

"Kids, teenagers, some people are still pretty immature and still say very racist things, but I hope they gain that maturity. We still have work to educate other kids on why racism is bad."

- Grade 11

"How teachers talk to him, his self-esteem is being destroyed. It's heartbreaking to see."

- Parent

Fact:

Victims of harassment report a loss of interest in school activities, more absenteeism, lower-quality schoolwork, lower grades, and more skipping/dropping classes, tardiness and absenteeism

- Canadian Red Cross

Finding:

Many of the students interviewed by YCAO reported being bullied or feeling unsafe at school.



"There's bullying.
[I] don't feel
welcome."
- age 13

What Could Be

Students should feel that the school environment is a safer space where they are comfortable to be and express themselves in honest ways. They should feel confident that they can come to school to learn and engage with their peers and educators in a healthy and uplifting manner.

A vision of what could be includes school teams that use restorative processes to resolve conflict and engage students, families, and educators in remaining accountable to their actions and upholding the school community. All staff are knowledgeable about the impacts of colonialism and how it contributes to implicit bias when working with Indigenous students and other racialized students. Schools work collaboratively with families and First Nations to create safer school environments. Through the Circle of Courage framework, this addresses the elements of Belonging and Generosity.

"For some people, school can be a sanctuary. They might want to escape what's going on at their home." - Grade 9

"I won't be telling kids to go to school, if they don't feel safe, especially when the principal doesn't do anything to address the situation." - Elder

"I have the right to be protected from being hurt or badly treated"
(UNCRC, Article 19, 2021).

MENTAL HEALTH & TRAUMA

"Real world [is] moving forward, kids [are] falling through the cracks. A lot of help is need for First Nation children, it's historical trauma." - Elder

"I have not even begun on the mental health issues and social issues in the system. The bottom line is that this is an EPIC failure for our children.

Attendance will never improve until there is an improvement in addressing these issues." - Parent

"It's hard for kids to come to school, stay focused and learn when they are struggling mentally and/or emotionally. Children [are] traumatized in regular life and then COVID increases stress."
- Educator

"One of our greatest concerns was a lack of availability of mental health supports. The half day from Health and Social Services in a school of 700 at FH, doesn't work. The person needs to be on-site, making relationships, have the social interactions, build the relationship of trust. If you don't have that, you don't go very far." - School council member

"When [I] am upset [I] curl up into a ball so [I] can calm down." - Age 9

**"I had counsellors through [my social worker]...but he never messaged me back when I texted him. I feel like if I don't go to the appointment, he still gets paid. That's how I think of it at least."
- Grade 12**

**"We need wider selection of counsellors. Every kid is different; we are a traumatized people."
- Grade 12**

"Teachers are under the gun because kids need to achieve academically, but all the trauma informed practice and mental health support doesn't show. Those teachers are still evaluated on the fact of whether those kids made the grade."
- School council member

"Kids can't stay [focused] on school work when they are traumatized. Those experiences don't go away, it's a long road to travel." - Parent

"Definitely [we] need more wellness support for students, people to help them deal with their concerns, counselling, even just getting out on the land. For some that is what works best; they need to be busy, not sitting across the table from a therapist." - Educator

"Learn who my children are, as they are. THEN, learn how to teach them."
- Parent

"When kids have to re-tell their story to another new person, that is not right, that is retraumatizing for the kids. We need teachers and counsellors in the school for the long haul."
- Parent

What Is

Mental wellness continues to be a huge area of concern for students, families, and educators. The COVID-19 pandemic has amplified existing mental health challenges and also precipitated new mental health concerns for students. Many young people share that they feel drastically heightened levels of general anxiety and depression since the beginning of the pandemic, along with feelings of isolation, stress over school workloads, and affected social relationships. The mental health of educators has also been impacted significantly, as school staff are being asked to adhere to strict COVID-19 regulations that have severely stretched their capacity and ability to teach in dynamic ways. In a survey for YCAO, educators speak to feeling burnt out, at a loss for how to engage their students, and that their own mental health is not being adequately supported by the Department of Education. These issues are exacerbated by huge changes in their day-to-day school routines that have required high levels of adaptability and resilience from both staff and students.

In our conversations with Yukoners, the need for drastically improved mental health supports was heard loud and clear. Students, families, educators, and First Nations all called for full-time mental health professionals in every school, separate from guidance counselors. There were also repeated requests to strengthen the presence of Elders in schools for the mental wellness of students, especially when potentially triggering curriculum on colonialism and residential schools is being taught in the classrooms.

"The school told us our child cannot have regular access to the counsellor because "there is nothing wrong." - Parent

"Every school needs to have a counsellor who can support the students through their life experiences. A counsellor once every two weeks for a day does not meet the needs of the students." - Educator

RESPONSE TO YCAO FROM MENTAL WELLNESS & SUBSTANCE USE SERVICES (MWSU)

"Throughout the territory, CYFTT counsellors provide mental health services within the education system." ... Youth Outreach and Addictions Workers attend each high school on set days during the week and attend elementary schools as needed and requested."



Fact:

Only 40% of students with emotional, behavioural and mental health disorders graduate from high school compared to the national average of 76%

- Association for Children's Mental Health

Finding:

Students are not getting the mental health supports they need in Yukon

"Every time I ask for help,
[they] don't help"

- age 12

What Could Be

The school should be a place that promotes the holistic wellbeing of its community - physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual health should all be emphasized and encouraged as important elements of a functioning school environment. Neither students nor staff should see going to school as a detriment to their mental health.

