



Yukon's Public School Education System,

A 360° PERSPECTIVE

By Yule Schmidt

Freelance political writer

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YUKON GOVERNMENT, DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Primary responsibility for the administration of the public school education system in Yukon belongs to the Yukon Government Department of Education (the Department).

The Minister of Education, currently Elaine Taylor, is the political head of the Department. The Deputy Minister, currently Val Royle, is the Department's head bureaucrat and oversees implementation of political goals and the execution of the Department's daily management. The Department is further divided into three separate Branches:

- Public Schools Branch:
- Advanced Education
- Education Support Services

The Public Schools Branch is the focus of this paper.

The Public Schools Branch manages 28 Yukon schools. This includes:

- 14 urban schools (i.e. schools in Whitehorse)
 - one K-12 Virtual School
 - eight elementary schools
 - two secondary schools
 - two Catholic elementary schools
 - one Catholic secondary school
 - one K-12 French First Language school
- 14 rural schools
 - one K-8
 - four K-9
 - one K-10
 - six K-12
 - one elementary (K-7), one secondary (8-12), both in Watson Lake

The main piece of legislation governing the Department's responsibility for education is the Yukon Education Act, passed in 1990 and amended in 2002.¹ In addition to outlining the responsibilities, rights, and powers of the Minister, the Department, parents, and students, the Education Act also delineates the role of school councils and the process by which school councils will be replaced by school boards to assume greater responsibility for the academic and administrative control of their designated school(s). As yet, only one of the territory's school councils has activated the process of establishing a school board – the Commission Scolaire Francophone du Yukon (CSFY). In the absence of a school board, the Education Act reverts various powers with regard to the establishment of school rules, policies, staffing, and curricula to the Minister or appropriate superintendent, depending.

Currently, Yukon's education system is based on the British Columbia curriculum, although as stipulated in the Act, 20 percent of the annual 950 hours of instructional time can be made up of local content.²

Through the Act, the Department is responsible to the Minister, the parents, and the students. In addition, the Department liaises with various groups and organizations to inform its activities. These include, Yukon First Nations, the Yukon Francophone community, and the Yukon Teachers Association.

¹ Education Act, Public Status of Yukon, (RSY 2002, c. C-61). Retrieved from the Yukon Legislation website: http://www.govyk.ca/legislation/acts/education_c.pdf

² *ibid*, 28

Yukon First Nations

To provide a brief historical outline, Yukon is home to 14 First Nations, 11 of which have settled land claims and self-government agreements. First Nations make up around 20 percent of Yukon's population.³ Historically, the Indian Act assigned jurisdiction for the education of Status Indian children to the federal government. In the late 19th century, the federal government provided financial support to missionaries to provide Western schooling to Yukon First Nations. The last of these Yukon residential schools closed in 1969.

In 1993, the Yukon Government and Yukon First Nations signed the Umbrella Final Agreement (UFA). The UFA is a framework agreement upon which individual First Nations land claims agreements are based. Section 24.3 regarding the devolution of powers from the territorial government to First Nations governments specifies that:

“...Government and the Yukon First Nation may negotiate the devolution of programs and services dealing with the following:

- 24.3.2.1** Yukon First Nation authority for the design, delivery and management of Indian language and cultural curriculum;
- 24.3.2.2** Yukon First Nation authority for the design, delivery and administration of tribal justice; and
- 24.3.2.3** the division and sharing of Yukon First Nation and Government responsibility for the design, delivery and administration of programs relating to,
Education
 - a. Indian student counseling,
 - b. cross cultural teacher/administrator orientation,
 - c. composition of teaching staff,
 - d. early childhood, special, and adult education curriculum,
 - e. kindergarten through grade 12 curriculum,
 - f. the evaluation of teachers, administrators and other employees.”⁴

As yet, no First Nation has opted to devolve full responsibility for education; however, Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nation (THFN) signed an agreement with Yukon Government last year which makes the two partners in the development of curricula and programming in the THFN traditional area. This agreement is in accordance with section 17.7 of the THFN self-government agreement. Although that section is unique to THFN, the Yukon government has stated that the THFN agreement will likely serve as a template for similar agreements with other First Nations.⁵

The Education Act specifies that any conflict between the Act and a Yukon land claim or self-government agreement will default to the latter.

Yukon Francophone Community

Francophone educational interests in Yukon are protected by the 1982 Constitution Act, section 23, which protects Minority Language Educational Rights. In accordance with this provision, the francophone community has access to a French first-language school in Whitehorse – École Émilie Tremblay. There is also a French Immersion program for both elementary and secondary school available, respectively, at Whitehorse Elementary and F.H. Collins High.

³ Yukon Bureau of Statistics. (2013) Population Report December 2013. Retrieved from Yukon Bureau of Statistics website: http://www.eco.gov.yk.ca/stats/pdf/populationDec_2013.pdf

⁴ Umbrella Final Agreement, The Government of Canada, The Council of Yukon Indians, & The Government of the Yukon, May 29, 1993, p. 261.

⁵ “Government of Yukon signs landmark agreement with Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in,” Government of Yukon News Release, July 11, 2013.

CSFY, Yukon's only school board, maintains oversight of Francophone educational interests in the territory and manages École Émilie Trembley. The Yukon Government and CSFY have been engaged in a lawsuit in recent years regarding the board's rights under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The original decision, reached in 2011, ruled that the Government had violated those rights and further ruled that a new French school be built. In February 2014, the Court of Appeal overturned the decision on grounds that the judge was biased. Consequently, CSFY submitted the decision for review to the Supreme Court of Canada, which granted leave for the appeal in June. The case has not yet been heard.⁶

Yukon Teacher's Association

The Yukon Teachers Association (YTA) is the Yukon union of teachers. All teachers in Yukon are technically government employees. YTA serves as a lobby group for teachers and negotiates the Collective Agreement between teachers and their employer, the Department.

THE ACT'S VISION

The fundamental goals and values of the education system are, first and foremost, to be found in the Education Act. The following excerpt is taken from that Act.

“The Minister shall establish and communicate for the Yukon education system goals and objectives, which are

- (a) to encourage the development of students' basic skills, including
 - (i) the skills of literacy, listening, speaking, reading, writing, numeracy, mathematics, analysis, problem solving, information processing, computing,
 - (ii) critical and creative thinking skills for today's world,
 - (iii) an understanding of the role of science and technology in society, together with scientific and technological skills,
 - (iv) knowledge of at least one language other than English,
 - (v) appreciation and understanding of creative arts,
 - (vi) the physical development and personal health and fitness of students, and
 - (vii) the creative use of leisure time;
- (b) to develop self-worth through a positive educational environment;
- (c) to promote the importance of the family and community;
- (d) to provide opportunities to reach maximum potential;
- (e) to promote the recognition of equality among Yukon peoples consistent with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Human Rights Act;
- (f) to develop an understanding of the historical and contemporary role of women and the reinforcement of the principle of gender equality and the contribution of women to society;
- (g) to promote understanding of the history, language, culture, rights and values of Yukon First Nations and their changing role in contemporary society;
- (h) to increase awareness and appreciation of the Yukon's natural environment;
- (i) to develop an understanding of the historical and contemporary role of labour and business in society; and
- (j) to prepare for participation in a Yukon, Canadian and global society”⁷

⁶ “La Cour suprême du Canada va entendre la cause de la CSFY” CSFY News Release, June 26, 2014. Retrieved at the CSFY website: http://commissionscolaire.csfy.ca/fr/Derni%C3%A8res_nouvelles_67/items/101.html. See also: Christopher Reynolds, “Commission pleased with decision allowing appeal.” Whitehorse Star. June 26, 2014. Retrieved from Whitehorse Star's website: <http://whitehorsestar.com/News/commission-pleased-with-decision-allowing-appeal>

