7/28/2026

Yukon External Independent Review Panel (YEIR) Status Report with Appendices

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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, with a mandate to assess the Department of Education's work and recommend improvements to support better outcomes for all learners and to make actionable recommendations moving forward. The Panel began working immediately on designing a research-based process to engage Department staff, school staff, parents, school councils, school boards, First Nations, partners, and stakeholders in this work. This status report updates the Minister of Education on the Panel's findings to date and outlines its initial recommendations for both immediate and long-term action. It also describes how the Panel will deepen and test those findings and recommendations in the next phase of the review.

The Panel began working with participants on April 10, 2026, and conducted more than 55 sessions with individuals and groups, starting with Department of Education staff and Yukon educators, and then including school boards, school councils and partner groups.

Sessions were organized around four focus areas – norms and culture, relationships and communication, structures, and accountability – and participants reflected on strengths, challenges, and opportunities for the future within each area.

The focus areas are adapted from a 2004 policy framework developed by Bruce S. Cooper, Lance D. Fusarelli, and E. Vance Randall to evaluate educational policy effectiveness. The panel adapted the framework to examine the central question of this review: why, after fifty years of recommendations from various reports and documents, has the Department failed to make the sustainable changes needed to improve outcomes for all learners in Yukon, and what can be done about the problem. Appendix A describes the framework, how the Panel applied it to analyze the central question, and how that analysis shaped the design of the phase one sessions.

In those sessions, participants spoke of the passion and the high level of expertise that exists at the Department of Education. They also spoke about the abundance of resources available to schools and the education system. As the sessions progressed, participants became increasingly reflective, open, and hopeful about the future. The Panel wants to recognize the hard work done each day even though the status report focuses on the challenges and opportunities faced by the Department.

Significant concerns emerged during the sessions across all focus areas, leading the panel to confirm the Government's position that the Department of Education needs to be overhauled. Deeper exploration of the focus areas is needed in phase two before the Panel can make more detailed recommendations, and participants will be asked more in-depth questions. However, there are some issues that require immediate attention, which are detailed in the initial recommendations.

2. Finding by Focus Area: Themes to Date

The following findings summarize what the Panel heard during the phase one engagement sessions. They are organized by the four focus areas explored during each session, based on the framework described in Appendix A. Each section begins with the focus question that guided participants' discussion for each area.

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 the education system are foundational to improving outcomes for all students. They contribute to fostering collective responsibility, psychological safety, productive dialogue, and wellbeing for staff and students.

The Panel found that norms and culture across the Department do not reflect a strong, shared responsibility for improving student outcomes, and that challenges are widespread.

Complacency is a central concern. Conflicts exist among Department staff and with schools and school boards. Participants spoke of an "us versus them" dynamic in which patterns of poor behaviour go unaddressed, blame is assigned for negative interactions, and people fear reprisals for raising concerns. The panel found little evidence of people working together to create a culture centered on learners and their needs. The Department staff, school boards, school councils, school staff and others suggest that lack of mutual respect is getting in the way of working together for learners, and is contributing to burnout, mistrust, high turnover, and workplaces 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. Educators 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. See Appendix B for further details on inclusion.

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 focusing 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 favouritism, inconsistencies, and inequities were evident at all levels. Examples of political interference were shared during the sessions. See Appendix C for further details.

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 the 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 needs 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 word consultation used by various Department staff referred 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 Superintendents 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 support decision making. Department gathered 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 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 directions 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. Please refer to Appendix D for further information about the dual role of the Department of Education.

Accountability

Focus Question:

To what extent does the Department of Education use 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 Authorities, schools, and in each classroom. Effective systems use data and information to create instructional and achievement goals, make decisions about resources, support, and build 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 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 educators, 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. See Appendix E for further details.

3. Summary of Recommendations for Immediate Action

The following four recommendations stem from the themes that came through during the Panel's engagement sessions to date, and its background research on the challenges faced by the Department in its work to improve student outcomes. Details about each recommendation, including supporting research, can be found in the appendices. In-depth research and engagement in phase two will continue to validate current and future recommendations.

1. Addressing Political Interference

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

- Creating a Quality Assurance Structure/Committee to oversee and address educational operational issues as they arise.
- In the interim, communicating a clear process for concerns to be heard. The interim process should start with concerns being raised to the classroom teacher, and then moved up to the school administration, school council/board, the superintendent, and eventually to the Assistant Deputy Minister and Deputy Minister level if necessary.
- On a longer-term basis, changing policy or amending the *Education Act* 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 should not overrule or dictate the day-to-day operations or decisions made by the various levels of governance within the education system.

2. Separating the Dual Roles of the Department of Education

The Panel recommends a physical and operational division of roles to a Ministry and School 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. Strengthening Inclusive Education Supports

Inclusion in education needs to be defined, understood, appropriately supported, and legislated. The Panel's recommendations to strengthen inclusive education supports are to:

- Create and offer a structure like the one at the Child Development Center (CDC) for students and families through Grade 3.
- Develop and maintain an inventory of shared resource programs, specialized programs, and school programs, and use it to inform a strategic planning process that establishes a coherent and consistent service delivery approach, with clearly defined responsibilities.

- Establish a therapeutic model for all students and schools. In developing this model, the Department should consider the various models used elsewhere in Canada, as well as the model developed by the Yukon First Nations Education Directorate.

4. Create a Robust Accountability System

The Panel recommends:

- Creating a robust accountability system using relevant research to lead the work of improving student achievement. This should include a process for new initiatives that are built collaboratively by Department and school staff as well as First Nations and partners.
- 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. The Panel will do further work with Department staff to understand whether the data currently collected helps schools and the Department make informed and actionable decisions. Data collection and analysis create information that is actionable by schools and the Department.
- Designing a new onboarding process, in conjunction with the Yukon Association of Education Professionals (YAEP), for new school and Department staff, and refining recruiting, hiring, and supervision processes.

