

Terms of Reference - Independent External Review

March 17, 2026

Background

The Government of Yukon, elected November 3, 2025, believes that to identify what changes need to be made at the Department of Education (DOE) an independent review must take place to assess the extent to which the department effectively serves the education system. The independent review is a commitment by the government to a comprehensive overhaul of the education system to ensure that all learners are effectively supported to achieve their full potential and are well prepared for the next steps in their lives, whether it be further education, trades training, or transitioning to the future world of work. The government believes that student learning and success must be at the heart of all decisions made, while recognizing that the system must be sustainable.

For years, reports have highlighted serious concerns with the Yukon education system, especially the fact that the system is not improving achievement for all Yukon students. The 2019 Auditor General of Canada's report on Kindergarten through Grade 12 education highlighted significant concerns about achievement gaps especially for Indigenous students, students with special needs and rural students. Unfortunately, past reports have not consistently led to implementation plans by the department that are monitored and adjusted to ensure student success.

Recently, the structure of the education landscape in the Yukon has significantly changed. School boards are operating in over one-third of Yukon schools. Yukon First Nation governments have the authority to negotiate government to government agreements for the sharing of authority for the administration and delivery of education services in their traditional territories. These developments highlight the need for organizational and operational changes at the Department of Education to reflect new realities.

Unlike other education systems across Canada, the structure of the Department of Education serves two purposes. One purpose is to serve the government in developing legislation and policy including standards and accountability measures. The other purpose is to function as a school board serving and supporting students, schools, and families. The dual functions are currently a challenge. Ministry and legislative responsibilities require careful management to ensure they do not detract from the primary mandate of serving students and schools. This is a structural situation that requires resolution. Additionally, regardless of the structures, equity is an issue across the system and educators are feeling disconnected from the department and the services and supports they receive.

Review Purpose and Independent External Review Panel

The purpose of the Review is to assess Department of Education strengths, challenges and opportunities, identify findings, and make recommendations that lead to a system that is student-centred, cohesive, and sustainable, with high expectations for each learner.

The Independent External Panel conducting the review consists of four persons with considerable experience in, or with the system. The Panel is independent of the government and external to the Department of Education. The panellists are Gillian Stavelly, Greg Storey, Judith Arnold, and Lorraine Taillefer.

Scope

The scope of the review will include kindergarten to grade twelve, post-secondary, trades, and future skills. The Early Learning and Child Care branch is currently participating in a performance audit with the Office of the Auditor General of Canada and recommendations from the resulting report will be addressed by the Department of Education separately. For clarity, neither the operations of the First Nation School Board (FNSB) or the Commission Scolaire Francophone du Yukon (CSFY) are in the scope of this review.

The Review Process

The review process will include an extensive organized engagement process with Yukon First Nation Governments and groups including, but not limited to, staff at the department and in schools and campuses, School Boards, School Councils, representatives of all First Nations, Yukon University, representatives of Catholic schools, homeschooling groups, special education groups, Yukon Association of Education Professionals, individuals and others. There will be opportunities for people to make written submissions and complete an online survey. Input received through the engagement process will be reflected by the Panel in the analysis of findings, and recommendations from the review.

Information about the review of the Department of Education, outlining timelines for participation as a group or individually, written submissions and a survey will be available on the website soon to be created for the review.

Areas of Focus

1. Structures

To what extent do the present organizational designs (roles, hierarchy) and operational structures (processes, service delivery, supports) at the Department of Education work for students in schools, school communities, partners, and stakeholders?

2. Accountability

To what extent the Department of Education uses consistent, data informed process with schools, campuses, and school boards to monitor student progress, review achievement, and implement effective strategies to address gaps and to consistently improve achievement.

3. Relationships and Communication

To what extent are relationships within the Department of Education and with schools, parents, partners, and Stakeholders positive and focused on improving success for each learner?

4. Norms and Culture

To what extent does the Department of Education promote shared responsibility, effectively address conflict, discrimination, or complacency and advance equity to improve outcomes for all learners.

Deliverables and Timelines

The final review report from the panel will outline findings, acknowledge successes, make research-based recommendations, and actionable suggestions. The report will be a short and long-term map for the Department of Education to ensure that the department is accountable for providing effective direction, guidance, monitoring and ongoing support services to the system and students.

The review will commence immediately with a status report to the Minister of Education by June 30, 2026, an interim report submitted to the Minister of Education by September 30, 2026, and a final report provided by the end of the 2026 calendar year. During this timeline, the Panel may identify concerns and make recommendations that require immediate attention.

Information Management

To safeguard independence, communications between the Department of Education and the panel will be as follows:

- A department liaison will provide the panel with organizational, technical and operational support and provide department-held information as requested. The liaison will also coordinate meetings with DOE staff, review participants and the Minister and Deputy Minister.
- The Panel and Secretariat will maintain information and records in compliance with access to information and privacy requirements.

Budget

- The department will fund panel operations in accordance with Yukon government finance and contracting policy.