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Chair

Mr. Colin Mayes

Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development

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● (0905)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Colin Mayes (Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC)): I open this meeting of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development this Tuesday, September 19, 2006.

I want to welcome all committee members back after the summer. I'm looking forward to working together in this fall session.

I also want to welcome our witnesses, and especially all the students in the gallery who have come today. I'm sure they'll find today's meeting informative and educational.

The orders of the day are that we will have presentations from two groups, for 10 minutes each, and then we'll have questions after that. After that our committee will spend a half hour talking about planning for future committee meetings.

The witnesses we have today are as follows. From Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated we have Natan Obed, director of the social and cultural development department; Laurie Pelly, legal counsel; and Joanasie Akumalik, director of government and public relations. Our second group is from the Nunavut Sivuniksavut Program, and we have Juanita Taylor, board of directors; Morley Hanson, coordinator; Murray Angus, instructor; and Jackie Price, instructor. We want to welcome you here.

I would ask that we start with the Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated presentation for 10 minutes. Thank you very much.

Mr. Natan Obed (Director of Department of Social and Cultural Development, Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated): [*Witness speaks in Inuktitut*]

Good morning. On behalf of Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, I thank you, the chair, and the members of this committee for the invitation to present to you this morning.

Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, or NTI, represents the interests of approximately 26,000 beneficiaries of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement. It's with pleasure that we share our presentation with Nunavut Sivuniksavut, and I sincerely hope they will make the most of this opportunity to personally interact with Inuit students so often discussed only in per capita funding formulas or abstract statistics.

Since we have 30 recent Nunavut high school graduates with us today, I'll start with some perspective. In 2005, 113 Inuit graduated from grade 12 in Nunavut. If these 30 Inuit who are here today all graduated in 2005 they would represent 27% of the entire territorial graduation class. This is a territory that has one-fifth of Canada's land mass. This is a territory that has untold prospects in natural resource extraction and that has a huge future ahead of it and a huge role to play in the future of Canada.

Graduating from grade 12 in Nunavut is an exceptional achievement. Our 75% dropout rate is a full 50% higher than the Canadian national average. Again, in human terms, each one of these Inuit sitting before you graduated while three of their classmates failed or dropped out. This sobering reality brings us to the content of “The Nunavut Project”, the report tabled March 1, 2006 by conciliator Thomas Berger to the three parties of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement: the federal government, the Government of Nunavut, and Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated.

“The Nunavut Project” is not an easy read, especially the lengthy discussions regarding the educational shortfalls of Canada's newest territory, such as the aforementioned dropout rate, low literacy levels, a lack of skilled trades people, and the disastrous results of trying to educate a population in its second language with borrowed curriculum. But in “The Nunavut Project” we also find hope through near- and long-term solutions that build on best practices and on social and cultural logic that has been ignored for the better part of 50 years. Having a culturally relevant K through 12 education system, supported by fully functioning early childhood development and by post-secondary programming that functions bilingually in Inuktitut and English, is a dream worth pursuing.

Nunavut Sivuniksavut needs to be expanded and adequately funded. Summer student and internship programs need to be expanded to expose as many young Inuit as possible to the professional work environment, to provide essential context, and to help mould career aspirations that provide the incentive to pursue education. Funding that provides for career development officers allows for community members to make better and more informed decisions about their future. A graduation diploma program for mature students would provide essential skills to the majority of students or citizens of Nunavut who have attained a grade nine education or less. Increased scholarship funding would allow more Inuit to pursue post-secondary degrees.

I've just run through the major recommendations and the near-term recommendations from the Berger report, all of which are key, NTI feels, to not only the successful education of the citizens of Nunavut, but also the success of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement as a whole. “The Nunavut Project” recommendations are designed to create a healthy functioning territory without sacrificing Inuit society and culture to do so.

And now let's come back to this room for a second. Before you start adding up the dollars and delegating implementation of the recommendations to the territory—because these are educational issues—“The Nunavut Project” is not so much about territorial education as it is about the federal government's providing of funding to implement the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement. Educating Nunavummiut through a massive overhaul in the education system just happens to be the only logical way that Thomas Berger saw to proceed to implement the largest land claim agreement in Canada's history. But the Nunavut project is not the only project going on in Nunavut, and it is not the only idea that is happening. There are many initiatives in Nunavut being undertaken now that will attempt to solve the issues discussed in “The Nunavut Project”.

● (0910)

NTI and the GN are currently undertaking many initiatives that focus on improving educational outcomes in Nunavut. Three legislative acts are currently being developed. An education act, an official languages act, and an Inuktituk protection act will provide the framework for Inuit in Nunavut to live and learn in a way that respects, protects, and promotes our language and culture.

A Nunavut adult learning strategy will be tabled in the Nunavut legislature this fall. A cultural school initiative based loosely on the European folk school model, called Piqqusilirivvik Cultural School, is being developed to deliver curriculum in relation to Inuit traditions, values, and skills. A trades school is being built in Rankin Inlet.

In these initiatives in Nunavut, federal funds have been essential for delivering the success and the realization of these projects. Federal funding for the trades school and the Piqqusilirivvik initiative have been crucial in their evolution from proposals to realities.

Federal funding through the HRSDC aboriginal human resource development agreements have provided access to post-secondary opportunities for thousands of Inuit in Nunavut. Federal funding through Heritage Canada's urban multi-purpose youth centre initiative and aboriginal languages initiative have helped Inuit stay connected with their culture and language through language camps, curriculum development, and other Inuit-specific initiatives.

These are just a few examples of how the federal government plays a role in educating Inuit in Nunavut, but none of the federal funding allocated to Nunavut is ever consistent or safe. The cultural school initiative and the trades school are a result of one-time northern strategy funding.

The aboriginal human resource development strategy in its second phase is scheduled to end in 2009. Heritage Canada unilaterally slashed Inuit urban multi-purpose aboriginal youth centre funding by 30% in 2006 and 2007. And the aboriginal languages initiative is now three years overdue to be replaced by its successor, which is currently being called the first nations and Inuit language initiative. In short, federal programs supporting the formal, cultural, and linguistic development of Inuit in Nunavut are constantly in danger of being terminated, but they are always welcome and always appreciated by the recipients in Nunavut when funds are given.

In reviewing evidence from the standing committee's proceedings in the first session of the 39th Parliament, it seems much time was spent discussing the merits and validity of the Kelowna Accord. I will only briefly add to the discussion. NTI supports the committee's Standing Order 108(2), which recommends the implementation of the Kelowna Accord, and NTI is especially eager to see a national Inuit education resource and research centre developed to help support curriculum development in Nunavut and across Inuit Nunaat, the Inuit homeland in Canada.

NTI asks the standing committee to consider the following recommendations.

First, that you invite Judge Thomas Berger to provide evidence to the standing committee regarding the Nunavut project report. He is in a much better position to talk about his report than even I am, even though NTI can speak at length about its policy issues and why it supports the Nunavut project.

