

August 30, 2016

**Nunavut Tunngavik Inc.’s
Preliminary Comments on Chapter 3 - Inclusive Education
in the GN Department of Education’s Policy Intentions document:
“A Collection Vision”**

“We do have children with special needs and we do not have the services for them. They are discriminated against — we do not give them the proper services that they should have.”¹

– Nunavut Elder

Inclusive education is a human right. It is recognized in the UN *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*² and required under Nunavut’s *Human Rights Act*³. Inclusive education is particularly important in Nunavut, which experiences exceedingly high rates of special needs in areas such as hearing loss and fetal alcohol spectrum disorder.

The current level of inclusive education services in Nunavut is grossly inadequate, amounting to a national embarrassment. It violates the basic human rights of many Inuit students. As a consequence, many young Inuit who with the necessary support or accommodation could be expected to complete school and have bright futures, are falling through the cracks. As noted in Barbara Hall’s external review of inclusive education in Nunavut (the 2015 Hall Report):⁴

“A strong philosophical foundation based on Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit has not been fully supported by legislation, resource materials, staff development or funding. . . . Health-related assessments and services for

¹ Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, “Inuit Children with Special Needs: Perspectives of Early Childhood Educators” at p. 1. Online: <http://www.inuitknowledge.ca/sites/naasautit/files/attachments/ITK_SpecialNeeds_English.pdf>.

² UN General Assembly, *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: resolution / adopted by the General Assembly*, 24 January 2007, A/RES/61/106, at art 24.

³ S. Nu. 18. 2003, c. 12 [Nunavut *Education Act*]. Paragraph 12(1)(a) provides as follows: “No person shall, on the basis of a prohibited ground of discrimination, unless done in good faith and with reasonable justification, (a) deny to any individual or class of individuals any goods, services or facilities that are customarily available to the public.”

⁴ Barbara Hall, “Reaching and Teaching All Students – A Model to Guide the Practice of Inclusive Education in Nunavut: Final Report of the External Review of Inclusive Education” (February 2015) at 6.

the school-age population are insufficient, and in some cases (depending on the region and area of specialization) non-existent.

Improving the quality of inclusive education must be one of the Government of Nunavut's top priorities.

PART A: Summary

NTI recommends that the GN:

1. Allocate adequate financial resources on an ongoing basis to the Department of Education (DOE) to correct the inadequacies of the inclusive education system in Nunavut, in accordance with the 2015 Hall Report.
2. Hire the necessary numbers and types of specialists to facilitate the diagnosis of students with special needs and the implementation of supports.
3. Collect the necessary data on the number and needs of students with special needs in Nunavut, and have in place an electronic data management system as an immediate priority.
4. Revise the Tunit model to reflect more accurately the high number of students with special needs in Nunavut.
5. Require that the procedure to identify students with special needs include input from a specialist.
6. Stop the practice of social promotion.
7. Stop endorsing continuous progress.
8. Keep the DEAs closely involved in the oversight of the implementation of special needs education, rather than assigning that responsibility solely to principals.

9. Keep DEAs responsible for the administrative aspects of an appeal, rather than assigning that responsibility to DOE.

PART B: Discussion

1. **Allocate adequate financial resources on an ongoing basis to DOE to correct the inadequacies of the inclusive education system in Nunavut, in accordance with the 2015 Hall Report.**

NTI has heard from DOE officials that adequate financial resources have not been and are not available to the Department to address the inadequacies in inclusive education and the inequalities being visited by the inadequate system on students with special needs. The Auditor General's 2013 Report recommended that the GN conduct an external review of inclusive education, and DOE did so with the 2015 Hall Report. Since then, the Hall Report has been largely unimplemented, with only modest funding increases recently allocated to special needs students.

Implementing the Hall Report is an issue of urgent proportions that requires the immediate attention of and prioritization by the Government of Nunavut. NTI endorses and calls for prompt implementation of the Hall Report. With a few exceptions, NTI's recommendations below will not repeat those recommendations.

2. **Hire the necessary numbers and types of specialists to facilitate the diagnosis of students with special needs and the implementation of supports.**

There is currently a lack of specialists in Nunavut who are qualified to assess students with special needs. NTI recommends that the GN hire the necessary number of specialists to form multi-disciplinary (integrated services) teams to perform specialized assessments of and provide supports students with special needs for all Nunavut schools.

