



**YELLOWKNIFE EDUCATION  
DISTRICT NO. 1**

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**ADMINISTRATION SCOLAIRE DE  
DISTRICT N° 1 DE YELLOWKNIFE**

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**June 12, 2020**

To all parents/ guardians and stakeholders:

**RE: Addressing the parent letter sent to Minister Simpson on June 7, 2020**

Yellowknife Education District No. 1 (YK1) would like to thank the group of parents who copied us on a letter to Education, Culture and Employment (ECE) Minister R.J. Simpson asking him to delay the demolition of École J.H. Sissons to free up more classrooms for the 2020-2021 school year.

We understand that, as parents, you only want the best for your children. At YK1, we take parent concerns very seriously. We have reviewed all guidelines issued by the Office of the Chief Public Health Officer as well as those put forth by the Workers' Safety and Compensation Commission. Based on these conditions, we are confident that our current draft plans – which have been submitted to health officials for approval – meet all recommended safety guidelines. There is currently enough space to house all of our students at École William McDonald Middle School for the duration of construction.

École William McDonald Middle School was originally built with a capacity of 484 students. With the addition of four portables, this raises that capacity to house current École J.H. Sissons students as well as Grade 6 and 7 École William McDonald Middle School students safely.

YK1 has consulted with the Department of Infrastructure to ensure that there is adequate ventilation in the school for the anticipated number of people in the building every day, which includes students and staff. There are 14 washroom stalls for female students and 14 more for male students, in addition to two washrooms for persons with disabilities. The four portables will also be equipped with washrooms.

If the demolition of Ecole J.H. Sissons was to be delayed to free up more classrooms, YK1 would still be faced with a staffing issue based on the physical distancing measures and class size limitations by which we must abide. This would require us to hire a significant number of new staff, something that would be quite challenging for our school district at this time.

## **Addressing the parent letter sent to Minister Simpson on June 7, 2020**

- On June 7, 2020, YK1 was copied on a letter from a group of concerned parents to ECE Minister R.J. Simpson. The letter asked Minister Simpson to consider delaying the demolition of École J.H. Sissons so that YK1 can free up more classrooms for the 2020-2021 school year during the COVID-19 pandemic. Schools will have to abide by increased physical distancing measures when they reopen in the fall and this letter suggests this is one way to create more space.
- École J.H. Sissons is slated to be demolished later this summer so that a brand new, state-of-the-art facility can be built in its place. The plan is for the new school to open in August 2022. In the meantime, all current École J.H. Sissons students will be housed at École William McDonald Middle School, which will become a JK-7 school for the duration of construction.
- YK1 and the Government of the Northwest Territories have worked closely on the École J.H. Sissons Project for a considerable amount of time, keeping parents informed throughout every step.
- The aforementioned parent letter was carefully considered by staff at YK1 and ECE. We understand that it stems from concerns for the health and safety of our students, which will always remain our top priority.
- We know that the COVID-19 pandemic has changed education delivery and operations significantly, but in terms of this project, YK1 has agreed to move forward as originally scheduled. We are fortunate to be getting a new school in the heart of our community.
- We have already submitted plans to ECE to reopen schools in the fall, and have considered the model for École William McDonald Middle School very carefully. We will continue to adhere to all public health recommendations issued by the Office of the Chief Public Health Officer as we plan further.
- At this point, École J.H. Sissons and École William McDonald Middle School are entirely packed up, contracts have been awarded, staffing arrangements have been made and portables are scheduled for delivery in August, among other factors that are necessary for this project to advance as scheduled.
- Although space was identified as a primary concern in the parent letter, another real challenge is providing enough staff in order to meet the physical distancing requirements outlined by the Office of the Chief Public Health Officer. Making more classrooms available requires more staff, something YK1 feels isn't appropriate during these uncertain times.