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**Official Report
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Tuesday 26 June 2001

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Mardi 26 juin 2001

**Standing committee on
estimates**

Ministry of Education

**Comité permanent des
budgets des dépenses**

Ministère de l'Éducation

Chair: Gerard Kennedy
Clerk: Susan Sourial

Président : Gerard Kennedy
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON
ESTIMATESCOMITÉ PERMANENT DES
BUDGETS DES DÉPENSES

Tuesday 26 June 2001

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The committee met at 1627 in room 151.

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

The Vice-Chair (Mr Alvin Curling): We shall now commence the estimates for the Ministry of Education. When we adjourned the last time, the New Democratic Party was starting.

M. Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): Merci beaucoup. Madame la ministre, la dernière fois qu'on s'est rencontrés on a eu le plaisir de causer ensemble sur des questions qui étaient demandées par les jeunes de l'école Saint-Louis de Hearst et aussi de l'école Jacques-Cartier de Kapuskasing. J'ai eu la chance de finir une couple de questions qu'ils avaient et j'aimerais vous les poser.

Mais avant, je veux dire que vous avez fait la grosse panique aux conseils scolaires. Une couple de journées après, j'ai eu un téléphone disant que le bureau du ministre ou le ministère a téléphoné directement au conseil en grosse panique pour savoir pourquoi ces questions-là sont demandées. Je vais vous dire que ce sont des questions des étudiants, et c'est notre responsabilité, comme vous savez comme députée, de demander des questions telles que demandées par nos concitoyens, dans ce cas-ci de l'école Saint-Louis et de l'école Jacques-Cartier.

Hon Janet Ecker (Minister of Education, Government House Leader): Excuse me. I'm getting very bad reception, very low volume on here. I'm sorry.

The Vice-Chair: We'll just wait a second.

M. Bisson : Avez-vous compris ce que j'ai dit jusqu'à date ? Pas besoin de le répéter ?

Hon Mrs Ecker: No. I got it.

M. Bisson : Merci. Il y avait une couple de questions, et ce ne sont pas seulement ces écoles, mais il y avait aussi des rencontres que j'ai eues avec d'autres écoles. Par exemple, j'ai eu l'opportunité vendredi, comme beaucoup de députés de l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario, d'assister à une cérémonie de graduation pour les 12^e année, dans ce cas-ci de l'école secondaire Thériault.

Il y a beaucoup de préoccupation faisant affaire avec la 13^e année. Ceux qui présentement sont en 12^e, on sait que l'année prochaine ils ont la chance d'avoir leur 13^e année, de finir les CPO. Mais il y a une question qui a été soulevée avec moi, la plus constante à travers le secondaire quand on se rencontre avec n'importe quel

étudiant ou même avec les profs et certainement les parents. Il y a une vraie préoccupation faisant affaire avec l'élimination de la 13^e année.

Ils me demandent de vous soumettre deux points. Premièrement, pour les élèves dans les régions éloignées des collèges et universités, ils se trouvent dans une situation—l'âge de ces jeunes est 18 ans, 17 ans dans certains cas—de faire leur graduation en 12^e et d'être forcés de déménager de leur communauté pour aller faire leur université après leur 12^e si on élimine la 13^e année. Il y a beaucoup de parents et certains étudiants qui pensent qu'ils ne sont pas préparés à faire cette transition et qui voulaient savoir : à votre avis, c'est-tu une situation qui doit être forcée sur les étudiants, de ne pas avoir la chance d'aller faire leur 13^e année dans les deux ans concernés ?

Hon Mrs Ecker: Thank you, Mr Bisson. First of all, I thought it was a very good use of the committee's time and your time and my time for you to bring forward the questions from students. I'm not aware of any calls. My guess would be—and we can certainly check with staff, if you'd like—that there might have been staff contact in order to resolve issues that were raised. I don't know, but I can certainly check. As far as I'm concerned, it's a very good, important use of committee time and I would encourage you to continue to do that.

Deputy, do you have anything further on that?

Ms Suzanne Herbert: I can speak to that. I think, M. Bisson, what we tend to do when we understand there's going to be a question coming from the field is that we have our field offices check to see if there's an issue we're not aware of. In this case you're correct: there was no issue.

M. Bisson : Seulement pour le record, parce que ça fait un peu la panique avec le conseil scolaire, qui ne savait pas pourquoi tout à coup le ministère téléphone, c'est juste pour dire que moi je comprends que ce n'était pas pour les engueuler ou les achaler. Je ne veux que démontrer pour le record que c'était seulement pour voir s'il y avait le besoin de répondre à certaines questions au niveau local.

Hon Mrs Ecker: The other point, just on the transition, in grade 13, as you know, there is considerable flexibility now in terms of how long some students take. Some go faster, some go slower, and it is certainly our intent to continue to have that kind of flexibility for students as part of the new curriculum. I quite understand

that some want to go faster and some want to go slower, and I think it's appropriate for that kind of flexibility to be there.

M. Bisson : Sur la question des jeunes, c'est une question posée par les élèves eux-mêmes et certains parents dans un meeting auquel j'ai assisté dernièrement, c'est la question de forcer des jeunes de 17 ans ou de 18 ans à partir de chez eux quand ils ne sont possiblement pas assez matures pour partir d'une communauté qui est éloignée de l'université. Comme vous le savez, ce n'est pas à chaque occasion qu'on a une université dans notre communauté, et ils veulent savoir ce que vous pensez, personnellement, sur la question des élèves qui partent à un âge assez tendre et tôt pour l'université quand ils aimeraient et préféreraient avoir une autre année à se préparer en restant en 13^e année.

Hon Mrs Ecker: The move from 13 years to 12 years makes us consistent with other North American jurisdictions. Ontario was kind of an outlier, if you will, in terms of being the only jurisdiction that was still doing 13. I quite agree that for some students an extra year is very useful for them, not only academically, but it might well be just because of their personal circumstances or their own level of maturity. So the flexibility to allow a student to take an extra year, if they wish to do that, should remain in the system. That is certainly the policy intent. It is a flexibility that is there now. I think it is flexibility that we need to continue to have in the system for students.

M. Bisson : Mais si je comprends la flexibilité, c'est à l'élève de répéter la 12^e année pour prendre d'autres crédits au-dessus de ce qui est requis. C'est la seule flexibilité.

Hon Mrs Ecker: They would be free to take additional credits. They don't have to repeat a subject they've taken, but they could. What some students do is split their credits, if you will, over two years as opposed to one year. It would certainly be our intent to continue to have that kind of flexibility for students. Some students, as I understand it, take a subject again. Maybe they didn't do as well, maybe they want to improve their mark, that kind of thing. What's important here is that we try to maintain as much flexibility as we possibly can.

M. Bisson : Oui. Il y a certains élèves qui sont contents de partir après la 12^e année, mais ce que j'ai trouvé marquant en 12^e est que plus que la moitié qui s'en vont aux CPO ne sont pas eux autres trop contents avec l'aspect de possiblement s'arrêter deux ans plus tard, de ne pas avoir cette chance. C'est le point qu'ils voulaient faire.

