

August 30, 2016

Nunavut Tunngavik Inc.
Further Comments on Chapter 2 - Language of Instruction in the
GN Department of Education's Policy Intentions document:
"A Collective Vision"

The Comments below include Inuit goals and objectives for the Government of Nunavut's Language of Instruction legislative and policy intentions document, as NTI understands it. NTI requests that DOE engage fully in a meaningful dialogue with NTI and respond fully on the details contained herein.

PART A: Summary

1. Nothing in the 2008 *Education Act*, Part 4, on Language of Instruction, and related regulations, should be repealed. They are basic pillars on which to build an infrastructure for strong Inuktitut Language of Instruction (LOI) in the Act, and are essential. No compelling, justifiable arguments have been advanced for repeal. Furthermore, DOE must not amend the *Inuit Language Protection Act* to downgrade the right of Inuit parents to have their children receive Inuit Language instruction. This is an Aboriginal right of the Inuit which the Legislature was right to recognize in the ILPA.
2. A vigorous Inuit Employment Plan (IEP) for Teachers and other Educational Professionals, which complies with Article 23 of the *Nunavut Agreement* needs to be completed and implemented without further delay. The requirement to do so must be enshrined in any amended legislation. The IEP should show how and when representative Inuit employment levels will be achieved.
3. Blaming the "three models" for the system's problems has not been supported by any evidence and suggests a misunderstanding of the issue on the Department's part.

4. A single model, the Qulliq model, should be seen as the default model (but with local variations for four specific communities with special circumstances), and it must be implemented properly, recognizing that the successful implementation of the model requires Inuktut-speaking teachers to be in the classroom in adequate numbers (#2 above).
5. The immediate priority must be to make the Qulliq model available in Grades K-3 in schools where it is not yet in place. Next, the model needs to be extended into the senior elementary grades (4-8). As a long-term goal, the model should be extended to grades 9-12.
6. DOE supports its policy intentions by arguing that the Nunavut Education system is underperforming, blaming the three models (addressed in our comments #3 and #4) and the lack of Inuit educators (addressed in our comment #2). However, the Department has not offered any evidentiary data supporting its conclusion. NTI requests that DOE (i) explain the absence of student assessments and similar data mandated by the 2008 *Education Act* to support its proposals; (ii) describe the evidence or information it is relying on to support its assertions of system underperformance, and (iii) respond to the suggestion, detailed below, that DOE is using informal anecdotal information provided by unspecified “partners in the school system” and “the private sector” to influence Departmental policy, rather than Inuit goals and objectives.
7. Inuktut in Nunavut is an endangered language, and valuable time has been lost through failure to fully implement the 2008 Act. The dream of Nunavut included a vision in which by 2020, Nunavut would be fully functional in Inuktut and English. NTI will support GN initiatives to achieve that dream. However, DOE’s policy intentions move in the opposite direction. They are a means of managing the limited numbers of Inuktut speaking teachers, when what is needed are bold steps to to promote and protect Inuktut as a language of instruction in Nunavut schools.

PART B: Discussion

1. The current legislative framework should remain intact.

DOE has not shared with NTI which sections of Part 4 of the 2008 *Education Act* it intends to repeal or amend, and in what way. Our assessment of Part 4 is that it provides a solid legislative framework for the promotion of Inuktitut as the foundation for LOI for Nunavut schools. There is nothing in Part 4 of the 2008 Education Act which needs repealing.

Each section of Part 4 addresses a specific aspect of the commitment to implement Inuit Language of Instruction. As a whole, Part 4 speaks to the urgent need to support the use, development and revitalization of the Inuit Language through an education system that produces fluent bilingual graduates.

Six key sections of Part 4 describe the role and mandate of the Minister (ss.25(1) and 25(2)) and were intended to ensure that DOE would develop, as a legal requirement, the following essential elements of a successful bilingual education system in which Inuktitut is a priority:

- community-specific LOI models chosen by DEAs (ss.24(1)),
- the production of learning materials (ss.25(6)),
- the development of LOI-supportive curriculum (ss.25(3)),
- culturally-appropriate language assessment (s.76),
- competency targets (ss.25(4), and
- system-wide assessments of meeting targets (ss.25.5)).