NTI fully supports the Hall Report's recommendation that the GN hire specialists in the following areas: student support services managers, hearing specialists, speech language therapists, vision specialists, occupational and physical therapists, emotional/behavioral specialists, educational psychologists, and Inuit language specialists, as necessary to liaise between students/parents and therapists.⁵

3. Collect the necessary data on the number and needs of students with special needs in Nunavut, and have in place an electronic data management system as an immediate priority.

Having reliable data on the number and needs of students with special needs in Nunavut is key to implementing inclusive education effectively. The GN has indicated in discussions with NTI that it intends to put in place an electronic data management system in 3 years. NTI believes that the electronic data management system is pressingly needed. As such, NTI recommends that the electronic data management be put in place sooner than that, and as an urgent priority, with more resources being allocated to this issue in order to have the system in place in a short time frame.

It goes without saying that collecting reliable data on students with special needs requires that the necessary specialists and multi-disciplinary teams be made available to provide specialized assessments to the large numbers of students requiring them in all schools throughout Nunavut.

4. Revise the Tumit model to reflect more accurately the high number of students with special needs in Nunavut.

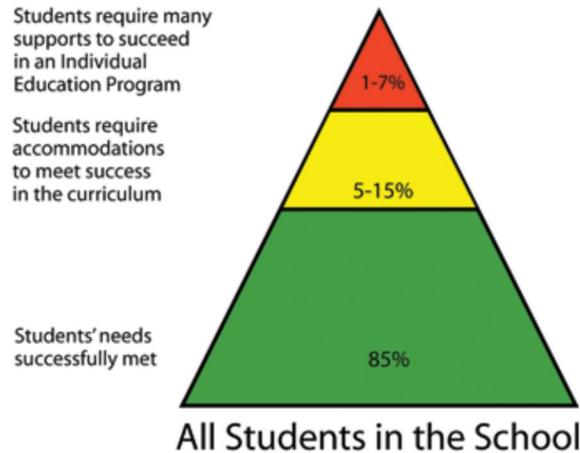
GN's current *Tumit Model of Student Support*⁶ is not based on reliable data about the number and needs of students with special needs in Nunavut. According to the model, reproduced below, which is in the shape of a triangle: 1-7% of students require many supports to succeed in an Individual Education Program, 5-

⁵ Barbara Hall, "Nunavut Inclusive Education Review: School-Based Multi-Tiered Interventions (Questions 3 and 4, Step 1)" (October 2014) at p. 9.

⁶ Nunavut Department of Education, "Inuglugijaittuq: Foundation for Inclusive Education in Nunavut Schools" (2008).

15% of students require accommodations to meet success in the curriculum, and 85% of students do not require supports or accommodations.

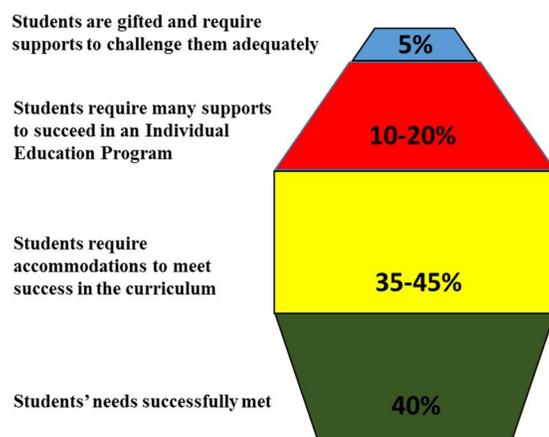
Tumit Model of Student Support



However, based on various studies and reports, as well as anecdotal evidence from teachers and parents, these percentages do not reflect the reality in Nunavut. For example, a recent news article in Nunatsiaq News (July 1, 2016 at 17) on the Arctic Inspiration prize, which was awarded to provide hearing loss amplification systems in the Qikiqtani Region, reported that there is a 40% higher incidence of hearing loss in the North than in the South, which could mean that 20% of students in a given classroom in Nunavut have significant hearing loss.

The breakdown of students with special needs may be closer to the following: 5% of students are gifted and require supports to challenge them adequately, 10-20% of students require many supports to succeed in an Individual Education Program, 35-45% of students require accommodations to meet success in the curriculum, and 40% of students do not require supports or accommodations. NTI has created the following model to reflect these numbers. The model could be referred to as the “sealskin model” due to its shape:

Reality in Nunavut



All Students in the School

Given that the Tunit model appears to be used as a basis for GN decision-making about inclusive education, NTI is concerned that incorrect assumptions in the model may prevent evidence-based decision-making about the resources and methods required to effectively implement inclusive education in Nunavut. We suggest that the GN adopt NTI's sealskin model.