A vision of what could be looks like dedicated full-time mental health professionals in every school whose sole objective is maintaining mental wellness within the school environment. Their practice will reflect a diversity of healing approaches including resources and capacity allocated towards land-based and culturally relevant programming. Additionally, every Yukon school will have thoughtful protocols in place that make Elders feel welcome, from physical space in the school all the way to proactive administrative interactions that eliminate undue stress. Students will feel safe to reach out for mental health support and will feel equipped with tools to self-regulate and engage in safe ways. Through the Circle of Courage framework, this addresses the elements of Belonging, Independence, and Mastery.

**"We think teachers need mental health first aid - teachers feel torn when they see kids with those needs but don't have the skills to deal with that situation."
- School council member**

"Even in [our community], we only get counsellors in the school maybe once a month from YTG or wherever they come from, and then we're left with the kids who are suicidal and their home life sucks and everything is happening for them and we don't know exactly everything that's going on in the home...It's an ongoing cycle and I just pray that one day that cycle breaks." - Elder

PERSONAL FACTORS

"Food and clothing for kids is so important for attendance. If kids aren't coming to school hungry, that'll make such a difference...If a kid comes to school with a jacket five sizes too big, kids notice those sort of things." - Administrator

"Some children have to overcome barriers in order to achieve. Language, nutrition, systemic issues. We need an action plan that incorporates teachers and parents." - First Nation chief

"Drugs and alcohol and lateral violence and those kind of things so it's finding these parallels within the existing system. It's not rocket science, it's about connecting dots, it's really about that." - School council member

"Many parents are overwhelmed at home and still have...poverty, lack of work and/or housing, that lead to attendance issues as parent can't force [students] to come to school and didn't do the work from 0-10 to reinforce importance of school." - Parent

"There are a lot of parents who are struggling out there, they are going through hard time and many are single parents too. It's tough to get your kids up, dressed, fed and out the door, if you yourself aren't feeling good about how your life is going. Sometimes, no food for lunches, maybe no clean clothes." - Elder

"[I] failed two classes right after the assault and [I] am having trouble getting back on track with school since then." - Age 18

"It's super hard for me to get to school in the morning and if I'm late, I'm like, 'What's the point?' It's just hard for me to get up, to show up. I'm late every day because I feel so behind." - Grade 10

"If a parent is a heavy alcoholic or is involved in bad relationships, it starts to impact the kids." - Grade 9

"How do we identify and foster community education champions? People that will take a special interest in students, be the people to cheer them along, be role models, and will guide them in ways that maybe because of intergenerational trauma, they aren't accessing in the ways successful students are." - School council member

"If [you're] struggling, it is easy to check out, or you show up but you don't participate because your mind is distracted...I know sometimes when I'm teaching, I forgot about that. I am so busy trying to teach so many students with different levels of learning. Luckily, sometimes I catch myself in time." - Educator

"A family in social housing who cannot choose where [they live], has no bus access although the bus drives by our school anyway." - Parent

"Currently we are running in partnership with our local First Nations a food program and it is helping to increase student attendance and productivity." - Educator

"How do teachers/schools best communicate to families that we want to help support students coming to school? It's not judgemental... it's done out of care and love! We see students who really want to be here yet circumstances are outside their control." - Educator

What Is

There is a range of personal factors including poverty, substance abuse, violence, intergenerational trauma, lack of value placed in education, and other systemic issues that prevent children from prioritizing school attendance in their own lives. It is necessary to consider the full spectrum of school attendance barriers, and recognize that systemic issues outside the school are often rooted in the impacts of colonialism, especially for First Nations students. These include intergenerational trauma, cycles of poverty, abuse, and addiction, and government-created dependencies. Further, there is longstanding fear and mistrust in the school system stemming from the violent legacy of residential schools from which many of the students today are only two generations removed.

Schools demonstrate a painful lack of awareness and empathy when a student's personal situation is not taken into account in regards to attendance issues; did they get enough sleep, were they taking care of their siblings, did they have a ride to school this morning, was there enough food in the fridge? All of these issues contribute to a student's inability to focus, learn, and be their best selves in school.

"Teachers [are] not insightful of community issues; we have community responsibilities."

- Grade 11

"Teachers don't understand, it's hard going to school in Whitehorse, it's hard being away from home, there's no support."

- Grade 11

"We've got no idea what's going on at home, we just wanna celebrate when they're here."

- Administrator

Fact:

The more instructional time students miss the more difficult it will be to catch up

Finding:

76% of students continued to experience chronic absenteeism over the three year period

"There's a lack of intent; [there is] no motivation. When you're already behind you don't wanna go."
- Student

What Could Be

Even the act of getting to school can be a remarkable achievement on any given day for a student. The Department of Education should emphasize celebrating children for their strength, adaptability, and resilience while also seeking creative wrap-around initiatives that fill gaps like food insecurity or lack of transportation to the fullest extent possible. Programs like serving breakfast and hot lunches, in-school mentor systems, parent support groups, Family Nights, nap rooms, and transportation options are all ideas suggested by students, families, and First Nations that have been highly successful when implemented.

A vision of what could be includes the Department of Education and schools being cognizant of the historical role they have played in the trauma that impacts many families, and working actively to create a welcoming school environment that is inclusive of students and also their families. In addition, educators and school staff are able to recognize the individual situations and unmet needs of each student, and are knowledgeable, empathetic, and responsive in how they communicate with and relate to their students and family members. Through the Circle of Courage framework, this addresses the elements of Belonging and Generosity.