⁷ Education Act, *supra* note 1,

The Department's Vision

“Success for Each Learner. Our vision is for all Yukon people to possess a desire for and appreciation of lifelong learning, a strong commitment to their communities and the skills required to live meaningful productive and rewarding lives.”⁸

The Department's Mandate

“Yukon Education's mandate is to deliver accessible and quality education to all Yukon learners including children and adults by:

1. Establishing meaningful partnerships that promote and support lifelong learning
2. Ensuring Yukon has an inclusive and adaptive labour market
3. Working in co-operation with parents to develop the intellectual, physical, social, emotional, cultural, and aesthetic potential of learners so they may become productive, responsive and self-reliant members of society
4. Helping students get the skills and knowledge they need to lead personally rewarding lives”⁹

This mandate, as with the above vision, displays some differences with the Act. As noted above, the Act goals are quite specific and comprehensive, whereas the Department's overarching vision is comparatively general. The Act outlines specific standards which students must achieve, both in their academic work as well as in their personal development (knowledge of a second language, environmental awareness, physical health, etc). The Department's vision does not specify what “success” means, the implication being a shift towards a less standardized view of “success” as specific to each individual learner.

The Department's Strategic Goals

“Yukon Education Goals

1. Everyone who enters school in Yukon will have the opportunity to successfully complete their education with dignity and purpose, well prepared to enter the next phase in their lives.
2. Make Yukon's education system more responsive in order to support every learner.
3. Yukon has an inclusive, adaptable and productive workforce that contributes to and strengthens the economy.”¹⁰

In addition to these fundamental goals, the Department also has specific goals identified in its five-year plan, which inform the strategic context of departmental planning. They include:

1. Improving Yukon First Nation student achievement and outcomes
2. Increasing successful transitions for all students to different levels of education and the world of work.
3. Effectively managing resources in urban and rural schools
4. Collaborating with Yukon First Nations governments
5. Proactively addressing skilled labour shortages. ¹¹

The 2009 Report on Yukon Public Schools and Advanced Education by the Auditor General of Canada precipitated the Department's development of a long-range strategic plan to underscore its goals and objectives. The rather critical report noted, with regard to strategic planning, “...not

⁸ Department of Education, “Our Vision and Mandate,” (2013) Retrieved from Department of Education website: http://www.education.gov.yk.ca/about/vision_mandate.html

⁹ Department Website, *supra* note 8

¹⁰ Department of Education. (2014). *Yukon Education Strategic Plan, 2014-2019*. 6. Retrieved from the Department website: http://www.education.gov.yk.ca/pdf/Yukon_Education_Strategic_Plan_2014-2019.pdf

¹¹ *ibid*, 7

all of the objectives in the Department's various key planning documents agree. Furthermore, in its Annual Report, the Department does not report on how well the objectives from previous reports were achieved." The report concluded: "While the Department of Education has elements of a strategic plan in various documents, taken as a whole, the Department does not have a comprehensive long-term strategic plan."¹² Since the report, the Department has been diligent in maintaining an updated strategic plan.

TOGETHER TODAY FOR OUR CHILDREN TOMORROW

Together Today for Our Children Tomorrow is a valuable source in identifying underlying the past and present goals of Yukon First Nations. The document, produced by the Yukon Native Brotherhood (YNB, the precursor to today's Council of Yukon First Nations, CYFN) in 1973, expressed fundamental First Nations concerns and objectives with regard to their future in Yukon. The YNB delivered the document to the Federal Government and sparked the initiation of land claims negotiations. The document also provides valuable insight into First Nations perspectives on the balance between traditional and modern ways of life.

With regard to education, *Together Today* expressed YNB's desire that Yukon schools should integrate education about First Nations society and way of life pre-Gold Rush into the curriculum, as well as experiential learning (i.e. on-the-land learning). It also described YNB's view that schools should teach First Nations more about the modern economy, especially the opportunities for First Nations within it.¹³

Substantial insight into YNB's original goals with regard to education can be found in Appendix 1 of *Together Today* – Appendix 1 is a 1972 position paper on education. That paper specifies two goals the organization considered fundamental to all education:

"...the stimulation of pride in one's culture and background and the development of those skills and that knowledge which is necessary to successfully compete in today's world."¹⁴

and continues:

"Our goal is the provision of those improved education and skills training opportunities to Yukon students of native descent which will result in more graduates from our Educational Institutions."¹⁵

The position paper also affirms YNB's view that First Nations children should be educated in Yukon public schools, but that those schools need to incorporate specific First Nations objectives, such as the preservation of culture and language, and additionally need to make First Nations issues a priority and be better equipped to deal with them, such as the residual societal impacts of residential schools. Only then will the gap between First Nations and non-First Nations student outcomes be narrowed.

Although *Together Today* was written forty years ago, its goals and objectives remain relevant. Some overlap can also be seen between the objectives outlined in this document and those in the Education Act, in that both consider the specific skills needed to succeed in the modern economy as relevant educational standards and both address particular First Nations objectives.

¹² Office of the Auditor General of Canada. (2009). *Public Schools and Advanced Education: Yukon Department of Education, January 2009*. p. 18

¹³ Council of Yukon Indians. (1977). *Together Today for our Children Tomorrow*. Brampton: Charters Publishing Company Ltd, (Original work by the Yukon Native Brotherhood in 1973), 21. Retrieved from the Yukon Government website: http://www.eco.gov.yk.ca/pdf/together_today_for_our_children_tomorrow.pdf

¹⁴ *ibid*, 50

¹⁵ *ibid*, 54

Self-Government Agreements

While the 11 self-governing First Nations have various departments and initiatives with respect to education, an underlying theme that is apparent across First Nations is a common belief in the linkage between community development and education. Inherent in this theme is an understanding that a child's education requires family involvement, substantial community support, and the promotion of the academic, creative, experiential, and social aspects of learning. In other words, many First Nations view education as not only beneficial to the child but to the community of which he or she is a part. Accordingly, education is a community responsibility, not just an individual or a familial one.¹⁶

Another goal apparent in self-government agreements is the desire for increased First Nations involvement in education and First Nations material in the curriculum. This goal is also expressed in *Together Today* and forms the basis of the recent agreement between Yukon Government and Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nation to partner in curriculum development.

Joint Initiatives

Yukon First Nations also partner frequently with the Department on various initiatives. Following a review of the Education Act in 2002-2004, First Nations and the Department partnered on the Education Reform Project (ERP). The project's central mandate was to address the gap between First Nations and non-First Nations student outcomes. The ERP team produced 153 recommendations towards this end, only some of which have been adopted. The final report outlined long-term objectives intended to help facilitate improved aboriginal outcomes, namely the evolution of Yukon's education system to better meet First Nations needs and increased involvement of First Nations in education.¹⁷

In general, many First Nations goals are shared with the Department and thus reflected in departmental documents (for instance, the Department explicitly defines closing the gap between First Nation and non-First Nations students as a strategic goal in its five-year plan).

Bridging the Traditional and Modern

The balance between the traditional way of life and modern education is addressed first and foremost through the curriculum. The Education Act stipulates that up to 20 percent of the curriculum can be local content, which generally includes First Nations content. In addition, the agreement between the Department and THFN provides accreditation to First Nations culture camps to allow for on-the-land learning.

