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Saskatchewan Government and General Employees' Union

NEWS RELEASE

For immediate release

May 5, 2017

Government ignores its responsibilities to northerners

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As government redirects funding from the Northern Teacher Education Program and Northern Professional Access College (NORTEP/NORPAC) to another northern educational institution, it appears that NORTEP/NORPAC's experienced faculty and staff will not make the transition, according to SGEU.

In the past few days, NORTEP/NORPAC employees have received letters notifying them that their jobs are being terminated. At the same time, Northlands College – which was recently awarded NORTEP/NORPAC's funding, and named the new provider of its programming – has posted job competitions for instructors to provide teacher education. Based on the posted requirements, some experienced NORTEP employees will be ineligible to even re-apply for their jobs at Northlands.

“Northern Saskatchewan students could lose the benefit of learning from experienced, dedicated educators and support staff,” says Bob Bymoer, president of SGEU, which represents NORTEP/NORPAC employees.

“The unnecessary shutdown of NORTEP/NORPAC has been hard enough on its students, staff, and faculty. It's appalling that this government has now turned its back on the employees of the NORTEP/ NORPAC program, and is signalling its unwillingness to honour its commitments to northerners,” he adds.

“Government has repeatedly said it would ensure that current NORTEP/NORPAC students experience minimal change during the transition,” says Bymoer. “Now, they're being separated from teachers and staff who they had built a connection with and who they knew they could depend on for an excellent education. This shows a serious lack of respect for the affected students.”

Bymoer notes that a recent survey found that 88 per cent of NORTEP grads were working in teaching positions, almost all of them in northern Saskatchewan, and that both NORTEP and NORPAC grads who'd found work in their field overwhelmingly rated the programs as “highly effective” in preparing them for these jobs.

“NORTEP has an extremely successful record of preparing northerners to teach in the north or to move into professional occupations such as nursing – and it is the program's faculty and staff who made that success possible,” Bymoer adds. “These are people with the exact skills needed to ensure a successful continuation of

teacher and pre-professional education in the north – why are they being left behind?”

By shutting down NORTEP/NORPAC and failing to transfer its employees, the provincial government is breaking promises it made in response to the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), adds Bymoen.

In its response to the TRC's final report, government specifically committed to improving education and employment outcomes for First Nations and Métis people, and to teaching Treaty and First Nations and Métis histories in the classroom. Now, it is undermining a program that prepared predominately First Nations and Métis northerners to work in the education system, and to begin careers in the arts, science, and health.

“This government made a promise to NORTEP/NORPAC students that it would ensure a smooth transition of their program. It made a promise to First Nations and Métis people that it would support their education. It needs to keep those promises, by committing to a direct transfer of NORTEP/NORPAC faculty and staff to Northlands,” says Bymoen.

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