"How do teachers/schools best communicate to families that we want to help support students coming to school? It's not judgemental; it's not finding fault; it's done out of care and love! We see students who really want to be here yet circumstances are outside their control." - Educator



BEHAVIOURAL SUPPORTS

"...Where is the logic in suspending a student for missing too many classes? Find ways to encourage them instead of punishing them for finally attending."
- Parent

"The trouble with school discipline is that for some students, teachers are the most important people in their world so they crave emotional support from them and if teachers don't have the capacity, training, or time to do it properly, then behaviour results and the child ends up getting separated from that relationship which they value the most."
- School council member

"Stop suspending students for being stoned. As much as many parents don't condone [its] use, some students do better in class with a mild buzz."
- Parent

"When a behavior occurs at school let the parent know, don't just deal with it without informing the parents, we need to know what's happening at school. When dealing with kids behavior, don't overpower the kids with lots of people at meetings. You need to build relationships."
- Elder

"Some teachers are understanding. [They'll say,] "Hey, do you want to go over there and calm down?" - Grade 11

"We get in trouble for not giving our best but it's hard to do that when we're just sitting there." - Grade 10

"Counsellor didn't force me to talk; she offered me to draw, offered juice." - Grade 9

"My kid used to be mad but now he's really sad and scared."
-Parent

"I told my kid to behave and prove everyone wrong who thinks he will mess up."
- Parent

"Kids with challenges placed in regular classrooms, sometimes they act out, or they are the class clown, shy, miss a lot of school, or only come when gym or their favorite class or teacher is teaching. Many only come in the afternoon. In these cases, it is hard to teach, I know they need more of my attention."
- Educator

"Those kids who are in the halls, they are disengaged. They need someone checking in on them."
- Administrator

"This idea of removing kids who need some structure in environment is not the best approach. In-school suspensions seem to make a lot more sense. There was a great example from the Teslin school where if an issue arises, they don't have suspensions but they keep the student in the school and just separate."
- School council member

What Is

Many of YCAO's individual advocacy issues pertaining to students not attending school stem from instances where a behavioural issue has not been met with a trauma-informed lens from school staff. Students share their experiences of not feeling heard, understood, or met with empathy by educators who often don't know what students are going through outside of school, or even within the school environment. Rather, suspension and other punitive measures are used to discipline students for behavioural issues stemming from underlying emotional turmoil.

In addition, behavioural assessments and behavioural support plans that are in place for students experiencing behavioural issues are often not being implemented. Students and families report that often educators are either not even aware of a student's behavioural needs, or are not equipped to support the student in an effective and empathetic way.

"I was totally dismayed, disgusted, that within the education act, the school council has the authority to suspend or expel the student, up to forever. But we're not given authority to get resources into the school, get support into the school."
- School council member

"Suspension, that's a big problem, suspension for any little thing. Children act up, first thing [is] suspension, send them home. Teachers don't want to deal with the issue I guess, I seen that happen quite a bit...What they learn is if they don't want to be at school, act up." - Elder

"We call upon the Government of Canada to repeal Section 43 of the *Criminal Code of Canada*" (TRC Call to Action 6, 2015):

"Every schoolteacher, parent or person standing in the place of a parent is justified in using force by way of correction toward a pupil or child, as the case may be, who is under his care, if the force does not exceed what is reasonable under the circumstances"
(*Criminal Code of Canada, Section 43, 1985*).

Fact:



THE AUDITOR GENERAL OF CANADA REPORT (2019) ASSESSED 619 INDIVIDUAL EDUCATION PLANS FOR CHILDREN IN YUKON.

Finding:

IN THE PAST 10 YEARS YCAO HAS HAD 117 ISSUES RELATED TO BEHAVIOURAL & EDUCATIONAL SUPPORTS. 35 OF THESE ISSUES STILL REQUIRE RESOLUTION.



What Could Be

While a clear standard of acceptable behaviour is practical and arguably necessary for the school community to function in a healthy way, the YCAO contends that students who are not meeting this standard either once or consistently should be supported with a trauma-informed, empathetic approach that considers all the factors that might be informing the behavioural issue. The goal of any disciplinary measure for students should be a restorative one that emphasizes student *and* family engagement, empowers all parties towards accountability, and ultimately seeks to return the student(s) to the school community in a healthy way. Punitive measures often do not have a positive effect and can lead to longstanding impacts on a student's confidence and holistic wellness. They can also harm the relationship between student and educator.

A vision of what could be would have students' behavioural issues recognized as symptoms of underlying emotional distress or an absence of understanding and empathy rather than standalone disruptive conduct. All staff who work directly with students practice with a trauma-informed lens when engaging with both students and their families. Additionally, restorative practices, when appropriate, are emphasized over punitive measures in order to recognize each scenario as a learning opportunity. This will in turn foster a greater sense of belonging for each student and increased independence in emotional regulation and healthy social interaction. Through the Circle of Courage framework, this addresses the elements of Belonging and Independence.

"First Nations representative should be present at school based team meetings to uphold view of their citizens." - First Nation education worker

"Instead of harassing the student, why not ask them if they need someone to talk [to], or offer them a drink of water; teachers need to be able to read the signs of distress." - Grade 11



EDUCATIONAL SUPPORTS

"It was a fight to get an EA for our child. Our school wasn't in agreement that our child needed 1-1 support. We were lucky to get funding through Jordan's Principle. Getting an assessment for your child, that is another story, one that the school doesn't tell parents about the options or how to navigate that process. Again, it was Jordan's Principle to the rescue. Unfortunately that resource is only available to First Nation children and youth." - Parent

"She's 7. How can you tell me she is not going to graduate just because she has an IEP?"

- Parent

"The Department plays this numbers games, X amount of students equals X amount of EA's. However, that is just not an accurate equation."