In addition, the Act has specific clauses with regard to First Nations student absenteeism due to traditional activities. Although Section 27(1) of the Act considers absenteeism due to parental negligence or refusal to "take reasonable steps to cause the child to attend school" an offence finable at \$100/day, the Act also provides an exemption in Section 22(2) if "the student is a participant in Yukon aboriginal cultural activities or in aboriginal harvesting activities."¹⁸

Several First Nations also emphasize the connection between education and employment, i.e. that education, even graduation, is not an end but a stage in a young person's development. This builds on the perspective inherent in *Together Today* that the goal of public school education is to equip students with the skills and knowledge needed to succeed in the modern economy and thereby enable them to fulfill the needs of the community and society at large.

¹⁶ For example, see Carcross Tagish First Nation. (2013). "Capacity Development Policy." Retrieved from C/TFN website: <http://www.ctfn.ca/documents/policies> "As a step towards creating a more healthy community, C/TFN recognizes its responsibilities to increase our community's capacity through education and training." 50

¹⁷ Yukon Department of Education and Council of Yukon First Nations. (2007). "Education Reform Project: Final Report."

¹⁸ Education Act, *supra* note 1. 18, 16

GRADUATION RATES

Yukon's graduation rates are a central success metric used by the Department. In addition, the Auditor General uses graduation rates to benchmark Yukon against other Canadian jurisdictions. Trends over the past three years are indicated below. Notable is the gap between First Nations and non-First Nations students, and between urban and rural students.

URBAN/ RURAL	FIRST NATIONS/ NON-FIRST NATIONS	2011 GRAD RATE	2012 GRAD RATE	2013 GRAD RATE	URBAN/ RURAL	FEMALE/MALE	2011 GRAD RATE	2012 GRAD RATE	2013 GRAD RATE
Urban	Non-First Nations	(215/289) 74%	(240/272) 88%	(183/241) 76%	Urban	Female	(152/207) 73%	(154/198) 78%	(121/201) 60%
Urban	First Nations	(56/96) 58%	(61/105) 58%	(50/116) 43%	Urban	Male	(119/178) 67%	(147/179) 82%	(112/156) 72%
Urban		(271/385) 70%	(301/377) 80%	(233/257) 65%	Urban		(271/385) 70%	(301/377) 80%	(233/257) 65%
Rural	Non-First Nations	(26/36) 72%	(18/28) 64%	(13/15) 87%	Rural	Female	(22/36) 61%	(23/34) 68%	(11/17) 65%
Rural	First Nations	(13/27) 48%	(17/29) 59%	(11/15) 73%	Rural	Male	(17/27) 63%	(12/23) 52%	(13/13) 100%
Rural		(39/63) 62%	(35/57) 61%	(24/30) 80%	Rural		(39/63) 62%	(35/57) 61%	(30/24) 80%
Yukon	Non-First Nations	(241/325) 74%	(258/300) 86%	(196/256) 77%	Yukon	Female	(174/243) 72%	(177/232) 76%	(132/218) 61%
Yukon	First Nations	(69/123) 56%	(78/134) 58%	(61/131) 47%	Yukon	Male	(136/205) 66%	(159/202) 79%	(125/169) 74%
Yukon		(310/448) 69%	(336/434) 77%	(257/387) 66%	Yukon		(310/448) 69%	(336/434) 77%	(257/387) 66%

Fig. 1: Yukon Graduation Rates 2013.¹⁹

Another metric of graduation is the “six-year completion” rate, which measures how many students eighth grade students graduate within a six-year period. Figure 2 shows Yukon's six-year completion rates, compared with British Columbia's shown in Fig. 3. While B.C. reports the six-year completion rates among different demographic groups (notably, First Nations and non-First Nations), similar information for Yukon was not available.

	2010–2011	2011–2012	2012–2013
Six-Year Completion Rate	68.0%	70.7%	72.2%
Still In School	7.7%	5.71%	9.8%
Not Found	24.3%	23.6%	18.0%

Fig. 2: Yukon Six-Year Completion Rates 2013.²⁰

		Rate %
All Students	2008/09	79.2
	2009/10	79.7
	2010/11	81.0
	2011/12	81.8
	2012/13	83.6

Fig. 3: B.C. Six-Year Completion Rates 2013.²¹

Academic Achievement

The Department's 2013 Annual Report provides valuable information with regard to Yukon student achievement on standardized testing, specifically the Yukon Achievement Tests (YAT) administered to Grade 4 and Grade 7 students, and the BC Provincial Exams, administered in various courses for Grade 10, 11, and 12 students. Writing, reading, and numeracy YATs are mandatory, as are five BCPs exams. Other BCPs are optional.

In the 2013 Grade 4 YAT tests, the majority of students were deemed to “meet” minimum

¹⁹ Yukon Department of Education. (2013). *Annual Report 2013*. 35. Retrieved from Department of Education website: http://www.education.gov.yk.ca/pdf/Yukon_Education_Annual_Report_2013.pdf

²⁰ *ibid*, 36

²¹ B.C. Ministry of Education. (2013). *Six-Year Completion and Grade 12 Graduation Rates, 2012/13*. Retrieved from B.C. Ministry of Education website: <http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/reports/pdfs/graduation/prov.pdf>

achievement in all three categories, with a significant proportion “not meeting” standards and a small proportion “exceeding” them. Already in Grade 4 a trend is apparent that non-First Nations students have higher outcomes than First Nations students.

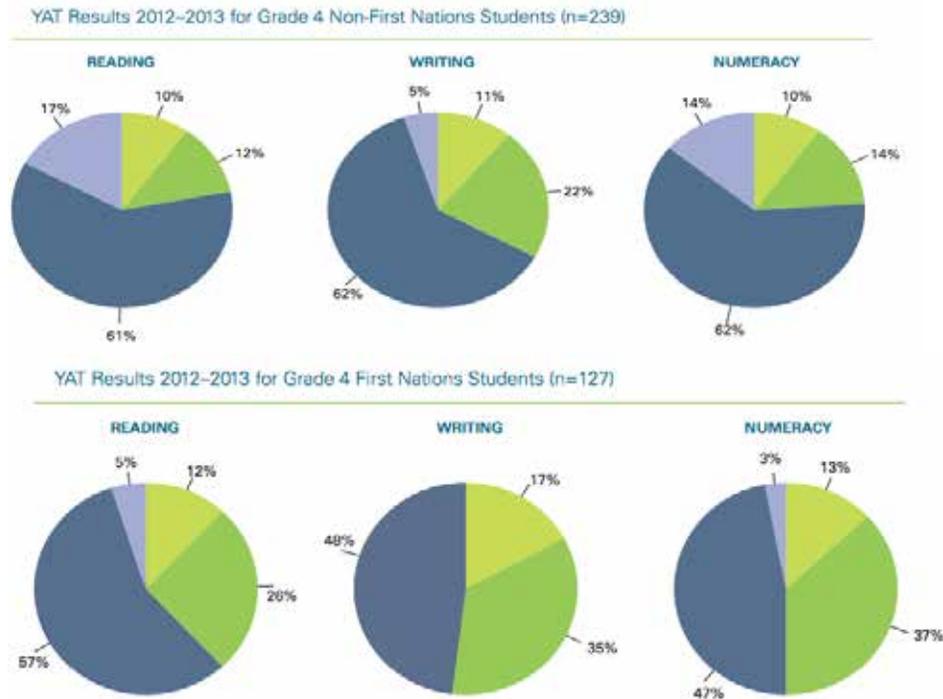


Fig. 4: YAT Results 2012-2013 for Grade 4 Students.²²

This trend continues in the Grade 7 YAT tests.