To sweep away these pillars of a strong system-wide commitment to Inuit Language education, without any justification, runs contrary to best practices in indigenous and minority-language education. NTI wants these pillars protected from amendment or repeal.

Similarly, DOE must not weaken or dilute the recognition in the *Inuit Language Protection Act* of the right of Inuit parents to have their children receive Inuit

Language instruction, an Aboriginal right of the Inuit which the Legislature was quite correct to recognize in the ILPA.

NTI's support for the existing sections of Part 4 extends to those sections which empower local District Education Authorities (DEAs). It would be counter-productive to diminish their role, as set out in the 2008 *Act*. Both common sense and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) Call to Action #10(v) ("*Enabling parental and community responsibility, control, and accountability, similar to what parents enjoy in public school systems*") require otherwise.

It would be retrogressive for the DOE not to follow the lead of the Government of Canada in its support for the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. DOE's policy intentions run counter to those Calls to Action, as well as to Sub-section 13(1) of the *Universal Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. In addition, the policy intentions violate Sub-section 32.2.1(b) of the *Nunavut Agreement*, which requires the Government of Nunavut to endeavour to reflect Inuit goals and objectives in its social and cultural policies.

2. The IEP for educational professionals must be completed and implemented.

There is one urgent element missing from the 2008 *Education Act*, and, despite the Department's acknowledgement that it is the real reason for the failure to achieve Inuktitut language of instruction, it is also missing from DOE's policy intentions: an Inuit Employment Plan (IEP) with numerical targets and timetables for putting Inuktitut-speaking educators in the classrooms at all levels. This absence is, in and of itself, an ongoing breach of Article 23 of the *Nunavut Agreement*.

The GN must begin work, without delay, on the completion and implementation of an IEP for education professionals, with robust timetables for the training and hiring of sufficient numbers of Inuit language educators to both:

- (i) inform and facilitate the delivery of the Inuit language K-12 educational program at all levels and

(ii) fulfill the GN's IEP and training obligations under Article 23 respecting educators.

As NTI has stated at our meetings with DOE, any legislative amendments to the *Education Act* and regulations must expressly recognize and support the direct link between these two requirements.

NTI has seen the implications of not including this element in the Act in the years since 2008: DOE didn't follow through on the *Qalattuq Strategy* (2006-2016), which was developed to meet the future Inuit staffing challenges of a strong bilingual education system. If the *Qalattuq Strategy* or an equivalent had been implemented, there would have been an estimated 304 more Inuit educators in the schools by 2011/2012. These numbers would have largely fulfilled the Act's objective of delivering a Qulliq model throughout the K-12 system well ahead of 2019.

In the absence of a commitment to implement a strong IEP, there was no pressure to vigorously develop the needed teacher training programs for Inuit teachers-to-be. As a result, the GN presided over eight years of zero growth in the numbers of Inuit educators in Nunavut schools. Shockingly, over the same period, the number of non-Inuit educators increased by 33%. This is the principal reason for the failure to achieve phased implementation of Inuktitut LOI, not the complexity of LOI models or variations among schools, as DOE asserts.

To this can be added the criticism levelled by the Auditor General's 2013 report, which stated that since it had no monitoring procedure, DOE had no idea how many bilingual teachers would be needed to carry out the Act, and that, in general:

"The Department has not adequately managed most aspects of implementation of the Education Act."

Further, data on DOE's bilingual staff indicate that there are almost no non-Inuit bilingual educators, leaving the small corps of Inuit teachers to deliver the educational program in Inuktitut.

Seeing as non-Inuit educators may occupy a significant portion of teaching positions for at least the next few years, and recognizing that the educational program is currently being delivered mostly through English and timelines for Inuktitut language of instruction are not being met even in Grades K-3 in most schools, it is now critical to adopt urgent measures to ensure that Inuktitut-speaking students have Inuktitut-speaking instructors they can communicate with in the classroom. To this end, NTI recommends that DOE immediately take steps to recruit a significant number of Inuit Language Specialists.

The Assistant Deputy Minister of Education told NTI in the July 2016 meeting that ideally there should be one Language Specialist in each classroom. This equates to approximately 692 Language Specialists. There are currently 76 Language Specialists employed in Nunavut. NTI recommends that GN immediately authorize the necessary funding to hire enough Language Specialists to deliver the educational program in Inuktitut, as required by law. These numbers should remain in place at least until adequate numbers of certificate, diploma and degree certified bilingual educators can be trained. An added advantage of this approach is that new Inuktitut-speaking teacher-trainees may in large part be recruited from this pool of Language Specialists.