4. Upcoming Priorities

Description
1. Continue “Moving Forward” sessions by reaching out to First Nations Leadership, school councils, schools, and communities in both rural and urban areas. 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. 3. Begin “Going Deeper” sessions using questions and issues arising out of the Panel work and sessions in each focus area. Note: In some cases, moving forward and going deeper may be combined. 4. Develop a survey tool to be open to the public in early September. 5. Continue analysis of data from participants and research and share best practices from accountable education systems. 6. Complete and share research on best practices in the separation of Ministry and School Authority work. 7. Gather input and suggestions for the potential transition to a Ministry and School Authority structure. 8. Monitor Department of Education responses to the recommendations from this Status Report.

5. Risks

The Panel identified the following risks for the Department to consider when applying the recommendations.

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 the 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 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 interference 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 leading to further instability and 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-centred decision-making.

Appendix A

The Review Framework

The Panel determined that establishing a framework for the review was an important first step before making recommendations for change at the Department. The framework is intended to support a holistic review that considers not only policies and structures, but also the culture, relationships, and accountability that influence how the education system operates. It provides a consistent way to organize engagement with Department staff, educators, First Nations, parents, partners, students, and the public. It helps structure discussions about the current strengths, challenges, and failures of the education system, as well as opportunities and aspirations for the future.

The framework is adapted from a policy framework developed by Cooper et al. (2004), which is a conceptual model designed to evaluate and analyze educational policy effectiveness across four interrelated dimensions:

- The norms and culture dimension examine the values, beliefs, and moral purposes that drive the work including shared responsibilities, managing conflict, discrimination and racism, and equity.
- The structural dimension analyzes the organizational hierarchies, roles, and institutional rules governing the system including ministerial and departmental operations, program and service delivery, and funding and supports.
- The relationships and communication dimension evaluate the political power, stakeholder interests, relationships, and public influence involved including internal and external relationships and communications, and involvement and decision making.
- The accountability dimension focuses implementation methods, student results, and improvement strategies including the use of student data and evidence, capacity building, monitoring progress and adjusting strategies, and assessing the effectiveness of strategies and initiatives in place. (Government of Yukon, 2026).

These four dimensions became the focus areas of the Panel's review and provided the structure for phase one engagement.

Ethics and social justice are at the centre of the Cooper et al. model. For the Panel, this means keeping learners and learning at the centre of the review and considering how each focus area contributes to equitable outcomes in Yukon schools. Deeper exploration of ethics and social justice in each of the focus areas, and a public survey will form part of phase two of the review.

Challenges with the Dual Role of the Department

A fundamental question explored throughout phase one was:

> Does the current dual role of the Department as a Ministry and a School Authority have an impact on the work required to improve achievement for all students, and what are the needed actions to address the challenges related to the current structure?

The Panel's research on the dual role indicates that the Yukon's structure is unlike most Canadian jurisdictions where education ministries are separate from elected local school boards. The combination of the two roles creates several challenges. Specific problems include:

- Loss of local democracy.
- Deflection of accountability.
- Reduced responsiveness.
- Politics in education.

Loss of Local Democracy

When a ministry controls the roles of various authorities in the system, parents and local stakeholders lose their democratic voice (Pollock, 2023).

Central control that makes decisions for all students without regard for the diversity in the population, and under a colonial structure that has been maintained for decades, dilutes the distinct voices, cultures, and languages of Yukon First Nations. (Yukon First Nation Education Directorate, 2022)].

Deflection of Accountability

Combining the roles of ministry and school authority allows governments to deflect responsibility for systemic issues by blaming previous administrations, instead of addressing the problems themselves.

In the Yukon, multiple Auditor General reports have found achievement gaps that have not been resolved for rural, First Nations, and students with special education needs. The absence of localized First Nations education governance resulted in a failure to provide culturally appropriate curriculum and support. This is one factor that led to the creation of the First Nations School Board (FNSB).

When the ministry is the funder, standards-maker, and the operational manager for education, as it is in Yukon, there is no independent oversight. If disputes arise over ministry or operational decisions, no structure exists to hold the government accountable. Without that accountability, governments under pressure to show progress tend to point to discrete actions that may seem responsive from the outset, but do not necessarily result in positive change. Genuine accountability requires exploring the reasons behind gaps in achievement, putting research-based strategies or initiatives in place, and monitoring their effectiveness to ensure the gaps are being closed.

Reduced Responsiveness

When an education ministry manages school-level operations, while also setting system-wide policies and standards, the system becomes, as Ted Hupe (2026) suggests, incapacitated by its own growing size, making it difficult for schools to swiftly address local emergencies. Centralized operations struggle to manage unique rural realities, such as acute community educator housing shortages and high staff turnover especially in rural areas. Many participants report viewing the central Department as an administrative hindrance that, rather than provide classroom and mentoring support that is needed, primarily sends materials and directives.

Politics in Education

Centralization risks turning localized educational issues into partisan political battles. Focus gets disproportionally placed on budgets and standardized metrics rather than student well-being (Elementary Teachers of Ontario, 2026).

In her 2021 *Review of Inclusive and Special Education*, Yee found that destabilizing political dynamics worsen the discriminatory, racist, colonial narratives and structures embedded in the Yukon education system. The four-year election cycle often leads to frequent and abrupt changes in education as new leadership introduces their priorities and strategies and ignores or rejects previous efforts to address student needs. As opposition parties and local advocates have consistently pointed out, this has created a perception that educational decisions are driven more by political agendas than evidence of what improves student outcomes.

The Panel also heard concerns that political interference can extend into operational decision-making. When individuals use their connection to government officials on a specific issue affecting their child, and operational changes are imposed in response, the public perception is that the system is unfair. Political interference impacts the Department’s and schools’ ability to provide equitable supports and research-informed programming to all learners.