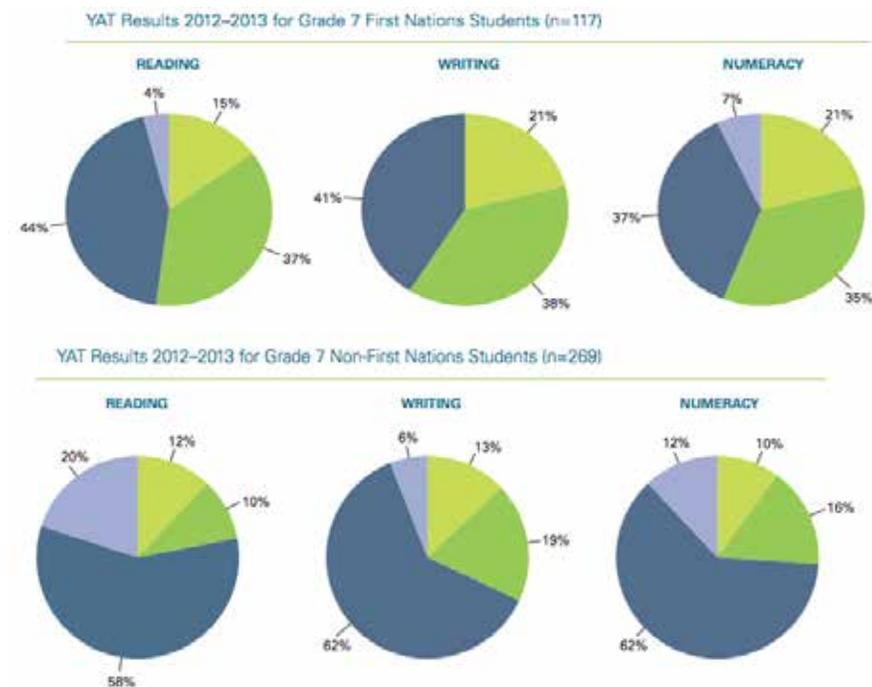


Fig. 5: YAT Results 2012-2013 for Grade 7 Students.²³

²² Annual Report, *supra* note 20. 40

²³ Annual Report, *supra* note 20. 43

Improving graduation rates and student performance were both recommendations in the Auditor General's 2009 report. Although the Department has developed several initiatives to address these recommendations, the effectiveness of these initiatives is, as yet, unclear, given that a significant proportion of students continue to fall into the "not meeting" category of YAT tests.

The statistics indicate that gaps in educational achievement are already apparent at an early age. The 2013 Boehm Kindergarten assessment test found that 36 percent of rural students and 20 percent of urban students may be "at risk" in learning and need investigation, shown in Fig. 6.

Boehm Spring 2013 – Summary

We assess student understanding of 50 basic concepts most frequently used by Kindergarten teachers to measure language comprehension skills and identify children who may be at risk in their learning.

	NC	CI	NI	NA	ENROLMENT
Urban	47%	32%	20%	2%	336
Rural	36%	28%	36%	0%	67
YUKON	45%	31%	22%	2%	403

NC: No Concern
 CI: Classroom Intervention
 NI: Needs Investigation
 NA: Not able to take the test or Absent

Fig. 6: Boehm Kindergarten assessment test.²⁴

In addition to the Boehm test, the Department also uses the Early Development Instrument (EDI) to measure five areas of potential vulnerability in kindergarten students. While specific EDI data was not included in the 2013 Annual Report, the 2011-2012 Annual Report notes:

"The 2011–2012 EDI revealed that 22% of Yukon Kindergarten students were vulnerable in the area of physical health, 18% in the area of social competency, 19% in the area of emotional maturity, 9% in the area of language and cognitive skills, and 15% in communications skills and general knowledge."²⁵

High School Exit Surveys

One of the Auditor General's other recommendations was for the Department to better track student transitions from high school to post-secondary education.²⁶ Accordingly, the Department implemented a High School Exit Survey in collaboration with the Yukon Statistics Bureau to track a cohort of students who could have graduated in 2010 over successive years. The most recent follow-up report from December 2013 noted that fewer than half of the original participants completed the follow-up survey. The report thus qualified its results by adding "[t]here is not enough information available about the non- participants to allow us to estimate and correct for non-response bias. Accordingly, the results presented in this report are only indicative of the experiences of those individuals who participated in the survey, and they may not be representative of the entire cohort."²⁷

In spite of the report's methodological shortcomings, it does shed some light on Yukon students after leaving Yukon public schools. For instance, the below figure indicates that a significant proportion (approximately 30 percent) of students with only Yukon high-school education did not feel they were able to get the education and training needed to qualify for their desired type of work.

²⁴ *ibid.*

²⁵ Annual Report 2012, Yukon Education, 8

²⁶ Auditor General Report, *supra* note 12. 14

²⁷ Yukon Bureau of Statistics. (2013). 2013 High School Exit Survey Report, 1-2. Retrieved from the Bureau of Statistics website: http://www.eco.gov.yk.ca/stats/pdf/2013_High_School_Exit_Follow-up_Study_Report.pdf

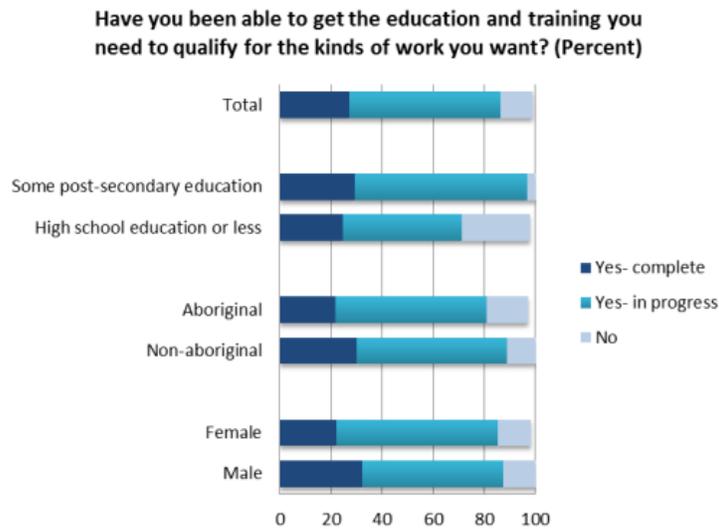


Fig. 7: Student responses on how well high school prepared them for desired career paths²⁸

The results in Fig. 7 can be compared to Fig. 8, which shows student perceptions of how well high school prepared them for college or university. The majority of students felt that high school only prepared them somewhat well.

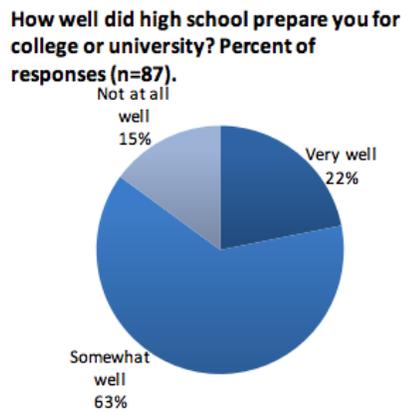


Fig. 8: Student responses on how well high school prepared them for college or university²⁹

With regard to trades training, First Nations students and male students were most likely to say it was important for them to get trades training after high school. While 40 percent of respondents had not pursued any post-secondary education or training, 29 percent had completed some trades or college training and 30 percent had attended university – roughly an even split. However, even though 40 percent had not yet pursued further education beyond high school only 8 percent of respondents expected high school to remain their highest level of achievement; 18 percent expected some college or trades training and 24 percent expected a Bachelor’s degree.³⁰

These responses underscore the importance of preparing students for post-secondary education or training. Whether Yukon’s education system achieves that objective is a valid question for discussion.

