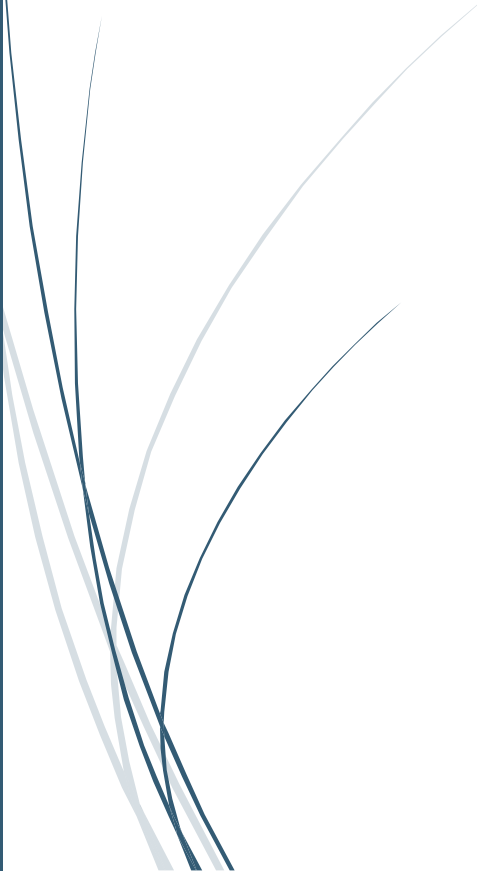


6/30/2026

# Yukon External Independent Review Panel (YEIR) Status Report



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## 1. Basic Information

### **Project Name:**

Yukon External Independent Review – Department of Education

### **Reporting Period:**

March 17 to June 30, 2026

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### **Executive Summary:**

The Yukon External Independent Review Panel (the panel) began its work immediately after the Review was announced in the Legislature on March 17, 2026. The mandate of the review is to assess the current work at the Department of Education to improve outcomes for all learners and to make actionable recommendations moving forward. The panel designed a research-based process that would engage Department staff, school staff, parents, school councils, school boards, First Nations, partners, and stakeholders.

The panel began working with participants on April 10, 2026, and conducted more than 55 sessions with individuals and groups. In phase one of the review, the panel conducted sessions with Department of Education staff, Yukon educators, and has gradually responded to requests from school boards, school councils and partner groups.

Participants spoke of the passion and the high level of education that exists at the Department of Education. Additionally, people spoke of the abundance of resources available for schools and the system. As the sessions evolved, participants were increasingly reflective, open and hopeful about the future. The panel wants to recognize people's work even though, the status report presented in these pages will focus on the challenges and opportunities faced by the Department.

The panel focused on four main areas; norms and culture, relationships and communication, structures, and accountability. Participants shared their thoughts of the Department related to strengths, challenges, and opportunities for the future. In each of the areas, significant concerns emerged leading the panel to confirm the Government's position that the Department of Education needs to be overhauled. There are areas that require immediate attention, and the panel has more in-depth questions in each focus area to be asked of session participants in phase two before more detailed recommendations can be made.

## 2. Findings: Focus Areas – Themes to Date

### Norms & Culture

#### Focus Question:

*To what extent does the Department of Education promote shared responsibility, effectively address conflict, discrimination, or complacency and advance equity to improve outcomes for all learners?*

#### Findings:

Positive norms and culture in education are the foundation for the work to improve outcomes for all students. It supports collective responsibility, psychological safety, productive dialogue and wellbeing for staff and students.

The panel found that norms and culture challenges were evident across the Department and did not reflect strong, shared responsibility for improving student outcomes.

Complacency was a central concern. There are conflicts existing among Department staff, with schools and school boards. Groups spoke of an “us versus them” climate as well as poor behaviour not being addressed, assigning blame for negative interactions, and fear of reprisals. There was a lack of evidence to show how people work together to create a culture centered on learners and their needs. The Department, school boards and schools suggested the lack of mutual respect was getting in the way of working together for learners. Unfortunately, the lack of respectful and safe working environments has contributed to burnout, mistrust, high turnover, and a workplace where people do not feel safe or supported to raise concerns.

Within the Department, the word “silo” and its variations referenced by Department staff and others reflected a culture where branches work in isolation, independently and often competitively without a shared purpose, mutual understanding, or collective problem-solving to help learners. The lack of communication between branches has caused confusion for schools.