Le deuxième point qu'ils font : ce qui va arriver l'année que les 12^e et les 13^e finissent en même année, « the double cohort », comme on l'appelle en anglais, la préoccupation qu'ont les élèves, c'est que dans une année les gradués des CPO, de 13^e année, et aussi les 12^e année vont tous aller en même temps se pointer vers nos universités à travers la province : l'Université de Hearst ou Laurentienne, Lakehead ou Nipissing, Ottawa etc. On a peur que la sélection des élèves dans cette année-là va

être difficile à cause de la hausse de la compétition, avec beaucoup plus d'élèves qui appliquent la même année, puis ils veulent savoir, est-ce qu'ils vont être défavorisés quand ça vient à la sélection pour être capables d'être acceptés dans une université provinciale ?

Hon Mrs Ecker: I agree. Three years from now we have to be ready for a potential influx of young people into our post-secondary sector. That's why the government has started making the investments now, both operationally and for capital funding. We are expanding our post-secondary system now so that those spots will be there for students in 2003, because our goal, and the steps we are taking to get to that goal, is to make sure there is a spot for every qualified student.

You may have seen investment announcements and expenditures that my colleague Dianne Cunningham, the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, has been making, giving out money, if you will, handing out cheques to post-secondary institutions to get that work started. For example, in Durham region, Durham College received last year \$23 million to expand their college by some 3,000 to 4,000 spots. That's just one particular college. We have already started those investments, as we should, to make sure those spots are there.

M. Bisson : Ce n'est pas la situation partout, parce qu'on parlait des collèges et c'est une question, mais le gros problème, c'est dans les universités. Par exemple, l'Université de Hearst, qui est dans ma région, n'a pas eu une augmentation sur leur base. Ils ne s'attendent pas à en avoir une immédiatement. La raison pour laquelle je demande ma question c'est que, quand j'ai eu la chance de parler à l'Université de Hearst, eux autres m'ont dit qu'à ce point-ci il n'y a eu aucun contact de la part de votre collègue la ministre M^{me} Cunningham, ni de son ministère—d'être capable d'accommoder ces élèves dans trois ans, quand tous ces élèves s'en iront vers l'université. Si on n'a rien en place comme cela, pourquoi est-ce que les élèves doivent avoir de la confiance qu'il va y avoir quelque chose en place dans trois ans si nos universités n'ont pas été contactées déjà ? Il n'y a pas de plan à cet égard.

Hon Mrs Ecker: I'd be quite happy to refer your request to Minister Cunningham. It's her ministry that does deal with this. But the investments we have and will continue to make have been for both colleges and universities. I can't speak to the specific indication in Hearst. I'd be quite prepared to raise that with Dianne, or you're free to do it yourself, if you'd like.

M. Bisson : Bien, c'est un point que j'ai déjà soulevé avec la ministre. On a déjà eu une rencontre. Ça, c'est une des questions, mais c'est une préoccupation des jeunes parce que, comme on le sait déjà, la compétition pour être capable de rentrer dans un bon programme est assez difficile. Le coût d'être capable de s'abonner à l'université et de partir de chez eux pour une période de huit mois, pour être capables de suivre un programme, est assez dispendieux. Ces élèves disent, en 11^e, en 10^e année présentement, « On a un peu peur que, quand ça vient à notre tour de faire une décision d'aller à l'université, ça

va être beaucoup plus difficile dans trois ans que présentement,» à cause de cette augmentation de compétition avec tous ces élèves qui arrivent à l'université en même temps. Ils me demandent, et je vais envoyer les réponses à ces élèves, à ces écoles : au niveau secondaire dans les écoles que j'ai rencontrées, ils veulent avoir une certaine assurance que ça ne va pas être plus difficile d'être capable de s'abonner à une université dans trois ans que présentement.

Hon Mrs Ecker: It should not be, because of the investments that we're making now to make sure that there is a spot for every qualified student at a post-secondary institution, whether it's college or university.

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I think the other thing that's important to recognize is that the so-called double cohort—if students continue to follow the practice that they have followed in the past, some students take longer and some students don't take as long. There's a great deal of flexibility in how students approach that final year. So it's not like we'll have a graduating class times two, necessarily.

Be that as it may, I understand the concern of students and parents and I quite appreciate your bringing that up here. That's why we've started to make those investments now to expand the post-secondary system to make sure that those spots are there. As I said, I can't speak with any knowledge about Hearst specifically. That is Dianne Cunningham's responsibility. But I'd be quite prepared to take your concern to her and see if she can respond more directly and appropriately to you.

M. Bisson : J'ai seulement une question, et c'est possiblement votre staff qui a besoin de répondre : combien de gradués passent chaque année des CPO à l'université ? Est-ce qu'on a ces figures, environ ? Grade 13 CPO.

Hon Mrs Ecker: We can certainly get the graduate numbers.

M. Bisson : Je me demande si votre collègue a ces chiffres-là.

Hon Mrs Ecker: We can get that for you.

M. Bisson : C'est un peu mieux parce que je ne suis pas sûr des chiffres.

L'autre affaire, puis ça encore revient un peu à la réunion que j'ai eue à peine une semaine passée—non, ça fait deux, trois semaines. On s'est rencontré avec un groupe de parents qui ont demandé de nous rencontrer faisant affaire avec l'éducation spéciale. Vous connaissez très bien ce dossier, j'en suis sûr. Mais un problème qu'on a, c'est que dans nos communautés il y a beaucoup de parents avec des enfants qui n'ont pas l'habileté d'accéder aux services nécessaires pour donner à ces jeunes-là le support dont ils ont besoin pour être capables de fonctionner à un niveau qui les aide à faire la compétition avec les autres jeunes dans les écoles. Puis je pense que c'est un peu la situation avec d'autres députés. Je m'imagine que vous avez les mêmes questions que nous, on a dans nos bureaux de comté. C'est qu'il y a l'air d'y avoir plus d'élèves aujourd'hui que jamais qui ont besoin de services d'éducation spéciale.

Ma première question : y a-t-il une hausse du nombre d'élèves qui ont besoin d'avoir des services d'éducation spéciale ? En as-tu une hausse de demandes ? De là, on va aller aux autres questions.

Hon Mrs Ecker: Certainly we can table numbers, the data that the ministry has available. When we're calculating the grants that school boards get, the anticipated number of students with special needs within a school population is part of the calculation.

Secondly, one of the reasons that we've been spending the time with our education partners, with the school boards, on the identification process, the ISA process, for students is so that we are going to have good baseline information, accurate data about the needs of students and the number of students. One of the biggest challenges in the special education field has been the fact that neither the ministry nor the school boards had good data. That's not a criticism of anyone; it's just a statement of reality. One of the things when I was first appointed minister that I was quite shocked at, quite frankly, was how previous governments and school boards hadn't collected that information, so it wasn't really there. It would have been very helpful for all of us in terms of making sure resources were there. We've been going through that process.