Appendix B

Recommendation: Strengthening Inclusive Education Supports

Inclusive education is founded on the principle that every learner has the right to access meaningful educational opportunities, participate fully in their school community, and receive the supports necessary to reach their potential. Modern inclusive education extends beyond classroom placement. Successful education systems provide coordinated supports, timely intervention, equitable access to services, and flexible learning environments that respond to the diverse strengths and needs of learners. They also recognize that successful inclusion depends upon building the capacity of educators through collaborative practice, professional learning, and shared responsibility for student success.

For the Yukon's inclusive education supports to be delivered at this level, the Panel recommends:

a. Creating a structure like the one at the Child Development Center (CDC), offered to students and families until the end of Grade 3.
b. Developing an inventory of shared resource programs, specialized programs, and school programs. Use that inventory to inform a strategic planning process aimed at establishing a coherent and consistent service delivery approach that sets clear responsibilities for all those involved.
c. Establishing a therapeutic model for all students and schools.

The following summarizes the evidence supporting a., b., and c. above, explaining how they build upon Yukon legislation, existing policies, previous reviews, and current research to strengthen inclusive education across the territory.

a. Provide Coordinated Early Supports to the End of Grade 3

The 2021 Review of Inclusive and Special Education in the Yukon, documented fragmented services, inconsistent access to supports, increasing educator workload, and families navigating multiple disconnected systems to access services. While the Yukon has made progress since that review, many of the same themes emerged in the Panel's review, suggesting that further system improvements are required

The Yukon has demonstrated leadership through the CDC, which provides coordinated multidisciplinary services for children from birth to school entry. The CDC operates using an evidence-informed model that integrates developmental assessment, therapeutic intervention, family-centred practice, and collaboration across health, education, and community services.

The Panel recommends that the Department examine how the successful principles already embedded within the CDC could be offered to students and families through the end of Grade 3. International research consistently identifies the period from birth through approximately eight years of age as the most significant window for brain development. During these years, children develop the foundational literacy, numeracy, communication, executive functioning, and self-regulation skills that influence later academic success and wellbeing. Research consistently demonstrates that early identification and coordinated intervention during this developmental period improves educational outcomes while reducing the need for more intensive interventions later.

The Yukon has established a legislative and policy foundation for inclusive education. The *Education Act* affirms that every school-aged child is entitled to an educational program appropriate to their individual needs and provides for individualized educational planning, parent participation, and programming in the least restrictive and most enabling environment practicable for students with special educational needs. These

principles are reinforced through the *Inclusive Education Guidelines*, which position inclusion as a guiding philosophy for the education system and emphasize learner-centred practice, Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports (MTSS), collaborative "circles of care," Universal Design for Learning (UDL), and partnerships with Yukon First Nations.

Research indicates that successful inclusive education depends not only on specialist services but also on building educator capacity through ongoing professional learning, coaching, UDL, collaborative planning, and school-based problem solving (Fullan, 2017; Meyer et al., 2024; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2020).

Despite these legislative and policy foundations, there is a significant shift once children transition into the kindergarten to grade 12 education system. Families often move from one coordinated service model into multiple independent systems requiring new referrals, assessments, and waitlists. This creates challenges with accessing timely specialist support and coordinating services.

The Yukon has an opportunity to build upon existing strengths. Using CDC's collaborative principles to offer services through the primary years of elementary school education would strengthen continuity between early childhood and school-based services. This would better align with the intent of Yukon legislation and policy and provide coordinated supports during a critical time in a child's development. Structural changes alone are insufficient. Sustainable inclusive education requires a shared philosophy of service, clearly defined leadership responsibilities, professional learning, collaborative practice, and accountability at every level of the education system. Successful implementation depends upon supporting educators, school leaders, and specialists to work as an integrated team rather than as separate services.

Multidisciplinary Intervention Teams

The 2021 Review of Inclusive and Special Education in the Yukon called for collaborative service delivery involving educators, specialists, families, and community partners. The *Inclusive Education Guidelines* encourage applying this approach through collaborative "circles of care" centred on the learner.

Despite this, the Panel found continued absence of a collaborative model in the Yukon Education System, with inconsistent coordination of services across schools and communities. Strengthening the effectiveness, consistency, and accountability of multidisciplinary teams is essential.

Depending upon local needs, multidisciplinary teams may include:

- Occupational Therapists
- Speech-Language Pathologists
- School Psychologists
- Behaviour Consultants
- Child and Youth Care Workers
- Family Support Workers
- Indigenous Wellness Practitioners
- Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and Language and Cultural Support Staff

Working collaboratively, these teams would be directly involved in assessment, consultation, intervention, transition planning, classroom coaching, and family engagement.

Multi-Tiered Systems of Support

One of the most significant developments in inclusive education over the past two decades has been the movement away from a traditional "wait-to-fail" model.

Rather than waiting for students to experience significant academic failure or receive formal psychoeducational assessments, schools increasingly organize supports through MTSS and Response to Intervention (RTI). MTSS is now reflected within Yukon's *Inclusive Education Guidelines*.

Tier	Purpose	Examples
Tier 1	Universal supports	High-quality instruction, Universal Design for Learning, differentiated instruction, universal screening
Tier 2	Targeted interventions	Small-group literacy and numeracy support, behavioural interventions, short-term specialist consultation
Tier 3	Intensive supports	Individualized multidisciplinary intervention, therapeutic supports, specialized programming

This graduated approach allows educators to respond to demonstrated educational needs before learning difficulties become entrenched while ensuring students requiring specialist services receive increasingly intensive support.