One workable approach may be to establish, for example, 10-person Language Specialist teams for each of Nunavut's 43 schools, with DEAs actively recruiting and recommending the Language Specialist candidates from local communities.

For this effort to be successful, there will be increased responsibilities for non-Inuit teachers, and they will need to be prepared for the challenges of a system committed to widespread bilingualism, including becoming bilingual over time.

Under a Qulliq system in which large numbers of Inuit Language Specialists are present in classrooms, non-Inuit teachers will continue to be welcome in Nunavut, especially those with credentials and experience in the teaching of English as a

Second Language, or experience with bilingual education, and who are willing to receive Inuit language training and professional development to help them work as mentors to the Inuit Language Specialists assigned to their classroom.

It would appear that, despite the Auditor General's report and the obvious need for Inuktitut-speaking teachers, the degree of DOE commitment to an IEP is still a work-in-progress. Education Minister Quassa, in his letter to NTI President Cathy Towtongie (August 8, 2016) wrote:

"The development of an IEP will take some time and implementation will require several years before the full impact of the plan is achieved."

The wording of this statement implicitly acknowledges the absence of an Article 23-compliant IEP, and falls short of conveying the urgency needed. It is nonetheless encouraging that the Minister expresses his view that DOE's and NTI's concerns with respect to an IEP *"are aligned"* and that *"new initiatives to increase the number of Inuit teachers must be moved forward."* (August 8 letter).

This alignment of concerns and shared commitment to increasing the number of Inuit teachers must be reflected in the Act. Legislative text should expressly direct the Minister to develop and implement an IEP as a first-order priority, with robust targets and annual reporting on progress. And to reiterate, NTI is strongly in favour of including the necessary linkages between phased LOI implementation dates and numerical timetables for new Inuktitut-speaking educators in any amendments to the Act.

3. Blaming the LOI models is unsupported by any evidence.

There is no merit in (or evidence supporting) DOE's assertion that the "complexity" of the LOI models prevents "achieving the desired language outcomes" (DOE policy Intentions, p. 8). DOE has not offered evidence from any source, including from any assessment reports on student "desired language outcomes" in relation to Nunavut-wide competency targets (as mandated in the

2008 Act in 25(4) and (5)), or from DEAs experiencing difficulties in determining which LOI model to choose.

To the contrary, in our discussions with DOE officials, it was agreed that the Inuinnaqtun immersion model was justified in terms of local conditions in Kitikmeot and didn't represent complexity for the system as a whole. In addition, there are two programs which have adopted a version of the "dual-language model" ---in Iqaluit and Rankin --- but these are local responses to special conditions (Qallunaat minority in an Inuit majority school, with Qallunaat parents desiring bilingual proficiency for their children) and can, in fact, be seen as local versions of the Qulliq model.

At most, therefore, the alleged "complexity of the multiple LOI models" is based on a misunderstanding. It is an issue for four DEAs (two in Kitikmeot, one in Iqaluit, one in Rankin) who want to achieve Qulliq outcomes, but whose specific local circumstances require that they follow a somewhat different path to get there. This is not a system-wide problem requiring legislative remedies.

4. The Qulliq model should be the default model and it should be implemented.

There is potential for agreement in the Special Committee's endorsement of the attractiveness of "one model." If there is to be one model, it should be the Qulliq model. As stated above, the other two models are really local variations of Qulliq.

Qulliq was designed to meet the needs and expressed wishes of the large majority of Nunavut communities where Inuktitut is still widely used and children come to school with some fluency in Inuktitut, and some English as well. It builds on this home/community language foundation and supports Inuktitut as the main language of instruction through Grade 8.

Consistent with current practice in many schools, the second language (English) would not be a language of instruction until grade 4 or 5, although it may ---

subject to local DEA direction --- be introduced as a second-language subject before then. The focus in the early years is on building strength, confidence, and spoken and written proficiency in the students' mother tongue, Inuktitut, with a strong IQ-grounded curricular base.