A majority of those students who did attend college or university said high school could have set higher standards, pushed them harder, and taught practical skills like time management and organization.³¹ In addition, 22 percent of the respondents said they took upgrading or college preparation courses after leaving high school. Most of these respondents (73 percent) said they

²⁸ *ibid.* 5

²⁹ *ibid.* 10

³⁰ *ibid.* 7-9

³¹ *ibid.* 9-10

did their upgrading at Yukon College. In addition, 33 percent of respondents said that they would need high school upgrading prior to attending college or university.³² The report does not specify what proportion of those students needing upgrading were First Nations or non-First Nations.

Given the demand, Yukon College has a robust upgrading program, particularly in mathematics, that covers the full range of mathematical concepts ranging from basic to advanced. Although this author was unable to find specific information as to the number of Yukon students enrolled in basic courses (such as foundational courses which cover whole numbers, fractions, and ratios) or advanced courses (such as calculus), the fact that basic courses are offered twice a year suggests that a significant number of Yukon students feel insufficiently prepared in these foundational areas.³³

INTERPRETING OUTCOMES

These statistics taken together suggest that Yukon public schools may insufficiently prepare students for their post-secondary careers. While the High School Exit survey indicates that many students pursue higher education at a collegiate level and the majority of public school alumni feel satisfied with their high school education, it does not examine other non-educational factors, such as parental support or socio-economic status, and correlate these factors to student achievement. In other words, neither the Exit Survey nor the Department's strategic plan identifies nor addresses the root causes of high or low student achievement, although the Auditor General's 2009 report was clear in numerous passages that identifying the "root causes" of various issues would be requisite to improving outcomes.³⁴

The goal of Yukon's education system, as expressed in the Act, is to facilitate student achievement, yet given the above statistics and the lack of non-educational information with regard to high-achieving and low-achieving students, it is unclear whether the system has a real impact on student performance, or whether student achievement is primarily a factor of external influences, such as family, community, and socio-economic status. It is not the aim of this paper to speculate but simply to point out that there is no information with regard to those external factors which would allow for a controlled study of the true impact of the education system.

It's also worth noting that although the Act, the Department's literature, and First Nations literature all make frequent reference to the education system's task of developing the "whole" child, academically, socially, and physically, the author could find no reports nor measurements with regard to non-academic student outcomes. What role the education system plays in the long-term, non-academic development of Yukon children is, thus, also unclear.

There are numerous ways to categorize the various challenges facing education. This paper identifies social, academic, and administrative, and First Nations-specific challenges.

Social Challenges

Although Yukon follows the BC academic curriculum, the territory's social landscape is profoundly different than its southern counterpart's. For one, data has consistently tracked a gap between rural and urban outcomes. Although this is in part likely due to different academic environments (Whitehorse schools have more teachers and more resources), it is likely also in part the result of social and economic challenges that exist in many rural communities across the North – higher incidence of violence, drug and/or alcohol addiction, and suicide. According to Statistics Canada's 2013 Report on Crime Rates, Yukon's violent crime rates is around four times the national average (4100 per 100,000 people versus a national average of 1092 per 100,000). Rates are even higher in the Northwest Territories (7425 per 100,000) and Nunavut (8659 per

³² Ibid, 7

³³ More information on the College Access Pathways Program is available at the Yukon College Website: <http://www.yukoncollege.yk.ca/programs/info/ccp>

³⁴ Auditor General Report, *supra* note 12. 10, 27

100,000), implying that the social and economic issues present in rural communities across Canada's North correlate to higher violent crime incidence.³⁵

Another acknowledged issue facing all Yukon communities is the prevalence of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD). The territory is at the forefront of FASD research, currently conducting a groundbreaking study to learn more about the prevalence of FASD in Yukon society and to develop strategies for its mitigation. In 2000, the Yukon Medical Officer of Health estimated that approximately 24 children are born with FASD in the Yukon every year, although not all are diagnosed.³⁶ The author was unable to find an updated average of FASD-affected children born annually. Children and youth with FASD are more prone to mental retardation (an IQ below 70) and are more prone to coming in contact with the justice system.³⁷ The Department of Education has a resource for educators called *Making a Difference: Working with Students Who Have Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders*, yet the presence of often undiagnosed students affected with FASD in regular school classrooms is an ongoing issue.

The challenges facing students who transition from communities to Whitehorse to attend secondary school is another issue. Most of these students are First Nations. The ERP describes this problem:

“Not only do they have to adjust to a new school, but to new living arrangements, new rules and regulations, different food and new schedules. They are also vulnerable to substance abuse. In their home community, classes are small and students may feel less intimidated about asking for help from the teacher. They are at home with their families, and have the support of extended family. When students come to Whitehorse, the school is much later, with a much greater number of students. Everything is unfamiliar... This can make them frustrated and confused, and in some cases can cause them to miss classes or drop out of school.”³⁸

Family life also has a profound impact on students regardless of whether they live in Whitehorse or in communities, yet rural students are more likely to have to deal with family issues. A Department of Health and Social Services (HSS) report relating to behaviours of school-aged children between 11 and 15 concluded:

“One of the most noticeable findings across questions about parents and home life is the urban/rural difference. Rural students compared to urban students tend to feel that their parents expect too much of them, that they have a lot of arguments with parents, and that there are times they would like to leave home. They are also far less likely to have dinner with their family regularly. The group most impacted in this respect is Grades 9 and 10 rural girls, who consistently report the most negative family relationships on these questions.”³⁹

With regard to friend relationships, Fig. 9 from the HSS study identifies risk behaviours among peer groups. Notable is the high incidence of alcohol consumption and drug use, particularly

³⁵ Statistics Canada, CANSIM table 252-0051 and Catalogue no. 85-002-X, July 2014. Retrieved from the Statistics Canada website: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/tables-tableaux/sum-som/101/cst01/legal50d-eng.htm>

³⁶ Yukon Department of Education. (2006). *Making a Difference: Working with Students who have Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder*. 4. Retrieved from the Department website: http://www.education.gov.yk.ca/pdf/fasd_manual.pdf

³⁷ Charlotte Fraser (ed). (September 2008). *The Path to Justice: Access to Justice for Individuals with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder*. 4. Summary paper of a national conference hosted by the Steering Committee on Access to Justice for Individuals with FASD in collaboration with the Yukon Department of Justice and the Department of Justice Canada. Whitehorse, YT. Retrieved from the Yukon Department of Justice website: http://www.justice.gov.yk.ca/pdf/Path_to_Justice_Conference_Final_Report_FINAL_Eng.pdf

³⁸ Education Reform Project Final Report, *supra* note 17. 2.18

³⁹ John G. Freeman, Hana Saab, Matt King, Kathleen Gropp. (2012). *Health and Health-Related Behaviours Among Young People in Yukon*. 22. Retrieved from the Department of Health and Social Services website: http://www.hss.gov.yk.ca/pdf/health_behaviourous_2011.pdf

among rural students, and the high incidence of sexual activity among female students in both urban and rural settings.