Second, that the committee table the entire Nunavut project in Parliament and also as a committee recommend that all recommendations identified in the Nunavut project be implemented.

● (0915)

Third, that the committee recommend a thorough review of all federal expenditures for aboriginal post-secondary education to ensure that Inuit receive a proportionate share of funding allocated for aboriginal students.

Too many times we hear of very low percentages of Inuit accessing federally funded aboriginal post-secondary programs. We are a small part of Canada's aboriginal population, but we are a deserving part of the aboriginal population in Canada. Funding that's allocated for all aboriginal people should be accessed by all aboriginal people, equally and effectively.

In conclusion, it will take an extraordinary effort to implement the Nunavut land claims agreement by all parties, but for Canada's sake, and for the sake of those sitting here today, we hope that extraordinary effort does not mean impossible effort.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Obed.

We'll move on now to the Nunavut Sivuniksavut program.

Juanita Taylor, are you going to give the presentation?

Ms. Juanita Taylor (Board of Directors, Nunavut Sivuniksavut Program): Good morning. My name is Juanita Taylor. I'm an executive member of the board for the Nunavut Sivuniksavut program. I'm also an alumni of the program, having graduated back in 1997.

Since graduating, I have been employed in various Inuit organizations, including Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, whom you've just heard from. There I was manager of the enrolment department, overseeing the list of beneficiaries. Most recently I was assistant director with the implementation department.

On behalf of the students, the board, and the staff of the Nunavut Sivuniksavut program, I'd like to thank you for this opportunity to speak with you today. I'd also like to thank our member of Parliament, Nancy Karetak-Lindell, for her support in arranging our appearance.

Nunavut Sivuniksavut means “Our land is our future”. It was started in 1985 to give Inuit youth a way to learn about land claims so that they would be available to help with its implementation when the time came. It has since evolved into a more general transition-year program for Inuit youth from Nunavut, helping them bridge the gap between high school and either college or university or the workforce. It's affiliated with Algonquin College here in Ottawa, and its courses are all accredited by Algonquin.

In 1999 Nunavut Sivuniksavut became incorporated as a non-profit charitable organization. It's governed by a board of nine directors, eight of whom are Inuit and eight of whom reside in Nunavut.

The NS program provides Inuit youth from Nunavut with a unique combination of life experience and academic and skills training, all centred around the study of their own history, culture, politics, and the land claims agreement. This is not something that young people can find in Nunavut.

We currently accept 22 students into our first year, although three times that many apply to get in. We also accept up to 10 students in the second year, which is devoted more specifically to preparing for university. Students in the first year take courses in Inuit history, Inuit organizations, Inuit politics, and an entire course on the Nunavut land claims agreement. In addition, they develop their academic and workplace-related skills in courses such as Inuktitut, English, and computers.

Students in the second year take courses that deepen their knowledge of Inuit issues in Canada and the circumpolar world. Some of these courses are university-level, taken at the University of Ottawa, Carleton University, and the University of the Arctic. During their eight months in Ottawa, students also acquire invaluable life experiences by living on their own for the first time, and by learning more about southern Canada.

When students graduate, they leave with the skills and the confidence they need to be able to live anywhere else in order to pursue work or further post-secondary opportunities. With the exception of those who come back south to pursue further post-secondary education, virtually all of our students return to Nunavut immediately after graduating, and pursue careers. They're all contributing positively to Nunavut's development.

I'll pass it on to Morley.

● (0920)

Mr. Morley Hanson (Coordinator, Nunavut Sivuniksavut Program): I'd like to tell you about some of the results of the program.

One, in perspective, Nunavut Sivuniksavut is the only program of its kind, not only in Nunavut but in Canada. There is no other program like it. To date, about 270 young people have benefited from the experience. It's a small program with a long history. It has remained quite small, but there are 270 young people out there now, slowing getting involved in Nunavut society.

In 2005 we did a survey of 180 of those graduates. We contacted them to do a survey of what their employment and academic history had been since they left the program. Of those 180 we contacted, 40% were working within government, either federal, territorial or municipal; 19% were working in the private sector; 15% were furthering their studies in post-secondary education; and another 19% were working for Inuit organizations. Of those 180, only four were unemployed.

Those are some workforce statistics on young people's participation once they've taken the program. But it's important to look at what's behind that. Why is it that they are so involved and so active in the workforce once they leave? It has to do with the impact of the program on individuals.

You can measure the success of a program in many ways. One is through statistics that come from workforce activity. The other, though, is more qualitative—the impact on young people themselves, the individuals.

Students come away with a knowledge of their place in Canada. They've learned their story, they've learned their history. They've learned what their ancestors, in generations before them, have gone through to get to the point where they are today, and they understand why things are they way they are today. They understand where the cultural, social, and economic reality of Nunavut has come from, and all importantly, the political reality. So they have knowledge of that. They've developed some unique academic and independent living skills, which gives them some confidence to move further.

But perhaps most importantly, they've developed some strong positive attitudes about themselves as Inuit, and this is what we've found to be the most important impact of the program. Students move away from the program with increased pride in who they are, increased respect for their culture, their society, and their people. They develop confidence in themselves. They're enthusiastic and they're strongly committed to the future of Nunavut and to being involved in it.

It's these understandings and attitudes that lead them to be so active in the workforce.

With these sorts of results, the program has garnered a high degree of support within Nunavut society. It's virtually unknown in the south, but within Nunavut society it's becoming more and more known. This support is measured in various ways.

One is among parents. Some families have encouraged two or three of their children to come to NS. We have teachers who are steering graduates in some communities to come to the NS program, and of course the graduates themselves are going home and telling other young people, their peers, that this is an experience that's worthwhile.

Political leaders, employers, and government officials have noted the positive qualities of graduates, and this has increased their commitment to the program. In fact, it's only through the support of people in Nunavut, political leaders and government officials, that the program still exists today.

Nunavut Sivuniksavut is not an institution with core funding, it's not an institution that can be taken for granted. There is only one organization that provides annual funding, and that annual funding is about 10%. All other funds must be sought out each and every year, which you can appreciate brings a certain amount of complication to planning for the future, for meeting any growing needs, and for developing and improving the program. Of the funds that come to the organization, 70% are through Nunavut territorial organizations —Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated and the training arms of the three regional Inuit associations. Up to 20% of the program's funding each year may come from Indian and Northern Affairs Canada through the university and college entrance program funding that is allocated to Nunavut.

That's some background on the results and the position of the program financially. Although it has existed for 22 years, it's still in a very precarious position. Now we're looking to the future and trying to decide where to go from here.

● (0925)

Ms. Juanita Taylor: Needless to say, this year the search for funding is taking a lot of the staff's time and energy, and you can appreciate the level of frustration they go through, too, during peaks of the year. It makes it difficult to plan for long-term training programs and improvements and to address the growing demands of the program, because as Morley mentioned earlier, it's a very popular program with the Inuit youth. More and more students are applying to take this program, which is offered only down here in Ottawa. It's not offered in Nunavut to the extent that it's offered here, so it's very limited. As its popularity is growing year by year, there's more need for corporate and stable funding, and this need is being addressed now. We're looking for ways of doing that.