Successful implementation requires two things: (1) supporting the Qulliq model the way it was originally designed to do (detailed below and in Appendix I); and (2) recognizing that the successful implementation of the model requires Inuktitut-speaking teachers to be in the classroom in adequate numbers (#2 above).

We must move from “transitional” (weak) bilingual education, in which Inuktitut disappears as an LOI after the early elementary grades, to “maintenance” (strong) bilingual education, in which Inuktitut remains a foundational LOI throughout the school system. This long-standing and incapacitating problem of weak bilingual education must be eradicated as a top and pressing priority.

5. Early attention must be given to implementing the Qulliq model in Grades K-3 in schools where it is not in place, and extending the Qulliq model to the remaining Grades 4-8 in other schools.

As acknowledged by DOE representatives, Inuit children who come to school speaking Inuktitut, and have Inuktitut LOI in Grades K-3, experience a jarring shock when they are forced to abruptly transition to a primarily English LOI curriculum in Grade 4. It is this weak “early-exit” system which the Department has become habituated to managing, which prevents Inuit students from becoming fully literate in either Inuktitut or English.

The 2008 *Education Act* and the Qulliq model were intended to put an end to this crippling system, but seven years after the bill's passage, still only a minority (10 of 26) of Nunavut schools offering kindergarten and the early grades are capable of delivering Inuktitut instruction from Kindergarten to Grade 3. Only 7 schools are capable of delivering Inuktitut instruction to Grade 4, and only one school

(Kugaaruk Ilihakvik) is capable of reaching Grade 5. These statistics, obtained through a request from the Office of the Languages Commissioner in June 2016, clearly demonstrate that no progress has been achieved in the last seven years to eliminate the negative impact on Inuit students of the jarring transition in their language of instruction from Inuktut to English at the end of the early elementary school years.

The Qulliq model, once it is implemented from Grades K to 8, has a common positive goal: by the time students enter high school, they should be proficient in both the Inuit Language, their mother tongue, and in English, their second language, with both languages available to serve as potential languages of instruction in high school. But to achieve these positive effects, it must be repeated, will require a serious commitment to putting Inuktut-speaking teachers in the classroom up to Grade 8 in adequate numbers. Attached as Appendix A is a detailed description of the how the Qulliq model should be applied in Grades 4-8.

One word of warning: NTI opposes a policy by which DOE, through Ministerial direction, would “backfill” schools not delivering Inuktut as LOI in K-3 by re-assigning Inuktut-speaking teachers from schools delivering K-3 or 4. Such a policy would amount to managing a continuing shortage of Inuktut-speaking teachers rather than turning the page on a decade of inaction by getting Inuktut into the schools, through Language Specialists and newly trained Inuit teachers. Only this will allow the Qulliq model to spread upward through the grades in all schools, wherever they may currently be in terms of offering Inuktut as LOI.

Extending the Qulliq model to Grades 9-12 will be a long-term priority, just as it was at the time of the 2008 Act model, eventually ensuring that Nunavut high school graduates will graduate with high proficiency in spoken and written Inuktut, as well as a satisfactory proficiency in a second language, English.

6. DOE must provide evidence supporting its policy intentions.

DOE claims that the system is underperforming (not delivering positive student outcomes) with respect to LOI, and blames the “three LOI models” and the lack of Inuktitut-speaking teachers for this underperformance. In these Comments, we have dealt with the “models” claim (in #3) and proposed a compromise (in #4). We have also proposed solutions for the lack of Inuit teachers (in #2 and #5). Only the underperformance claim remains, since much of the Department’s push to re-write the *Education Act* rests on that claim.

No solid evidence supports DOE’s underperformance claims. Were DOE to apply Qulliq across the elementary grades as its priority mission, it would eliminate the main cause of low student performance: the devastating effect on Inuit children of the jarring transition from Inuktitut to English at the end of the early elementary grades.

As well, the grounds on which DOE bases its view of system underperformance are, upon scrutiny, unreliable, and possibly skewed by special interests. The public has been offered no data to shed light on the degree and nature of this underperformance. DOE’s conclusions suggest it is relying on the existence of competency targets and some means of determining student performance in relation to these targets, which it has not shared. It is possible that southern teachers are using informal assessment not appropriate or applicable to Nunavut students. As the 2008 Act mandated, and as DOE officials acknowledge, norms, competency targets, and assessment instruments need to be developed in Nunavut.