A year ago I announced a three-year plan to deal with a lot of issues around special education that included more money and trying to get those data, to make sure that all the ISA cases were done and everything else, the data were in, so we knew what was happening, and that we had good program standards at a variety of levels so that school boards were clear on what they should be providing and so that parents could be clear on what kinds of services or range of services would be available for their children. We're halfway through that process, and while we can certainly point to some improvements, there is so much more that needs to be done.

M. Bisson : Quand est-ce qu'on peut s'attendre à ces améliorations au système ? Parce que moi, je vais vous dire présentement, comme vous le savez bien et les membres du comité aussi, les parents sont en pleine crise. Ils regardent leurs jeunes, qui n'ont pas les services dont ils ont besoin. Ils savent qu'à long terme, ça ne va pas rendre les affaires plus faciles pour leurs jeunes. Ils veulent savoir, quand est-ce qu'ils peuvent s'attendre à des améliorations ?

Hon Mrs Ecker: One of the things we have been doing is making those changes now. For example, since 1998-99, there has been a 17% increase in funding for special needs, which I think is an important improvement. School boards this year for the first time have started to use standards for individual education plans and board programs. The ministry has just done some spot audits to see how well those standards are working. So some of those improvements are indeed already in place. But again, a lot of those decisions about what and how resources are used still remain with school boards, and they have the responsibility to make a lot of those decisions. I appreciate that it can be a challenge in some

communities. We've been working closely with the boards to put in place those changes so we can continue step by step to try and improve services for special-needs kids.

M. Bisson : Mon collègue a des questions.

Mr Tony Martin (Sault Ste Marie): In response to that answer, I was in Ottawa on Friday and continued to read over the weekend that in fact the Ottawa school board is now saying that they can't do it. Given the legislation that you're pushing through the House here these days which will make it illegal for boards or any public body funded by the provincial government to run a deficit—and I suppose they can even be liable personally or individually—they can't do it. They can't cut programs, but they can't pay for what they know they need. How are you going to respond to that?

Hon Mrs Ecker: As you probably appreciate, there has been balanced budget legislation for school boards in existence in this province for many years. That's not a new requirement for school boards. I appreciate that it's a very difficult challenge for school boards to make at any time. That challenge has not changed.

Our staff has been, and continues to be, available to be of assistance to school boards in terms of what advice we can offer, but the obligation for school boards is to submit balanced budgets to set appropriate priorities, and they do have a great deal of flexibility in terms of how they allocate their resources. The Ottawa-Carleton board, for example, did receive increases in special-needs funding and in their overall spending, increases that were above and beyond enrolment increases. I appreciate that's always a challenge, whether it's a school board or your own household budget or any other organization where you're trying to set a budget.

The Vice-Chair: I think your time is up now. The time really runs pretty quickly.

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): I'll be sharing my time with Mrs Mushinski as well. Minister, I appreciate your responses today. Specifically, I want to put on the record a couple of things from your ministry. I'm looking at a document which shows funding of elementary and secondary schools, and that projected 2001-02 revenue is over \$13.8 billion. We hear these numbers all the time, but it's important to be clear about it. That's a \$976-million, or 7.6%, increase relative to 1995 spending levels, while at the same time we had enrolment increases of 4.2%. So there is an increase in real numbers, and it is a problem for some boards. I know that.

In sitting in on Bill 45, I heard from lots of different people, including from Ottawa. I didn't see Mr Martin there; he must have just been in town for the weekend or something, because he wasn't at any of the hearings for the entire time I sat in. I heard from presenters during that whole process, which really was a budget deliberation. This is a presentation I'm reading from—and these are not my words—submitted June 14 by B'nai Brith Canada. I think it's important. Their comments were in a very general sense about the debate that Mr Kennedy and others were trying to provoke about how

there isn't more money. Mr Mackenzie is one of them. His numbers have been basically refuted as the starting point of the problem, from where he calculates his numbers. The 2.8 number, all that stuff, is so much food for the cannons.

In the presentation from B'nai Brith on June 14, it says that proponents of public education appear to be more interested in fighting to preserve an inadequate status quo than in fighting to create equity for children. So there is a suggestion here, and not just in this presentation—that's one I'm citing for the record—that the status quo, the reluctance to change, is clearly a part of the whole debate. Until you can get past that, you can't talk about specifics.

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I think Mr Ibbitson's article in the *Globe and Mail* on June 23 had a pretty good summary. It's not always favourable, but I will cite again from that article: "It is true that today's education system is a far cry from the one the government inherited six years ago. Then, vested union and administration interests protected a discredited pedagogy, education taxes rose remorselessly to no good end, and too many students read, wrote and calculated bad, if at all."

Ms Marilyn Mushinski (Scarborough Centre): Badly.

Mr O'Toole: "Badly." I'm one of those students, perhaps, but that's a debate for another day. I'm just trying to put the record straight.

Minister, I want to put to you, and probably put to rest if possible, not just the Ottawa citation but the rest of the citations that we're hearing. If investments in education are appropriate, is there in any way a relationship between putting more money in and getting more results out? I'm not just trying to make this into a production environment. Over the last number of years, education spending has risen and education achievement has not risen. Isn't this something to do with giving our children the right competitive skills for the future and making sure that we have the right opportunities for children, and not for the status quo of the system?

It upsets me. As you know, my wife's a teacher and my daughter's a high school teacher, and at the classroom level there are challenges. Administratively, they're travelling to different countries investigating all the best practices. I'm not sure. The bottom line is that the children seem to be the less—even in Ottawa. Mr Guzzo sat on the committee. He's the member from that area. He said that that board has physical assets they have not disposed of. I would say that in Toronto, the whole debate is about sharing schools, or Toronto's selling schools to the separate board—there's no willingness to move forward. They've got assets in Toronto that they want to rent to the separate board. The ministry doesn't cover rental, as I understand it.

Maybe we could just start with a general response to my first statement, that we've increased funding; and then the second part, that if there were more dollars, what

more are we achieving from this part of the equation? Is that too broad?

Hon Mrs Ecker: No, I think it's the number of points that you've raised, actually. One of the interesting things is when you look at the data, increased spending does not necessarily give you increased student achievement. As a matter of fact Ontario, when you look at the data, was one of the bigger spenders, yet our students were among the lowest performing on many testing processes that were done—not by Ontario but by international and national bodies which do this kind of thing. What we are shifting to is a system that does measure the outcomes of student achievement, that does ask how do we improve students' ability to learn, as measured not only by testing—testing is certainly one significant measure, but not the only measurement of student success—but the other assessments that teachers use, and also, to put in place appropriate benchmarks to measure how effective schools are. We'll be receiving further advice from our task force in the future on that about how to set those benchmarks to make schools so effective.

The goal here is not to be the jurisdiction where we can stand up and say we spend the most, because that's not how you guarantee improved student achievement. Our goal is to stand up and be able to say we have an education system here in this province where our students can perform the best, can learn the best, can be getting the skills and the knowledge they need in order to succeed.