- Educator

"My grandson has ADHD and sat out in the hallway most of elementary school. They are set up for failure. They need to find out what they can do different." - Grandparent

"At my school we are a team. When training becomes available, the EAs are also invited to participate with the teachers. We see the difference in how staff work with the students. We all have to participate and do the work, it only makes sense."

- Educator

"It would be best if I had the same EA all day. Or at least all afternoon."

- Age 11

"Hands on work in class, splitting us up into smaller group discussions, these things are so much more helpful. In pairs or one-on-one is so much more helpful for us to get our work done."

- Grade 10

"I'm excelling because I have a 1:1 teacher. He recognized I need help."

- Age 16

"I can't go to university because I have ADHD."

- Grade 9

"Instead of getting those kids an EA to help explain math to them, they just put them in low IQ class. Either that or they send them to Native Language class, which the kids like that because they get treated like a human being, they are treated with respect." - Elder

"One size does not fit all. Kids have different learning styles [and] the current system is not meeting their needs. When kids feel like they aren't learning or capable of learning, their self-esteem is impacted. Gradually they start to give up; what's the point of showing up?"

- Educator

"We want the best for our kids and it's a struggle when we've got a system that works against us."

- School council member

"My experience [is], and I've been in the schools for quite awhile, we are failing students and there is even less support for students with learning challenges when they get to high school [and] lack of resources to provide necessary 1-1 they may need." - Educator

"We need more EAs to support the teachers. Teachers are getting more stressed and when they are stressed the kids pick up on that." - Parent

What Is

According to the Yukon Student Support Services website, the Department of Education promises to “make every effort to provide support so that all students reach their goals” (Student Support Services, 2021). However, findings from the Auditor General’s K-12 Report, along with evidence from YCAO’s individual advocacy case files, show that this is not the case. Not all Yukon students who require educational supports receive them; a rigorous referral, triage, and assessment process typically takes many months or longer, can be stressful and/or traumatizing for the student and their family along the way, and does not always guarantee effective outcomes.

In addition, resources and services that *are* available cannot keep up with demand. Typically, this puts the onus on classroom educators to provide preliminary support to students with learning challenges, regardless of whether they have the appropriate training or expertise to do so. This places undue pressure on both student and educator that is unfair and could be harmful for the student. In our advocacy cases, many students and parents have vocalized a need for more in-person educational assistants and a stricter adherence to formalized Individualized Education Programming (IEPs).

"I sometimes wish I had an EA so I got more help. I have to put my hand up to get help, I have my hand up all the time. Is anyone even noticing me? I feel invisible."

- Grade 3

"There are many students with high needs that are not having their needs met because they need 1-1 EA to support their physical, mental or emotional needs."

- Educator

"Students who, because of intellectual, communicative, behavioural, physical, or multiple exceptionalities are in need of special education programs, are entitled to receive a program outlined in an Individualized Education Plan"

(Education Act, Section 15.1, 2002).



FACT:

Students who, because of intellectual, communicative, behavioural, physical, or multiple exceptionalities are in need of special education programs, are entitled to receive a program outlined in an Individualized Education Plan.

- Education Act 15 (1)

FINDING:

Less than 1% of students who have missed more than 40 days of school have an Individualized Education Plan.

"It's a gong show. We need a routine."

- Parent

What Could Be

Schools should be a place where all students feel empowered to learn, grow, and achieve to their highest potential. The archaic notion that there is only one way to learn has long been debunked. The current offerings of land-based and experiential education programs, the Individual Learning Centre and Wood Street Centre, and other avenues are all excellent and valuable pieces for the Yukon's students. However, significant gaps remain. Many experiences shared with us highlight the difficulty of accessing some of these alternative programs due to age restrictions, application processes, or a general feeling of not belonging.

A vision of what could be includes the Department of Education's own mission to provide inclusive schools where all learners have access to "appropriate education programming and required supports" (Student Support Services, 2021). Every student will have access to all options and opportunities to learn and flourish in ways that cater to their strengths and gifts and support the development of areas of improvement. This in turn will equip them to achieve mastery to their fullest potential and capability. Through the Circle of Courage framework, this addresses the elements of Belonging, Independence, and Mastery.

**"We need educational assessments for learning disabilities done by the Department when the parents ask. We've been asking for 4 years!"
- Parent**



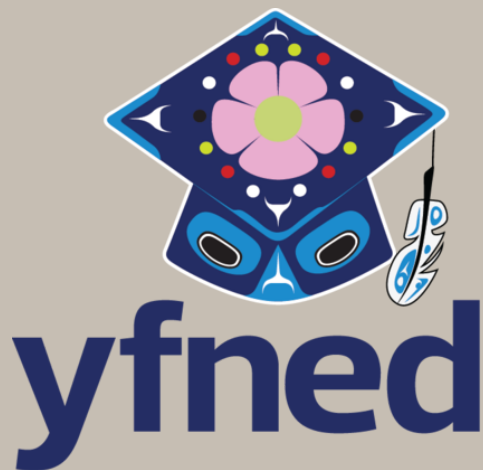


SHIFTING LANDSCAPE:
ORGANIZATIONS LEADING THE WAY

Image by: Christopher Tse

YUKON FIRST NATION EDUCATION DIRECTORATE

WHAT IS THE YUKON FIRST NATION EDUCATION DIRECTORATE?



The Yukon First Nation Education Directorate launched in 2020 with the mandate of taking unified control over First Nation education in the territory, something that has been long overdue for Yukon First Nation governments and students. Under the guidance of the Chiefs Committee on Education (CCOE), YFNED aims to advance First Nation decision-making and control over education. YFNED's vision to develop students who can excel in both worlds is accomplished through the incorporation of cultural values and traditional knowledge, and the opportunity for all students to engage with language and land-based learning.