Universal Screening

Unlike traditional referral models, which often rely on visible academic or behavioural concerns, universal screening helps identify students whose needs may otherwise remain unnoticed because they are quiet, compliant, or performing within the average range despite underlying learning or developmental challenges. One of the strongest predictors of later academic success is the development of early literacy skills. The National Early Literacy Panel (2008), the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (2000), and Snow, Burns, and Griffin (1998) all concluded that children's acquisition of early literacy skills is strongly associated with later learning and achievement, reinforcing the importance of systematic screening and early intervention during the primary years.

Many jurisdictions incorporate universal screening as part of their early years programming, typically during Kindergarten, Grade 1, and Grade 2, to assess areas such as:

- Speech and language development
- Early literacy skills
- Numeracy readiness
- Hearing and vision
- Fine motor development
- Social-emotional development
- Self-regulation

Within the context of the Panel’s recommendation to provide inclusive learning supports through to grade 3, universal screening should be considered as a component of a coordinated early intervention system, not an assessment process in isolation. Screening is most effective when it is connected to timely follow-up, multidisciplinary collaboration, family engagement, and graduated support that respond to identified needs.

This approach aligns with both the principles of the CDC and *Yukon’s Inclusive Education Guidelines*, which emphasize proactive, learner-centred support rather than waiting until students experience significant academic or developmental challenges before intervention begins.

Considerations for Future Exploration

Regional hub models used across provinces such as Alberta, British Columbia, Saskatchewan, and Ontario demonstrate one potential approach to coordinating specialist expertise while recognizing the realities of geography and limited human resources. Similar approaches may merit consideration within the Yukon, alongside existing community-based strengths and partnerships.

b. Develop a Resources and Programs Inventory and Strategic Plan

Without a clear understanding of existing services, educational systems end up evolving incrementally, resulting in inconsistent practices, inequitable access between schools or regions, unclear responsibilities, and varying experiences for students and families.

Strategic planning allows education systems to:

- Establish common service standards.
- Clarify roles and responsibilities across the education system.
- Identify gaps in programming and specialist services.
- Improve coordination between education, health, and community partners.
- Ensure equitable access regardless of where students attend school.
- Align resources with student needs and educational priorities.

The Yukon has already established many of the principles necessary to support a coordinated approach to inclusive education. The *Education Act* provides the legislative foundation for individualized educational planning, multidisciplinary assessment, parent participation, and programming that meets the individual needs of students. The *Inclusive Education Guidelines* expands on these principles. It identifies inclusion as a shared responsibility across the education system and establishes learner-centred planning, collaborative circles of care, UDL, MTSS, and culturally responsive practice as guiding principles for Yukon schools. The 2021 Review of Inclusive and Special Education in the Yukon similarly identified the need for stronger coordination between services, clearer governance, improved collaboration, and a more integrated approach to supporting students with diverse learning needs. Completing a territorial inventory and developing a strategic plan is the next logical step in implementing these existing legislative and policy commitments.

Successful inclusion requires coordinated systems rather than individual programs. While specialist services remain essential, inclusive education is sustained by strong leadership, educator capacity, shared responsibility, and accountability for implementation.

Many jurisdictions begin their move towards coordinated inclusive education supports by completing a comprehensive inventory of:

- Shared Resource Programs.
- Specialized Programs.
- School-Based Supports.
- Learning Assistance Services.
- Educational Assistant allocation models.
- Specialist staffing (psychologists, occupational therapists, speech-language pathologists, behaviour consultants, etc.).
- Mental health and wellness supports.
- Indigenous education and wellness programming.
- Community partnerships.
- Transition supports.
- Rural and remote service delivery models.

This information is necessary to identify duplication, service gaps, inequities, and opportunities for improved coordination.

Successful inclusion cannot rest on individual educators or specialists alone. Responsibility must be shared across schools, departmental leadership, boards, families, Yukon First Nations, and community partners. A coherent system needs both structural alignment and a shared philosophy of service.

Schools also needs their own capacity for inclusive education to be effective. Ongoing professional learning, collaborative problem-solving, coaching, and instructional leadership all build schools' abilities to support

learners directly. Many jurisdictions do this through Learning Assistance Teachers (LATs) or similar roles, which coordinate interventions, support classroom teachers, monitor student progress, and connect schools with specialist services. Roles like these keep responsibility for inclusion within the school community and give educators timely access to specialist expertise when they need it. Any future strategic planning process should include strengthening school-based capacity since specialist services and classroom supports complement each other.

Potential Benefits of an Inventory and Strategic Plan

A comprehensive inventory of services and a related territorial strategic plan would create a more coordinated, equitable, and accountable inclusive education system.

Students	Educators	Families	Education System
More equitable access to services	Greater clarity regarding available supports	More consistent experiences across schools	Improved coordination of services
Timelier access to interventions	Stronger collaboration with specialists	Clearer pathways to support	Better use of existing resources
Greater continuity between schools and services	Enhanced professional learning	Increased confidence navigating the system	Reduced duplication and service gaps
Improved educational outcomes	Shared responsibility for inclusion	Stronger partnerships	Increased accountability and continuous improvement

c. Establish a Therapeutic Model for Urban and Rural Students

Inclusive education is not defined by always placing every student in the same environment. Rather, successful inclusion ensures that every learner has equitable access to the level of support they require to participate, belong, and achieve success.

For most students, these supports can be provided through high-quality classroom instruction, targeted interventions, and specialist consultation. However, a smaller number of learners require intensive multidisciplinary services that integrate educational programming with behavioural, developmental, mental health, and family supports.

Across Canada, therapeutic education models have been developed to respond to these complex needs. Although models differ across jurisdictions, successful approaches typically combine educational programming with coordinated access to psychologists, occupational therapists, speech-language pathologists, behaviour specialists, child and youth care workers, mental health professionals, and family supports.