The other thing I'd like to stress, since you mentioned it, is that one of the things I think is always very helpful for people to appreciate is that many members of the government caucus are not only teachers themselves, but have spouses who are teachers, and children, grandchildren, brothers and sisters who are teachers in the public education system, and also have children in the public education system. The members of this caucus share with parents across this province a major stake in making sure that our public education system can continue to grow, to solve problems and to get better for our students.

Mr O'Toole: I do want to share some of my time. There's an old saying that goes something like, "If you measure it, you are in fact preparing to achieve it," and if you're not setting goals and objectives, you have some difficulty benchmarking. I think it's important, not just in a competitive sense, but for each individual to reach their potential. I think of my five children. The parents need to have good feedback, the students need to have good feedback, and in an appropriate manner. It doesn't always have to be a carrot-and-stick approach. It can be important for them to realize where they are at certain times in life.

That being said, I suspect the debate's over, that testing and student achievement is a relationship which is widely supported, not just by Mr Ibbitson, but by many educators who have said very positive things about it. It's important to recognize that Mr Cooke, when he was the Minister of Education, had the Education Quality and

Accountability Office as one of his initiatives. The whole issue of testing was introduced. I have the 1994 press releases and I commend him for that—striving for student excellence and student quality as if they're bad words, that this feel-good, fuzzy, wa-wa stuff that really lacked any sense of, dare I use the term, accountability.

But that being said, I had a good part of 30 years in the systems world; I was a programmer. I was always amazed to go into classrooms and find books and all that stuff piled around the computers. Quite honestly, when it comes to student testing, the issue I'm trying to make here is teacher testing. Now, is that a bad word? Is that some kind of threatening relationship? No, I think it's an appropriate professional development.

I was talking to my brother-in-law on the weekend, who is a very skilled architectural draftsman. He had to retire basically because it all went into a three-dimensional CAD/CAM system where the skills then didn't match the skills now. I was at a General Motors presentation a few weeks ago on how they train all their hi-tech mechanics on cable television—on-line, interactive television. The dealers in Calgary and Montreal don't have to travel to Toronto. They can log on and take the course. It's interactive now. That's what I see for education in the future. It's an exciting opportunity, not just distributive learning.

The question I have is with respect to the 14 credits, or whatever the teachers have to achieve over a five-year period—and I think of my daughter this summer taking a couple of courses and planning and talking to her, and my wife has always taken them. I don't see this as a problem for 98% of the professional teachers I'm familiar with, including members of my own family and extended family. This is a specific one, because I haven't seen many of the regulatory-type details, but of the 14 credits over five years, would a professional development day, if it was behaviour management or classroom management, count as a credit? Would it involve a full, annualized credit from a university? Give us some of the choices and options that both exist today and what you envision as the Minister of Education for the future. Is it something that should be rather routinely achieved by a professional trying to maintain credibility and quality education for the students in their classroom? Is it something they should see as threatening and intimidating, or is this all kind of Liberal or opposition rhetoric?

Hon Mrs Ecker: We certainly have seen that our critics like to interpret many of the initiatives we are putting forward, which are basically initiatives we promised the voters that if we were elected we would move forward with, and we've been moving forward with the advice and the input from our education partners.

A comprehensive teacher testing program is not something that is unique to Ontario teachers. The requirements that we are phasing in over the next several years are requirements that are very consistent with what other jurisdictions are doing with the teaching profession and what other professions do here in Ontario, whether we're talking about doctors, dentists, nurses, architects,

professional engineers, insurance agents or any range of folks who are out there.

1700

Different levels of quality assurance or professional development assessment evaluation tests are in place in other jurisdictions for teachers and in other professions around the world and in Ontario. So we went to best practices in other jurisdictions and other professions; secondly, we took the advice of our education partners; and thirdly, we looked at what the research said was an appropriate quality assurance program for teachers.

One of the initiatives that is before the Legislature now, the legislative framework for that—and if passed by the Legislature would start being phased in this fall—is the requirement for recertification for teachers based on a series of professional development activities. It's important to recognize that the Royal Commission on Learning, in their report in 1995, had all three parties' support. It recommended a mandatory recertification program. That's what we said we would do if we were elected, so we've been moving forward to do that.

Professional development activities that teachers will be engaging in are very similar to the kinds of things they're already doing, whether they are board-sponsored in-service or professional development courses, whether it's the summer institute for teachers that the ministry pays for—every summer we've been putting that in place for teachers—or whether it is what they call additional qualifications—the AQs—that teachers can take which result in salary increases, which they can get from faculties of education. Faculties put on courses, the teachers' federations and the unions themselves have courses, and many of these will be able to be counted as appropriate professional development activities.

The kinds of activities teachers will be asked to engage in are courses that upgrade their curriculum knowledge—very basic and straightforward. Many teachers are doing this already and see it as part of their job. Student assessment, special education, is a very important priority, as our level of knowledge about the different exceptionalities—how to recognize, identify, and help those students learn—increases, teachers need to continue to upgrade. And again, many are doing this anyway. Teaching strategies, classroom management, leadership, the use of technology and communicating with parents and students are the sorts of streams of professional development activities that teachers will be pursuing.

Ms Mushinski: How much time do I have? About five minutes?

The Vice-Chair: That's right.

Ms Mushinski: I just have a couple of fairly quick questions of the minister. I recently met with the chairs of one of my parent councils for an elementary school in my riding. Actually, she's the chair of the parent council for a school that my children went to. We spent about an hour going through some local challenges, not the least of which was the need for developing some joint options between the school trustee and the local councillor and

myself to improve safety for the children going to that school. This had been a problem even when my own children went to the school.

Coming out of that discussion, which was a few days after the end of the support workers' strike, the chair of this parent council lamented the fact that the parent council felt it lacked any sort of strong influence on the ability to encourage the teaching staff to strongly participate during the strike.

I was particularly pleased to see that you have included continued support of the Ontario Parent Council in your estimates. I'm wondering if you could explain to this committee the changes you've made to the OPC so that parents feel they have more hands-on influence—I won't say control—in their local school's day-to-day proceedings. After all, it is parents who are really impacted most by what goes on in the classroom for their kids. I guess I need to see from you, through your estimates, some commitment to ensuring that principals and school boards not only consider the advice of school councils but that school councils play a very important role in the day-to-day administration of education in our local schools.

Hon Mrs Ecker: The involvement of parents in a school, in education, is extremely important for two reasons. Not only do parents intuitively know—and I guess parents don't need research studies to prove this to them—but the research clearly indicates that when parents are involved in a child's education, the child does better; and not only that, the school does better, the system does better. Some of the research has actually suggested that parental involvement can be as important a quality indicator as good teaching, which I think underlines the importance of it.