TABLE 4.2 Risk Behaviours – Grades 9 and 10 students stating most of the friends in their social group perform these behaviours often, by urban/rural status and gender (%)

	Male Urban	Male Rural	Female Urban	Female Rural
Smoke cigarettes	8.7	29.2	11.8	18.8
Get drunk	24.8	29.2	24.1	32.7
Have used drugs to get stoned	12.5	33.3	16.6	23.4
Carry weapons	5.4	8.3	2.4	0
Have sexual relationships	14.4	14.9	16.7	25.5

Fig 9: Urban and rural peer influences on Yukon students.⁴⁰

A last measure provided by the HSS survey that is relevant to this paper is the number of students who do not feel positively in their school environments. Although rural boys are disproportionately represented in feeling that their school does not meet their needs, the study qualifies that statistic against other students:

“Although the school experiences of Grades 9 and 10 rural boys are the most negative, there are significant numbers of students who do not see schools in a positive light. At most a third in any group say they like school a lot and close to half of the students in Grades 9 and 10 and about a quarter in Grades 6 to 8 do not think their teachers care about them as persons. About half of the students do not think their school rules are fair or that students in their classes are kind and helpful. Additionally, more than a third of students do not believe their schools are nice places to be, that teachers treat them fairly, or that they belong.”⁴¹

These findings about Grade 9 and 10 students correlate with findings in the High School exit survey. Figure 10, taken from the 2012 exit survey, describes the issues students felt hindered them most in school. While absenteeism was the main hindrance, it is usually symptomatic of other issues, including emotional issues, trauma, peer issues, and problems at home. A similar table was not available in the 2013 survey.

Did any of the following take away from your success during high school?		
	Number	Percent
Poor attendance	86	48.9
Trouble getting along with teachers	67	38.1
Personal emotional issues	58	33
Illness in the family	40	22.7
Dealing with a traumatic event	39	22.2
Personal health issues	34	19.3
Lack of good friends at school	27	15.3
Feeling left out	26	14.8
Other problems at home	23	13.1
People using alcohol or drugs in your home	20	11.4
Bullying	18	10.2
Parents separating or divorcing	12	6.8
Pregnancy (female respondents only; n=94)	10	10.6
Anything else	7	4
None of the above	11	6.2

Fig. 10 : Issues identified by respondents as hindering their academic success.⁴²

⁴⁰ ibid. 27

⁴¹ ibid. 36

⁴² Yukon Bureau of Statistics. (2012). 2012 High School Exit Survey Report, 49. Retrieved from the Bureau of Statistics website: http://www.eco.gov.yk.ca/fr/pdf/2012_High_School_Exit_Survey_Re-

The social pressures at Yukon schools are apparent. However, an additional challenge is the lack of resources at the school level to deal with these issues. The Department's Student Support Services website indicates the various services available for students. One potential challenge is the assumption that the request for intervention in the student's social and academic challenges will originate with the parents. As noted in the above figures, student-parent relationships are not necessarily conducive to this expectation. In addition, the Department emphasizes the intention to deal with challenges to the greatest extent possible "in class," yet, depending on the nature of the students' issue, this may not be ideal. The teacher may lack training to deal with such issues, have insufficient time to take on the role of the responsible adult in the child's life, or simply be unwilling to assume that role. In addition, a recent study on northern teacher workloads showed that, on average, northern teachers already work overtime with insufficient support, leading to stress and burnout. They may not be the best candidates to assume additional responsibility for the child's social and emotional welfare, although the study also indicates consensus among teachers that those issues need to be addressed before learning can take place.⁴³

The Department does offer professional psychologist services for students, but not on a consistent basis. There are six Educational Psychologists listed in the Department's directory, yet they are departmental, not school, employees who are available in both urban and rural school on an as-needs basis. Their function is primarily learning assessment as opposed to social assistance. The latter falls under the jurisdiction of school counselors and teachers, but whether they are equipped to address the often serious social issues facing students is worth further consideration.

As part of a nation-wide pilot program to deal with the students' social and emotional issues, the Department has implemented the Self-Regulation Initiative in all Yukon schools. Self-regulation is:

"...the ability to manage your own energy states, emotions, behaviours and attention, in ways that are socially acceptable and help achieve positive goals, such as maintaining good relationships, learning and maintaining wellbeing."⁴⁴

As the initiative has only now been implemented, its effectiveness in Yukon's particular social landscape remains to be seen. Some concerns have already arisen with regard to the practicality of the initiative, given that emotionally or socially troubled children often lack the self-control or awareness to adequately deal with their own issues and instead need help from responsible adults.

Academic Challenges

A central academic issue is the prevalence of Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). In 2005, there were 710 students on IEPs in a total of 5340 students, or 13.3 percent, as of May of 2004-05, 21 percent of all rural students were on IEPs, and 11 percent of all urban students were on IEPs. As well, 25 percent of all First Nation Yukon students were on IEPs, whereas 8 percent of all non First Nation Yukon students were on IEPs.⁴⁵

Although a comparable breakdown of statistics is not available for 2013-2014, the total number of IEPs has increased by 11 percent (to 785 in 2012) while the overall student population has decreased by 6 percent (to 5024 in 2012), resulting in a greater proportion of students on IEPs.

The incidence of IEPs overlaps with another shift towards inclusion and differentiated

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⁴³ Northwest Territories Teachers Association. (2013). *Understanding Teacher Workloads: A Pan-Northern Teachers' Time Diary Study*. 5. Retrieved from the YTA website: <http://www.yta.yk.ca/index.php/latest-news/340-teacher-workload-study.html>

⁴⁴ Citation attributed to Stuart Shankar. Retrieved from the Yukon Education Teacher's website ("yesnet"): http://www.yesnet.yk.ca/staffroom/self_reg.html

⁴⁵ Annual Report 2012, *supra* note 25. 27

teaching. Under the inclusion model, all students learn together in one classroom regardless of special needs or cognitive, emotional, and social aptitude. This model begets differentiated instruction, which requires a teacher to adapt his or her teaching style and techniques to each student's unique needs within the classroom. Given the high number of potential IEPs in any given classroom, the range of cognitive capabilities among students, and the social issues that influence many students' academic receptiveness, designing a differentiated lesson plan is a significant challenge for teachers. The flexible nature of this philosophy suggests it may not accommodate certain basic teaching methods, such as rote learning (repetition-based learning), which is by its nature rather inflexible. As yet, no Yukon-specific research has yet been completed to identify whether this shift towards inclusion and differentiated instruction has had a positive or negative impact on student outcomes.

A final and very important challenge to student academic performance is absenteeism. The Education Act stipulates against absenteeism, yet how often the clause issuing a \$100 fine for an unexcused absence is invoked is unknown. Likely seldom if ever, even though it is, technically, a legal requirement. Other initiatives to reduce absenteeism have been launched in recent years, such as the Every Student Every Day partnership between the Department and Victoria Gold Corp, yet still the incidence of absenteeism in Yukon schools is quite high, as seen in the Fig. 11.

Fig 11: Student absenteeism in 2013 school year.⁴⁶

Average Absence Days for 2012–2013 School Year				Average absence days 2012–2013 (FIRST NATIONS / NON-FIRST NATIONS)			
Average absence days for 2012–2013 (FEMALE / MALE)							
RURAL/URBAN	FEMALE	MALE	STUDENTS	RURAL/URBAN	FIRST NATION	NON-FIRST NATION	STUDENTS
Rural	29	27	28	Rural	31	22	28
Urban	18	17	18	Urban	23	16	18
YUKON	20	19	19	YUKON	26	17	19

To return briefly to the High School exist survey, absenteeism is one issue that respondents consistently cited as a central hindrance to their academic success.