Therapeutic models can improve student engagement, reduce behavioural escalation, strengthen educator capacity, improve school safety, and support successful transitions back into less intensive learning environments when appropriate. This approach is not separate from inclusion. It is one component within a continuum of supports that matches the level of intervention to each learner's needs at a given point in time.

Adapting a Therapeutic Model for the Yukon Context

Yukon's unique geography, small schools, and obligations to Yukon First Nations require solutions that reflect local realities. The *Inclusive Education Guidelines* emphasize learner-centred planning, collaborative circles of

care, culturally responsive practice, and partnerships across education, health, families, Yukon First Nations, and community organizations.

Likewise, the 2021 Review of Inclusive and Special Education in the Yukon identified the importance of coordinated, multidisciplinary approaches, and stronger collaboration across systems.

The work YFNED is already doing is a prime example of innovative practice in this area, right here in the Yukon. Rather than looking exclusively to models developed elsewhere in Canada, future work to develop a Yukon-wide therapeutic model should look closely at the therapeutic model developed by YFNED to see how its principles, successes, and lessons learned can apply to broader approaches to supporting learners across Yukon.

Potential Benefits of a Therapeutic Model

A therapeutic model has the potential to ensure students with the most complex needs receive coordinated, individualized supports that keep them connected to their school communities as much as possible.

Students	**Educators**	**Families**	**Education System**
Improved wellbeing and engagement	Increased confidence supporting complex learners	Better coordinated services	Stronger continuum of supports
Timely access to multidisciplinary services	Increased access to specialist consultation	Greater participation in educational planning	Improved collaboration across departments and agencies
Safer and more supportive learning environments	Shared responsibility for inclusion	Clearer pathways to support	More effective use of specialist expertise
Stronger transitions between levels of support	Reduced educator isolation and burnout	Increased confidence in the education system	Improved long-term educational and wellbeing outcomes

Appendix C

Recommendation: Addressing Political Interference by Establishing a Quality Assurance Committee

Based on the specific and varied comments heard regarding political interference, the Panel recommends that the Government of Yukon:

a. Create a Quality Assurance Committee to oversee and address educational operational issues as they arise. In the meantime, communicate to all schools, school councils, school boards, parents, and communities a clear interim process for reporting concerns until the Committee is established.
b. Amend policy or the *Education Act* to ensure that the Minister of Education does not interfere with day-to-day operational decisions. This recommendation is intended to support the Minister and to ensure credibility and equity at all levels of education governance.

Interim Process

The Panel recognizes that establishing a Quality Assurance Committee may take time. Until it exists, concerns should proceed through the following levels, and the process must be clearly communicated to all schools, school councils, parents, and communities:

- Classroom teacher
- School administration
- School Board/School Council (as per the 2013 Yukon Education School Council Dispute Resolution Procedure Policy)
- Superintendent/Executive Director
- Assistant Deputy Minister (ADM)
- Deputy Minister (DM)

a. Quality Assurance Committee Role and Function

Once established, the Quality Assurance Committee would serve as an independent body to review and resolve concerns regarding educational services, processes, and administrative decisions, before they are escalated to the Education Appeal Tribunal or the Minister. The goal would be to increase credibility, strengthen trust, improve accountability, and resolve concerns as close as possible to where they occur.

The Quality Assurance Committee would not replace the Appeal Tribunal. Rather, it would provide an independent review to ensure the formal appeals process is procedurally fair, evidence-based, and consistent with legislation and policy. Research on procedural justice (Tyler, 2006), quality management (Deming, 1986; Juran, 1980), organizational learning (Senge, 2006), and Canadian administrative law (Mullan, 2021) demonstrates that this type of early quality review would improve decision quality, identify systemic issues earlier, reduce unnecessary appeals, and strengthen confidence in the integrity of the decision-making process.

In essence, a Quality Assurance Committee helps ensure procedural fairness before a decision reaches an appeal body (Mullan, 2021).

Quality Assurance Committee	Appeal Tribunal
Reviews complaints and concerns	Reviews specific decisions
Focuses on improvement and accountability	Performs a quasi-judicial role

Determines whether processes, services, and practices meet established standards	Determines whether a decision should be upheld, changed, or overturned
Reviews issues before they escalate to appeals	Hears cases after a formal decision has been made
Focuses on individual resolution and systemic improvement	Focuses on protecting the rights of the individual

Purpose of the Committee

The committee would:

- Review complaints that have not been resolved through the normal school or departmental process.
- Examine systemic issues and recurring concerns.
- Monitor compliance with legislation, policies, and standards.
- Make recommendations for corrective action.
- Ensure processes are followed fairly, appropriately, and consistently.

The committee would monitor issues, identify trends in complaints, and promote targeted improvements in practice and policy. Marzano (2003) emphasized improving educational practices to enhance student learning. Similarly, Harvey and Knight (1996) stated, "Quality assurance in education is about creating a culture of continuous improvement rather than merely complying with standards."

Examples of issues appropriate for committee review include:

- Concerns about service delivery.
- Delays in providing support to students.
- School climate issues.
- Communication breakdowns.
- Concerns regarding policy implementation.
- Allegations that procedures have not been followed.

Rather than assigning blame to individuals, the Committee would examine whether policies were clear, procedures were followed, documentation was adequate, and communication processes were followed. By monitoring issues and identifying trends in complaints, the Committee would promote improvements in practice and policy on a regular basis. This kind of systems-based approach is consistent with Deming's (1986) principles of continuous quality improvement.

Committee Membership

The committee should include:

- An independent Chair (e.g., judge, lawyer, or Ombudsperson).
- A school administrator not directly involved in the issue.
- A representative from the Yukon Association of Educational Professionals (YAEP).
- A First Nations representative nominated by Yukon First Nations.
- A parent.
- A high school student, when applicable.
- A specialist in inclusive education.

