

January 20, 2021

Nunatsiaq News editors@nunatsiaq.com

BY EMAIL ONLY

Dear Editor,

This letter is in response to the article titled, *Nunavut's language commissioner worries Inuit language will decline under Bill 25*, dated December 19, 2020 published in your paper.

I wanted to take this opportunity to address some of the misconceptions raised in the article and respond to the questions raised by the Languages Commissioner.

1. The Government of Nunavut is not required to offer instruction in Inuktut to students until 2039.

The *Education Act* introduces a phased implementation of bilingual education until 2039. This does not mean the Department of Education is not required to offer instruction in Inuktut to all students until 2039. It means the department is required to implement Inuktut language instruction in a staggered approach from now until 2039.

The new *Education Act* goes beyond this and requires that if the Minister is able to implement any of these schedules sooner than the listed deadline, then he must do so.

While it is noted at the end of the article, that the 2039 deadline does not mean Inuktut instruction is delayed for 19 more years, the initial statement made by the reporter at the beginning of the article that "beyond Grade 4, the Nunavut government isn't required to offer instruction in Inuktut to students until 2039" is misleading and inaccurate.

Additionally, it is important to note that Inuktut instruction is already happening in the schools based on requirements outlined in the current Language of Instruction models.

The *Education Act* does not propose to delay the application of the *Inuit Language Protection Act* (ILPA). Instead, it introduces a phased implementation of bilingual education in the territory to ensure the necessary elements to support quality Inuktut



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instruction – curriculum, assessments, resources, and training – are in place. These elements will ensure educators will have everything they need to effectively implement the curriculum.

The department has developed a comprehensive Language of Instruction (LOI) Implementation Plan for the development of a made-in-Nunavut curriculum for all subjects, which includes considerations for each of the above listed elements. This plan was shared during the public hearings for Bill 25 in November 2019.

The Implementation Plan, which supports the firm timelines outlined in the Schedule of the Act, is both realistic and ambitious towards our goal to graduate bilingual students who are fully fluent in the Inuit language and one of Nunavut's other official languages.

The phased timelines hold the department accountable at each grade level in a staggered approach and the increased annual reporting requirements of the Minister ensures both transparency and accountability to the public on our progress in these efforts.

2. A comprehensive review of the Bill was not conducted.

The Department of Education conducted a comprehensive review of the *Education Act* including reviewing best practices across Canada and conducting consultations in all 25 of Nunavut's communities.

The consultations that were held in fall 2018 and winter 2019 provided a platform for Nunavummiut to express their visions for education in the territory. Throughout the consultation period, the department engaged directly with hundreds of individuals, organizations, and community members. All feedback collected through the consultation process was considered while developing Bill 25. The *Education Act* is a product of the department's internal review and feedback gathered from Nunavummiut.

The department also conducted extensive consultations with our education partners such as the Coalition of Nunavut DEAs and Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated (NTI).

Bill 25 also underwent extensive review by the Standing Committee on Legislation including the first ever public hearing of a Bill by the Committee, held in November



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2019. As a department, we carefully considered the input provided by the witnesses throughout the hearings and proposed additional amendments to the Bill in response to what we heard.

At each of these stages of review, the department considered and balanced the various perspectives that were raised. This feedback was incorporated into the Bill that was passed in November 2020.

3. There is nothing to stop other Ministers from changing legislation they do not feel they are obligated to accomplish.

When any government department engages in drafting bills or amendments to bills, they must follow the Government of Nunavut's designated legislative process.

All bills and any amendments must also be brought before the Legislative Assembly of Nunavut in accordance with the Rules of the Legislative Assembly. This process ensures that government departments are accountable for the legislation and any amendments they bring forward and ensures they cannot unilaterally make changes to legislation.

The review of legislation includes reviews by the Standing Committee on Legislation and the Committee of the Whole. Both Committees consist of elected representatives whose role is to ensure that legislation passed in Nunavut meets the needs of Nunavummiut and not the just the needs of any one Minister or department.

4. The Department of Education did not abide by their obligations in the Act, so they have amended the act to avoid contravening the Act.

It is a statutory requirement to review the *Education Act* every five years. The recent amendments to the Act were made as part of that review process.

The decision to focus the amendments to the Act concerning bilingual education on Inuit Language Arts for first and second language learners is a result of careful consideration of the most effective way to prevent further language loss; encourage language retention in our schools; and to support each of the Language of Instruction models.



Though the Schedule of the Act directly addresses only the development of *Inuit Language Arts – Inuktitut as a first language; Inuit Language Arts – Inuktitut as a second language*; and *Inuit Language Arts – Inuinnaqtun,* the department has developed a comprehensive Language of Instruction Implementation Plan for the development of a made-in-Nunavut curriculum for all subjects.

The department is committed to this plan for a made-in-Nunavut curriculum and learning resources for all K-12 subjects, and we are working diligently towards our goal of a fully bilingual school system.

5. How will Inuktut instruction be implemented and rolled out?

In the article, the Commissioner raised questions regarding the implementation and rollout of Inuktut instruction. As previously mentioned, during the November 2019 public hearings on Bill 25, the department shared the comprehensive Language of Instruction Implementation Plan with the Languages Commissioner and Members of the Special Committee.

This document outlines each of the necessary steps required to implement the phased implementation of Inuktut instruction – curriculum development, assessments, resources, and training and development for staff. The document is appended for your reference.

6. What are the next steps for the *Education Act?*

Now that the Bill has passed, and the majority of the Act has come into force, work is underway on the implementation and monitoring of the Act. This includes the updating and development of the necessary regulations (Inclusive Education and Language of Instruction regulations) and the required policies, guidelines, handbooks, etc. to support staff in their revised or new roles.

The department will be engaging with NTI, the Coalition of Nunavut DEAs, and other education partners in the development of the regulations, and any associated consultations.

The department is also required to report annually to the Legislative Assembly on the status of various aspects of the Act including the status of inclusive education and



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Inuktut Language instruction. This report will be posted on the Department of Education website and accessible to the public and our education stakeholders.

Improving Nunavut's education system is a continuous effort that requires all Nunavummiut to work together towards our common goal of a fully bilingual education system. However, I believe that the amendments to the *Education Act*, together with the ongoing work of the department, are a significant step in the right direction.

In five years, we will once again have the opportunity to re-evaluate and make any necessary adjustments to this legislation. In the meantime, we have an opportunity to see the impact of the recent changes to the *Education Act*.

I look forward to working with our education partners, parents, students, and Nunavummiut on the implementation of the *Education Act*.

Sincerely,

Honourable David Joanasie Minister of Education

Cc: Kathy Okpik, Deputy Minister

Rebecca Hainnu, Associate Deputy Minister Melanie Abbott, Assistant Deputy Minister