

Briefing Note

Prepared for: Chief and Council
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TOPIC:

Yukon Government (YG) Advanced Education (AE) is undertaking a review of the Student Financial Assistance (SFA) Program and entering into a consultation process.

KEY ISSUES:

1. YFNs have a vested interest in SFA but are not openly recognized as YG partners in lifelong learning. FN capacity development is critical to the effective operations of FN governance.
2. Education is a fundamental right for everyone. It is very expensive in FN northern communities because students must travel to study.
3. In most cases federal EI program criteria does not allow students to attend full-time studies. Under Yukon criteria students are NOT allowed to receive EI Benefits and the Yukon Grant.
4. FN family circumstances sometimes makes it hard for FN students to meet residency requirements for the Yukon Grant. (Students are required to complete two years of high school between Grades 8 and 12 in the Yukon Public School System to be eligible for the Yukon Grant.)

BACKGROUND:

Past TH Experience with SFA:

- TH Status Citizens were not eligible for the Yukon Grant until we assumed responsibility for the INAC PSE program. There are 5 YFNs that have not taken down PSE.
- When discussed at the Section 17 table at the time of the PSE transfer, YG officials stated “that they would have to review their policy to determine whether they would be prepared to provide the Grant to students who (post transfer) would be receiving help directly from their YFNs.

Consultation Questions:

- The SFA Consultation will be attempting to address a series of questions:

- Whether Yukon Students can receive financial assistance from both the Government of Canada and the Yukon Grant;
 - It does not appear that YG is thinking about removing funding from students receiving PSE assistance from YFNs, but this is something to watch very carefully;
- Whether students who achieve high school equivalency in the Yukon should be eligible for the Yukon Grant;
- If there should be a difference in the funding amount for students attending their post-secondary studies outside – versus within the territory;
- Student eligibility categories as defined in the Yukon SFA Act;

CONSULTATION PROCESS:

- When the SFA consultation was announced in March 2015, it appeared YG only planned public forums in Whitehorse. This would not have allowed meaningful consultation with TH; TH Communications has now arranged consultation in Dawson. June 4th 2015.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- That TH HRCT and Communications provide a summary of the issues and recommendations from this brief, including a written submission to YG AE.
- That TH Council and HRCT ensure effective representation from Council, staff and Citizens in the Community consultation meeting with YG on June 4th 2015.

Suggested Message:

1. Thank the YG Committee for coming to TH Traditional Territory and trust that their inclusion of this FN community consultation opportunity will be a first of many when it comes to addressing any life-long learning reviews;

We trust the committee will ensure the FN interests are seriously considered;

YFN should be openly recognized as YG partners in lifelong learning and in the interests of capacity development for their Citizens have a vested interest in SFA.

2. Education is a fundamental right for everyone. It a very expensive one in that most FN northern community students in the Yukon must travel to study;

At present far fewer YFN high school graduates go on to Post-Secondary Education programs than their non – FN counterparts. This imbalance needs to be corrected.

FN capacity development is critical not only to the effective operations of FN governance, but to the prosperity of the whole territory;

All FN students in Yukon should be eligible for Government of Canada and Yukon Grant assistance.

3. There should be no barriers to receiving the Yukon Grant based on EI;

Students receiving EI are typically not allowed to attend full-time studies;

There are some EI programs that allow some students to receive benefits while attending;

Yukon FN Communities experience higher employment opportunities outside the winter months. Classroom and other life-long learning opportunities requiring financial support occur over those winter months;

Continuing EI while the student is in an approved life-long learning engagement is critical to successful capacity development initiatives.

4. Students are required to complete two years of high school between Grades 8 and 12 in the Yukon Public School System to be eligible for the Yukon Grant;

This is not conducive to a select group of FN students who may drop out of high school and later in life attend Yukon College for upgrading.

5. Students need the opportunity and support to make choices on where they will receive the best education in their chosen discipline whether that be in the Yukon or outside the Territory;

Lack of suitable levels of financial support to leave the Yukon for study would simply close a door to further education for many FN students;

As well, leaving your northern community for Whitehorse to study can also be a dramatic and costly move for a student and consideration must be taken for suitable levels of financial support for study in the Territory.

6. FN students are not all living in the Yukon through circumstances that may not be of their own choice and need to be considered for funding support;

FN governments work hard to support their citizens wherever they live and considers all Citizen capacity development as an important part of their larger mandate to strengthen the FN future for generations to come;

Dependent and New Resident Student definitions should remain alongside that of Independent Student so that no one FN student is left without support.

Attached:

Minister Doug Graham Letter to the Chief - Feb 16, 2015

Deputy Minister Val Royale Letter to School Council Chairs - March 2, 2015

SFA Consultation Questions – Document not dated. Received – April 16, 2015