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South Slave Minister's Regional Forum on Aboriginal Student Achievement Focuses on Revitalizing Language and Culture

YELLOWKNIFE (Thursday, April 28, 2011) – Language and culture revitalization was the focus of the South Slave Aboriginal Student Achievement (ASA) Minister's Regional Forum on Hay River's K'atlo'deeche First Nation Reserve, April 5 to 7, 2011.

This was the fifth in a series of forums hosted by the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment, Jackson Lafferty, to hear from community and youth representatives, educators and Aboriginal governments. Feedback from the forums will help direct development of territorial, as well as community specific, education plans.

“The Northwest Territories (NWT) is unique in its multitude of recognized languages and cultures,” says the Minister. “Many of our Aboriginal languages are disappearing; we must work diligently to preserve and revitalize these, which in turn revitalize our cultures. We will succeed by working together to develop a plan to engage our children and youth in their Aboriginal language.”

K'atlo'deeche First Nations Chief, Roy Fabian, spoke to the importance of Dene language and culture. “The expressed concern for the well being of young Dene in the future is in all the hearts of the people involved in the Forum. Returning to the Spirit of being Dene with strong Dene beliefs, values, knowledge and skills based on the Integrity of the Land is vital for Dene Culture and Language to survive.”

“It was a great workshop. It really widened my eyes on what the education system is lacking and why,” says grade 12 Diamond Jenness Storefront School student, Tali Warrington. “I believe that the people are going to take what we youth have been saying and make some progress in upgrading our educational system.”

Grade 11 student, Jake Basil, of Lutsel K'e Dene School, says, “I think this is a great way to get everyone's ideas coming together and sharing options and ideas to rebuild our cultures and traditions for the future.”

Mattie McNeill's comments, as the former principal of Chief Sunrise School, long time South Slave educator and keynote speaker, mirrored the high school students' outlook. “I think this

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forum is an opportunity for us to explore our willingness to shift and share power for decision making and political action in order to improve Aboriginal student achievement.”

The sixth and final meeting of a series of regional forums throughout the 2010-2011 school year will take place in Inuvik on May 3-5. Discussions will focus on the ASA priorities of early childhood education, family and student supports, Aboriginal Language and Culture and literacy.

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