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Asked by: Adam Arreak Lightstone, MLA (Iqaluit-Manirajak)

**Asked of: Hon. David Joanasie, MLA
Minister of Education**

Number: 032 - 5(2)

Date: May 30, 2019

Subject: FASD in the Education System

Question 1:

Has the Minister of Education and senior personnel of the Department of Education become informed in the needs of students with FASD?

Response:

The Department of Education is aware of the needs of students with FASD and has a Division that deals with these needs

The Department of Education through the schools is constantly supporting school staff in dealing with these challenges.

The Canadian Mental Health Association states that individuals with FASD may have trouble with abstract reasoning, organization, planning, understanding or recalling a sequence of events, connecting cause and effect relationships, and/or regulating their own behaviours and emotions.

Question 2:

Does the Department of Education consider the issue of FASD in our education system a priority matter?

Response:

The Department of Education takes FASD seriously and we are always prepared to work with relevant agencies and support efforts to address it where it is identified. The Department believes in an inclusive approach, which supports all children, including children displaying difficulties associated with FASD. The priority is to ensure all students receive proper supports.

Question 3:

How many students currently have confirmed FASD?

Response:

The exact prevalence of FASD in Nunavut schools is not tracked. Diagnosis of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder is a medical diagnosis which is made by a multi-disciplinary team (typically a pediatrician, speech language pathologist and neuropsychologist) using rigid and standardized criteria. The Department of Education deals with the symptoms of FASD, regardless of diagnosis. However, the Department of Education does not collect information on the number of students diagnosed with FASD. An FASD diagnosis is very complicated and involves a multidisciplinary team of health care providers. Occasionally, the Pediatric unit of Qikiqtani General Hospital may be able to make a diagnosis, but this service is not available in the other communities.

Many families are not looking for this diagnosis for various reasons such as stigma. This is consistent with all of Canada and not just Nunavut.

Studies show that lack of concrete prevalence rates and underreporting is common in all provinces and territories for multiple reasons, including the complexity of diagnosis, misdiagnosis and stigma.

Question 4:

How many additional students have been confirmed with FASD over each of the last three fiscal years?

Response:

As indicated above, the Department of Education does not collect information on the number of students diagnosed with FASD.

Question 5:

What current supports are in place for students with FASD?

Response:

Any student displaying the symptoms of FASD, or showing difficulties with behaviour, attention, cognition or executive functioning have access to appropriate supports.

Currently when a teacher or a parent has a concern that a student needs additional adjustment or support to access the education program, the teacher or parent requests a review by the School Team.

The School Team will support the classroom teacher to meet the student's needs. This may involve building teacher capacity through collaboration and coaching, implementing an Individual Student Support Plan and/or referring the student to an education support service provider for further assessment to support in-school programming.

Question 6:

Are the current supports for students with FASD adequate to meet their needs?

Response:

The current supports that are available to students that display the symptoms of FASD are similar to supports that are available in the rest of Canada. Currently we are working with all schools and staff to ensure they are aware of supports that are available. All requests for support in School Year 2018-2019 were addressed and no request was denied.

Question 7:

Does the Department of Education intend on increasing supports for students with FASD?

Response:

The Department is constantly reassessing and updating its training to support the needs of the students. Needs assessment is gathered from many sources including school staff, parents, the community, the Departments of Health and Family Services, and education support service providers currently in our schools.

The Department has submitted two business cases for support services in the past. In 2016-17 eight PYs were approved for support services in the Student Achievement division. In 2017-18 \$850,000.00 was approved in contract services dollars to provide added support for schools with support services. The Department continues to advocate for support services.

Question 8:

Does the Department of Education provide training to teachers on how to identify suspected undiagnosed students with FASD?

- a. If so, how often is the training provided?
- b. Does the Department of Education intend on expanding this training?

Response:

Although many of our staff are aware of the symptoms of FASD, the actual diagnosis is medical diagnosis made by a multi-disciplinary team (typically a pediatrician, speech language pathologist and neuropsychologist) using rigid and standardized criteria. The Department of Education focuses on the individual needs of all children, which will also include the needs of children displaying characteristics of FASD

Question 9:

Does the Department of Education provide training to student support assistants on how to identify suspected FASD?

