



JUNIOR KINDERGARTEN | QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

DECEMBER 5, 2016

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TOPIC: JK REVIEW

Q: What's new this time around? How are you addressing the critics of JK?

There was a comprehensive review conducted of JK in the NWT, and both the technical and summary reports are available on our website. There were eight recommendations for future JK implementation and ECE is addressing the recommendations. Some of the ways ECE has addressed the recommendations include a revised funding model, increased training for teachers, enhanced curriculum and teacher guide, detailed communications plan, and engagement for territorial implementation. Further details will emerge after the completion of engagement in December 2016. Under the *Education Act*, the Minister of Education is responsible for education for all children in the JK-12 system, ensuring they have access to programs of equal quality and content, regardless of where they live or their socio-economic status.

The government cannot pick and choose where it implements programs and services across the North; it must provide equal access.

Q: How are you addressing each of the eight recommendations?

1. Parents and educators in JK settings are collectively positive about the effect that participation in JK has had on children. They identify multiple benefits to children and families. JK should be continued in the existing sites.

There is a positive impact of JK in communities where it operates and it is seen as one piece in the change to improving overall education outcomes. Teachers and parents have described growth in the students' numeracy, literacy and the development of healthy social skills. The early EDI results from February 2016 show that amongst children with no prior license based care, those that attended JK showed significant improvements in their development, especially in the areas of language and comprehension and communication. Despite the promising findings, the JK/non-JK comparison is based on only one year of data. Therefore, the number of students is rather low and we cannot be too definitive in our conclusions.

2. Expanded implementation of JK must take into account community contexts, strengths, needs, and the existence of quality early childhood learning programs in communities. A holistic strategy for early childhood learning and development (which includes JK, where appropriate) needs to be developed, in consultation with the community, to address diverse community needs and contexts (one size does not fit all).



ECE is engaging with key stakeholders to build from strengths, needs, and to support communities with a territorial implementation plan. JK will be implemented in every NWT community. Considering community context will include working with schools and programs to support their decisions regarding full-day or half-day scheduling, teacher qualifications, class-size, configurations, and specific needs for materials, infrastructure, and training.

3. Recognizing that equity must be considered, funding of JK may vary depending on community strengths and needs, with the funding model developed in consultation with the local education authority.

In most cases, there is an acknowledgment that JK is a beneficial early childhood initiative as early childhood programs are commonly located in schools for four year old children. Schools have provided space to accommodate paid preschool programs including AHS, and most recently JK programs. ECE is moving forward in a fiscally responsible manner by using the existing infrastructure of school spaces which is in line with existing early childhood practice and working with Education Authorities regarding funding in their regions.

4. Expanded implementation of JK needs a clear communication strategy and a comprehensive, locally sensitive implementation plan.

We will strengthen our communication approach and develop improved approaches around implementation. A communication plan has been approved and supports the territorial implementation plan. Engagement allows for two-way discussion and supports in shaping the implementation plan going forward.

5. Decisions regarding appropriate pupil-teacher ratios within school settings need to be made, taking into consideration the *Child Day Care Act*, the *Education Act*, the needs of four year olds, and the type of classroom setting (e.g.. multi-grade).

The *Child Day Care Standards Regulations* requires a minimum staff ratio of 8:1 for children who are cared for in mixed groups between 25 months and 5 years and 9:1 for 4-year old groups. JK will be funded for a ratio of 12:1.

While both programs include 4-year olds, in daycare settings they are the oldest with all other children ranging in age from 0-3 years requiring additional supervision and care; whereas in JK classrooms, they are the youngest with all other children aged 5-years and older.

The 12:1 funding ratio also addresses the additional personnel and resources available in schools such as the principal, assistant principal, program support teacher, classroom assistants, counselors, etc.



Decisions regarding class size, teachers, and supports are made by the Education Authorities. It will be up to schools to allocate the resources to meet the needs of their specific circumstances including class size, multi-grade classrooms, and assistants.

6. More teacher professional development related to early childhood education and the Kindergarten curriculum in relation to four year olds is needed.

Professional development and training are a key component to supporting JK/K teachers. Ongoing supports will be available through a variety of methods such as teleconferences and in-servicing. There are already teachers delivering JK in 19 communities. As well there are Kindergarten teachers throughout the education system with well-developed skills in supporting children through play based curriculum. We will build from these strengths to support other teachers in the delivery of JK curriculum including monthly webinars and in-person training in the spring and fall of 2017 in the areas of play-based learning, literacy, numeracy, culture, self-regulation, assessment, and reporting

7. The Integrated Kindergarten Curriculum and the Draft Implementation Guide work well together; however, these documents would benefit from supplementary information, such as identification of the learning activities that are best suited to the Junior Kindergarten learner.

