



**Government of the Northwest Territories Response to Committee
Report 9-20(1): Report on the Review of Bill 8: An Act to Amend the
Student Financial Assistance Act**

Background

The Department of Education, Culture and Employment (ECE) completed a comprehensive review of the Student Financial Assistance (SFA) program in 2023 and introduced several improvements that not only increased benefit levels, but also removed barriers to better support residents in accessing benefits. In June 2024 during the second session of the 20th Legislative Assembly, MLA Hawkins introduced Bill 8, which proposed raising the maximum amount of loans that can be made to one person under the *Student Financial Assistance Act* from the current limit of \$60,000 to a higher limit of \$90,000.

During the second reading of Bill 8 on June 12, 2024, it was referred to Standing Committee on Social Development (SCOSD) for review. SCOSD presented its *Report 9-20(1): Report on the Review of Bill 8: An Act to Amend the Student Financial Assistance Act* on October 27, 2024.

The Report made three recommendations for response from the Government of Northwest Territories (GNWT).

Recommendation 1

The Standing Committee on Social Development recommends the Government of the Northwest Territories increase education funding to Indigenous communities and Indigenous students in the NWT to improve the education outcome of Indigenous students.

GNWT Response

The GNWT delivers funding for education through the ECE's School Funding Framework (SFF), which is currently available on the ECE website. The SFF is applied to Junior Kindergarten (JK) to Grade 12 programs delivered by the four Divisional Education Councils (DECs), four District Education Authorities (DEAs), the Tłıchǫ Community Service Agency (TCSA), and the Commission scolaire francophone, Territoires du Nord-Ouest (CSFTNO), collectively referred to as "education bodies". This method of allocating funds allows education bodies that represent the communities they serve to provide quality educational programming to meet the unique needs of their student population. ECE does not provide funding directly to Indigenous community governments or deliver funding based on

ethnicity. Through self-government negotiations, some Indigenous governments are pursuing draw down of authority over education in their communities. ECE is supportive of these discussions with Canada.

The SFF allocates funds equitably throughout the territory and, outside of prescribed funds, permits flexibility to accommodate local decision making by education bodies. Through the SFF, education expenditure per capita in the NWT is typically the highest or among the highest in Canada (see Appendix 2). The SFF also requires public accountability for the use of funds via the development of a Planning and Accountability Framework, which requires that education bodies report on their operations, compliance, and implementation of activities and initiatives via an Operating Plan and an Annual Report. The SFF is based on the premise that in addition to funding for basic operations, education bodies should receive funding for factors that are beyond their control. Funding is distributed based on the following factors:

1. A base level of funding;
2. Enrolment based funding;
 - Education bodies are funded proportionally according to the size of their student population. The exception to this is education bodies who have schools in Yellowknife, where a portion of funding is provided by City of Yellowknife taxpayers (see Appendix 2).
3. A northern cost index (location factor);
 - The northern cost index (location factor) provides for more funding to education bodies operating schools in the most rural and remote communities of the Northwest Territories.
4. Consumer price increases; and,
5. Targeted funding:
 - Funding designated for operational requirements that are not currently addressed by other funding formulas. Examples include: the cafeteria funding for the Tłı̄chǫ Community Services Agency, as well as specific adjustments to the School Based Mental Health and Wellness funds for smaller communities who have smaller populations but a need for mental health services. These types of targeted adjustments are to address the operational environment of the education bodies.

The SFF does currently provide for additional funding for Indigenous students, as the Indigenous Education funding category delivered through the SFF is based on the Indigenous Student enrolments. The Indigenous Education funding category provides funding to cover the hiring of Regional Indigenous Language and Education Coordinators, Indigenous Languages Staff, as well as funding for Indigenous resource development and Indigenous

Community Support. Education bodies may also seek additional funding for Indigenous students through federal programs, including Jordan's Principle funding and the Children First Initiative. Jordan's Principle funding was designed to ensure that Indigenous children in Canada can access products, services, and supports that they need and can be used to address a wide range of health, social and education needs. These funds are intended as an immediate intervention as Canada works to address long term and systemic inequities faced by Indigenous children and improve Indigenous student outcomes, and works closely with provinces, territories, and Indigenous governments to build better structures and funding models.