"Our youth are not failing the current education system, rather the system has failed our youth. It is only right that the education of Indigenous people be carried out by Indigenous peoples."

- Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation Chief Dana Tizya-Tramm, Chair of the CCOE

"It's not always about getting to post-secondary, but it's about being a really strong community member, and, how do we foster that for our children? So my biggest hope with it is that it will affect a change for our children, that they can find their success and become really, really strong community members."

- Melanie Bennett, YFNED Executive Director

PROGRAMS & SERVICES

Funded by Jordan's Principle, YFNED's programs emphasize an Indigenous, wrap-around approach to education that aims to support students holistically:



First Nation Education Advocates champion the rights of all Indigenous students and work in and with schools to increase First Nation culture and values.



The **Mobile Therapeutic Unit** provides culturally appropriate health services in rural and urban areas. An open referral policy ensures access to care for all.



The **Rural and Urban Nutrition Program** ensures all Indigenous students are receiving school-based breakfasts and lunches, along with food hampers.

MOCCASIN TRAILBLAZERS



Image from: Moccasin Trailblazers

WHO ARE THE MOCCASIN TRAILBLAZERS?

The Moccasin Trailblazers is a YFNED-supported group of First Nations youth who were formed in November 2020 to provide youth voice on education issues affecting Indigenous students in the Yukon. The goal of the group is to eventually have two youth representatives from each Yukon First Nation to provide perspective on where the education system is working well, and identify opportunities for improvement in the areas of Indigenous cultural incorporation, awareness, and inclusivity. The group aims to meet monthly to build community and strategize youth-forward solutions that prioritize Indigenous students.



Image provided by Trina Pauls

Below is an interview the YCAO conducted with Trina Adanchilla Pauls, a founding member of the Moccasin Trailblazers. Trina is Champagne and Aishihik First Nations citizen and a 16-year-old student at Porter Creek Secondary School.

Why the name Moccasin Trailblazers?

TP: There are so many people who've come before us and have started that trail and we just want to continue to push it and see more and more growth in our education system and awareness of Indigenous issues. Trailblazers is a really powerful word, we're pushing forward...The moccasin is representative of us as Indigenous people walking forward and blazing that trail.

Why is it important to have Indigenous youth informing education in the Yukon?

TP: In the Yukon, First Nations students and youth [are] such a big part of the population in the Yukon and our culture is too, so why wouldn't you be educating, why wouldn't you have art in the schools...instead of making Indigenous people feel pushed down by the colonial education system? The colonial education system, that's what we see. We wanna break that down [by] incorporating more experiential things into basic school, not just the experiential programs because not everybody can get into the experiential programs. Lots of kids don't like school or don't want to be at school or once they graduate they're pushed away from school because it wasn't a good experience.

How are the Moccasin Trailblazers collaborating with YFNED?

TP: I believe the person who had the idea of the youth council was Melanie Bennett (Executive Director of YFNED.) We definitely want to make changes in school environments and that's a big focus. YFNED supports and we work with their workers and they provide our spaces and stuff...We're definitely our own thing. They're supporting us but we're the ones bringing up the things we wanna do. We're talking about the next steps of what we wanna do. They're there providing guidelines, assistance, and ways to communicate and get our voices heard.

What are the main challenges for Indigenous youth in the education system?

TP: I think one of the biggest issues that Indigenous youth face is support. There's Indigenous support workers and they're amazing if your nation has them. You can go to them for anything...but the education system for Indigenous people has not been a good history. Our history is residential schools so from the get go, our history with education has not been fun. If their parents or grandparents are residential school survivors, they might not have a good outlook on education. I know a few years ago they changed the curriculum and started incorporating Indigenous studies and it helped but it's definitely a hard topic and there's lots of factors that [make] it an unequal playing field.

What advice do you give to First Nations students who are struggling to see themselves represented in the education system?

TP: Someone brought up YNTEP (Yukon Native Teacher Education Program at Yukon University) and how there's so many First Nations educators who go through that but you don't see them. There's classes that are teaching First Nations topics but with non-First Nations people, which is an issue...because sure you can be trained and educated but if you're teaching about Indigenous issues or Indigenous history, I feel like it should be coming from an Indigenous person. So it's hard when you don't see any representatives of teachers who come from your culture or people. The biggest thing is that it's scary to ask for help or to ask what you want, but if you have a trusted person, whether they're your age or a teacher or whatever, if you tell them, they can bring it up. Try to get the confidence to voice what you need or just asking for help is a really big thing on trying to be more inclusive.

What has gotten better?

TP: Educational support workers are amazing. They really help create a super safe environment for Indigenous kids and even non-Indigenous kids to learn about culture and stuff. So that's something that's improved a lot, having those supports. You do see culture in school more too and I think lots of schools are working harder on that cause they're realizing it's such a big part of the population.

What do you hope to achieve through the Moccasin Trailblazers?

TP: My goals are to gain leadership experience and gain knowledge so I can be knowledgeable when it comes to me educating people. The big picture is I hope to see changes in our education system or even see an Indigenous school cause we really need that. The things we as a group we've been bringing up and talking about, I hope we start seeing lots of action. Lots of First Nations governments and the YFNED are really working on getting these things heard and getting movement and I hope to see the education system become way better for not only Indigenous students but for everyone.

COMMUNITIES BUILDING YOUTH FUTURES

WHAT IS COMMUNITY BUILDING YOUTH FUTURES?