A committee composed of individuals with diverse expertise encourages input from multiple stakeholders, including educators, administrators, parents, and students. Broad representation supports a comprehensive perspective on educational quality (European Commission, 2025).

Committee members should receive training in administrative fairness and Access to Information and Protection of Privacy (ATIPP) requirements. Ongoing professional learning on topics such as administrative fairness and conflict resolution helps maintain the integrity of the quality assurance process (Darling-Hammond, 2017). Members should also sign confidentiality agreements and adhere to conflict-of-interest requirements.

Canadian administrative law emphasizes that administrative decision-makers should employ processes that are fair, transparent, accountable, and evidence-based. A pre-appeal review process demonstrates that an organization has taken reasonable steps to ensure these principles are met before litigation or formal appeals (Evans et al., 2021).

Process and Escalation Path

The proposed issue escalation process would be:

- Teacher or school-level resolution.
- Principal review.
- School Board/Council review.
- Superintendent/Executive Director review.
- Quality Assurance Committee review and recommendations.
- Recommendations provided to the appropriate authority responsible for implementation and reporting within the designated timeline.
- Appeal Tribunal.
- Minister, when policy direction or ministerial attention is required.

This process keeps the Minister focused on governance, policy, and strategic leadership and stops them from becoming the default point of contact for operational complaints. It also establishes a mechanism to strengthen public confidence, trust, and credibility throughout the education system.

b. Limiting Ministerial Involvement in Operations

Over the longer term, amendments to policy or the *Education Act* may be required to ensure that the Minister of Education does not interfere with day-to-day operational decisions.

Section 204 of the *Workers' Safety and Compensation Act* provides an example of legislative limitations on ministerial involvement in operational matters. Under a similar governance model, the Minister could establish overarching policies and issue strategic directives but would not overrule or direct routine operational decisions made at other levels of governance, except where authorized by legislation.

Appendix D

Recommendation: Separating the Dual Role of the Department of Education

The panel recommends that the Government of Yukon:

a. Physically and operationally divide the Department of Education's current roles as a ministry and school authority into two bodies with clearly defined roles, adequate staffing, and well-defined service levels.
b. Initiate the development of a school funding formula that upholds transparency, equity, and accountability.

a. Defining the Roles of the Ministry and School Authority

The Panel emphasizes the importance of clarifying all roles and responsibilities when the government moves forward with the process of creating a ministry and a school authority.

BC provides a useful reference point. Its Ministry of Education and Child Care governs B.C.'s K-12 system and childcare, providing provincial leadership, funding, and legislation. The ministry also sets curriculum standards and graduation requirements and allocates resources for inclusive education and Indigenous student success support. The ministry also creates and monitors accountability processes including student achievement. Service levels in neighbouring provinces and territories could be used as a guide when determining ministerial service levels. The Panel would like to emphasize the importance to investigate the staffing levels for a Ministry in other jurisdictions. For example, consider the B.C. Ministry staffing level as it manages 60 school districts with more than 600 000 students.

A school district (or school board) operates as the local governing body for education. It is responsible for managing schools regionally, implementing the curriculum, hiring staff, and allocating the budget it receives from a ministry based on community needs. Understanding the division of labour between these two entities provides clarity on how the education system operates. The Yukon will have to consider what elected democratic process will work for a school authority.

Key Roles and Responsibilities of BC's Education Ministry

- **Governance and Oversight (Accountability):** The Ministry directs the public and independent school systems through legislation like the *School Act*, *Independent School Act*, and *Teachers Act*.
- **Curriculum and Assessment:** It establishes policies, such as the English Language Arts curriculum, to help students develop critical thinking and literacy skills.
- **Funding and Infrastructure:** The Ministry allocates capital and operational funding, including targeted investments like the Classroom Enhancement Fund to improve school infrastructure and facilities.
- **Inclusive Education:** It manages policies and audits enrollments to ensure students with diverse abilities receive targeted support services and resources.
- **Indigenous Education:** The Ministry supports the academic success of Indigenous students and incorporates Indigenous histories and languages into the provincial curriculum.
- **Child Care Integration:** Alongside education, the Ministry manages childcare services to ensure strong, accessible, and affordable programs are available to families.

The Yukon government could explore a similar framework that incorporates territory-specific elements such as early learning and childcare, First Nations governance, and post-secondary and future skills.

Key Roles and Responsibilities of BC's School Authority (School Districts and Boards)

School districts are governed by their own corporate Board of Education comprised of five to seven locally elected School Trustees. The Board is responsible for:

- **Strategic Direction:** Establishing a multi-year strategic plan detailing local educational priorities.
- **Policy Development:** Creating and revising local district policies within provincial guidelines.
- **Budget Approval:** Reviewing and approving the annual operating budget and capital plans.
- **Executive Oversight:** Hiring, evaluating, and delegating administrative authority to the Superintendent.
- **Community Engagement:** Advocating for public education and consulting with local families, stakeholders, and Indigenous communities.
- **Final Appeals:** Hearing formal appeals from parents regarding staff decisions that significantly impact a student.

Characteristics of Effective School Districts

Marzano and Waters (2009) conducted a multi-year analysis of school districts that had strong, measurable impacts on student outcomes. They found that these districts shared five practices that had a significant, positive statistical correlation with student achievement:

- **Collaborative goal setting**: All stakeholders, including the school principals, are involved in setting and measuring goals.
- **Non-negotiable goals for achievement and instruction**: Strategies to support research-based goals and build teacher capacity to improve student achievement.
- **District alignment with goals:** The district is primarily focussed on the goals and the strategies to support them.
- **Consistent monitoring of achievement and instructional goals**: District leadership continually monitors progress to achieve the goals.
- **Resource allocation in support of the goals:** Time, money, personnel, and materials are allocated to achieve the goals and support teachers with instruction.