But even without proper made-in-Nunavut assessment instruments being available – as apparently they are not - we expect DOE to cite hard data drawn from currently available student language assessments in both languages and to comment how they compare to any system-wide competency targets currently available. NTI requests that DOE provide such data, to the extent it is available.

As discussed under #1 above (p. 3), two parts of the 2008 *Education Act* specifically require language assessment in both LOIs. Sub-section 25 (4) of the *Education Act* states that “The Minister shall establish competency targets in the spoken and written forms of the LOIs” and Sub-section 25(5) requires the Minister to “ensure that students are regularly assessed to determine whether the competency targets are being achieved.” Also, Section 74 in Part 8 (Assessment of Students) deals extensively with “a program of Nunavut-wide assessments to assess the literacy of students in each LOI...”

These assessment instruments are especially important in a young system, to aid planning and policy at all levels. They are essential to provide feedback on system performance, especially where major changes to the system are proposed. In the absence of assessment, it is hard to put credence in broad statements of “underperformance.”

If the Department hasn’t developed the instruments required by the 2008 *Education Act*, NTI requests that DOE explain its decision not to do so. However, if the Department has developed alternative assessment means as the basis for its view of system underperformance, we request that this information be provided.

In his August 8 letter, Minister Quassa refers to an unexpected source of information which the Department uses to develop priorities:

[in addition to consultations with NTI] “the department has daily connections with DEAs, school staff, parents and students. This allows us to see and hear what is working and this informs our priorities for much needed improvements.”

The Minister makes no reference to language assessments, proficiency targets, literacy in each LOI, or his mandated roles under the Act. And since 78% of teachers and the majority of senior Nunavut Teachers Association representatives and DOE staff do not speak Inuktitut, it is unlikely that they are assessing Inuktitut

language competency. Rather, informally gathered “daily connections” in schools are cited, which have apparently driven DOE’s priorities, but without being referenced. This informal information-gathering has been extended, as the Minister states, to include “all our partners within our school system” and “a broad spectrum of voices.”

Who are these unidentified partners and voices? In our discussions with DOE, passing references were made to the roles of the Nunavut Teachers Association and “the private sector” in helping shape Departmental priorities. However, no written sources have yet been provided or cited from either the Nunavut Teachers Association, or any specific private sector entity with respect to its position on the working of the education system, although DOE officials did state that “the private sector is concerned that not enough students are graduating.”

To help clear up this confusion, NTI requests that the Department provide the following:

- (i) its language assessment documentation or a summary of this data,
- (ii) any other basis to support its views on system underperformance, and
- (iii) any recommendations from the NTA and the private sector which the Minister has taken into consideration with respect to proposed changes in the Education Act.

NTI has no doubt that the system is underperforming and that it is depriving the majority of Nunavut youth of the education they deserve, and specifically the education in their language and culture which, as Inuit, is their right. We offer our priority recommendations to transform the Nunavut education system into one which is performing well, and in conformity with best practices in bilingual education, with Article 23 of the *Nunavut Agreement*, with the goals of the 2006

Berger report, the 2008 *Education Act*, the *Inuit Language Protection Act* and the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.

Our priority recommendations are as follows:

- 1-Proceed with all possible urgency with the development and implementation of a vigorous IEP,
- 2-fully develop the potential of the Qulliq model throughout the junior and senior elementary grades to eliminate the jarring LOI transition.

Both of these recommendations need to be addressed in legislation.

3-As the Qulliq model spreads throughout the upper elementary years with a vigorous IEP, the system must be delivered with a degree of knowledge of, and commitment to success in an environment in which Inuit Language strengthening is a priority. System-wide made-in-Nunavut competency targets, language assessments, IQ-grounded curriculum development, and performance reports, as required by the 2008 *Education Act*, must be required in any future Act, and must be the principal feedback mechanism to provide information on “what is working and inform our priorities.”

7. The trend of decline in Inuktut must be reversed.

Inuktut is an endangered language, and has been assessed as vulnerable by the United Nations. There is accumulating evidence that every decade there has been a decline in home use of Inuktut in Nunavut, a trend which could eventually lead to the language no longer being used by younger Inuit.