5. Require that the procedure to identify students with special needs include input from a specialist.

The accurate evaluation of whether a student has special needs is a specialist skill, which should not be performed by non-specialists such as teachers alone. Currently, the *Education Act* states that students with special needs are identified on the basis of a teacher's opinion and the response is developed by the school team.⁷ The Act does not require that a specialist participate in the identification process. NTI recommends that the identification procedure prescribed by the Minister include input from a specialist, or more properly a multi-disciplinary team, when required.

⁷ Nunavut *Education Act*, ss 43(2) and ss 90(1).

6. Stop the practice of social promotion.

The practice of social promotion has done significant harm to Nunavut students by allowing them to pass from grade to grade without acquiring the necessary competencies. Ultimately, many students who have been socially promoted graduate without the skills they need to function in many employment situations, and end up worse off than students who were failed until they acquired the necessary skills to advance to the next grade level. Even more likely, socially promoted students experience serious problems with the material at around Grade 10 and drop out/are pushed out between Grades 10 and 12.

This situation is incompatible with the Inuit value of *Pilimmaksarniq*, development of skills through observation, mentoring, practice, and effort.⁸ NTI recommends that the GN stop the practice of social promotion in all schools in Nunavut.

7. Stop endorsing continuous progress.

There has been significant confusion around the concepts of continuous progress and social promotion. In practice, it appears that teachers and parents in Nunavut often see the two as synonyms, and believe that the GN endorses social promotion because it endorses continuous progress.

NTI recommends that the GN discontinue the directive on continuous progress, in order to make it clear to teachers that the GN does not endorse social promotion under any name. The concept of continuous progress should be removed from DOE's policy documents, such as the *Inuglugijaittuq: Foundation for Inclusive Education in Nunavut Schools*⁹ and the *Ilitaunnikulirniq: Foundatiuon for Dynamic Assessment as Learning in Nunavut Schools*.¹⁰

Also, principals and school staff should receive mandatory training which clarifies that social promotion should not be practiced.

⁸ Elder, Public Consultation on the proposed *Education Act* amendments (June 20, 2016), Inuksuk High School, Iqaluit.

⁹ Nunavut Department of Education, "Inuglugijaittuq: Foundation for Inclusive Education in Nunavut Schools" (2008).

¹⁰ Nunavut Department of Education, "Ilitaunnikulirniq: Foundatiuon for Dynamic Assessment as Learning in Nunavut Schools" (2008).

8. Keep DEAs closely involved in the oversight of the implementation of special needs education, rather than assigning that responsibility solely to principals.

Under the current *Education Act*, the DEAs have responsibility for overseeing the implementation of inclusive education.¹¹ The proposed *Education Act* would assign this very significant responsibility to principals alone and remove it entirely from local DEAs. As local residents, DEA members are usually persons well-known in the community who have the confidence of parents and, therefore, the ability to act as liaisons between parents and school officials with regards to children's needs. In addition, DEA members know the children, their histories and their needs, often far better than the principal does. Finally, as elected representatives, DEA members are more easily held accountable for decisions made in relation to inclusive education.

NTI recommends that the local DEAs retain first-hand responsibility in relation to special need students in their communities and implementation of individual student support plans (ISSPs), rather than assigning that responsibility solely to individuals such as principals.

While the current *Education Act* gives DEAs responsibility for the implementation of inclusive education, mechanisms and resources have not been put in place to ensure that DEAs can meet their mandate. NTI recommends that the GN increase resources to DEAs so that they can fulfill their current responsibilities to implement inclusive education and their other responsibilities.

9. Keep DEAs responsible for the administrative aspects of an appeal, rather than assigning that responsibility to the Department.

Currently, DEAs are responsible for organizing the administrative aspects of appeals of decisions made by DOE officials in relation to ISSPs. Under the DOE's policy intentions, the administrative aspects of appeals would be administered by DOE. NTI is concerned that this proposal could significantly increase DOE's role in the appeal process, with possible effects on the results. NTI recommends that the DEAs continue to be responsible for the administrative aspects of an appeal.

¹¹ Nunavut *Education Act*, s. 42.