Refer to Appendix E for further discussion of accountability systems for the Yukon.

b. Developing a Funding Formula

The development of a funding formula is fundamental to ministry and school authority work. The Yukon must consider a variety of elements when developing their formula and considering block funding may assist in this work. A transparent and predictable formula will allow the authority and the boards to do long-term planning and ensure equity for Yukon students.

YFNED has done extensive work examining formulas used in other jurisdictions to create a starting model for the Yukon. We strongly suggest that this work be looked at with YFNED, and that block funding be considered.

The Panel suggests examining the Northwest Territories' School Funding Framework. It is a formula-based model used by the territory's Department of Education, Culture, and Employment to distribute budgets to regional education bodies for costs like staff salaries, inclusive education supports, and cultural programs. Its allocations are based on factors like student enrolment, collective agreements, and the Northern Cost Index. It is imperative that the funding formula created by the Yukon Government for the two school boards and the school authority be transparent and focused on improving achievement. It is worth nothing that certain school boards may access funding from the Federal Government which is external to the Yukon Government funding formula.

Appendix E

Recommendation: Create a Robust Accountability System

The Panel recommends:

a. Creating a robust accountability system using relevant research to lead the work of improving student achievement. This should include a process for new initiatives to be developed collaboratively between the Department, schools, First Nations, and other partners.
b. 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. The Panel will do further work with Department staff to understand whether the data currently collected helps schools and the Department make informed and actionable decisions. Data collection and analysis create information that is actionable by schools and the Department.
c. Designing 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.

a. The Need for an Accountability System

There is currently no distinct structure within the Department responsible for overseeing and driving improvements in student achievement.

In most Canadian education jurisdictions these responsibilities are clearly defined and divided. Ministries set policy and hold boards and authorities accountable for improving learner outcomes. School boards and authorities are responsible for implementing those policies, responding to local needs and gaps, and supporting schools to improve outcomes. When the Yukon government adopts the structures outlined in Appendix D, the role of accountability at the ministry level and in school boards and authorities will be clearly defined, and clear actions can be taken to ensure that all students thrive.

The Panel found that the Department currently operates with more of a ministry policy focus, which is likely a reflection of the dual role it currently plays. That focus must be addressed as roles and responsibilities are clarified. High-performing education systems demonstrate alignment across the system. Policy is connected to practice and outcomes in schools and classrooms across the jurisdiction. Building capacity and support is in place at all levels to do the work. The Yukon's system is not currently doing that.

The 2025 *Yukon Integrated Outcomes Strategy* acknowledges the challenges in the work ahead: "A critical part of improving learner outcomes will be strengthening communication among students, schools, parents, Yukon First Nations, partners, and advocates. Intensive collaboration will be needed to redesign education systems and structures to better support learners and advance the learner outcomes" (Government of Yukon, 2025, p. 14).

Considerations for an Accountability System

Developing an accountability system or framework as part of the separation of roles and responsibilities between the ministry and school authority requires the kind of communications and collaboration discussed above. Such a system would require the integration described in the *Yukon Integrated Outcome Strategy for Yukon Learners*. It must respect the shared education governance between the First Nation School Board, the

Commission Scolaire francophone du Yukon, and the two areas presently governed by the Department, and include the renewal of the policy in School Growth Plans in its processes.

Because Yukon public schools follow the BC curriculum, an accountability system or framework could leverage the province's academic competencies while localizing indicators and evidence to be reflective of Yukon's community contexts and unique educational priorities.

A K–12 accountability framework should be a structured system designed to measure, evaluate, and continuously improve student success and school performance. Effective accountability frameworks emphasize holistic student achievement, focus on continuous improvement rather than just punitive measures, have active stakeholder and First Nations engagement, apply equity and inclusion to their practices, and make evidence-based decisions that uphold transparency.

Useful reference points for how these principles are applied can be found in the:

- Collaborative roadmap for the *Framework for Enhancing Student Learning (FESL).*
- *Assurance and accountability in Alberta's K to 12 education system*, which provides an example of continuous improvement in practice.
- Appendix D reference materials, which explores potential structures for the Yukon.

b. The Role of Data in Accountability Systems

The use of both qualitative and quantitative data is essential. Data should serve not only as a record of student achievement but also the foundation for informed decision making, continuous improvement, and system accountability.

Using Data Wisely and Effectively

Effective data use extends beyond collecting numerical information. It requires thoughtful analysis that transforms data into meaningful information and the application of research to identify evidence-based practices that improve student outcomes. Data analysis also supports ongoing monitoring to determine whether implemented practices are producing the intended results.
Currently, data collection within the Yukon education system is not consistently analyzed or shared. As a result, opportunities to identify achievement gaps, understand their underlying causes, and determine effective interventions are limited. A more systematic approach to collecting, analyzing, interpreting, and communicating data would enable educators and decision makers to use tangible evidence to improve teaching, allocate resources strategically, and strengthen learner outcomes across the territory.

Data serve many purposes in a successful education system. It can be used summatively to evaluate progress at a specific moment in time, or formatively to inform decisions in classrooms, schools, and across the entire system. Both forms of assessments are necessary for understanding student progress, identifying areas of concern, and determining appropriate interventions. High performing education systems not only use data to summarize achievement but also to identify emerging challenges, guide interventions, and support continuous improvement (Edmentum, 2024).

Effective accountability systems rely on a range of evidence to understand how students are progressing. Some jurisdictions use simple, visual dashboards to track a range of holistic indicators of student success along with those from standardized assessments. BC, for example, complements its standardized assessment results with classroom performance standards in the areas of reading, writing, numeracy, social responsibility, and healthy living for grades one to nine.
Indicators included in an accountability framework should provide both leading and lagging measures of progress. Leading indicators help show which students may need additional support before they score poorly

on an assessment (Young & O'Leary, 2016). For example, reading proficiency by the end of Grade 3 is widely recognized as a critical predictor of future academic success. As discussed in Appendix B, leading indicators can help identify students who are struggling before they reach this milestone, helping connect them to timelier intervention and supports. Similarly, success in Grade 9 is strongly associated with secondary school completion, making early identification and intervention essential for students at risk of course failure.