Administrative Challenges

The management challenges facing Yukon's education system have to do with competing interests and tensions at the "top" of the education pyramid, for instance between the Department, Yukon First Nations, CSFY, YTA, and the various acts, policies, and philosophies which govern the system's operation.

For instance, the Auditor General's 2009 report recommended that the Department take steps to increase graduation rates, which the Department has sought to do. However, although graduation rates were deemed too low by the Auditor General's report when compared to other jurisdictions, Yukon's unique set of challenges may not be readily conducive to increasing graduation rates unless root socio-economic causes are identified and mitigated, especially in rural Yukon and among First Nations students. A tension thus exists between increasing rates by implementing various initiatives or changing graduation standards on the one hand, and addressing the root causes of poor academic performance on the other, which may have more to do with students' social challenges than with curricular content. Dealing with such issues is beyond the education system's mandate.

An additional pressure lies in implementing the goals of the Education Act in practice. Forty-two pages of the Act are dedicated to describing the process by which school councils will become school boards, and outlining the latter's electoral process and powers. The intent of the Act's framers appears to be quite clear in the expectation that school administration was to be localized in school boards rather than centralized in the Department. As noted in the opening

⁴⁶ Annual Report, *supra* note 20. 32

section, to date only one school board exists in Yukon. The ERP similarly questions this reality:

“During the Education Act Review...it became apparent there was a general perception that school councils lack authority and are subservient to the school’s administration and the Department... Without an enhanced and supported school council – one able to be fully involved in the operations of a school – community empowerment is not possible. And without community involvement, the intent of the Education Act will not be realized.”⁴⁷

The Department’s five-year plan includes “[strengthening] the leadership capacity of school boards and school councils” as a strategic goal.⁴⁸ Yet what practicable measures have been taken towards this end is unknown.

First Nations Challenges

One ongoing issue specific to First Nations is the legacy of residential schools. To better educate all Yukon students about residential schools, material on the topic has been incorporated into the curriculum. Yet how best to come to terms with that past in schools today and promote a positive future is an ongoing challenge. Recently, psychological literature has begun to refer to “intergenerational trauma” to describe the residual impacts of residential schools on First Nations today. It doesn’t necessarily mean that trauma is genetically transmitted, yet instead identifies the root of the social and economic issues facing aboriginal communities today in the legacy of residential schools. It’s a somewhat contested term that has been criticized for perpetuating the cycle of victimhood as opposed to overcoming it. In March, former Assembly of First Nations Chief Shawn Atleo encouraged aboriginal Canadians to “turn the page” on residential schools for the sake of their younger generations, saying: “We will never forget. But we must not burden another generation with anger and pain.”⁴⁹ How to facilitate this page-turning with First Nations students without seeming dismissive or insensitive to the history of residential schools remains a challenge for the Yukon education system and for education systems across Canada.

Another related challenge exists between traditional First Nations ways of life and modern education. The ERP includes several recommendations with regard to bridging this gap, but itself notes an underlying challenge in defining what it means to have an education system that promotes both traditional and modern objectives. To cite the report:

“The draft Universal Declaration of Indigenous Rights and the 1999 Universal Declaration of the Indigenous Aboriginal Nations of Canada address the fundamental rights of indigenous people to speak their language and to live their cultures. The challenge lies in defining exactly what this means in terms of creating a new school curriculum and providing culturally relevant education for Yukon First Nations students.”⁵⁰

In other words, the question to be answered in resolving this tension is: precisely wherein does First Nations’ traditional culture exist today? Culture in its broadest interpretation refers to a way of life and all the practices, traditions, and knowledge it encompasses. Yet this interpretation is perhaps too broad to adequately reflect First Nations’ realities today, as certain ways of life have naturally evolved or been abandoned with settlement and modernization over the past century. A narrower interpretation posits culture as the collection of traditional practices and knowledge which is not contingent on a certain way of life – music, food, spirituality, and oral history are examples of this interpretation of culture. Yet this is perhaps too narrow, as certain

⁴⁷ Education Reform Project Final Report, *supra* note 17. 1.10

⁴⁸ Strategic Plan, *supra* note 10. 14

⁴⁹ Shawn Atleo, (March 31, 2014) “First Nations must turn the page on residential schools.” *The Globe and Mail*. Retrieved from the Globe and Mail website: <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/globe-debate/first-nations-must-turn-the-page-on-residential-schools/article17723794/>

⁵⁰ Education Reform Project Final Report, *supra* note 17. 2.7

First Nations ways of life are still upheld, for example those that are protected as aboriginal rights under s.35(1) of the Constitution. The answer lies somewhere in the between. As the ERP astutely pointed out, the challenge lies in finding it.

Yukon's education system sought to find this balance in the Act, yet various difficulties remain. Consider the Act's allowance for 20 percent local curriculum content and the exemption of student absences to partake in First Nations cultural activities and harvesting. These allowances are in line with First Nations educational objectives yet raise some practical questions. For instance, if 20 percent of the BC curriculum must be culled to include local content, it's unclear how that culled material, assuming it's important, is recovered and inserted into the remaining 80 percent. In addition, the exemption for First Nations students to partake in harvesting and cultural activities is of course important, but, again, it's unclear how they will learn the instructional material covered in their absence.

While there is unquestionable merit to participation in such activities, students must still pay the opportunity cost of missing some of the curriculum, which often leads to falling behind. Students can take homework along and try to catch up, but that doesn't equate to time spent in class. The importance of attendance to academic success is clear, for which reason absenteeism under normal circumstances draws a \$100/day fine, at least in theory. Although the Act makes the exception for First Nations students to partake in cultural activities, how they can do so and simultaneously uphold their academics to the same standard and at the same pace as other students is an issue that has not been resolved.

The above issues raise questions as to whether modifying the BC curriculum to suit Yukon needs is the ideal approach to education or whether a more innovative solution is needed that would allow for the incorporation of local material but not to the exclusion of other parts of the curriculum.

INITIATIVES TARGETING TEACHERS

Several initiatives designed to achieve Yukon educational goals and address challenges are included in this section, although it's not exhaustive by any stretch.

Yukon Native Teachers Education Program (YNTEP)

First created in the early 1990s, YNTEP's initial aim was to train more First Nations as teachers. The program was opened to non-First Nations students. It is a four-year Bachelor of Education program in conjunction with the University of Regina that places particular emphasis on First Nations cultural awareness and practicum experience in communities across the territory.

Teach for Canada

Teach for Canada (TFC) is a new initiative that proposes to train young Bachelor of Education graduates to successfully teach in rural, remote, and indigenous communities. Although the initiative is still in the fundraising phase, the idea is to train TFC "Fellows" through a summer intensive prior to the school year, helping them understand the cultural, historical, and socio-economic realities of the communities in which they will work. The program is pan-northern, so would apply to teachers working in Yukon communities. In this regard, the program is similar to YNTEP, although YNTEP is a full degree program whereas TFC is a post-graduate intensive.

Although the program is still in the planning stage, some critics have already called its viability into question. The Canadian Teachers' Federation has argued that simply training teachers does not address the root issues of lack of educational support in rural communities and has criticized TFC's "presumptions about how to best serve Aboriginal communities. Short term injections of ill-trained, albeit good intentioned, personnel is ill-advised at best."⁵¹ Since the program's first cohort of Fellows is not yet active in communities, it's too soon to judge its success

⁵¹ Canadian Teachers' Federation. (2014). *Teach for Canada*. Informational pamphlet outlining CTF's key messages and activities with regard to TFC. Retrieved from CTF website: <http://www.ctf-fce.ca/Research-Library/teach-canada-final-2014-ENG.pdf>

or shortcomings. In any event, increasing awareness for the challenges faced by schools in rural communities is certainly beneficial.