The *NWT Integrated Curriculum* and *Implementation Guide* have been revised, enhanced, and renewed as the *NWT JK/K Curriculum* and the *JK/K Teacher Guide*. Building from the culturally-grounded, play-based program, additional supports and materials have been added to help teachers implement the curriculum to meet the specific needs of the students in their community.

8. GNWT needs to engage multiple stakeholders in a process whereby the findings of this Review form a basis for ongoing consultation and collaboration.

Engagement is focused on *how* to best support JK territorial implementation going forward. All stakeholders, including Board Chairs and Superintendents, agree that Jk is the right thing to do.

ECE has engaged since May, 2016 and will continue until December, 2016. To date, engagement has included key stakeholders such as:

- Licensed early childhood operators
- Aboriginal Head Start (AHS)
- JK/K teachers and school principals
- Education Superintendents
- President of Tłı̄ch̄o Community Services Agency, Education Board Chairs



- Northwest Territories' Teachers Association (NWTTA)

TOPIC: ENGAGEMENT

Q: Why are you doing more engagement beyond the JK Review?

More engagement is taking place to share information on the success of Junior Kindergarten from the 19 communities where it is currently running and to understand the needs of those communities that do not have JK. Through these engagements ECE has taken away information resulting in adjustments to the roll out of JK. This includes the ability for JK to be delivered as a half day or full day program so that it can be better integrated with existing programs in communities such as AHS. This will give parents choices on programming for their 4 year old children. As well adjustments have been made to who can deliver the program. Not only BEd teachers, but also those with a 2 year diploma in early childhood can instruct JK.

Q: Who has been involved with the engagement?

Engagement started in May, 2016 with key stakeholders across the territory and will continue until December, 2016. Staff at ECE have been scheduling meetings with stakeholders such as Junior Kindergarten and Kindergarten teachers, school principals, licensed early childhood programs, Education Superintendents, the Northwest Territories' Teachers Association (NWTTA), community members, Aboriginal Head Start (AHS) staff... ECE has engaged since May, 2016 and will continue until December, 2016. To date, engagement has included stakeholders such as:

- Licensed early childhood operators
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TOPIC: FAMILIES

Q: How will JK benefit families?

Many parents and families in the NWT are anticipating the arrival of free, play-based JK programming. Despite numerous programs, there are still waiting lists for parents wishing to access childcare; in particular there are waiting lists for infant spaces.



The cost of living in the north will be reduced for parents of 4-year old children to relieve financial stress on those paying high fees. Parents can save approximately \$910 per month up to \$12,000 per year, per 4-year old.

Every family in the NWT deserves the choice to access equitable quality early learning opportunities; not just those who can afford to pay those fees. With territorial JK implementation, every parent in the NWT can feel confident that their child has equitable access to quality early childhood development and learning opportunities.

TOPIC: IMPLEMENTATION

Q: Why can't some communities have JK and others not?

The Minister of Education, Culture and Employment is responsible for providing education to *all* students in the NWT. With territorial JK implementation, every parent in the NWT can feel confident that their child has equitable access to quality early childhood development and learning opportunities. Every child and family deserves the right to choose what is best for them.

Territorial implementation of JK provides every child regardless of where they live, with access to free, quality early childhood opportunities including children in small communities where no early childhood services are offered, in communities where waiting lists block access to programming, in centres where families struggle to afford daycare fees.

Q: How are you taking into consideration community contexts?

Community context does not mean implementing JK in some communities and not others. Community context will include working with schools and programs to support their decisions regarding full-day or half-day scheduling, teacher qualifications, class-size, configurations, and specific needs for materials, infrastructure, and training.

Q: Why are you institutionalizing young children?

Both JK and K are optional programs. JK for 4-year old and K for 5-year old children is not mandatory to attend. Parents can choose to enroll their child full-day or half-day or not at all. It is available as an option for families if they choose it is the right decision for their child. With JK offered in every community, there will be high interest from families.

JK/K begins with what children already know and recognizes their past experiences, culture and language. Children thrive in environments that validate their individual identities that they bring with them to school.

A curriculum is more than a document and learning outcomes. It begins with what teachers intentionally plan for their students and extends into all experiences planned or not.



The NWT Integrated Kindergarten Curriculum is child-centred and play-based. This allows children to be actively involved in the learning process and helps them construct a deeper understanding of the world around them. The Aboriginal Languages curricula of Dene Kede and Inuuqatigiit are interwoven throughout the JK/K curriculum with culture and heritage.

TOPIC: ABORIGINAL HEAD START (AHS)

Q: What about communities with AHS?