The Communities Building Youth Futures project (CBYF) is a five-year initiative funded by the Tamarack Institute in partnership with Employment and Social Development Canada. The project brings together youth and youth organizations in the Yukon to innovate ideas for supporting youth as they transition out of high school. The image below outlines CBYF's six priority areas:



"I have learned a lot and seen many examples of functioning/broken systems...These experiences have shaped my opinions and motivated me to problem-solve in order to create solutions to these systematic failings." - Samreen, CBYF Intern

"I am interested in working with youth because they are the future and they have better ideas on what the school systems are missing. " - Zarah, CBYF Intern



"I want to become somebody who youth can trust, talk to, and ask for support when needed. I've had a hard upbringing and I can relate to a lot of troubled youth. I feel I have an advantage in helping these youth in their own struggles."
- Isaiah, past CBYF Intern

Images provided by: CBYF

UNCRC ARTICLE 12:

**EVERY CHILD HAS THE
RIGHT TO EXPRESS THEIR
VIEWS, FEELINGS &
WISHES IN ALL MATTERS
AFFECTING THEM, & TO
HAVE THEIR VIEWS
CONSIDERED & TAKEN
SERIOUSLY**





Fact:

We call on the government of Canada to develop with Aboriginal groups, a joint strategy to eliminate educational and employment gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians

- TRC 7th call to action

Finding:

For students in grade 7, only 68% of Indigenous students met or exceeded expectations while 85% of non-Indigenous students met or exceed expectations. In numeracy only 44% of Indigenous students met or exceeded expectations while 77% non-Indigenous students met or exceeded expectations

- Auditor General's Report (2019)

"[I] would like to see, in the Yukon, more creative spaces for Indigenous youth, to help them become successful as well as overall safer places for the entire Indigenous population."

- Quote from "The Gaps in the Education System Affecting the Indigenous Population" (Tuton, 2020)

A photograph of a person kneeling in a snowy field at sunset. The person is wearing a dark jacket and a hat, and is looking down at something in their hands. A dog is sitting on the snow to the right. The background shows a line of trees and a bright sun setting behind a ridge, with a sky filled with wispy clouds. The overall scene is peaceful and serene.

FILLING IN THE GAPS

Image by: Christopher Tse

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Belonging, Safety and School Culture

1. Implement Canada's Rights Respecting Schools, a UNICEF initiative that uses the UNCRC as a basis for enhancing an inclusive, participatory and respectful school culture for children and adults.
2. Incorporate the Circle of Courage model to recognize children's unmet needs and work collaboratively with relevant YG departments, First Nations, non-government organizations to provide wrap around services for children and families.
3. Work in partnership with First Nations governments and First Nation Education Directorate to increase First Nation representation in all schools. This includes educators, assistants, Elders, counsellors, presenters, and community support programs. Incorporate cultural competencies and First Nations mentors into school curriculum and training of educators.
4. Build experiential learning and cultural activities and values into the curriculum and academic schedules so that it is accessible to all students in all schools.
5. Assign and honour academic credit to family or community-based learning that takes place outside of school (family time on the land, trips home, and travel). Develop curricular adaptations to ensure learning gaps will be filled.
6. Assign academic credit to pre-existing culture camps when the First Nation government is interested.
7. Provide opportunities and options for all students that address individualized learning goals, such as co-op training programs, community placements, and employment opportunities for students grades 10-12.

Mental Wellness and Personal Factors

8. Standardize and implement school policies for managing prolonged absences and chronic absenteeism. Through a child rights lens, attendance policies must use collaborative processes to engage students to achieve their goals. Allocate resources identified by school-based teams and school councils.

9. Immediately create and fill full-time clinical counsellor positions in every school. These mental health counsellors must be in addition to school/guidance counsellors. All counsellors must have a trauma informed lens, cultural humility, and counselling approaches that are effective in a variety of settings. They will be knowledgeable about referrals for family treatment, community support and crisis response. As part of their everyday interactions, clinical counsellors will develop relationships with students, educators, and families.

Behavioural Supports

10. Develop and implement alternatives to dismissal that promote safety and address problems in a way that restores relationships, promotes children's rights, and supports students in meeting their goals.

11. Implement restorative justice processes in disciplinary cases. A YFNED Education Advocate or a First Nation representative should be offered to all First Nations students and participate in a school-based team where relevant and appropriate.

Educational Supports

12. Review and integrate developmental assessments and transition plans from early learning centres at entry to Kindergarten.

13. Provide concrete steps to implement timely assessments and track the implementation of educational supports, modifications and adaptations. Interventions will include communication with parents, classroom teachers and school-based team and EDU student support consultants.

14. Provide a public response to the review of Inclusive Education, detailing actions EDU will take to provide options and opportunities and necessary resources for all students to reach their learning potential. Advise YCAO of steps taken in response to the review of inclusive education and how EDU will support timely assessment, early intervention and adequate resource allocation when students “with intellectual, communicative, behavioural, physical or multiple exceptionalities” are identified.

CLOSING REMARKS

Over and over in the conversations we had with students, families, educators, and First Nations the past year and a half, we've heard the same question: "What is this review *actually* going to accomplish?" The six Areas of Concern that YCAO identifies in this review as barriers to school attendance do not come as a surprise, least of all to the people most impacted by them. In a meeting with the Association of Yukon School Councils, Boards & Committees where YCAO met with representatives from across the Yukon, a frustrated member said, "We've raised this before, it's nothing new. It's nothing new." Over lunch in one of the communities, a First Nations education worker reminded us, "You know, these kids have gifted you with their stories. You have a responsibility now."

“

These kids have gifted you with their stories. You have a responsibility now.

