BEST EDUCATION STORY

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Bill to amend education act draws ample public criticism

39 of 40 letters sent to Nunavut legislature pan the proposed legislation

BETH BROWN

Out of 40 comments sent by the members of the public to the Nunavut Legislature about Bill 37 on amending Nunavut's education and Inuktitut protection act, 39 called for the proposed legislation to be dismissed.

These submissions—now public—provide insight into the May 5 decision made by the standing committee to reject Bill 37. While the committee's conclusion was made during in camera discussions, chair of the committee MLA Tom Sammurtok said consensus was based on an overwhelming lack of support for the bill.

The comments make up a document called "Submissions to Standing Committee on Legislation on Bill 37, An Act to Amend the Education Act and the Inuit Language Protection Act" that was tabled at the legislature on May 30.

They largely accuse the bill of watering down Inuit language rights, acting against the Nunavut Agreement and compromising access to educational support at a community level, among other things.

The Office of the Languages Commissioner wrote: "Amending the Inuit Languages Protection Act in the manner proposed by the Department of Education will reduce the language obligations of the Government of Nunavut. As effective transmission of the Inuit language is already critical, the Inuit language will continue to decline in use at an accelerated rate."

The bill would amend the 2008 Education Act to delay full implementation of Inuktitut language instruction in schools from 2019 to 2029, and, at that point only, require instruction for students in kindergarten to Grade 9.

Two Iqaluit parents, Jeremy Debicki and Ceporah Mearns said some students in current Inuktitut streams end up academically disadvantaged compared to their peers being instructed in English. Often when they reach Grade 9, "Inuktitut speaking students are streamed into the lowest ability classes," they wrote.

"Bill 37 will continue the trend where students in the Inuktitut streams in the elementary grades will find themselves streamed into the lowest level courses at the high school level. We do not want this segregation by race, language and class to happen to our children or any other students in our schools," said the couple.

The Coalition of Nunavut District Education Authorities is also against the bill saying, for example, that centralization suggested by the bill will make it more difficult to provide programs at a community level such as early childhood education and support for students with added learning needs.

Iqaluit Parent Bernice Clark, who gave the bill a #killbill hashtag on social media, has a son who needs educational support from the school for a medical condition. She said she is concerned that changes will make it even harder for him to get timely access to the learning tools he needs.

"How will the minister know up-to-date information with each parent? How is the minister going to know my son's accommodations are being met?" she asked.

The Cape Dorset DE also pointed out that communication was a problem w the language bill, saying c sultations were held in summer while schools w closed which meant department received feedback.

"There was also a la explanations to the re mended changes that left the DEA committees with more questions than answers," said the DEA's letter.

A Nunavut Sivuniksavut student, Justin Milton, did write in support of the bill, saying he saw requirements of the existing Education Act by 2019 as impossible to fulfill.

"One may argue that rejecting Bill 37 will preserve the Inuktut language quicker, but in my opinion, Nunavut needs work on preparation for implementing bilingual education," he said.

But James Takkiruq, another Nunavut Sivuniksavut student from Gjoa Haven, said there isn't time to wait, especially for his home region where he fears language preservation is overlooked.

"By the proposed date of 2029, there will be no masters-of-language left to help with the preservation of Inuktut in the Kitikmeot region," he said.

A York University professor said the 2008 act should be left as is even though me ... in time re

Iqalungmiut lined up June 3 at the Iqaluit mosque to receive one of 72 bags of food donat- ... packed and distributed by members of the Muslim community. Syed Asif Ali, president ... said the food donation was in response to the city's show of ... City mosque earlier this year. It is

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BETH BROWN

Nunatsiaq News

Excellent job in not only providing a balanced view of this contentious issue, but also presenting it in a manner that anyone unfamiliar with it would understand.

Features

"We're giving the students a reason to stay in school and take ownership of their education."
- David Hodges, Program Coordinator

Mikw Chiyâm arts program celebrates its ...

Active Arts

the Nation 11

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DAN ISAAC

the Nation

Wonderful feature on the power of creativity and opportunity. Well-balanced and written.

Called to action

Ontario says curriculum changes are a **path to reconciliation** with Indigenous Peoples

Photos & Story by Ben Powless

"As educators, it's **essential** learning we bring to our students what our history, what our country's history is – **the good and bad**, acknowledging the harm, but also the wonderful cultures that are there"
- Vice Principal Michelle Gauthier

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BEN POWLESS

the Nation

Excellent pairing of a national issue with localized action.

Judge: Catherine Whitnall, Reporter, Kawartha Lakes This Week, Brock Citizen, Lindsay, ON. Entries: 20