



Government of Northwest Territories



NWT Education Leaders agree to keep schools closed for the remainder of the 2019-20 school year

Yellowknife — May 14, 2020

Communiqué

Education Leaders from across the Northwest Territories (NWT) met via teleconference with Education, Culture and Employment (ECE) Minister R.J. Simpson and the NWT Teachers' Association (NWTTA) on May 13, 2020 to discuss the recent recommendation that NWT schools are safe to reopen for the remainder of the school year as part of Phase 1 of [Emerging Wisely: Path to Eased Public Health Restrictions](#).

All leaders agree that the recommendation from the NWT Chief Public Health Officer (CPHO) that schools can be reopened is encouraging news as it relates to the COVID-19 situation, and that the detailed risk assessment planning process provided by the CPHO gives schools the essential guidance needed to move forward with reopening classrooms for students and staff.

As circumstances vary greatly across communities and regions in terms of capacity to reopen schools at this time, Education Leaders have agreed to take a coordinated, territory-wide approach to determining if schools will reopen for the remainder of the 2019-20 school year.

Due to the many complex operational challenges faced by schools at this time, Education Leaders have decided not to reopen schools for the remainder of the 2019-20 school year. These challenges include, but are not limited to, the absence

of teachers in many communities, strong concerns from local governments, and an immediate shortage of the equipment required to maintain safety under the CPHO's recommendations. Most schools anticipate being unable to complete and implement the rigorous risk management plans needed to reopen prior to the end of the school year.

With the ECE Minister's support, Education Leaders have agreed to use the new recommendations of the CPHO to inform ongoing planning for the 2020-21 school year to ensure strong health and safety practices are put in place for staff, students and their families.

Both the Minister and Education Leaders recognize the efforts that educational staff, students, parents and guardians have made to accommodate the rapidly evolving COVID-19 situation over the past weeks. Many difficult decisions have had to be made in the interest of public safety in a short amount of time, and the education system will continue to adapt to public health information as it becomes available, while taking into consideration the unique circumstances of schools and communities across the territory.

ECE continues to provide guidance and resources to schools to help them support students and families with at-home learning for the remainder of the year, and ECE, Education Bodies and the NWTTA will continue to work together on planning for the coming 2020-21 school year based on the most up-to-date recommendations from the CPHO.

Quotes:

"I am encouraged by the recent recommendations of the NWT Chief Public Health Officer regarding the safe operation of schools during the time of COVID-19. I understand the many challenges faced by our Education Bodies across the territory, and support their unified decision to focus efforts on planning for the fall while supporting continued learning for all NWT students for the remainder of the 2019-20 school year."

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

"The phased-in approach to lifting restrictions as described in Emerging Wisely is indeed welcome news. As school boards, we have heard the recommendation that schools can reopen. Together, we have analyzed our capacity to do so and have determined that for the safety of our staff and students, we will not. Taking the necessary time to plan for a well-thought-out re-entry in the fall is our priority. That being said, we will continue to support our students via our continuity of learning

plans until the end of June.”

-Simon Cloutier, Chair of Commission scolaire francophone des Territoires du Nord-Ouest, on behalf of NWT Education Leaders

For all COVID-19 media inquiries, contact:

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