While there is currently a strong level of support from funders, several have indicated to us that they're reaching the limits of what they are able to contribute. In essence, the program has reached a plateau in what it's able to deliver. If NS is to continue to make a contribution to Inuit youth and to the development of Inuit society, stable, long-term funding needs to be found.

This predicament was highlighted within the recent report by Mr. Thomas Berger regarding the implementation of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement. In his assessment of the role of education in Nunavut and the current state of affairs regarding education, Mr. Berger highlighted Nunavut Sivuniksavut as a unique success story with a vital role to play. I'd like to cite some of Mr. Berger's comments regarding Nunavut Sivuniksavut.

He says,

> For me, the spirit of Nunavut—and its future—is exemplified by the students and graduates of the Nunavut Sivuniksavut program. There, in an unremarkable building in Ottawa's Byward Market district...the graduates of NS have for 20 years been going on to become leaders in business, government, education, and the arts. On a shoestring budget, thousands of kilometers from their home communities, they support one another, and they show us what can be done.

In Mr. Berger's report, he lists a number of short-term and long-term recommendations. In the short term it is recommended that Nunavut Sivuniksavut be given core funding to continue its curriculum and to expand the program, which is greatly needed. We are repeating that recommendation to you, the standing committee, this morning.

Did you want to close?

● (0930)

Mr. Morley Hanson: Okay.

If we had one recommendation to make to the committee, we would appreciate that the program be viewed in accordance with Thomas Berger's report and that the recommendations put forth by Mr. Berger be acted upon. That report and the recommendations it contains say it all for the program.

In closing, then, we'd like to extend a formal invitation to any of you to come down and actually visit the institution, the school. It's only a 10-minute walk from here. You're welcome at any time, and you can come in and give a presentation on your role to the students. You could talk with the students and learn more about Nunavut, about Inuit society, and about the challenges of post-secondary education. If you come at the right time of day, you might even get some *tuktu* and *muktuk*.

Thank you.

Ms. Juanita Taylor: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you for the presentation and for the invitation to visit the school.

We're going to start our question time now, and for the committee members, it's going to be the same order.

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Ms. Karetak-Lindell will lead off.

The Chair: Madam Karetak-Lindell, go ahead, please.

Ms. Nancy Karetak-Lindell (Nunavut, Lib.): Thank you.

[*Member speaks in Inuktitut*]

Thank you very much for coming. I welcome all the students here. I think it's a great way to start our fall session, going right into hearing from the people who are most affected by our lack of educational support for Nunavut.

I very much welcomed the report when it came out, because I think it solidified what all of us from different sectors have been saying, that we need to do something radically different. We have to acknowledge that what we have done for the last 40 or 50 years has not produced the numbers that we think we should be seeing from our young people, so they reach the right levels of education that the rest of Canada sees. It's always so hard to separate one from another—our land claims agreement, our language and culture protection, seeing education opportunities at the same level as what other students in Canada have. So I really would like to see this implemented just as much as you would.

Going back to questions, I have a very simple question. If you were able to get the funding that is recommended in the report and get base funding, what would you do more than what you are doing now on a shoestring budget? Again, I have to say that this program, for the benefit of listeners and our committee members, has done more for educating young people in Nunavut with very little money. Imagine what they could do if they had base funding.

My question is very simple: what would you see? Would it be more within Ottawa? Would you see other centres in the rest of Canada, more pan-Canadian? Would you see something in Nunavut that bridges to this? What would be your vision of NS with that core funding, more than what you are doing now?

Thank you.

● (0935)

Mr. Morley Hanson: As for a vision for the future, it takes a critical mass of young people to develop the idea that going on to university and college is a possibility, for young people who are coming up through the public high school system in Nunavut to realize that there are other young people progressing, and that this becomes a natural path to take. Right now it's not a natural path. As Natan said, the young people here are exceptional within their schools back home.

To develop that critical mass, Juanita mentioned earlier in her presentation that three times as many students apply for the program as we are able to accept. So in the immediate term, we would expand the program and double the first-year intake. That would then provide a greater number of students who would be seeking further education. The second-year program would increase. So rather than the 29 students we have today plus the seven or eight students who are attending post-secondary and count as former graduates, we could see eventually 50 or 60 young people down here. That would develop some momentum and some ideas for young people coming up through the system.

That would be an immediate step, to expand what we're doing right now. It would take some preparation and some time to develop materials and develop structures. This is not something you can just go and hire somebody from a teachers' college for.

Going beyond that, there is significant interest in other Inuit regions among young people for a program like Nunavut Sivuniksavut. Although we don't have specific plans for where that might go, we could easily see the program bringing in young people from Nunavik, from Labrador, and even from the Inuvialuit regions. But those are more long term.

We could also see developing partnerships with institutions in the north where, perhaps through distance education and alternative delivery methods, students who do not choose to travel south would still have access to the material. We have already developed materials and shared them with Arctic College for specific programs they offer from time to time. We would be able to do more of that, so we would become more of an education and training centre. Ottawa has become a logical place for that to happen. The transportation links are very good, and as you said, as more students come here, they attract more, and it simply snowballs from that.

That's what our plan would be.

Ms. Nancy Karetak-Lindell: Thank you.

I'm very struck by what you said. For me, it's something that I hear all the time, but I think it would be good to make sure that everyone here understands that it is not a normal course for our students to think post-secondary, especially university. Down south, when people enter high school they think about what university they want to go to, because that's the average talk around the other students, or their parents are alumni of Queen's University, or whatever. The conversation starts from the time children are born. There's an education fund for children so that they can go to university. It's a normal thought process that starts when a child is entering this world. With education funds and throughout high school, people are thinking about and absorbing the thought of going to university.

We just don't have that. Perhaps that's something the NTI could also comment on. My colleagues will vouch for me that when I talk about what Nunavut needs, it's the basics. We're not right at a level playing field yet. I think part of our barrier is that the thought process is not quite there in terms of thinking of a long-term education plan for our children. I know that's changing, but very slowly.

Maybe NTI can add to that, on why that is such a challenge for us too.

● (0940)

Mr. Natan Obed: NTI recently co-chaired development of the Nunavut adult learning strategy, which will be tabled this fall, as I previously mentioned. As you read through the document, one thing strikes you: when you think of adult learning, often you think of post-secondary—maybe trades training, or maybe college, or maybe even four-year university—but in Nunavut, we're going to spend the first five years of the strategy ensuring that the citizens of our territory get basic literacy skills. This will be basic upgrading so that more than 50% of our population can have a grade 10 or grade 11 education or the equivalency of that, so that the majority of our population can become literate.

That's why, when we were discussing what to present here for you in terms of your request on post-secondary, we decided it must go hand in hand with the reality of the situation that Nunavut is in right now. The way we have chosen to lobby is to not leave behind those people who have not graduated, to ensure that the majority of the population can function within Canadian society better than they do today.

That's the main focus of the first five years of our adult learning strategy.