Another comment made is that political demands supersede the work needing to be done to support students and schools. Staff experience the Department’s priorities as driven by political responsiveness rather than by a responsibility to focus on student success. Teachers feel increasingly alone and unsupported as classroom complexities increase.

A significant concern is the current inclusion model which is not meeting the needs of students, particularly vulnerable learners and students with complex needs. Safety concerns were raised by a variety of participants. Early intervention is another important factor in improving the long-term success of learners. There is a need for significantly more Kindergarten to Grade 3 support.

Also needed is a strategic plan to implement and monitor shared resource programs, and a therapeutic model.

The panel understood that significant issues of discrimination exist in the Yukon. This area will be explored in detail in phase two of the review.

Overall, the panel heard a powerful desire to build a more respectful, transparent, student-centered, and collaborative culture. This requires that everyone works together to develop and implement a student-centered vision, mission, values, and priorities including norms of respectful conduct. There must be a deliberate shift to ensure all parts of the system become a team with respectful relationships that focus on serving and supporting learners.

## Relationships and Communication

### Focus Question:

*To what extent are relationships within the Department of Education and with schools, parents, partners, and Stakeholders positive and focused on improving success for each learner?*

### Findings:

The panel found it difficult to find a link in the relationships between the Department of Education and schools, parents, partners, stakeholders, and First Nations Governments that focus on improving student success.

The panel heard of a disconnect between the Department and partners, external agencies, school councils, and school boards. People do not feel heard, are not getting answers and feel frustrated. Participants informed the panel that relationships are fractured, and communications limited. Perceptions of favoritism, inconsistencies, and inequities were evident at all levels.

In the area of decision-making, the panel discovered that many decisions are made without engaging school boards, school councils, school staff, and First Nations. They think this exclusion is purposeful and put in place to restrict dialogue and discussion of critical issues. Participants noted the discontinuation of advisory committees. Such actions on the part of the Department affect trust, limit shared responsibility, and wide-spread support needed to make the changes required to improve outcomes for all learners.

The present culture has led schools to avoid Department contact and schools have reported that Department consultants and specialists rarely come to their schools, although programming suggestions are made, follow-ups are limited. Session participants identified biases in Department decision-making, and that decisions are not always made based on facts or research. Unfortunately, it means individual schools receive different level of services and support from the Department. This creates inequities across the system and erodes trust.

The disconnect extends to the work with schools and with the school boards. Answers to important questions are often not provided in a timely manner, and when they finally are, issues are not clarified or resolved which increases stress and mistrust. People spoke of two different timelines, the Department's time, which is slow in reacting, offering advice or suggesting appropriate action and school's time, which is fast-paced and often needing immediate action or advice. Schools staff often do not know who to contact at the Department to discuss an issue and even when someone is contacted, they may have no authority to resolve the issue. This can create long waiting periods for responses with timelines missed or decisions made in isolation.

Schools are creating their own culture with little or no oversight or support and monitoring from the Department, and many are working in isolation to avoid interaction with the Department.

This lack of relationships, and ongoing miscommunications do not foster an approach focused on student success.

The substantial number of requests coming from the Department has left the principals struggling to be the Instructional leaders they would like to be. They often find themselves completing administrative duties coming from the Department as opposed to being present for their staff and students. All these issues must be resolved so that relationships heal, and transparency and equity become the norm across the system.

Additionally, discussions with educators in schools revealed that the use of the word consultation by various Department staff was used referring to the transmission of information or expectations. It is important for everyone in education to understand that consultation in the Yukon has a specific meaning, and using this word to reference engagement processes is inaccurate and needs to be changed.

## Structures

### Focus Question:

*To what extent do the present organizational designs (roles, hierarchy) and operational structures (processes, service delivery, supports) at the Department of Education work for students in schools, school communities, partners, and stakeholders?*

### Findings:

At present, the Department is organized into five branches led by a Deputy Minister or Assistant Deputy Minister with sub-branches led by a Director or Superintendent. The Department also provides services to two school boards, the First Nation School Board (FNSB) and the Commission Scolaire Francophone du Yukon (CSFY). The organizational structure is not clear, and the organizational chart delivered to the panel is confusing, and 30 pages long. Principals, school staff, and members of the public express confusion as to who they might call to get help with a specific challenge. This is exacerbated by a lack of clarity about the exact roles and responsibility of each branch and sub-branch. Frequent re-organizations at the Department add to the confusion when trying to solve a problem or get help and the workflow created by the complexity of the current bureaucracy is hard to understand.