Recommendation 2

The Standing Committee on Social Development recommends the Government of the Northwest Territories make a public commitment to guarantee continued reconciliation efforts in regards to education outcomes for Indigenous students, such as the removal of semester limits and increased access to funding under the Basic Grant.

GNWT Response

In support of reconciliation and to promote continued learning, ECE made enhancements to the SFA program including removing the cap on the number of semesters a Northern Indigenous resident can receive under Basic and/or Supplementary Grant funding and providing 100% of the average costs for the Basic Grant. Although these changes were implemented at the end of the 19th Assembly, they have been carried through to the 20th Assembly. Additional SFA enhancements that were introduced beginning in the 2023-2024 academic year include increasing financial support for tuition, books, and monthly living allowances, as well as increasing grants for student with disabilities.

The GNWT is not in a position to make commitments that impact the decisions made by future Assemblies, however, ECE wants to assure SCOSD that these changes have been seen as positive move towards truth and reconciliation and there are no plans to revoke these changes.

Recommendation 3

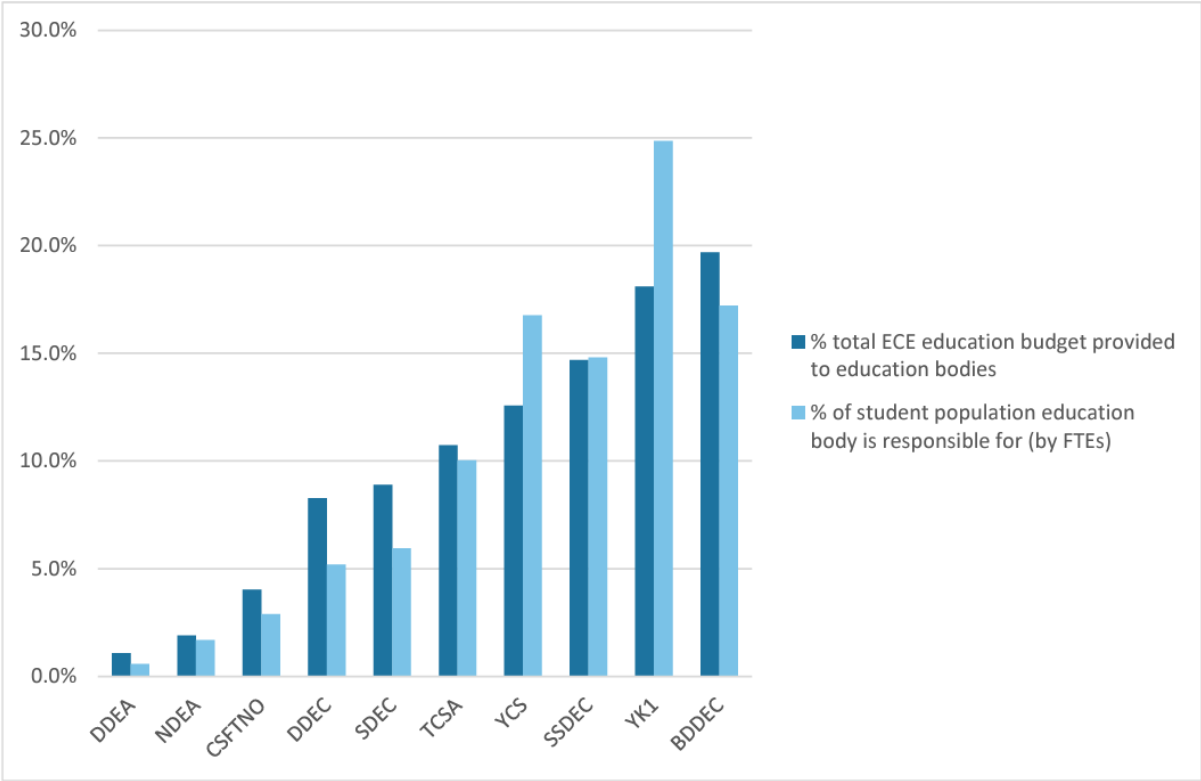
The Standing Committee on Social Development recommends the Government of the Northwest Territories study the disparity of educational outcomes between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous students, and put forward a plan with solutions to ensure that our Indigenous students are not left behind.