The Chair: Thank you.

We move on now to the Bloc, with Mr. Lemay, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Thank you for joining us today. Your remarks were extremely interesting.

I'll give you some time to adjust to the interpretation. I understood your remarks in English, but I'm sure it's difficult for you to understand my French.

I'm impressed and disappointed at the same time. I'm impressed by the work your two agencies are doing. My colleague to my left, Yvon Lévesque, represents all of northern Quebec. He may have some questions for you later.

As for being disappointed, I have a relatively simple question for you. Supposing a member of your community manages to complete his secondary studies — something that is not always a given — and wishes to pursue some post-secondary studies — we are discussing post-secondary education, after all — and attend university. What would this decision involve? Would that individual have to leave the community? If that person wished to study medicine in order to help his people, would he be forced to spend five, six, seven, eight or ten years away from home, at the risk of never returning?

In an ideal world, could we possibly go one step further and establish, or help to establish, an Inuit university so that your people can remain in their community or could we provide an incentive of some kind for them to return? I don't know if I'm making myself clear. I hope I haven't gone on too long and that you've managed to get the gist of my question.

[*English*]

Mr. Natan Obed: Thank you for your question.

Nunavut is home to one post-secondary institution, and that's Nunavut Arctic College. It has a couple of main branches, but there also are programs delivered across a number of communities in Nunavut. There are some great successes at Nunavut Arctic College. The Nunavut teacher education program provides some much-needed help to Inuit teachers in Nunavut schools. There was recently a program with McGill University, the Akitsiraq law program, that was the first of its kind in Nunavut. We hope that it will be a benchmark for post-secondary education delivered within the territory.

Unfortunately, the costs associated with running a university, along with the lack of human resources and physical resources it would take to operate such a facility in Nunavut, have led us to pursue different paths at present. That isn't to say that in the long term we wouldn't like to have a four-year university program delivered in Nunavut, but right now we're pursuing other things.

For the first time ever, there will be a trades school based in Nunavut. For the first time ever, Inuit in Nunavut will not have to leave their territory to become journeypeople, to become apprentices. That is a huge step forward for us.

So we are taking steps, but a four-year university in Nunavut is not one that we feel we'd like to pursue at the moment.

● (0945)

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, please, Mr. Lévesque.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Lévesque (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): In Nunavik, which is very close to where you live, to pursue post-secondary studies, a person must first graduate from secondary school. Before that can happen, children need to attend primary schools. Are there enough adequate primary schools to accommodate the student population? Do enough children attend primary school and go on to high school?

After high school, there are post-secondary studies and university as options. At present, you have agreements in place with Algonquin College. Students seem to benefit from this institution's programming. With additional funding, could Algonquin College offer courses in Nunavut or in neighbouring communities? Students would then be able to remain with their families while attending classes. This arrangement would probably be an incentive to them to go further in life.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Lévesque, could you give Mr. Obed a chance to answer this, because you're running out of time.

Mr. Obed, go ahead, please.

Mr. Natan Obed: I'd like to defer and ask if there is somebody who can speak more on a first-person level to the question.

Mr. Morley Hanson: This is highly irregular, but we have another staff person from NS here who is a former primary school principal, and he could certainly answer the first part of your question.

With regard to the second part of the question, whether Algonquin College could deliver courses, there already is an Arctic College that has expertise and could develop more expertise and deliver programs in many communities, which it does in a decentralized fashion, but there is also the question of numbers. You have only a certain number of students available for all of the programs that you might want to create, so if there were people who aspired to, say, professional activities, there would be no way a program could be started in Nunavut, unless it was specifically for a short period of time, such as that offered through the Akitsiraq Law School, or the nursing program that has been developed. But we're still talking about numbers of people available to take the programs. That's why initiatives in education are so important, both in the primary system and in the secondary system.

Could I ask somebody else to answer the first part of the question?

● (0950)

The Chair: Could our witness identify himself so that we can have that on record, please?

Mr. David Serkoak (Instructor, Nunavut Sivuniksavut Program): If you don't mind, could you repeat the question please?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Lévesque: Overall, are there enough primary schools in your communities? Are there enough spaces to accommodate all students who want to attend?

[*English*]

Mr. David Serkoak: I can talk only about my own experience in two or three communities in which I worked in the past 20 or 25 years.

Looking at primary education, it varies from community to community. I'm using Iqaluit as an example. A large portion were coming into the primary system, let's say at kindergarten, and a certain number would exit at the end. Looking at the grades in between, at K to 5, the attendance is fair to good, in some places very good, depending on your location, the makeup of the community, and how you run your programs. Attendance is based on your commitment to the community and your role as a school in the community.

Yes, a good number of students coming in at the primary level exit grade 5 in fair to good numbers, and beyond that, I may not have the right numbers. If I gave specific numbers, I would just be guessing. I would like to emphasize some of the good students that also come out at the grade 12 level and go on to other programs at NS, Arctic College, or other colleges across Canada. For example, in the last year, you could find the kids coming out of high school in Iqaluit, for example, in colleges across Canada and also in various universities across Canada—many in this group here.

Yes, at the primary end, from my own experience I can say that the space and the lack of personnel are always problems. I'd like to see more Inuit teaching in Inuktitut across Nunavut. I think we are moving towards that, but there's lots to be done.

The Chair: Thank you. Could you identify yourself, sir, please, so we can have it on the record?

Mr. David Serkoak: My name is David Serkoak. I am an instructor at Nunavut Sivuniksavut.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll move on to Madam Crowder, please.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank you for coming before the committee today.

I wonder if we could introduce the two people who weren't introduced at the beginning.

Ms. Mishael Gordon (Student, Nunavut Sivuniksavut Program): I'm Mishael Gordon, a second-year student with the Nunavut Sivuniksavut program. I'm from Iqaluit, Nunavut.

Mr. Tommy Akulukjuk (Alumni, Nunavut Sivuniksavut Program): I'm Tommy Akulukjuk, an alumnus of the Nunavut Sivuniksavut program.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Welcome.

Of course, I have many questions, and committee members will know that.

I would like to start with centring this discussion. I think it's a point that often gets missed. I have the PricewaterhouseCoopers report that just recently came out. It reminded all of us about the objectives of the NLCA, the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement, which is I think why we're having this discussion around education. Just as a reminder, part of it was to encourage self-reliance in the cultural and social well-being of Inuit. It seems to me that education fits within that objective of the land claims agreement.

My question then becomes, if there was a commitment in the land claims agreement—and Mr. Berger was very clear, from what I understand, in his report that education was an essential part of the land claims agreement—has anybody done an analysis of what it will cost Nunavut if investment in education is not adequate to meet the needs of the people? I'm thinking about what the cost will be in the justice system, the welfare system, and the health care system if adequate investment in education hasn't been made.

● (0955)

Ms. Laurie Pelly (Legal Counsel, Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated): Thank you.