Schools and administrative groups told the panel that they did not understand why the staffing level at the Department appeared to be increasing while the number of schools under the direct authority of the Department was decreasing. The number of leadership positions may contribute to the organizational and relationship challenges.

At the same time, operationally, schools under the authority of the Department currently function without the proper staffing, budgets, or power of authority to support school staff and match the work done by the two school boards. This has created inequities in all service areas. The authority of the Superintendent and ADM of Public Schools appears to have lessened over the years so that this important bridge with schools is diminished and is increasingly hard to staff. Turnover of these leadership positions is constant.

In terms of focusing on the needs of students, schools report being understaffed and/or under-spaced due to a lack of projection of student numbers. There is also a lack of transparency and clarity regarding service levels. Staff at the Department report a lack of vigorous strategic planning and data does not seem to function in a reliable way to make decisions. This data is shared inconsistently with schools.

Innovative programs are created ad-hoc by individual school leaders rather than by a universal strategic plan. Programs may also be determined by political needs rather than the use of data

and information. School leaders spoke to mandated work often not being directly connected to improving outcomes for learners.

The present organizational designs and operational structures do not work for students. The dual functions of Ministry and district/school authorities are entangled within the Department organizational structure and are not well understood, clearly differentiated, or properly executed. Role confusion is widespread and contributes further to the lack of direction at the Department, a situation which must change. The role of Ministry and school authority must be separated and clearly defined to fulfill the responsibility of each entity in improving the achievement of all students.

## Accountability

### Focus Question:

*To what extent the Department of Education uses consistent, data informed processes with schools, campuses, and school boards to monitor student progress, review achievement, and implement strategies to address gaps and to consistently improve achievement?*

### Findings:

An accountable school system is one that actively takes responsibility for the learning of all its students. The work to address the needs of each learner requires honesty, transparency, collaboration, and hard work from the Department/Ministry level to school boards/authorities, schools, and in each classroom. Effective systems use data and information to create instructional and achievement goals, make decisions about resources, support, and builds staff capacity to improve the achievement of all students.

It was unclear to the panel how data is collected and analyzed at the Department to create information that drives action in schools and at the Department, to improve outcomes for students. The Yukon is said to be data rich and information poor but questions about the validity, credibility, and usefulness of the current data sets came up and must be explored further.

The panel also found limited evidence of monitoring student progress or the implementation of strategies that are tracked for effectiveness to address well known gaps in achievement. It was also clear that the necessary support for teachers, principals, and other staff to implement innovative programs, initiatives, or resources are not consistent or effective. Participants both at the Department and externally noted that there are too many things being done to do any of them well.

Successful accountability systems make sure that all student groups, including underserved populations like rural and First Nations students in the Yukon, show progress, however, in many cases that needed progress has not happened. Again, it is not evident that resources to the schools that need them, get them, which raises questions of equity of service and support. Other equity questions from participants came around transparent funding of school boards and the two authorities, as well as the distribution of educational assistants.

The concept of school autonomy in relation to accountability needs further exploration. It is perceived as downloading Department work to schools and raises concerns about the workload of principals in the context of increasingly complex school situations. School leaders often do not have any time to coach, mentor and evaluate school staff and work on school growth plans.

The system requires highly skilled educators, the recruitment, support, and supervision, to retain expert growth-oriented staff in each school must be a priority for moving forward to an accountable system.

There are significant questions from the discussion above that need to be clarified with Department and school staff in phase two of the review. Accountability is central to the work to improve student success in the Yukon. However, without the development of a robust, accountable education system, the gaps described by the Auditor General and in other reports will remain open.

### 3. Recommendations for Immediate Action

The recommendations below stem from the themes that came through during our engagement sessions to date. Details about each recommendation can be found in the appendices. In depth research will validate current and future recommendations.

#### 1. Political Interference

This recommendation is meant to support the Minister and ensure credibility and equity at all levels of governance. The recommendations are:

- To oversee and address educational operational issues that arise, create a quality assurance structure/committee. In the interim, a clarification regarding a process for concerns to be heard should be shared with everyone: start with the classroom teacher, move to the school administration, the superintendent and then to the DM's level.
- On a longer-term basis, a change in policy or an amendment to the *Education Act* may be required to ensure the Minister of Education does not interfere or dictate day-to-day operational decisions.

While the Minister could establish overarching policies or issue certain directives to the Ministry, the Minister could not overrule or dictate the day-to-day operations or decisions made by the various levels of governance within the education system.

#### 2. Dual Role of the Department of Education

The panel recommends a physical and operational division of roles to a Ministry and school boards or authority structure.