There are 8 communities with AHS programs throughout the NWT and 25 other communities where AHS is not offered. ECE staff has engaged with AHS on many occasions to listen to their concerns. AHS and JK currently run concurrent programs in 2 communities. In Fort McPherson, JK is offered in the afternoon to accommodate the AHS site which offers programming for 4-year olds in the morning demonstrating that the programs can be complementary and not in competition with one another. Giving parents choices for their children is achievable.

Although AHS has been offering programming for older preschool children, their mandate is for children ages 0-6 years old. In addition to the funding ECE gives to AHS sites, AHS is a federally funded program through the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC). PHAC has provided assurances in meetings with AHS that funding will not be jeopardized by shifting to provide services to three year olds.

TOPIC: LICENSED EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS

Q: Why are you duplicating programs in those communities with established programming for 4 year olds?

Not all families can access existing early childhood programs:

- Some families cannot afford the fees for early childhood programming for their child.
- Some programs have waitlists for spots.
- Some programs are only available part-time.

JK/K provides an option for *all* parents to access and/or extend full-day early childhood programming. ECE is committed to increasing accessibility and participation in early childhood development programs for children and families beyond JK.

ECE recognizes that the territorial implementation of JK may result in the loss of 4-year olds in user-pay licensed centres. In order to offset this ECE has increased funding given to licensed daycares with significant increases to funding for infant spaces, in particular, to help address the



shift to spaces for 0-3 year olds. Daycares may choose to use the increased funding to adapt preschool spaces to include younger children.

Existing infrastructure to offer quality, play-based programming is not consistent across the NWT. In Yellowknife, over half of the licensed spaces are in dayhomes which do not require specialized education or experience in early childhood development. Dayhome operators may not have the education or experience to deliver the JK/K play-based curriculum. ECE is developing an Early Learning Framework over the next three years as part of the Action Plan for the Early Childhood Development and Learning (ECDL) division.

ECE continues to work with licensed sites to support their ability to expand programming to younger children. Territorial implementation requires us to work together toward our common goal of providing all children in the NWT with equal opportunities and access to quality early learning programs. Growth in the number of licensed early childhood programs is not guaranteed. JK implementation provides equitable access through the JK-12 public education system.

TOPIC: JK/K CURRICULUM

Q: How will teachers know the difference between JK and K objectives?

The *NWT JK/K Curriculum* is not a list of objectives determined by age but a continuum that builds the foundation for lifelong competencies. Therefore, they are relevant to all learners and cannot be separated for exclusively JK and/or K students. The *NWT JK/K Curriculum* applies to all 4 and 5 year old children. The difference is evident in the age-appropriate expectations for stages of learning. By the end of JK, children will demonstrate proficiency in most of the competencies “with support”. By the end of K, children will demonstrate confidence in most of the competencies “independently”.

Q: What will a 4-year old child do in a JK/K classroom?

The *NWT JK/K CURRICULUM*:

- is a play-based program;
- encourages children’s natural curiosity through inquiry, exploration, and hands-on experiences;
- focuses on helping children develop their language, wellness and physical health, creativity, problem-solving, and social skills;
- integrates cultural content;
- is child-centered and builds from individual interests and strengths;
- promotes learning and development through play and inquiry;
- *is not* designed to support old-fashioned schooling in desks with worksheets.

Q: What about traditional language and knowledge?



The *NWT JK/K Curriculum* is grounded in *Dene Kede* and *Inuuqatigiit* curricula. Schools have the ability, and are encouraged to, adapt the delivery of the curriculum to meet the strengths of community and regionally-specific culture and traditions.

TOPIC: TEACHER QUALIFICATIONS

Q: Who will be qualified to teach JK/K?

Teachers will require either a Bachelor of Education degree or a two-year accredited diploma in Early Childhood with a Letter of Authority from the DEC Superintendent of Education. It is up to Education Authorities to make decisions regarding the hiring of their staff.

TOPIC: SCHOOL PROGRAMMING

Q: Won't JK take funding, teachers, and resources away from all the other programs and grades in the schools? Will older children still have access to all high school courses or be in a larger and/or split grade classroom?

We know that the GNWT is in a challenging fiscal situation but that does not absolve this government and our collective leadership from taking responsibility for doing the right thing for our young children and their families and achieving the Assembly's mandate. Our children deserve the best we can provide even during a time of fiscal restraint. Schools already provide space to accommodate paid preschool programs including Aboriginal Head Start, and most recently JK programs. More money is not necessarily the answer. ECE is moving forward in a fiscally responsible manner by using the existing infrastructure of school spaces which is in line with existing early childhood practice.

Core high school programming will be protected. The impact to grades above JK will be minimal especially in light of the amount of funding Education Authorities are being asked to identify (1.76% of overall funding). Principals are already very experienced at adjusting staffing and class configurations each year based upon enrollment changes. Schools will make their own choices regarding the details of their classes, teachers, and programs to best meet the needs of their students.