I can respond to that question in terms of what Mr. Berger has found and what PricewaterhouseCoopers found in its analysis of the cost if the bilingual education system in Nunavut is not established in a successful way. What he reported is that there will be a net dollar cost to the Government of Canada of approximately $137 million per year as of 2003. Those costs include $72 million in lost Inuit salary and wages, as well as a cost to the Government of Canada in terms of recruiting, hiring, and training southern employees to come north and run the Government of Nunavut, and also an estimated cost in social assistance payments and effective tax revenue flowing back to the government.

Ms. Jean Crowder: That does not include the human cost to people in terms of their quality of life. I just want to add that.

I'm not sure who would want to answer this question. We've been talking about the cost of running your organization, your college, in Ottawa. I spoke to colleges in northern Ontario this year that have a significant number of aboriginal students. They told me that the cost of running the programs and all of the issues you've identified was one thing, but the second issue was the cost for students to actually attend, how seriously underfunded they were, and how there was a lack of recognition of different family circumstances. Many students are older or may have children, or there are other issues in terms of transportation to return home if there's an important event that they need to go home for.

Can you talk about the difference between what the college gets for funding versus how the students are funded?

Mr. Murray Angus (Instructor, Nunavut Sivuniksavut Program): The NS program is funded, as was mentioned, from about six different sources that we have to raise every year, only one of which is automatic.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Does that funding pay for the students? Does that cover student costs?

Mr. Murray Angus: The funding we raise is separate from the funding students derive from the Government of Nunavut.

Ms. Jean Crowder: That's what I was trying to get at. Where is the money coming from for the students?

Mr. Murray Angus: It comes from the Government of Nunavut under their financial assistance for Nunavut's students program. It's automatic because they're enrolled in an accredited post-secondary program while they're at NS. It amounts to about $825 a month for living expenses, air fare for two return trips a year, and an allowance for books. The money we raise in the program is raised to supplement that, to the tune of perhaps $300 a month maximum, and that amount is based on attendance.

Ms. Jean Crowder: So you're raising money to subsidize the students attending.

Mr. Murray Angus: To supplement, yes.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Because there isn't enough funding for that.

Do I have time left?

The Chair: Yes, you do.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Back to the funding for the college itself, you touched on it briefly, but I actually worked in a university college, so I have some sympathy for the challenges. So you're funded on an annual basis by your own fundraising efforts, which means that you have limited funds for curriculum development and additional program development, which probably means that you have very little funding to do training for your own instructors, so there's no professional development for your instructors, which I also assume means that you have very little money to do extracurricular projects for the students. Is that an accurate assessment?

● (1000)

Mr. Murray Angus: Mostly. The issue of development of the program is that we're at a stage in the history of the program—we're in our 22nd year. The demand has been so high for such a sustained period of time, but our capacity to prepare the organization internally to meet that demand is that we just don't have that capacity because our funding sources that we raise money from every year have more or less maxed out. They're giving us all they can, but they've reached their limit. And because that funding is year to year, we can't presume next year's amount. We can't safely invest in new staff because it takes a couple of years for anybody to come on stream and really be well versed on what it is we do in this rather unique operation. David Serkoak, who was sitting here a minute ago, has just begun, but he's on a secondment arrangement with the Government of Nunavut. This is a wonderful arrangement for us, because we can't predict our own funding, but he's still on their salary and we're sharing the cost.

Our ability to develop staff is a real critical issue right now because that's going to be critical in our ability to meet that demand. You know, there are 60 people applying and we have only 22 spots, and it's been like that for years. We can't move unless we have a more secure and more sizeable base of funding that we can plan on for several years ahead. That's our core issue.

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Crowder.

Before we go to the government questions, the Pricewaterhouse-Coopers report you have, what is the official name of that report?

Ms. Jean Crowder: It is the "Second Independent Five Year Review of Implementation of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement, Final Report", May 11, 2006, prepared by PricewaterhouseCoopers.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

To the government side, Mr. Bruinooge.

Mr. Rod Bruinooge (Winnipeg South, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank all of you for coming out this morning. I really appreciate your people and your land. It's a beautiful territory. I've only been there once, but I very much enjoyed it while I was there.

I have to definitely pay tribute to the work of Nunavut Sivuniksavut. I think I said that okay. How an organization like yours works without funding and without really knowing where your next dollar is coming from takes a lot of entrepreneurial spirit and a lot of energy and innovative thinking. It's a good thing; it's a really good thing, because you clearly are passionate about the work you're doing and you're not going to let anything get in your way in order to achieve your goals. I personally am very impressed by that. So I just wanted to pass that along.

Perhaps this is for both organizations. I wanted to talk a bit about the rate of return you're seeing to Nunavut, in terms of people who are educated in the south. Do you have any tracking of the rate of return to jobs in the north?

Mr. Morley Hanson: It's virtually 100%. People are not interested in relocating to the south, to live here, with the exception of students who stay to go on to other post-secondary programs. And this also refers to a question that Mr. Lemay asked about keeping students in Nunavut. If they come south to study, even if they're here four or five years, they still virtually all end up going back home. There's no problem with retaining people in the territory. That's their home and that's where they want to be.

Mr. Rod Bruinooge: That's incredible.

Do you have any tracking on the vocations that people are seeking or primarily entering into?

Mr. Morley Hanson: Of the survey I quoted earlier of the 180 students that we tracked, we do have specific records on each of them. I only summarized the statistics in terms of government, private sector, Inuit organizations, or studying, but we have detailed tracking on each one of them.

● (1005)

Mr. Rod Bruinooge: Go ahead, Mr. Obed.

Mr. Natan Obed: Yes, I would like to add to the discussion.

At the college and university level, the Government of Nunavut is so desperate for Inuit staff that they'll take somebody who's been in university for a semester or a year. The Government of Nunavut has an obligation under the land claims agreement to be a representative workforce: right now that means 85% Inuit, and they're failing that by a good 40%.

We're not blaming them for that discrepancy, but the reality is that beneficiaries who have any sort of post-secondary school experience are invaluable commodities to the government and to the communities in which they should be. The question moving forward will be how you balance that insatiable need for Nunavut beneficiaries to be working within government and working within other occupations in Nunavut, because our whole land claim is structured around a representative workforce, not only in government but also in terms of economic opportunities, business development, and all of these other areas.

Being a beneficiary of the land claim gives weight to someone in Nunavut as nothing else can. Weighing that insatiable need for beneficiaries to be producing immediately against the need for a student to get a solid educational foundation and then to return and be even more of an asset to the territory is something that is going to be a reality in the future, and is a reality now.

Mr. Rod Bruinooge: In terms of that insatiable need, you spoke about people graduating from grade 12 as an exceptional experience. Part of what we as a committee are doing right now is studying post-secondary education. I think, from some of your comments, you would suggest, at least as it applies to your people, that you have a lot of interest in seeing the high school and even primary levels being studied more, or perhaps stimulated through the plans that you have.

In terms of your overall sentiment, is that an accurate reflection?

Mr. Natan Obed: We don't want to diminish the importance of post-secondary education for Inuit of Nunavut, but we're at a transformative time: there is the development of a new territorial government, the acclamation to a different society and a different governance structure, and the unprecedented influx of southern-based media into a northern environment.