A couple of ways we've tried to encourage that is through the school councils, where parents have the opportunity to be involved at the school level. New regulations that were developed in consultation with parent groups, parent councils, will be coming into effect for this school year. They've been released. They've been out for many months now, and we've actually had training sessions across the province for parents on school councils. They clearly outline the role. It says that principals and school boards, for example, must consult, must ask for the views of school councils. They must report back to them on what happened to that advice, how it was considered, how it was factored into whatever decision a principal or a school board made.

The regulation makes it clear that school councils can offer advice on any matter they think is important to them, although there are some specific areas where we want to make sure they are included, such as under the code of conduct, behavioural codes, setting of uniform policies or dress codes for students, safe schools, the school improvement plans, how to take test results and benchmarks, and work with the staff of the school to make the school better. So there's a whole range of things they need to be involved in and the regulations will help make that happen. As I said, we have training,

and we have a handbook and those kinds of things to help parents in that.

A couple of other things are that principals are receiving training, and some of the professional development for teachers. We've also expanded the Ontario Parent Council. They now have regional representation. They elect representatives. So we have a province-wide body that can give advice to the government on behalf of parents. It's an important initiative.

Mr Gerard Kennedy (Parkdale-High Park): Minister, I want to draw your attention to the matter we discussed somewhat inconclusively last year but which has now really come to a head, and that has to do with your responsibility for special education: the amount of money and the resources that individual children in the system are getting and the process by which they are to obtain that kind of assistance.

With us today are a number of people. They are parents, and if I may say, fairly extraordinary parents. They are here, and I think you appreciate, Minister, that they represent themselves, but also, without trying to, they represent many other people. I'm going to introduce them for the record: Linda Carey on behalf of her seven-year-old daughter Emily, from Hamilton; Karen Dunbar, daughter Carleigh; Donna Cooper on behalf of her son Steven, of the Kawartha Pine Ridge board; Wendy Johansen for her son Travis; Kathy Payne-Mercer for her daughter Laura; Mark Jeppeson for his daughter Hanna, from Hamilton; Anna Germaine, here with her son Mathew; Mrs Rosenberg was here earlier, from York region; and Linda Belthofsky is here. I think her daughter Sandra had to go to a birthday party.

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We have this number of people here on a very serious matter. Several of the children just named can't go to school next year, Minister. The people who are here today are here to demand your attention to this because they believe you are substantially responsible.

I want to relate to you the circumstance. I want to ask you about the contradiction of the song and dance we've heard of late about money and resources being available. The reality is there are not resources being made available; resources are being withdrawn. These nine parents we have today represent five or six different boards, and I can tell you it is happening in boards across the province. Parents are being informed that the needs of their children haven't changed but the assistance they're going to receive has.

To be very specific, we have Emily Carey, who has been told that she won't have a full-time assistant next year. Similarly, Carleigh Dunbar, in the same school in Hamilton, has been told she will not get a full-time assistant. It means they can't go to school. What they've been told is, there have been expanded needs at that school but there have been no expanded resources. The children are spread out over too many grades for resources to be shared.

These parents will not send their children to school unattended. Both of these individuals—without trying to

generalize—have very specific health-related conditions serious enough to warrant this support. It's what the principal of the school, Mary Johnson, has asked for and it is what the board has said they cannot provide.

You will know from your previous experience that the Hamilton board does fund special education from other pockets. It takes money that could be used, for example, on textbooks and uses it on special education. But every year they've been able to take less and less from other programs to support these initiatives because your funding has been drying up.

The parents are here and they would like to hear your very direct response. What are you prepared to do to ensure, if not guarantee, that their kids can go to school next fall?

Hon Mrs Ecker: I think you and I would agree that every child, regardless of their particular exceptionality, deserves a good education. This is especially true for students with special needs. That's one of the reasons we have increased special education funding for the system some 17% since we've been—

Mr Kennedy: Minister, with respect, we have a number of—

Hon Mrs Ecker: Mr Kennedy, excuse me. You asked me a question. I'd like to answer it.

Mr Kennedy: Fine.

Hon Mrs Ecker: That's why we have increased expenditures, why we're asking boards to be accountable for how they spend and why we have parent groups, SEACs, who advise school boards. But I think it's also clear to recognize that it is a joint responsibility between the ministry and the school boards as to how programs actually get delivered on the ground, and school boards make those decisions. I appreciate that many times there are difficult calls and decisions that school boards have to make, but I think it should be stressed that the funding that has been made available for special education needs across this province does continue to increase. We are also continuing to make changes to put in place better standards, better ways to assess and recognize that the needs of those students—

Mr Kennedy: Minister, I am going to interrupt you. I believe I've given you adequate time to answer my question, which is, what specifically are you going to do? I'm very concerned that all over the province students are getting notified that they can't have the support they need to be able to go to school, and you're feeding us back, "It's somebody else's responsibility."

Hon Mrs Ecker: No, that's not what I said, Mr Kennedy.

Mr Kennedy: Your funding has not kept pace with any reasonable measures in these boards from this year to last. I can cite you the figures, but I'd rather talk about these people. Two people I mentioned, Emily and Carleigh, have been told they can't have full-time assistants. They've been through the process—and we're going to talk about the process in a minute, because I gave you what I thought was a very important opportunity last year

to assure people and you declined to do that. I'm going to come back to that.

Hon Mrs Ecker: No, I did not, Mr Kennedy.

Mr Kennedy: I wonder instead, though, if you would address the situation of these two young girls. In fact, because the parents have asked me to, I'm going to pass you their pictures and I'm going to ask you to pass them along to the rest of the committee, because this is as substantial as it can be. I want to know what, from your position of responsibility—and I argued in the House in my statement this afternoon that it's a particular and unique responsibility. I don't think we have a greater one in terms of this area than for these particular children whose parents have to provide so much care. I think these are our responsibility in a very special and significant way.

I'm going to quote to you from some of the parents, but I want to give you another opportunity. Again, they see you as responsible. They understand the system very well. What they want to know from you is, in the face of these kinds of cuts that would keep their children, Emily and Carleigh—and you have the pictures in front of you—out of school next year. They're not kidding. This is not a ploy. They have better things to do than spend their whole afternoon in the Legislature this afternoon. They are here because they want to know what you, as the responsible official, are going to be able to do. And it's not just these two and it's not just these boards. I'm wondering what you can tell us, anything tangible, that you're prepared to do to ensure that these children—there are nine of them represented today, but I can guarantee you there are hundreds more—are going to be able to go to school next year safely and in an environment that is proper and good for them to learn. This is new, Minister. It has been happening over the last couple of weeks. They've been advised that the money is not there, the educational systems aren't there, and the parents are turning to you.

Hon Mrs Ecker: Are you finished? As I said before, we have increased expenditures. We will continue to do that for special-needs children. The decision about how that gets allocated is a school board responsibility. That's not to point figures at anyone; that is the way education and educational services are delivered in this province. We have been working with school boards to increase those resources to make sure there are standards in place and that programs are there for students. Students deserve a good education. Students should be at school and they deserve to be at school. But I must also remind you, Mr Kennedy, that when we did bring in legislation to give us the ability to ensure accountability, that school boards were meeting the rules to provide services, it was legislation you voted against. You did not agree that we should be holding boards accountable for providing services to special-needs children.