- a. If so, how often is the training provided?
- b. Does the Department of Education intend on expanding this training?
- c. Does the Department of Education intend on identifying FASD leads at each school to ensure FASD best practices are adhered to when signs of FASD are raised for suspected FASD or confirmed FASD in students at each school in Nunavut? (This would most likely be the SST)

Response:

As outlined in Question 5, any student displaying the symptoms of FASD, or showing difficulties with behaviour, attention, cognition or executive functioning have access to appropriate supports.

Question 10:

Does the Department of Education provide training to teachers on how to provide educative assistance for students with FASD?

- a. If so, how often is the training provided?
- b. Does the Department of Education intend on expanding this training?

Response:

Since fall 2017, our department has been able to directly provide access to education support services in the form of Occupational Therapy, Speech Language Pathology, Physiotherapy and, in some cases, Behaviour Intervention to improve programming for students who may have complex needs. This would include students with FASD, regardless of diagnosis.

Therapists visit all Nunavut schools one to two times a year to assess new referrals and follow up with previous referrals. During their visits to the schools the therapists offer staff training in three ways: 1) an in-service for the whole school staff on an issue that is relevant to that school; and 2) teachers are given training individually with respect to the student that is being assessed, quite often this information is used when developing In School Support Programs; and 3) therapists are available during the school visit or remotely to discuss general issues with teachers.

At the end of each school year, the students' reports are reviewed and training is planned around those needs. During the 2019-2020 school year, many new trainings will be added to the list of services that these education support service providers can provide.

Teachers, Student Support Teachers and Student Support Assistants often reach out to the shared mailboxes: EDUSS@gov.nu.ca and EDUstudentreferrals@gov.nu.ca. This gives the Department staff valuable information regarding training needs. The Department is able to use this information to provide training on a needs basis, both remotely through Connected North and if necessary, specific training can be offered to individual schools.

In the school year 2017-2018 Student Support Assistants gathered in four various locations across the territory to receive training in supporting students who are exhibiting difficult behaviour, including behaviour associated with FASD.

This training was again rolled-out as an optional modular training for Student Support Assistants in February 2019. For School Year 2019-2020 the Department is rolling out training for Principals, Student Support Teachers, Student Support Assistants and Illiniarvimmi Inuusilifijiit on reframing and responding to student behaviour.

Question 11:

Does the Department of Education provide training to student support assistants on how to provide educative assistance to students with FASD?

- a. If so, how often is the training provided?
- b. Does the Department of Education intend on expanding this training?

Response:

Although many of our staff are aware of the symptoms of FASD, our children are usually not diagnosed (See response to Question 3). The Department of

Education focuses its training on the individual needs of all children, which will also include the needs of children displaying characteristics of FASD.

As with teachers, student support assistants are trained to deal with many of the specialized needs of the children in our school. (See response to number 10). Student Support Assistants also receive training during the Professional Development week in February, which is continuously updated to provide relevant training.

Question 12:

Has the department considered incorporating an FASD screening process?

Response:

As outlined in Question 3, the exact prevalence of FASD in Nunavut schools is not tracked. Diagnosis of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder is a medical diagnosis which is made by a multi-disciplinary team (typically a pediatrician, speech language pathologist and neuropsychologist) using rigid and standardized criteria.

Question 13:

Has the Department of Education begun the development of a comprehensive strategy on how to address the needs of students with confirmed and unconfirmed FASD?

Response:

The Department of Education has developed strategies to address the needs of all students that require extra supports. These strategies are briefly mentioned in the response to Question 5, but specific guidelines are outlined in the In School Support Program Handbook. The Education Support Services Directive also outlines the process of requesting and receiving extra supports for students.

Question 14:

The federal government, in association with Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, has created the Child First Initiative that ensures Inuit children have access to the essential government-funded health, social and educational products, services, and supports they need when they need them. Some examples of what could be funded include:

- tutoring services;
- educational assistants;
- specialized school transportation;
- psycho-educational assessments; and

- assistive technologies and electronics

A request for a group of children with similar needs from multiple families or guardians can be submitted by a community or a service provider.

Has the Department of Education submitted a request for funding to assist Inuit children living with FASD to provide comprehensive support and accommodated learning approaches for these students?

Response:

The Department of Education is aware of the Child First Initiative and is in the process of developing a consolidated approach in informing and mobilizing parents and members of the community to access the funds. The Department is also looking into an efficient system to support proposals and its implementation that require coordination with the Department.