So we'd love for the committee to not diminish the importance of post-secondary education, but we'd also like to highlight the very real problems that we have in maintenance of Inuktitut, for one.

There was some discussion a little bit earlier about how students flow through the educational system, K through 12. Currently most Inuit in Nunavut start off learning in Inuktitut, and then in grade 4 there is a fundamental shift to English. Then in grade 10 there's a fundamental shift from the territorial curriculum to the Alberta curriculum, with departmental exams counting for as much as 50% of the entire school year.

So we have an education system that doesn't make up its mind as to what's most important for the student, and the result of that is that students don't feel proficient in any of those different levels that they go through. By the time they reach grade 10 they don't have the foundational Inuktitut skills to be able to function in Inuktitut. They don't have the foundational English skills because it's their second language and they've only been learning it for a few years. And then they're immersed in a curriculum that's based on Alberta, southern Canada, with questions talking about grain silos, and cattle, and things that have no relevance to Inuit in Nunavut.

So you see how it is of fundamental importance to NTI that this sort of problem be corrected as well.

● (1010)

The Chair: Thank you. That was a good answer.

We'll move on to the Liberal side now.

Mr. Merasty, go ahead, please.

Mr. Gary Merasty (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, Lib.): First of all, I want to welcome all the students who are here, and of course our witnesses. I think it's great to have you come down here.

I am a first nations person who has spent a lot of years in education and investing in trying to do the best for our communities and really working to ensure that our youth graduate and find that success, so this issue is very near and dear to my heart. I've read a lot of national reports on post-secondary, elementary, and secondary education. From what I've read and from what I hear you saying, it's clear that we need fiscal stability and an increase in funding because our population is increasing but the funding isn't, and the gap is growing every year. This issue needs to be addressed.

We have Indian Affairs, Heritage, HRSD, and the territorial government all funding, but do they talk, and is there any coordination among them? We seem to be hearing that there usually isn't any communication between federal departments, and so that needs to be improved so that the educational opportunities are actually better coordinated to meet the needs of our communities.

Post-secondary institutions need to cooperate to establish training centres in the north. Trades schools and universities need to cooperate, to get under one roof, and get out into the communities and onto the doorsteps in the communities to give our people access to these institutions. Those types of things are what I hear consistently.

One of the issues for me is that the government is currently talking about sovereignty in the Arctic and investing in a military and naval presence in the northwest passage. To me, the best way to establish sovereignty is to invest in the education of the Inuit people in the north in an unprecedented manner, in a way it has never been done before, perhaps in the way that Kelowna talked about it, as you spoke of. Would you agree with that statement?

I'm going to share my time with Todd.

Mr. Todd Russell (Labrador, Lib.): You're the most generous man I know.

Mr. Natan Obed: I'm so happy you've brought that up.

Sovereignty in the Arctic has been a major platform for the Conservative government. In the recent speech that the Prime Minister made in Iqaluit, not once did he mention Inuit; not once did he mention the strong role that Inuit have played in cementing Canada's sovereignty in the Arctic, and the potential role that Inuit can play on a global scale in linking the Canadian Arctic with Canada.

Inuit are Canadians. We embrace Canada. Look at Nunavut; it's a public government that's run through a land claims agreement. For Canada to then not talk about the importance of investing in its people in an area it wants to ensure it has jurisdiction over doesn't make much sense to us.

I probably would not like to comment on increased patrols in the Arctic—

Mr. Gary Merasty: Feel free to comment on it.

Mr. Natan Obed: The investment in the people of the Arctic is in the end going to determine whether or not the Inuit are onside with Canada about this issue or the Inuit have a different understanding of how they fit into Canada and into Canada's sovereignty.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Russell, go ahead, please.

Mr. Todd Russell: Thank you very much.

I'm Todd Russell from Labrador.

Natan, Nancy was telling me you have a Labrador connection, and I'll find out about that later. I'm sure we probably know some people mutually.

I want to welcome you all here. It's a distinct pleasure especially to see—without prejudice to the older faces—so many young faces here in this room and around the witness table.

I want to comment on a couple of things—for one, on the Arctic sovereignty. It is an extraordinary statement that the people who live there wouldn't be a part of establishing Canada's jurisdiction or sovereignty in the Arctic. If the Inuit people don't know the land, sure as hell the people in the south don't. I can guarantee you that.

I want to ask a couple of questions, because I've read over the Berger report, I've heard your wonderful testimony today, and the depth and breadth of this issue is something that we'll have to wrestle with as a committee. It's not a linear thing as such for which one intervention will make the difference.

What I'm reading in the Berger report—

● (1015)

The Chair: The five minutes is up, but I'm going to let you ask your question.

Mr. Todd Russell: It is a huge issue, but two things come up. One is the full implementation of the land claims agreement and Kelowna, which I see as supplementing—not taking away from—or complementing it in certain ways. How far would these two initiatives or these two directions go if we fully implemented the land claims agreement, if we had Kelowna fully funded and implemented? How far would they go in addressing the needs in the Berger report or the needs that NTI or the Nunavut government in general has addressed or is trying to address?

I would just like to hear one thing—

The Chair: Let's get that question answered, and then we can give equal opportunity to all the representatives here.

Mr. Obed, go ahead, please.

Mr. Natan Obed: Simply put, the Berger report was necessary only because the three parties could not come to an agreement on the second phase of implementation and contract negotiations, and Berger thought that the most pressing issue for the implementation of the land claims agreement was the educational issues of the beneficiaries of the agreement. So we feel that the implementation of the agreement and what is in Berger are one and the same. Berger did an excellent job of articulating what is needed on the human resources side to ensure that the land claims agreement can live up to its full potential.

On the Kelowna side, NTI invested a lot of time and energy in attending the round tables, in attending the meetings that led up to the November 24 and 25, 2005, meeting, and we fully support the outcomes of that meeting. We think it would go a long way towards improving the lives of Inuit and Nunavut.

I'll leave it at that.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll move on to the Bloc now.

Mr. Lemay, go ahead, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Lemay: Let's move on to a more serious topic. I'm not implying, however, that what we've been discussing isn't serious, but I do need to understand something.

You said something rather important, Mr. Obed, namely that the children in your community attend classes given in both English and in Inuktitut. However, they do not have the tools to make their way in life and to pursue a given career, even after they complete high school.

I have two questions for you. Firstly, do you know what has become of the Berger Report tabled on March 1, 2006?

Secondly, what kind of improved program would you like to see in place, and in which language should classes between grades five and twelve, as well as any complementary courses, be taught?

As we know, some of your communities are also established in northern Europe. Are there any established models there that we could adapt to communities here in Canada?

● (1020)

[*English*]

Mr. Joanasie Akumalik (Director, Government & Public Relations, Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

First of all, I'd like to thank the people, especially the committee members, for coming here to listen to us. This is very important for us in the north, in Nunavut especially. You have a lot of good questions, and I also encourage you to call our office, because I'm based here in Ottawa. If you need more information, give us a call.