GNWT Response to 3

ECE monitors and reports on education outcomes annually through the Junior Kindergarten to Grade 12 Performance Measures Report (the JK-12 PM Report). Through the JK-12 PM Report, between 20 and 25 performance measures are reported by different variables. While most performance measures do not break down results by Indigenous and non-Indigenous student status, enrollment and graduate rates are two performance measures that are reported by Indigenous and non-Indigenous student status annually.

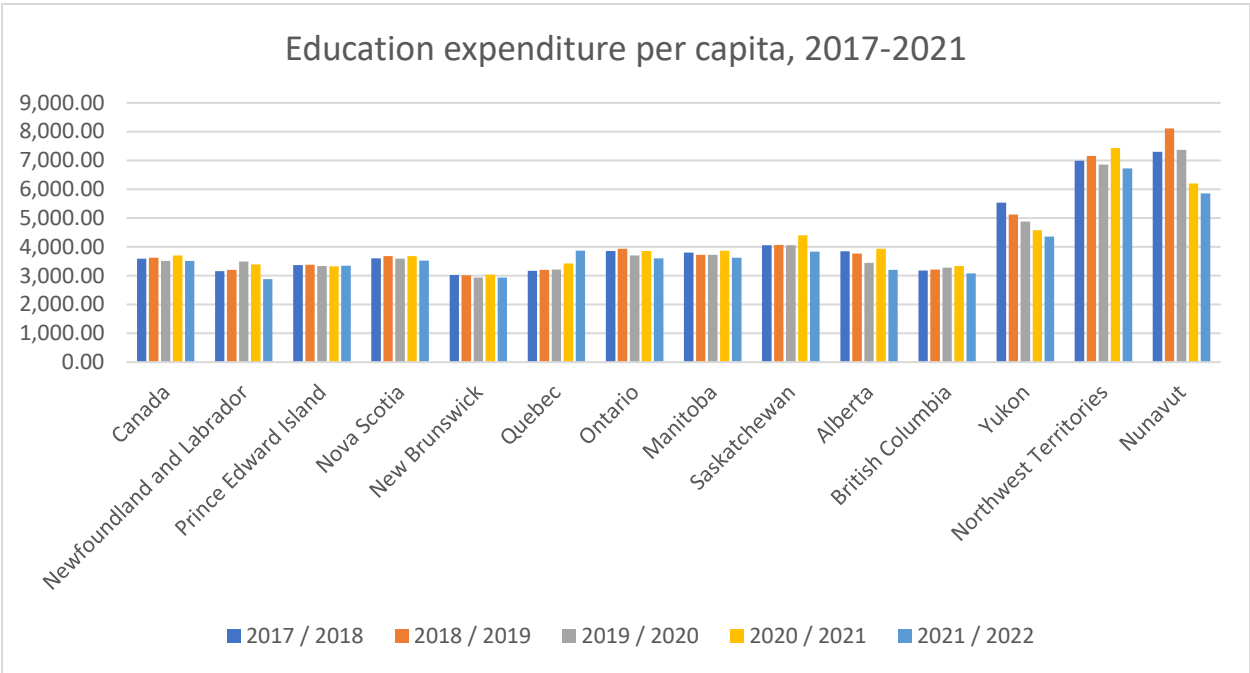
In 2023-2024, the Education Renewal and Innovation (ERI) Framework and the corresponding Action Plan to Improve Student Outcomes came to an end. With the conclusion of these guiding plans for the NWT education system, ECE is undertaking an evaluation of the ERI Framework. The evaluation will provide information on key performance measures from the JK-12 PM Reports, including more results broken down by Indigenous and non-Indigenous student status and will be available in spring, 2025. The results of the evaluation will inform ECE's work to improve the NWT education system across several initiatives, including the implementation of the adapted British Columbia curriculum, the creation of the new School Based Mental Health and Wellness program in schools, improvements to inclusive schooling in the NWT, and ECE's work in partnership with Indigenous Government on modernizing the NWT *Education Act*.

Appendix 1: Percent of ECE education budget that education bodies receive compared to the number of students served, 2022-23.



ECE. Figure 7. Junior Kindergarten to Grade 12 Performance Measures Report 2022-2023.

Appendix 2: Expenditure on education per capita in Canada, provinces, and the territories



Statistics Canada. Table 37-10-0025-01. Combined public and private expenditure on education per capita and index of change