- The Ministry and the school authority will need to have clearly defined roles, adequate staffing, and well-defined service levels.
- A funding formula must be developed to ensure transparency, equity, and accountability. Considering block funding may assist in this work.

#### 3. Inclusion

Inclusion in education needs to be defined, understood, appropriately supported, and legislated. The panel's recommendation for Inclusion is divided up in three sections:

- The creation of a structure like the one at the Child Development Center (CDC) to be offered to students and families until the end of Grade 3.
- An inventory of shared resource programs, specialized programs, and school programs be conducted, followed by a strategic plan process leading to a coherent and consistent approach, and clearly defined responsibilities.
- The panel recommends the establishment of a therapeutic model for rural and urban students and schools. There are a variety of models to explore across the country, and one that has been developed by YFNED.

#### 4. Accountability

The panel will do further work with Department staff to understand how data collection and analysis create information that is actionable by schools and the Department.

- Assessing the credibility and validity of the data used is an important strategy and alternative data sets should be explored to ensure usefulness for schools and the Department.

A robust accountability system for the Yukon must be developed using relevant research to lead the work of improving student achievement. This includes a process for the development of new initiatives that are built collaboratively by Department and school staff as well as First Nations and partners.

Design a new onboarding process, in conjunction with the Yukon Association of Education Professionals (YAEP) for new school and department staff and refine recruiting, hiring and supervision processes.

## 4. Upcoming Priorities

Description
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Continue “Moving Forward” sessions by reaching out to First Nations Leadership, councils school councils, schools, and communities in both rural and urban areas.</li><li>2. Continue doing “Moving Forward “sessions with schools, school councils, partners, stakeholders, and the public who have not participated in Phase 1 on request and by invitation.</li><li>3. Phase 2: Begin “Going Deeper” sessions using questions and issues arising out of panel work and sessions in each focus area. Note: In some cases, moving forward and going deeper may be combined.</li><li>4. Develop a survey tool to be open to the public in early September.</li><li>5. Continue analysis of data from participants and research and share best practices from accountable education systems.</li><li>6. Complete and share research on best practices in the separating of Ministry and school board or authority work.</li><li>7. Gather input and suggestions for the potential transition to a Ministry and school board/authority structure.</li><li>8. Monitor Department of Education responses to the recommendations from this Status Report.</li></ol>

## 5. Risks

Risk	Impact
Insufficient Change (too slow or not as impactful as needed)	There is cynicism and skepticism regarding yet another committee or group creating a report that changes nothing. Moving forward to Phase 2 of the review there must be persuasive evidence that real systemic change is on the way so there is public confidence needed for tough decision-making.
Unmanaged Change	Change management that is strategically planned in manageable phases will be imperative moving forward. This will help to avoid confusion and honour the passion and skills of staff impacted by the changes.
Inconsistent Communication	Communication of the findings and changes need to be rolled out to ensure accuracy, transparency, equity and buy-in from the public.

## 6. Summary

The first phase of the Yukon External Independent Review confirmed that the Department of Education requires significant and system-wide change. The panel's engagement to date has primarily focused on Department staff, school staff, school councils, school boards, partners and stakeholders. The themes raised across more than fifty-five sessions were consistent, serious, and interrelated.

The panel found that the Department's current culture, communication practices, structure and accountability mechanisms are not organized around improving outcomes for all learners. Participants described a system where the dual role of the Department as both Ministry and school authority creates confusion, blurred accountability, inequity, and inconsistent decision-making. There is a lack of shared mission, clear priorities, and measurable goals to guide the work of the system.

Several issues require immediate attention. These include the need to address political involvement in operational decision-making, clarify the Department's Ministry and school authority roles, develop a transparent and equitable funding formula, and take immediate action on inclusion.

At the same time, the panel recognizes that there are committed and skilled people throughout the education system who care deeply about students and who will be essential to rebuilding trust and improving outcomes. Change must therefore be meaningful and timely, but also carefully managed. The Department cannot afford change that is too slow or symbolic or too rapid, poorly communicated creating further instability or leading to the loss of important staff capacity.

The next phase of the review will be critical. The panel will continue engagement with Yukon First Nations, Department staff, school councils, school boards, school staff, partners, families, students, and the public. These perspectives are necessary to evaluate, deepen, and refine the panel's findings and recommendations. However, the themes identified to date are strong enough to support early corrective action and confirm that the education system requires a clear shift toward transparency, accountability, shared responsibility, equity, and student-centered decision-making.