In terms of Inuktitut usage in the schools, I'll give you an example from the community I'm from. I'm from a small community of 700 to 800 people in Arctic Bay. The students there start school at kindergarten. At that level and up to grade 3 they're taught in Inuktitut only. In grade 4 they switch to English. Can you imagine switching yourself into some language that you don't understand?

Mr. Marc Lemay: Why?

Mr. Joanasie Akumalik: It's the system we have up there.

A good example is my two boys. They had a hard time. In Iqaluit, which is a community of 6,000 people, the education system is a little better than that in Arctic Bay, where I'm from. They pick up English pretty well out on the street, but still they struggle. Getting into grade 4 was tough for them because their teacher only taught in English, which they don't understand. So they had a hard time, and I think that encourages them not to go to school in the morning.

Some of the job opportunities that are advertised in the north require Inuktitut and English; therefore we also need Inuktitut in our qualifications. I know some people in my age group don't have Inuktitut, or they can't write it. They can speak it, but they can't write it. So a program such as Nunavut Sivuniksavut is really good. It's an ideal program.

When I was in Arctic Bay looking after a hunter and trapper organization, the first people who were hired in my community were the previous students from NS, because they have the skills and the knowledge of the European stuff.

What kind of curriculum do we want? I realize that GN is revamping their education act, but there has been some talk about other countries such as Greenland, where they have a folk school, where everybody is taught in their language. I understand they learn several languages at one time. With the model case, I am not sure yet, but I think something like the NS program would be a good model, with an emphasis on Inuktitut and on life skills, as well as going into colleges such as Algonquin, or Carleton or other universities.

I was educated before the NS program was created, so within my time I went to a school in Winnipeg, to Red River College, to take trades training. At that time the only route I could take to get into higher education or post-secondary was through the Arctic College, which was an adult learning centre way back then. If the Arctic College can accept a model where they can develop a curriculum, that would be ideal.

● (1025)

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Pelly, a short one.

Ms. Laurie Pelly: Thank you.

Very briefly, to add to the answer to Mr. Lemay's question, Mr. Berger has stated that the only solution is to provide a bilingual system that works, and that would require bilingual education starting in pre-school and going through grade 12, with Inuktitut still being the principal language of instruction from kindergarten through the early grades, but then having English added gradually until you're at about a 50-50 level through grade 12.

Just quickly in terms of what has happened since the Berger report came out, NTI has made a number of efforts in terms of approaching the government. Our president has a letter dated March 7, 2006, to Mr. Prentice asking for support from the government for the establishment of a strong bilingual system, and we've had no response.

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Pelly.

Madam Crowder.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Really quickly, because I know we're almost out of time, I want to come back to a couple of remarks you made around both the ARDA agreements and the language initiatives and youth initiatives out of Heritage Canada. There are certainly a number of rumours that the language initiatives are under review, and we're not certain whether the cultural and language initiatives out of the heritage department are going to continue to be funded. I wonder if you could talk about the importance of those programs and the impact if that funding, which is insufficient as it is, is cut.

Mr. Natan Obed: In regard to the aboriginal languages initiative, there are so many things that representational Inuit organizations can do that other jurisdictions cannot. Representational organizations such as the regional Inuit organizations in Nunavut can decide what programs they run with aboriginal languages initiative funding as long as they fit within the funding criteria.

A perfect example is the Qikiqtani Inuit Association's little scientists project, where the regional Inuit organization has used funding from the aboriginal languages initiative to create a curriculum that in Inuktitut describes scientific terms to elementary school students. It introduces the outside world in Inuktitut into the north, ideas about what is an Inuktitut name for alligator, or snake, and things like that. Applying dollars that come from federal funds to enhance and improve our society and our language is immeasurable.

We were hoping that the aboriginal languages initiative would be replaced by an ambitious $140 million project that was originally titled the first nations and Inuit language initiative, or FNILI, but because of the change of government, the implementation of that initiative has been put on hold. Unfortunately, the money for that initiative has been in place since 2003, but it just never got implemented.

With the urban multipurpose aboriginal youth centre funding—which is a very strange title for the project considering that an urban centre is considered anything over, I believe, 1,500 or 2,000 people—we received a 30% cut for the Inuit projects without any sort of notice until we were actually into the fiscal year of 2006-07. That fund is mostly used for getting youth involved in cultural and linguistic experiences outside of their communities that they would not otherwise get a chance to do. Not everybody in Nunavut has access to the land. Because of the social problems, because of the reality of broken homes and difficult situations, many young people can only access the land and their traditions through projects like the ones that are funded through the UMAYC program.

So taking away funding from those sorts of initiatives cuts off a social support network in their own culture, in their own territory, that they don't have otherwise. These programs are of immense benefit to the young people and to the traditions, culture, and language of the Inuit of Nunavut.

● (1030)

The Chair: Mr. Hanson.

Mr. Morley Hanson: I'd like to add to that, because I think it would be appropriate to see how it applies specifically here.

In terms of funding that we now receive from three regional organizations, those are devolved Human Resources dollars, and if there's a policy shift within Human Resources Canada, we would immediately be out 60% of our funding that we currently strive for each year.

In another sense, in terms of government programs that exist, there are in existence programs within Indian Affairs that have been in existence for many years now for supporting post-secondary in a variety of ways. One of them that I mentioned earlier was the university and college entrance program, UCEP. That is one from which, through Nunavut, we receive some of our funding. But also, there is a program within Indian and Northern Affairs called the Indian studies support program. We did a request for information search back about three years ago, and in 2001 there was $17 million spent on Indian studies support programs, which is very good, but there is no equivalent for Inuit studies support programs.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Morley Hanson: So we would highly support the recommendation from Mr. Obed here about reviewing the program delivery.

The Chair: We'll go to the government side now. Mr. Albrecht.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to thank all of the witnesses and all of the students for being here today as well.

It's amazing to look at the results of your program, especially as it relates to NS, and see the high number of graduates who are successful, first of all, in graduating, and then who return and are productive members of society there.

It seems as though there's a common theme coming through today, from my understanding, and that is the problem at the K to 12 level. I think it has been addressed in two ways. For one thing, I heard something about the problem of the sudden flip in the language from grade 4 to 5.

I need to ask a question. Are there school boards or groups of parents who have any input at all into those kinds of decisions? I think the Berger report is probably wise in its recommendation of bilingual education from kindergarten on. Have parents had any input into this process in any of your communities, or is it something that's mandated from the top down? I served on a school board for a number of years, and I know that parental involvement and expertise are helpful in creating the kinds of programs that are most beneficial in educating our young people.

Mr. Natan Obed: Right now, there are district education authorities in Nunavut that are closest to communities and community-level decisions. That wasn't always the case, but that's how it functions now.

In our discussions leading up to the tabling of a new education act for Nunavut, this idea of community control has been a huge issue. The Inuit in communities want and are demanding more control over the education of their children, and the territorial government is pulling in the opposite direction to have more control over the education in communities at the territorial and regional levels.