We will continue to increase resources, as we have. We know there needs to be more. We also know there needs to be continued improvement in how the money is allocated to boards and how they provide those programs

to parents. That's why we've put in place, and are working with boards to put in place, good program standards and accountability measures for parents. It's extremely difficult for a parent with a special-needs child. The parents who have special-needs children are incredibly committed and dedicated and work very hard to advocate on behalf of their children. I think you and I would do the same if we had a student with special needs.

Our commitment is to continue to invest new dollars and to continue to have improvements in procedures. We will continue to do that. If there was any magical solution to solve all those problems overnight, everyone would be waving that wand, but there isn't. We will continue to work with our partners to provide these services, but we do not, as a government, make those individual decisions. That's something that has to be made at the school board level between the school board, the principal, the teacher and the parent.

Mr Kennedy: Minister, I know you don't mean the implied condescension there that says to these parents that somehow this requires a magic wand, that this isn't something that can be tracked back. They can see, for example, that the amount of money going to their boards is almost nothing this year, is less than 1% for special education. Less than 1% is going there. I have the figures right here in front of me. We can waste time, but I prefer not to.

Hon Mrs Ecker: Mr Kennedy, that's not a correct interpretation of the money that has gone forward to the school boards.

Mr Kennedy: Minister, I'm going to ask you to refrain yourself, to answer questions and not try to pull away from the point of the question.

The point of the question is, you have so far declined any active involvement on your part to do something for children whose parents have brought a new circumstance to you. In the absence of saying there is something new that you're prepared to do, you're suggesting this is the rightful outcome of the rationing that you've got going on around this province.

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Hon Mrs Ecker: That's not what I said.

Mr Kennedy: They know full well how this system works. They have been through it. In a minute we're going to turn to the paperwork grind you've put them through which demeans them and their families.

Minister, I want to give you one more chance, because this is for the written record if not for a result. I would hope for the result and I will pass on my round of questions if you actually provide to these parents some action steps you're prepared to take. We're at the end of the school year. They've been told by their boards that they can't have the education assistants who have helped to make their children successful in school. They deserve to be there.

It is linked, it is directly consequential to your funding decisions that these boards are making these reductions. Is there something—anything—you're prepared to do

over the course of the next days, hopefully, or weeks if necessary, some new action you can offer to ensure that these kids will be in school come September?

Hon Mrs Ecker: Mr Kennedy, as you well know, any Minister of Education does not have the legal ability to order a school board to make a decision as to a particular child. That is just not in the legal framework. That is something school boards have the responsibility to deal with. That's not new; that continues.

But in terms of specific steps, we have taken and will continue to take steps to try and resolve these issues. We have more dollars which we are continuing to put forward, better standards, accountability measures, working with the boards, mechanisms by which parents can access appeal mechanisms if that's what it takes in some cases—and it has. The ministry has been working with school boards to resolve these issues in many communities. We will continue to do that.

It is also important to recognize that school boards asked us this year for additional flexibility in how they received their money. So it is therefore not fair to somehow say, "There was only this amount in the particular category." School boards received increases above enrolments and those increases can be used for their highest-priority areas. As you quite rightly say—and I have said this publicly many times—many school boards have found savings in other areas to increase special education funding, and I think they are to be commended for doing that. We will continue to take steps to—

Mr Kennedy: Minister, you're condoning a practice that has them cannibalize things that are needed elsewhere for an extreme need in another place, and you know what the result has been. Year after year they've had to cut back from that. That's been taking place every year. You further know they are laying off educational assistants all around the province.

In your own riding of Durham, in that school board, they restored 24 educational assistants not because your formula was flexible but because they dipped into reserves. They took \$2 million out of reserves, and that's going to be just another short-term solution. That just cuts off anxiety for a short period of time.

For example, for Kathy Payne-Mercer and her daughter, Laura, they may be able to continue to receive it. They don't know yet. I think they're looking at about a 0.6 that they have to share, as opposed to a full-time, but it was a last-minute reprieve by the board, whereas in the Kawartha Pine Ridge board, where they are looking at larger deficits and so on, they've made the cuts of education assistants. There are fewer there now for more children.

You can dance around all you want and say there are all these other things happening, but that's what is occurring. I am a little surprised that you're not aware of this.

Hon Mrs Ecker: Mr Kennedy, that is not an accurate statement.

Mr Kennedy: I'm a little surprised that you're not providing some more substantive response to say that

you're going to do something about this. When you said you gave flexibility, you gave an amount of money that was palpably less than inflation and less than enrolment and you've set up a situation where every single need the board has will then fight for it. The board has no recourse to get extra money except you, Minister, except here today.

These are the needs. These are the children. There are many of them. Their needs are here. It's the end of the school year. Will you do something specifically for these families, and the others who are in similar circumstances, to make sure they are in school next year? Will you, as the Minister of Education, do something specifically?

Hon Mrs Ecker: Mr Kennedy, we continue to do many things to try and assist school boards to resolve these issues, to make sure that students are receiving the education they need to receive. How the money is allocated, the decisions that are made at the school board level, are the school board's responsibility. That is a statement of fact. That has not changed. That is the same position, as it has been and will continue to be.

We have increased resources. We will continue to do that. We've received a number of recommendations about how to improve the process for identifying and assessing children. We're moving forward to make those changes as well, and our commitment to continue to improve in this area continues.

I don't think it is fair or accurate for you to suggest that somehow or other you have the monopoly on compassion. These parents do need assistance. We are taking steps to try and provide that assistance. I am the first to say, as I have said many times, that we all need to do more, and we are continuing to do that.

Mr Kennedy: Minister, you stand here to be accountable. This is a committee of the Legislature. This is the only place of recourse for you to actually be held to some account for whether or not the compassion that everybody would like to see flow through your ministry reaches these kids, and so far there has been nothing that you have put on the table.

I am going to turn right now to that system. You talked a little bit about—

The Vice-Chair: Just a caution, Mr Kennedy: you have about two minutes.

Mr Kennedy: I'm going to give you some notice, Minister, so hopefully we can engage in a helpful discussion around what you called "getting the data" earlier today. You talked about reforms. You talked about it this year and last year and I'm pretty sure you talked about it the year before.

You have these families on a fruitless paper chase that does not deliver any benefits to their children. You know about it, you condone it, you let this happen. These families are required, by your rules, to have their children described in very negative terms—in fact, excessively negative terms—in order to qualify for funding. After they fill in the forms, after they gather up the health professionals in their scarce time, some of them paying out of their own pocket to get those assessments done so

they can fill in your forms—I have them here, and you know that you prescribe these forms and how and when they should be filled in—they are audited, just sampled by your ministry. You know that at the end of the day there is no benefit to be derived from those specific children. In fact, you end up giving a lump sum for special education, and especially for the intensive support amounts, back to the board based on some previous year.