Initiatives Targeting the System and the Curriculum

1) Education Reform Project (2005)

The ERP has been discussed above. Its main objectives were to build on feedback from the 2002-2004 Education Act review to devise a plan for how to improve Yukon's education system, and, specifically, how to close the First Nations and non-First Nations student achievement gap.

2) School Growth Process (beginning 2010)

Since 2010, Yukon schools have been on a continuous school review process every three years. School growth planning is a collaborative process involving school board/council members, First Nations representatives, teachers, administrators, and students. The Department has identified strengthening the school growth process to improve student achievement as a strategic goal in its five-year plan.

3) Rural Equity Action Plan (beginning 2014)

Listed as a strategic goal in the Department's five year plan and included in the Government's 2014 Budget, the Rural Equity Action Plan will see the Department work with communities and other stakeholders to improve completion rates and access to post-secondary training and employment. The Plan does not indicate whether improvement of social support services within community schools will be a project component – it appears to be focused more on program offerings, course delivery, and scheduling than on social issues.

4) The Individual Learning Centre (ILC), the Aurora Virtual School, and Credit Recovery

These two initiatives, each technically a “school,” aim to allow students to learn independently and flexibly. The ILC offers tailored curricula to students based on their interests, rate of learning, and career plans. The Aurora School offers distance and home education support. In addition, each high school offers a credit recovery option, which enables students to retake courses independently under the supervision of a learning assistant or teacher.

5) Trades and Training Initiatives

There is no single initiative to cite with regard to trades, but several that underscore the viability of the trades as a career path for Yukon students. Yukon Women in Trades and Technology (YWITT) is an organization supported by the Yukon Women's Directorate and the Department of Education that works to increase the number of women entering the trades. Skills Canada Yukon has also proven a successful organization, bringing Yukon skilled workers to national Skills Canada competitions.

At the post-secondary level, the Yukon College has a sizable trades program and recently invested in a mobile trades trailer, which is essentially a workshop on wheels that can travel to rural college campuses in the communities. At the secondary level, there has been talk of bolstering vocational training in schools, including motions put forth in the Legislative Assembly. As yet, there is no vocational “track” available for students interested in such a career. Formerly, a secondary school teacher at F.H. Collins arranged trades placements for students, enabling them to earn credit while working for a local journeyman during school hours. This concept is similar to vocational training programs available in several European countries (Switzerland, for example), yet the program no longer exists in Yukon.

One issue that has been cited across Canadian jurisdictions is a negative stigma attached to the skilled trades that views them as the career path for “those who couldn't cut it” academical-

ly.⁵² Several trades organizations, including YWITT and Skills Canada Yukon, seek to change that stereotype and convince bright young students that trades are a viable alternative to university, enabling them to obtain their journeyman ticket with minimal debt and high earning power upon completion.

Initiatives Targeting Students

1) Community Education Liaison Coordinators (CELC), Education Support Workers (ESW), and Education Outreach Coordinators (EOC)

All of the above positions are First Nations community members who work in schools. There specific services include:

- Support First Nations students
- Provide counseling or referrals for First Nations students, and/or parents
- Assist with planning and securing resource people within the community for lesson and unit plans
- Provide guidance pertaining to First Nations curriculum content
- Plan and provide workshops and training related to cultural relevancy
- Act as a liaison between the school and the community⁵³

Those posted in Whitehorse serve as a first point of contact and support for transferred students from Yukon communities. There are CELCs, ESWs, and EOCs in several communities as well as in Whitehorse schools.

2) Gadzoozdaa Residence

A 38-bed residence located near F.H. Collins school that opened in 1990. It serves as a dormitory for out-of-Whitehorse students completing their high school in the capital. Some community students opt to stay with family when studying in Whitehorse. Gadzoozdaa is an optional alternative. It provides room and board without charge on the requirement that students attend school. Residents are also able to partake in field trips.

3) Teen Parent Centre

The centre is located near F.H. Collins school. Its objectives are: “to maintain an environment where young people who are pregnant or parenting can continue their education; to offer academic, pre-natal, post-natal and parenting education; and to manage a daycare facility to care for the infants and toddlers.”⁵⁴

4) The Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Society Yukon (FASSY)

FASSY is a not-for-profit organization that supports the prevention of FASD and those individuals affected by FASD. Specifically, the organization coordinates adult diagnostic services, facilitates workshops on FASD, and serves as an outreach point for FASD-affected individuals.

5) Dreamcatcher Mentoring

⁵² Katrina Clarke. (August 20, 2014). “Apprenticeship competition aims to draw attention to looming shortage of skilled trades workers in Canada.” *National Post*. Retrieved from National Post website: <http://news.nationalpost.com/2014/08/20/apprenticeship-competition-aims-to-draw-attention-to-looming-shortage-of-skilled-trades-workers-in-canada/>

⁵³ “CELC and ESW: Community Education Liaison and Education Support Worker.” Retrieved from YESnet website: <http://www.yesnet.yk.ca/firstnations/celc.html>

⁵⁴ Retrieved from the Teen Parent Centre website: <http://www.teenparentcentreyukon.ca/index.php/about/history>

DreamCatcher Mentoring was developed in response to the declining number of students entering and graduating from northern high schools. It's an e-mentoring program that connects students with Canadian mentors who will help them pursue their career goals. It is available in all three territories, yet has a stronger presence in Yukon through the DreamCatcher Yukon Mentoring Society and the higher number of student participants in Yukon than in the other two territories.

The program was piloted in 2005 by four Action Canada alumni. The way it works is students identify their top three dream careers and then work with mentors from those professions through a tailored online “curriculum” for a period of about three months that teaches them about the career in question. In 2012, 250 Yukon students from six Yukon high schools took part.⁵⁵

6) Every student every day (as of 2012)

A partnership between Victoria Gold Corp's Student Encouragement Society and the Department of Education, this project is aimed at improving attendance at Yukon schools. Schools can apply for funding to implement various initiatives intended to keep kids in school. These initiatives vary from school to school. For instance, Jack Hulland Elementary has a Home and School Support Liaison who works directly with families to help improve outcomes. Selkirk Elementary School offers “Suzuki at Selkirk” violin classes. Porter Creek Secondary School offers a breakfast and evening café program to chronic non-attenders.

CONCLUSION

Education is at the heart of a successful society. Despite the many challenges facing Yukon's education system, it is built upon strong foundations. The Education Act is a robust document that provides a vision for Yukon education. It must be the starting point for any systemic reform, as it is the most comprehensive reflection of Yukon's educational aims. Although various initiatives, notably the Education Reform Project, have sought to advance the education system towards the vision outlined in the Act, much remains to be done. The challenge for the future lies in uniting all stakeholders – legislators, bureaucrats, administrators, teachers, parents, and communities – in conducting an honest assessment of the root social, health, economic, and political challenges facing Yukon schools and developing practical solutions to mitigate them.

In building a practical roadmap for the future, stakeholders must be prepared to discuss difficult issues, ask hard questions, and consider innovative, localized solutions in developing a curriculum that will uphold the Education Act's fundamental promise to develop the “whole child” and thereby produce individuals who are academically and socially prepared to move into the next stage of their lives, whatever it may be.

⁵⁵ Program Overview. Retrieved from the DreamCatcher Mentoring website: http://www.dreamcatchermentoring.ca/program_overview.php