Because Laurie Pelly has done more work on this than I have, I'll pass it to her for further comment.

Ms. Laurie Pelly: Thank you.

The district education authorities are very active and engaged, for the most part, in the communities. Their capacity to act and influence the education system varies greatly, as you can imagine, from community to community. But the most severe issue is the shortage of teachers who are in a position to teach in Inuktituk to children from K to 12. Currently, they're all really in the lower grade levels. The Government of Nunavut is currently spending $7.5 million a year on teacher education and Inuktituk curriculum development. That's primarily where more resources are needed.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: It's a matter of resources more than of policy that dictates that this will happen at grade 4. It's just that there aren't enough teachers for it to happen prior to that.

● (1035)

Ms. Laurie Pelly: That's right.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: In terms of the English, or the—

Ms. Laurie Pelly: Primarily, yes. The Government of Nunavut has adopted a bilingual education strategy, which follows on the Berger report. They did this before the Berger report came out, but there hasn't been the money to implement it.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Blaney, go ahead, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): I'd like to welcome you and the students as well. Your organization seems to be a very positive one. Basically, Ms. Lindell has introduced to us this morning a northern diamond in the rough, namely qualified young students with very high self-esteem. In my view, that's extremely important.

The education system appears to be an obstacle course of sorts. As my colleague Mr. Albrecht was saying, at the primary level, language seems to be a barrier. That explains why 75 per cent of students, an unacceptably high number, drop out. The committee needs to look at this situation which affects students from grades one through twelve. We need to put our heads together and look at ways of lowering the dropout rate.

You've made it clear that what you want is stable funding for your institution. The committee will probably be making a recommendation to that effect.

Do you see any other obstacles in your path? Aside from language, why do you think the dropout rate is 75 per cent? How do you explain this state of affairs, Mr. Obed? What steps can be taken to lower the dropout rate and to encourage more people to enrol in programs such as yours? The question is for anyone who would care to venture an answer.

[*English*]

Mr. Natan Obed: I'll start.

The very idea of the importance of education is a new one to Inuit. I'll point out Tommy, and he'll probably be shy about this. Tommy is from Pangnirtung. His family didn't move into Pangnirtung until he was 12. We're talking about a transformation of societal values and the idea of how you live your life.

Elders talk about education. When they talk about education, they talk about skills that are useful to life. I was just able to have discussions with somebody who was talking about people dying from exposure in Nunavut and of that being such a strange, new concept and that it never happened before, and the idea that children are having children when they can't provide for them, especially by hunting and that sort of nutritional support. These are fundamental issues of a society that's going through immense change. That's why I think we're not yet getting the parents to fully understand the importance of a southern-based education system for their children.

The buy-in of communities will take time, but I think that as the development of Nunavut proceeds, that understanding will grow and the support for southern-based learning will grow. But that support will only grow if the southern-based learning is relevant to the society in which it is delivered. That goes back to how you educate your children. That goes back to what sort of fundamental priorities you want to put within a K through 12 education system.

There is leverage on how you develop and deliver curriculum. If we send our children out to the ice floe to count seals as they're passing by and that's how they learn about counting seals, and we can do it within the same sorts of funding requirements that are given to us, then.... All that matters is that they attain the educational requirement that is needed to become productive members of Canadian society.

I wanted to linger on the idea of the importance of education in Nunavut in the minds of Nunavummiut, the people of Nunavut, and how this is an emerging concept, that southern-based education is relevant to their lives. The only way to make it more relevant is to, one, to show the direct correlation between education and employment, and two, have an education system that meets the cultural, linguistic, and societal needs of the territory in which it is delivered.

● (1040)

Mr. Tommy Akulukjuk: I think it's important to say, from my own school experience in going from kindergarten up to grade 12 in an Inuit community, that what I've noticed down here is that lots of students get support from their parents. Their parents can help them out with their homework and help them study in English. When I went home after school, there was no one to help me at home, because both of my parents are unilingual Inuktitut-speaking and they grew up on the land. So it's a huge shift for me, going to my parents. If I ask for help, I can't really get any help. So I think it's even more important that there's a program in Inuktitut from kindergarten to grade 12 where we could at least talk to our parents about the subjects that we are studying in school. I didn't get that much opportunity. All I got was from my older sisters and my older brothers.

I used to be part of the district education council in the community. I was the student representative for a year, and from that I got to see the real problems that an education board in a community deals with. A lot of our time was spent trying to raise funds for our own education association in the community. Sure, maybe half of the time we actually dealt with policy stuff around dealing with the school and trying to help out students. As for what I learned from that, I think I learned more about how to make money in a community than how to deal with education policies.

I always think about this too: how can Inuit parents support us so much, trying to make us go through high school like that, and then when we go home they're saying, “You don't speak enough Inuktitut when you get home.” I always question my parents about why they support us so much in learning English and learning science, while at the very same time as we're learning that, I'm forgetting how to speak my language like my father does, or I'm forgetting how to hunt like he used to, or my little sisters are forgetting how to prepare seal skins and animals like my mom has been doing for so many years. I always question why they're supporting this when they're losing their actual way of being themselves.

I think education can answer both lifestyles. Look at all these students you have right here. They can speak Inuktitut and English, so there is something there that is working and making us proud of who we are. But we're all out of high school, and how about the young kids—10-year-olds up to 18-year-olds—who aren't really proud of who they are in high school? They're not very confident about getting out of their own communities. Most of my friends have been to one community in Nunavut, and that's only Iqaluit. They've never lived anywhere else.

I think education plays a huge part in how we go into the future as Nunavummiut. You'll see caps and jackets of Nunavut all over the community, and we are really proud of who we are, even if we don't know much of what is happening around this kind of stuff.

I just wanted to say that. Thanks.

Voices: Hear, hear!

The Chair: I think it has been just great to have you here for our first meeting. I really want to thank the witnesses for being here, with the short notice that you were given to make this presentation.

I think the support of the young people is such an encouragement, and what you have said, Tommy, with regards to your experience puts a real personal touch on it. We can have a better understanding of the issues that we face as a committee as we move on.

On behalf of the committee, I want to thank each one of the witnesses. It is the effort of all of us here—it doesn't matter which party you're speaking to—to resolve this issue and to make sure you can go forward and that we have the support from the Government of Canada to go forward and meet those challenges you have in the north with your people.

Again, thank you very much for being here.

Mr. Angus.

● (1045)

Mr. Murray Angus: Thank you too.

We would like to reiterate that we are extending a serious invitation to all members of the committee to merely come down the street in order to have a real experience, right here in Ottawa, of education in Nunavut. We would welcome that opportunity whenever it can be arranged.

The Chair: Thank you for that invitation.

I have been very generous with the questions and the time. I would ask the committee to adjourn now.

We're going to deal with the planning of future meetings and where we want to focus our attention as a committee. Would it be acceptable to the committee to wait until the next meeting to discuss the planning issues?

Thank you very much.

The meeting is adjourned.

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