The responsibility for the continued decline in Inuktut among young Inuit must rest, to some extent, with the GN and its increased hiring of unilingual English teachers (more than 110 since 2008) and its failure to implement fully the 2008 Act. By not devoting funds and programming to adequately prepare Inuktut-speaking educators, the government appears to be abandoning its commitment to strengthening Inuktut as a language of education, government and society.

More than three decades ago, the Inuit of Nunavut took the first steps toward achieving their dream of self-determination. They envisioned a territory and a public government based on the linguistic, cultural and societal values and aspirations of Inuit. With the *Education Act*, the *Official Languages Act* and the *Inuit Language Protection Act*, Nunavut moved closer to that vision, adopting legislation of unprecedented strength to promote and protect the Inuit Language. In so doing, the Government made powerful statements to ensure the survival of the Inuit Language, to reverse language loss, to counteract the dominance of English, and to facilitate the growth of Inuktitut as a living language in all sectors of Nunavut society, including the school system.

NTI supports this direction, but the GN must now go beyond words and act on its commitment to these historic goals with respect to the Inuit Language as a Language of Instruction in Nunavut schools. We are at a tipping point with respect to the Inuit Language, and cannot afford to wait another ten years for positive action from the Department of Education.

We have offered positive priority recommendations for the Department to consider. We look forward to engaging with the Department in a meaningful dialogue to address these recommendations.

Appendix I

Qullik Priorities for the Upper Elementary Grades

In keeping with the priority of moving from the current “jarring transition” experience (and consequent school drop-out rates) to a maintenance approach in which Inuktitut is used in a principled way beyond Grades 4 and 5, the following broad strokes toward setting priorities should be pursued:

- First, for Inuit students to reach their potential, their mother tongue Inuktitut must be seen as an academic language, capable of being used in the learning of academic subject matter, such as social studies, history, mathematics and science.
- Academic Inuktitut, through Qulliq, should be used in Grades 5-8 as a language of cognitive development, for critical thinking, reasoning, problem-solving, storying, and artistic creation. Indeed, such content, imbued with IQ thinking, is exemplified in the ground-breaking made-in-Nunavut curricular materials developed over the years by the Curriculum and School Services branch (C&SS) in Arviat, with the assistance of local elders. The made-in-Nunavut curriculum and learning materials already largely sketched out (and in some cases, fully prepared for use) by the C&SS Branch will need practical classroom application and field testing (including stated language competencies). This understanding of and commitment to promoting Inuktitut as an academic language in the upper elementary grades can run parallel to similar experiences in Nunavik, and no doubt curricular and learning material can be shared between the two jurisdictions.
- The role of English (taught as a second language, preferably by bilingual Inuit teachers) would be first a subject of study, following an ESL Language Arts framework, and, depending on the wishes of the local DEA, and student proficiency, it could, in the upper elementary years, become an LOI in subjects which are less cognitively-demanding than those taught through the medium of Inuktitut (*e.g.*, art, music, physical education, computer).

- The balance between the two languages should follow the principle that the language most in need of institutional support --- Inuktut ----- receives that first claim on support. To this end, the ratio of no less than 80% Inuktut support to 20% second-language English support, would be appropriate planning targets for the upper elementary years. This ratio is supported by extensive international research in similar circumstances.

As the default model for the entire Nunavut education system, broad Qulliq proficiency and curricular goals for graduates would be common for all communities. Due to special local circumstances, the common Qulliq goals will require local adjustments in a small number of communities. It is to be understood that the Inuinnaqtun-speaking communities will continue to use their Inuinnaqtun-immersion approach with a view to producing students who will graduate from Grade 8 with roughly similar Qulliq proficiency levels in Inuktut (in its Inuinnaqtun variant) as those who have graduated from a standard Qulliq school, who will be proficient in spoken and written Inuktut (in its Inuktitut variants). Also, there may be schools in which a minority of Qallunaat students are included (e.g., Iqaluit and Rankin), which will require special treatment for Inuktut to be the foundational LOI for all students, not only Inuit students.

The common Qulliq goal of all Nunavut schools by the end of elementary school years will be those set out by the Qulliq model: proficiency in both spoken and written Inuktut plus an emergent level of proficiency in English as a second language.