The principals are saying that 20% of the time is being spent on this; \$80 million being wasted on your paperwork. I asked you last year if you would bring it down to 10% or 5%, if you would lift some of the burden on these families. Minister, you made no such commitment then. I want to ask you today—

Hon Mrs Ecker: That's not true, Mr Kennedy.

Mr Kennedy: —specifically to adopt some form of target or scrap the system altogether, because there are many parents in this room who see it as harmful, and not helpful to their children being able to get a decent education.

The Vice-Chair: That concludes the time for that, Madam Minister. Mr Bisson, before I give it to you, I will ask Mr Peters to assume the Chair.

Mr Bisson: For the committee, I'm going to have to be back in about 10 or 15 minutes. I may not get a chance to change if I finish my rotation. We'll just take the time later in a future rotation, whatever we don't use, if that's OK with the committee. Any problem?

Ms Mushinski: I'm not quite sure what you're asking.

Mr Bisson: All I'm saying is that I've got 20 minutes and I'm going to use about 10 or 15. I have to run back to the House. I would ask that whatever I've got left be lumped on our time the next time we come around. You'll be very happy with what I'm doing.

Ms Mushinski: Rather than go 10-10-10, you'll just lump that back on?

Mr Bisson: Are we doing 10 now?

The Acting Chair (Mr Steve Peters): You have 20.

Mr Bisson: That's what I thought: 20 minutes. Is that agreed? That's fine? OK.

Ms Mushinski: That sounds good to me.

M. Bisson : Merci, monsieur le Président. Pour continuer, on a fini tout à l'heure justement sur la question dont M. Kennedy a parlé. On voit qu'il y a des parents ici avec des élèves qui ont besoin d'aide spéciale. C'est un gros point de frustration, comme vous le savez, madame la Ministre, parce que vous êtes, comme nous, une députée. Vous avez un comté. Vous avez un monde qui vient vous voir faisant affaire avec la difficulté qu'ont les parents et les élèves à accéder aux services pour leurs jeunes quand ça vient à l'enfance en difficulté.

Vous avez dit tout à l'heure dans vos remarques que c'est vraiment la décision du conseil local de décider des services qu'ils vont mettre en place, mais vous savez, madame la Ministre, comme moi je le sais, qu'à la fin de la journée les grosses décisions du ministère de l'Éducation, quand ça vient au financement, sont des décisions que vous avez besoin de prendre comme ministre ; c'est votre gouvernement.

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La question qu'on vous demande est très simple : pour quelle raison obstinez-vous à ne pas mettre en place le financement nécessaire pour s'assurer que ces jeunes, pas seulement ceux qui sont avec nous aujourd'hui mais à travers les comtés de cette province, ont la chance d'accéder aux services dont ils ont besoin pour pouvoir faire la compétition avec les autres jeunes ? Pourquoi vous obstinez-vous à ne pas mettre en place le montant d'argent nécessaire ?

Hon Mrs Ecker: First of all, we have indeed increased resources for special education some 17% in the last three years. The other thing I think it's important to recognize is that school boards receive money for special needs in a variety of ways, and I touch on a point Mr Kennedy made. For example, there is money that school boards receive for special education where there is no paper process or some administrative stuff that the honourable member was going on about. Through the SEPPA grant, school boards receive additional monies they can use flexibly for special-needs students and that is based on the incidence within their population.

Secondly, there is a process, as there has to be, to determine how many high-needs students there might well exist and—

M. Bisson : Ça, on comprend. On comprend qu'il y a le besoin d'avoir des évaluations, mais ma question devient, vous savez qu'il n'y a pas assez d'argent dans le système présentement pour répondre aux besoins. Pourquoi refusez-vous de faire les investissements nécessaires ? C'est une question simple. C'est une question de financement.

Hon Mrs Ecker: Well, we have continued to increase spending on special education. I would suggest, Mr Bisson, and I know you would agree, that continuing to make those new dollars available is a very high priority. I am the first to agree that more resources are needed and that's why we have continued and we will continue to do that.

M. Bisson : Le premier pas pour corriger un problème, c'est d'accepter qu'on l'a. Vous avez pris le premier pas, qui est intéressant.

At this point I have to leave. I need to get back to the Legislature. I apologize, but being what it is, I guess it goes to the Conservative caucus.

The Acting Chair: You used four minutes.

Ms Mushinski: I'd like to pick up where I left off, and that had to do primarily with school support in terms of how we provide assistance to teachers, for example, in implementing the new curriculum. One of the issues that is raised to me on a fairly consistent basis—and I meet with my school trustee quite regularly. I'm meeting with him tomorrow as a matter of fact, just to make sure that we have it straight on how the funding formula actually protects vital materials in the classroom, such as textbooks for the new curriculum. We hear a lot, especially from the opposition benches, about kids who are bringing home old textbooks, broken textbooks, textbooks without pages. Can you assure me, Minister, that

in your estimates process you did indeed protect these vital programs, these vital materials for the classroom?

I am assuming, first, that one of the reasons you came up with the funding formula was to guarantee not only stable funding in the classroom but increased funding in the classroom. It was always my understanding as we went through some pretty revolutionary changes—Mr Ibbitson himself alluded to that in his article on Saturday—that the reason there was this fundamental shift from administration to classroom protection—including, of course, teachers—was to ensure that vital materials like textbooks would be protected under your funding formula. I wonder if you could just expand on that a little for me to address some of the critics who are suggesting kids are bringing textbooks home that don't meet the standards of the new curriculum.

Hon Mrs Ecker: Having resources for new learning materials has been an important priority. School boards receive funding for textbooks basically in two ways. It is part of what we call the foundation grant, so part of what goes into calculating and determining the amount of money a school board receives includes a regular cost for the provision of textbooks and materials. Secondly, we've also put in place special targeted one-time funding to compensate for the request for new materials with the new curriculum and that has gone out.

In 2000-01, the grant was some \$67 million for secondary students and about \$98 million for elementary students. The foundation grant, as I said, provides monies for textbooks and for other classroom supplies. In 2001, it amounted to about \$116 million for secondary students and over \$100 million for elementary students. That's in addition to the special top-up grants that we gave for materials. So there's been a considerable demand with the new curriculum, and we are phasing that in with the new curriculum so that we can make sure we have those resources.

One of the other things that textbook money is part of is what we call the "classroom envelope," and that money is protected to classroom. School boards do have flexibility to use classroom dollars within the classroom to address the priorities, and it's important to note that with the changes in education expenditures, not only do we have more money available for education in Ontario—it has gone from \$12.9 billion to \$13.8 billion; that's from \$12.9 billion in 1995-96 to \$13.8 billion this coming school year—more of that is in the classroom envelope, approximately \$800 million more, which I think is an important improvement. But, as I have certainly stated many times and agree, we need to continue to invest new dollars into our public education system, into our classrooms to meet the needs that are there.