”

As an office whose mandate is to amplify the rights and voices of children and youth in the Yukon, this review is our pledge to fulfilling that responsibility, however long it will take. The 14 recommendations outlined above that we've made to the Department of Education are just the first step. It does not stop here. We will follow up with EDU to track their progress, hold them accountable, and ensure that tangible actions are being taken to address the concerns highlighted in this review. The YCAO is optimistic and hopeful that the government is finally starting to hear what Yukoners have been saying for decades. The status quo is not enough.

When a child or youth is not in school, it means more than an empty desk. Attendance issues are symptomatic of root issues that run deep and are entrenched and interconnected. It is imperative that we adopt a wraparound approach to these issues and break down siloed solutions. As we heard repeatedly, education issues are intrinsically linked to issues with health, family, home, psychosocial, justice, and more. It takes all of us with a shared commitment to seeing children and youth succeed to their fullest potential, whatever that might look like. We owe it to generations past, we owe it to the generation today, and we owe it to generations to come for the future of our territory.



APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

TRUTH & RECONCILIATION COMMISSION

Relevant Calls to Action

7. We call upon the federal government to develop with Aboriginal groups a joint strategy to eliminate educational and employment gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians.
8. We call upon the federal government to eliminate the discrepancy in federal education funding for First Nations children being educated on reserves and those First Nations children being educated off reserves.



9. We call upon the federal government to prepare and publish annual reports comparing funding for the education of First Nations children on and off reserves, as well as educational and income attainments of Aboriginal peoples in Canada compared with non-Aboriginal people.

10. We call on the federal government to draft new Aboriginal education legislation with the full participation and informed consent of Aboriginal peoples. The new legislation would include a commitment to sufficient funding and would incorporate the following principles:

- i. Providing sufficient funding to close identified educational achievement gaps within one generation.
- ii. Improving education attainment levels and success rates.
- iii. Developing culturally appropriate curricula.
- iv. Protecting the right to Aboriginal languages, including the teaching of Aboriginal languages as credit courses.
- v. Enabling parental and community responsibility, control, and accountability, similar to what parents enjoy in public school systems.
- vi. Enabling parents to fully participate in the education of their children.
- vii. Respecting and honouring Treaty relationships.

11. We call upon the federal government to provide adequate funding to end the backlog of First Nations students seeking a post-secondary education.

12. We call upon the federal, provincial, territorial, and Aboriginal governments to develop culturally appropriate early childhood education programs for Aboriginal families.

62. We call upon the federal, provincial, and territorial governments, in consultation and collaboration with Survivors, Aboriginal peoples, and educators, to:

i. Make age-appropriate curriculum on residential schools, Treaties, and Aboriginal peoples' historical and contemporary contributions to Canada a mandatory education requirement for Kindergarten to Grade Twelve students.

ii. Provide the necessary funding to post-secondary institutions to educate teachers on how to integrate Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods into classrooms.

iii. Provide the necessary funding to Aboriginal schools to utilize Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods in classrooms.

iv. Establish senior-level positions in government at the assistant deputy minister level or higher dedicated to Aboriginal content in education.

63. We call upon the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada to maintain an annual commitment to Aboriginal education issues, including:

i. Grade Twelve curriculum and learning resources on Aboriginal peoples in Canadian history, and the history and legacy of residential schools.

ii. Sharing information and best practices on teaching curriculum related to residential schools and Aboriginal history.

iii. Building student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect.

iv. Identifying teacher-training needs relating to the above.

64. We call upon all levels of government that provide public funds to denominational schools to require such schools to provide an education on comparative religious studies, which must include a segment on Aboriginal spiritual beliefs and practices developed in collaboration with Aboriginal Elders.



APPENDIX B

CANADIAN COUNCIL OF CHILD & YOUTH ADVOCATES

DECLARATION OF RECONCILIATION

June 1, 2015

The experience of the past is a lesson for the future. We have learned from the experiences of those who were sent to residential schools, of the profound tragedy that resulted when the rights of children; their connection with family and community; and their traditions and culture were not respected. The federal government's residential school policy of forcibly removing all children from the home as young as four years old, until they were adolescents or in some cases never returned home, left a tangible emptiness; it is a forced exodus that seems unthinkable today. We have listened and we now know the truth. We know Aboriginal peoples and all Canadians were changed by residential schools.

As independent Child Advocates in each of our respective Provinces and Territories, we listen every day to the voices of Aboriginal children who suffer the intergenerational trauma of the residential schools system. We hear their voices.

The eleven members of the Canadian Council of Child and Youth Advocates share an unwavering belief in, and respect for, the rights of children and youth.

As enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, all children have basic rights to health, safety, education and well-being. The family is recognized as a fundamental and natural environment for the growth and well-being of children. Children have the right to be heard.

In our work advocating for the rights of children and youth, we have special regard for the circumstances of Aboriginal children and youth who are among the most vulnerable and marginalized groups of children in Canada.

Our pledge is to ensure that the rights of Aboriginal children and youth are kept at the forefront in our advocacy work.

The Canadian Council of Child and Youth Advocates, in the spirit of active reconciliation, supports the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's work on residential schools. The members of the Council strive to be a voice for all children and youth, and as such we support the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission for the implementation of the history of residential schools in the curriculum of all public schools. We call for this in memory of those children who have passed away, those who survived, those who are living through the legacy of the imposed trauma, and to improve all Canadians' understanding of the true history of our country.

Our Council of Advocates will continue to work towards the reconciliation initiated by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission process. We will be vigilant in ensuring that the rights of Aboriginal children are respected. We will continue to work to engage with Aboriginal children and youth.

