



March 25, 2020

Dear Parents, Guardians and Education Staff:

**COVID-19
and Junior Kindergarten to Grade 12 Education in the Northwest Territories**

The health and safety of our Northwest Territories (NWT) students, staff and their families is our highest priority and therefore all NWT schools will remain closed for the remainder of this current 2019-2020 school year.

COVID-19 is moving quickly throughout the world, and despite having only one confirmed case in the NWT to date, its impact on our territory is growing.

On March 24, 2020, I met with NWT Education leaders to recommend that all education bodies support the closure of schools for the remainder of this current 2019-2020 school year. I made this recommendation due to the significant health concerns posed by COVID-19 and as a way to keep students, education staff and the communities safe. The recommendation received overwhelming support from the majority of NWT education bodies.

I want to assure you that despite school closures, the Department of Education, Culture and Employment (ECE), in partnership with all NWT education bodies and the Northwest Territories Teachers' Association (NWTTA) will make every effort to support NWT students through this uncertain time.

One of the main priorities will be supporting Grade 12 students to meet graduation requirements. For those students expecting to graduate this year, ECE will work with post-secondary institutions across Canada on admission requirements to ensure the smoothest transition possible in this extraordinary year.

Another priority will be identifying essential services that many children and youth depend on like school meal programs, mental health supports and finding ways to support students with complex needs by developing home-based resources for their parents and caregivers.

I have also asked ECE staff to work with our education and licensed early childhood partners to find ways that we can help provide child care services for NWT health care and essential services staff. These positions are critical in supporting our overall health system and we must find ways to support these workers during this pandemic.

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While the immediate priority is not to provide lessons or give instruction - it is to identify and secure essential services for supporting students, their families and their communities - we all share in the interest to ensure opportunities for continued learning for NWT students as soon as possible. The NWTTA has advised that teachers are prepared and willing to help students and communities however they can during this unprecedented time.

A bulletin to clarify how school closures will impact students, and that will address the NWT's plan for continued student learning, will be released on Monday March 30, 2020 on the ECE website at <https://www.ece.gov.nt.ca/en/services/education-culture-and-employment-covid-19-updates>.

This bulletin will explain how Junior Kindergarten to Grade 12 (JK-12) students' academic results and high school course completion will be captured for the 2019-2020 school year, as well as information on continued JK-12 learning opportunities for students including home-based resources. All of this work will take time to develop, and we ask students, parents and school staff to be patient.

These measures are temporary. This is a very challenging time in the NWT, in Canada, and around the world, but we must act together and act now to prevent the further spread of COVID-19.

Please take necessary preventative measures to keep you and your families healthy and safe.

Take care,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R.J. Simpson', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

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

- c. Ms. Rita Mueller
Deputy Minister
Education, Culture and Employment