Ms Mushinski: I wonder if we could explore that a little bit further, Mr Chairman. Did you have a question?

Mr Ted Arnott (Waterloo-Wellington): I do, but if—

Ms Mushinski: I'll just ask one more question and then hand it over, if that's OK, Mr Chairman.

It has to do with the change. Clearly, going into the 1995 election, for example, we'd heard—especially in the GTA—that education taxes had increased by 120% but enrolment had only increased only 16%. There seemed to be more money going into administration and, as Mr Ibbitson alluded to, six years ago we complained that our students couldn't read and multiply or divide and today we complain they don't get band practice—which would you prefer? I think that was the general sentiment going into the 1995 election.

You have indicated that the education budget envelope has increased from \$12.9 billion to \$13.8 billion. Can you tell me, in drawing comparisons over the six years, how much of the savings have come out of administration, for example, and gone into the classroom—which includes teachers—and what kind of measurements you can detail to ensure that the improvements that we anticipated in terms of switching the focus from administration to classroom spending, pupil-based funding, how we've done so far and how your estimates will continue to target improvements in that area?

1740

Hon Mrs Ecker: In making the changes in how we fund, you're quite right, recognizing not only what our party or government—

Ms Mushinski: Mr Chairman, there seem to be two conversations going on, and it's a little disruptive.

The Acting Chair: We'd just ask our guests in the audience, if it's going to persist, to take the conversation out to the hall.

Ms Mushinski: Thank you.

Hon Mrs Ecker: We recognized that what taxpayers were seeing were significant increases in the amount of property taxes they were paying for education, some 120% of an increase in education property taxes, but certainly education spending in the classroom had not increased by that much. Those increases outstretched increases in enrolment growth, for example, and other pressures. It was clear that while the expenditures were going up, more money was not going into the classroom and we also were not getting an improved outcome. Students were lagging behind on national and international tests; parents, post-secondary institutions and employers were saying that students were coming out of high school without the skills, the basic skills and knowledge that they needed.

There was a clear recognition that that was a problem, and we said if we were elected we would deal with it and how we would deal with it. We said we would reduce the number of school boards, and we did, by about half if I recall. We went from over 100 down to 72 school boards. We reduced the number of school board politicians. We said that the priority for dollars was to be in classroom, so the amount of money in the education system being spent on administration as compared to classroom has been going down, and the amount of money on classroom has been going up, some \$800 million more in classroom. The reduction in administrative expenditures has been some \$150 million that we've seen.

We also say to school boards that certain dollars are enveloped; special education dollars, for example. A special-ed dollar that a school board gets, they must spend on special ed, and if they don't require it for special ed it goes into reserves to be saved for special education needs. They can spend more but they cannot spend less.

Classrooms—the same thing. Classroom money is enveloped, but within that classroom envelope is a flexibility that we think is appropriate for boards to use.

Where we now need to move to is not to continue to measure or try to say, “Our system is good because we spend more money on it,” or “Our system will be better because we spend more dollars.” New resources are important, that's one of the reasons we've been putting new resources in there, but what is equally important is the students' levels of learning that are coming out at the other end. What we've seen is, when you look at what research and comparisons with other jurisdictions show you, just because you invest a dollar, that doesn't mean you get a particular increase in student learning. So while we are increasing resources, will continue to do that, at the same time we are also putting in place strategies to lead to improved student learning. That's teacher training, that's more resources for learning materials, for teacher training, asking schools to set improvement targets, working toward that, a whole range of steps to get improved student learning.

Mr Arnott: Minister, I want to engage you in a brief conversation on the issue of standardized testing. In my riding I believe the vast majority of parents support some system of standardized testing, providing the testing is meaningful and leads to improved student achievement. I think that's your objective too.

I know that last week the member for Kitchener, Mr Wettlaufer, raised the issue in the Legislature and you had an opportunity to respond, but I also know later on in the week you made an announcement about further steps that the government intends to take in terms of student testing. I was just wondering if you would take this opportunity to explain to the committee members what you intend to do in that respect and where you see us going.

Hon Mrs Ecker: Yes. First of all, we started with the Education Quality and Accountability Office, the tests that they provide. They're an independent testing agency with a great deal of expertise and credibility in this. We do reading, writing and mathematical tests in grade 3 and grade 6, mathematics in grade 9 and a grade 10 literacy test. Those tests are very intensive, very standardized, because they're designed to measure whole schools, whole school boards, the system, in terms of how well our students are doing.

Just to step back again, the reason we test is to see how well we are doing, where are the problems so we can fix them, because if we don't test, we don't know where the problems are. Those kinds of tests will

continue, and we're starting to get good year-over-year data, so we're starting to be able to make comparisons. Schools and school boards are starting to be able to make priorities.

We've just announced additional testing. This is testing that's a little different. It'll be in other core subjects in other grades, and it's designed to be more of an assessment tool for the students, the teacher and the parent as opposed to measuring schools. Those test results will count for approximately 20% of a student's mark.

Division bells rang.

Hon Mrs Ecker: I think this should be a five-minute bell.

Mr O'Toole: I just want to put something on the record. It's unfortunate there are no opposition MPPs here, but—

The Acting Chair: I think, Mr O'Toole—it's a five-minute bell.

Hon Mrs Ecker: It's 10; sorry.

The Acting Chair: Is it? OK. Then you've still got time. You can keep going.

Mr O'Toole: Saved by this bell, so to speak, which is a very appropriate occasion.

I know you and I have met rigorously and relentlessly with the Durham boards, public and separate, and Kawartha Pine Ridge, Peterborough Victoria. I was very happy to read in the Toronto Star today—I normally don't read it, by the way, for the record, but there are occasions when you stumble over it on the floor. Shelley Page is the president of district 13, Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation. I'm just going to quote for the record, because I always like to have records on things: “Page said an initiative by the province in May to break the three-year deadlock over instructional time was pivotal in bringing an agreement in Durham,”—and she mentions the lack of extracurricular activities.

I think it's important for you to be recognized for your efforts at the cabinet table on behalf of students and really here trying to acquiesce to the teachers' demands and the board having difficulty. I just want to put that on the record. It's good that she's come clean here and given you credit for your tough discussions at the table.

Hon Mrs Ecker: Thank you very much.

The Acting Chair: We're about to adjourn, but just for the information of members, because of the time today—and we were late starting—I believe the clerk is going to give direction to the Ministry of Health that we will not call them. We've just got two and a half hours left tomorrow, so that will take the rest of the time. Health was scheduled for later in the day tomorrow.

Ms Mushinski: So the rest is on education?

The Acting Chair: Yes, because we still have two and a half hours remaining with education, so we'll use all of that tomorrow. The meeting is adjourned.

The committee adjourned at 1749.

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Mr John Hastings (Etobicoke North / -Nord PC)

Ms Marilyn Mushinski (Scarborough Centre / -Centre PC)

Also taking part / Autres participants et participantes

Mr Tony Martin (Sault Ste Marie ND)

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