The healing journey, and the path to reconciliation, includes the involvement of youth in defining their own future. This is a journey that must be taken by all Canadians. By appreciating the past and hearing and learning from and about each other, trust and respect can be built. We will work to support Aboriginal children and youth to speak out, have their voices heard, and have their best interests reflected in how our nation's future unfolds.



APPENDIX C

UNITED NATIONS DECLARATION ON THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

Article 2

Indigenous peoples and individuals are free and equal to all other peoples and individuals and have the right to be free from any kind of discrimination, in the exercise of their rights, in particular that based on their indigenous origin or identity.

Article 14

- (i). Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning.
- (ii). Indigenous individuals, particularly children, have the right to all levels and forms of education of the State without discrimination.
- (iii). States shall, in conjunction with Indigenous peoples, take effective measures, in order for indigenous individuals, particularly children, including those living outside their communities, to have access, when possible, to an education in their own culture and provided in their own language.

Article 15

- (i). Indigenous peoples have the right to the dignity and diversity of their cultures, traditions, histories and aspirations which shall be appropriately reflected in education and public information.

Article 21

- (i). Indigenous peoples have the right, without discrimination, to the improvement of their economic and social conditions, including, inter alia, in the areas of education, employment, vocational training and retraining, housing, sanitation, health and social security.



APPENDIX D

TERMS OF REFERENCE

1.0 AUTHORITY:

The Yukon Child and Youth Advocate Office (“the Advocate”) operates under the authority of the Child and Youth Advocate Act (“the Act”). The Advocate is conducting a review of inconsistent school attendance. The Advocate brought the issue to the attention of the Department of Education. The Minister of Education responded with a formal request for the Advocate to conduct a review and make a report of the issue, pursuant to s. 15 of the Child and Youth Advocate Act. The Minister provided additional authorities for the Advocate to report publicly and engage with the public, key external partners in education and Yukon First Nations as part of the review.

The Yukon Child & Youth Advocate and the Minister of Education agree that the Terms of Reference will guide The Review.

15(1) The Legislative Assembly or a Minister may refer to the Advocate for review and report any matter relating to the provision of designated services that involves the interests and well-being of children and youth, which may include a review of critical injuries, a death or other specific incident concerning a child or youth in the care or custody of the government or a First Nation service authority.

15(2) The Advocate must conduct a review and make a report under subsection (1) in accordance with the terms of reference established for the review by the Legislative Assembly or the Minister.
S.Y.2009, c.1, 2.15

2.0: ISSUE

Children have a right to an education. They have a right to go to school and to receive an educational program that helps them reach their educational goals and full potential. In the course of providing individual advocacy, the Advocate has learned of numerous children of all ages who do not attend school consistently. Some do not attend at all.

This issue is currently relevant due to the high volume of children who currently have attendance issues, which is recognized by the Government and Yukon and is intensified by the Auditor General Report entitled Report of the Auditor General of Canada to the Legislative Assembly of Yukon – Kindergarten Through Grade 12 Education in the Yukon which highlights many of the barriers to attendance and achievement that the Advocate has observed in the course of individual advocacy.

3.0 OBJECTIVES

- To review attendance rates of Yukon students
- To analyze the issue of school attendance from the perspective of children's views and children's rights
- To identify the barriers to school attendance and therefore student achievement
- To collect information from children, caregivers, families, communities, school personnel, school councils, Department of Education and any other relevant departments, stakeholders and First Nations to understand the issue, the barriers, and strategies for eliminating those barriers
- To bring public attention to the issue promoting a coordinated response to improving attendance
- To provide advice to the Department of Education that promotes children's rights to education and addresses root causes and barriers to consistent school attendance and therefore to student achievement.

4.0 SCOPE/LIMITATIONS:

The Review will include:

- All Yukon children and youth who are eligible to attend Yukon schools during the period August 2017–March 2020.
 - A review of all instructional days missed
 - A review of student dismissals
 - A review of homeschooling and non-enrollment
 - A review of educational assessments, learning plans and behavioural supports
- Barriers to attendance will be reviewed for Yukon children and youth who have missed more than 20 days in a school year during the review period and the root causes of those barriers and strategies for eliminating them.

The review will not include:

- Children and youth who are registered in homeschool programs and have provided reports to the Department of Education*
- Children and youth who were over the age of 16 on August 28th, 2017.

*For data analysis purposes

5.0 METHODOLOGY

- Review of Advocate data
- Identification of Department of Education point person
- Review Department of Education data and school records
- Review Department of Education initiatives to improve school attendance
- Communication and coordination with First Nations governments regarding First Nation government concerns and priorities for improving school attendance
- Personal interviews with children and youth
- Personal interviews and surveys with caregivers, family members, school personnel

- Personal interviews and surveys with caregivers, family members, school personnel, school councils
- Review of legislation, policy and departmental strategies
- Review of relevant reports and research
- Consultation with relevant experts and advisors
- Other factors may arise for consideration

6.0 TIMEFRAME

The review is launched January 2020. An interim report will be provided to the Minister of Education by March 2021.

7.0 REPORTING

Public participation and public reporting will occur through personal interactions, social media and public media throughout the review. Formal reports will be made public and tabled by the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly. The Advocate will protect the personal information of children and youth involved in the review and will ensure information provided to the public is non-identifying. The review will be summarized in the Advocate's annual reports.

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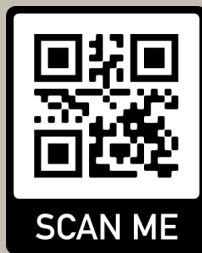
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