

Education Minister and Education Leaders recommend NWT schools remain closed for remainder of school year

YELLOWKNIFE, NT (March 25, 2020) - Minister of Education, Culture and Employment (ECE) R.J. Simpson met with Northwest Territories (NWT) Education Leaders and the NWT Teachers' Association (NWTTA) via teleconference on Tuesday, March 24 to discuss the status of JK-12 education in the territory as a result of the ongoing COVID-19 public health emergency.

Due to the significant health concerns posed by COVID-19 and the importance of following direction from the Chief Public Health Officer (CPHO) on social distancing as a way to keep students, staff and communities safe, Education Leaders have agreed with the recommendation from Minister Simpson that schools be closed for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year.

Education Leaders have shared the recommendation with District Education Authorities, who hold the authority under the *Education Act* to close NWT schools. Closures are being announced individually by respective education councils.

Minister Simpson, Education Leaders and the NWTTA recognize the serious impact school closures will have on students, parents, staff and communities, and have agreed that a plan is required to support continued learning for all students, especially those in Grade 12, to achieve their education and career goals.

ECE continues to meet daily with NWT education superintendents and the NWTTA to discuss support for essential services, continuity of educational programming and ongoing communication. These plans continue to be adjusted as new information and direction is provided by the CPHO.

The NWTTA has advised that teachers are prepared and willing to help students and communities however they can during this unprecedented time. While the immediate priority is to identify and secure essential services for students and communities, all parties share the strong interest of parents and communities in ensuring opportunities for continued learning.

ECE will continue to work with the NWTTA and education bodies to find options for providing educational programming to all NWT students, particularly those in Grade 12. This includes reviewing what's being done in other jurisdictions, especially Alberta, whose curriculum and major assessment tools are used for the majority of NWT education programming.

ECE will also be working to coordinate with post-secondary institutions across Canada in an effort to ensure the smoothest transition possible for those graduating this year. Minister Simpson continues to have weekly calls with Canadian Education Ministers to discuss ways to ensure students graduating high school this year are able to advance to post-secondary institutions.

The continuation of food support, along with counselling and other health and wellness programming, have been identified by ECE, the CPHO and education bodies as essential to NWT communities, and work is ongoing to identify which positions and individuals will be involved in providing these programs and services during school closures.

Quote:

“The COVID-19 situation in the Northwest Territories has evolved substantially since the initial closure of schools on March 16. As new public health advisories and orders are put in place, including the declaration of a public health emergency, the closure of the NWT border and the cancellation of all gatherings, we must continue to make difficult decisions to protect the health and safety of our residents. I am grateful to the NWT Education Leaders for their dedication and commitment to ensuring the well-being of our students, staff and communities in deciding to close schools for the remainder of the school year. As Minister, I remain committed to working with our education bodies to provide students and communities with the programs and services they need to succeed throughout this unprecedented time.”

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

Quick Facts:

- The Chief Public Health Officer (CPHO) of the NWT, in consultation with the Minister of ECE, made the recommendation to cancel all JK-12 classes until April 14, 2020, as a precautionary measure to minimize the potential spread of COVID-19. Education bodies were notified that all students and staff could be dismissed as of March 16, 2020.
- On Saturday, March 21, the CPHO issued an order to close the border and require all NWT residents returning from outside the territory to self-isolate for 14 days. This [current order from the CPHO](#) applies to all school staff and students returning from travel. A significant number of school employees were out of the territory on spring break when these travel restrictions were ordered, and are therefore currently self-isolating.
- ECE and education bodies continue to work together on continuity planning in relation to JK-12 class cancellation. All options for continued provision of educational services, including potential alternative learning plans, are currently being explored.

Links:

- [COVID-19 Information](#) (HSS)
- [Information for Schools and Early Child Care Programs](#) (ECE)

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