Lagging indicators, such as graduation rates, provide information about outcomes that have already occurred. While these measures are valuable for evaluating overall system performance, they do not explain why individual students are unsuccessful. Data is meaningful only when it is analyzed, interpreted, and translated into information that supports action. Building analytical capacity across the education system is essential to improving learner outcomes.

It is important to have the right data or evidence. Increasingly systems are using data beyond the standard literacy and numeracy. Assessments must cover a range of dimensions of learning that are critical to students' overall success. A possible list of dimensions of learning, respecting Yukon First Nations' ways of knowing, being and doing, could include:

- Academic achievement.
- Physical and mental health.
- Social-emotional development.
- Engagement, creativity, and innovation (e.g., land-based learning).
- Citizenship, democracy, cultural competencies and language revitalization.

Data driven decision-making that has learners at the centre is becoming increasingly important (Leithwood, 2008). Department staff responsible for collecting, analyzing, and sharing data will have a critical role in determining the best interventions or programs to use before students fall behind. This can only be accomplished by collaborating with teachers in using appropriate data and information about their students so that the interventions, resource allocations and supports provided make a positive difference for learners.

The Panel will explore how these functions can be strengthened in upcoming discussions with Department staff. The coming transformation in the system will need expertise as new systems, structures and processes are developed to support a more responsive and accountable education system.

c. Building Staff Capacity and Developing a New Onboarding Process

The single most effective lever for sustainable school improvement is what educators know and can effectively do and teach. Fullan (2011) defines capacity building as the continuous development of collective skills, resources, and shared beliefs within an organization. In education, capacity building empowers educators to improve instructional practices, foster continuous improvement, and make deep-seated system change. Rather than relying on rigid, top-down mandates, building capacity in the Yukon's system must focus on growing the skills, collaborative networks, and data fluency needed to adapt to evolving classroom demands.

The Yukon continues to face challenges recruiting and retaining educators. Sustaining improvements over time depends on having skillful, well-supported educators and school leaders, particularly those who are new to the profession or new to the Yukon. During engagement sessions, participants told the Panel that the Department provides little support when new educators begin working in the territory. Coaching and mentoring would be crucial, especially when staff is recently hired or living in a rural or remote community and has little idea of how the system works.

Benefits of Strengthening Capacity Building and Developing a new Onboarding Process

Investing in professional capacity building, particularly for those new to the profession, has the potential to transform K-12 educational systems through several critical avenues that impact student success through interconnected strategies.

Strengthening Instructional Learning

Professional learning that enhances pedagogical knowledge, instructional organization, and differentiated teaching practices contributes directly to improved classroom Instruction and higher-quality learning experiences for students. Capacity building should move beyond reliance on isolated expert models (Darling-Hammond, as cited in Wood et al., 2026), equipping all educators with foundational competencies in inclusive education, assistive technology, and universal design for learning (CAST, 2018). This approach promotes equitable access to learning opportunities for all students while strengthening instructional capacity across the education system.

Building a Collaborative Professional Culture

Establishing strong professional learning communities enables both new and experienced educators to collaborate, share expertise, solve problems collectively, and respond effectively to changing educational priorities. Collaborative professional learning supports continuous improvement and strengthens system-wide capacity (Dufour et al,.2005).

Supporting Recruitment, Retention, and Well-Being

Understanding the cultural, historical, and community context of Yukon schools and Yukon First Nations is fundamental to establishing positive relationships with students, families, and communities. During engagement sessions, participants told the Panel that trust is built through authentic relationships and a demonstrated commitment to the well-being of Yukon children. Only then can professional expertise be fully appreciated.

Comprehensive onboarding programs, mentoring, and coaching can also reduce professional isolation and occupational stress, particularly for educators working in rural and remote communities (Ingersoll & Strong. 2011).

These supports contribute to improved staff retention and foster healthier working environments that benefit both educators and students. System-wide approaches that promote educator well-being are closely connected to positive student outcomes and sustainable school improvement (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

Working collaboratively with the YAEP to develop a comprehensive onboarding program would help ensure that educators new to Yukon feel welcomed, prepared, and supported. New teachers require assistance not only in developing effective instructional practices but also in understanding the unique social, cultural, and governance in the context of northern communities, including the shared governance relationships between Yukon First Nations and the Yukon Government.

It is important to not only refine current recruitment and hiring processes, including timelines for posting vacancies, but also to improve supervisory practices that will ensure that qualified educators receive consistent support, meaningful professional guidance, and encouragement to build long-term careers in Yukon schools.

Accountability and Responsibility

Recognizing that accountability today should be much more about collective responsibility than historic blame and shame. Doing what we know from research works and keeping in mind what accountability and responsibility mean in the work we need to do together.

While closely linked, they represent different aspects of the learning journey:

- Responsibility is about action and process, owning tasks at all levels from ministry/departments to districts, school boards and authorities, to schools, classrooms educators and learners.
- Accountability is about the results and consequences—ensuring the task was successfully completed, answering for the outcomes, and taking steps to correct course if the expected outcomes were not met (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2017).

Ultimately the work of an accountability system or framework in Yukon education may find a structural home with other initiatives like the Quality Assurance efforts suggested in Appendix C.

However, the commitment to overhaul the Yukon education system depends on the actions taken by government to make the essential structural changes that raise the bar and narrow the gap for every learner in the territory. The answer to the question of why achievement is not improving, although complex, may emerge.

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