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**Wednesday 25 September 2002**

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**Mercredi 25 septembre 2002**

**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

Wednesday 25 September 2002

Mercredi 25 septembre 2002

*The committee met at 1535 in room 151.*

## MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

**The Vice-Chair (Mr Alvin Curling):** We shall resume the estimates hearings of the Ministry of Education. Just a note first that the minister had indicated, and we all agree, that she has to leave at 5 o'clock. So keep that in mind.

The last time around it was the NDP who had started. Twenty minutes; I think it's Mr Prue.

**Mr Michael Prue (Beaches-East York):** I think I'll have to pass. I have no idea where—I'll just pass.

**The Vice-Chair:** OK. We will then go to the Conservatives.

**Mr John O'Toole (Durham):** It's a real pleasure, Minister. Even in your response in question period today, I am always impressed with your compassion on the issue of education and your genuine concern.

I know we're all looking for the current review on the—

**The Vice-Chair:** Just as a matter of clarification—and this won't take away from your time. You have passed, given up your time, Mr Prue. We can divide that extra 20 minutes the committee has earned between everyone else or—what is the wish and desire?

**Mr O'Toole:** I was presuming that I had the floor.

**The Vice-Chair:** You do have the floor. I'm just asking for—

*Interjections.*

**The Vice-Chair:** You've got your 20 minutes.

**Mr John Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands):** We'll take their 20 minutes.

**The Vice-Chair:** I just need to be clear. I don't need another debate afterwards on this. Is it agreed that they will just pass and then when the rotation comes around, they will get their 20 again?

**Mr O'Toole:** They'll just miss one.

**The Vice-Chair:** Oh, they'll miss their 20.

**Mr O'Toole:** I don't get 40 minutes. My speech is about 30.

**The Vice-Chair:** So you've lost your 20 minutes, Mr Prue. Proceed.

**Mr O'Toole:** I represent an area that I believe has been doing an excellent job, the Durham area, the Kawartha-Pine Ridge-Peterborough area. I want to put on the record that I'll continue to work with them as they

find equity in education. That, to me, is what it's all about, making sure that at the end of the day, however large or small the resources are, they are distributed equitably, which really leads to my first question.

Some of the media reports have suggested that student funding has not changed since 1997. I'm going to put the question to the minister: is that true?

I can only reflect for a moment, if I could, on my own boards. I might say there are four boards in my jurisdiction; six including the French panel, public and separate. I have done the research here on the boards I have the privilege to work with. Having been a former trustee on the board, I watch it with a great deal of passion. I can see here both the enrolment and the total revenue, and if I break it down on per student funding—all the minutia in between the big dollar and the number of students—there may be questions on the program level but I can see the changes just from 1997. The per student level has increased by \$700 in the Kawartha-Pine Ridge board. The Peterborough-Victoria board has increased by a mere \$68, but none the less, it has increased. Further, if I look at the boards in Durham, similar numbers apply.

I'm going to put to the minister this very important study by the president of Guelph university on the student-focused funding model. Could you perhaps give me some indication, is it true that it hasn't changed since 1997? I know that just this year, listening to the budget, it's over \$500 million more.

I can understand sometimes that the boards want to make a political statement, as three of them have—and I consider it just that, a political statement. I look at Toronto and I see, for instance, that the separate board somehow, with the same kind of boundaries, the same mix of ethnic groups, new languages and all these things, on a per student level has balanced its budget.

It's been politically hijacked, I would suggest. The board itself was split. There were core members on that board who were prepared to follow the staff recommendation of a balanced budget. You may want to respond on the Toronto issue specifically, but I just want to have some reinforcement that the equity you talk about in education is really what we're trying to work to.

1540

In fact, if I go back far enough, the Royal Commission on Learning really spent a lot of its time on that very issue of equity in education. All of us here knew, any of those who had paid attention—I'm sorry Mr Marchese is

not here today because he would know. He was a trustee in Toronto.

The issue always was that in Durham we were getting less than \$5,000 per student because we had a very weak assessment base. We didn't have the rich assessment base that other larger, more developed urban centres had. So we're trying to find a mechanism of providing publicly funded education equitably in the province of Ontario, while at the same time not disadvantaging any group or area of the province. I'm confident that you will make the fine adjustments that I'm sure Professor Rozanski is going to be making to you.

You can respond in whatever stead you like, and then I'll ask my next question.

**Hon Elizabeth Witmer (Deputy Premier, Minister of Education):** First of all, I think I need to state that any media reports or any reports from any source that would suggest that student-focused funding has not changed since 1997 are definitely not true. We have made tremendous, important improvements to the funding formula every year since it was first introduced in 1998-99.

In fact, since Premier Eves and I came into office in our respective positions, we have announced almost \$560 million in new spending for our schools. That includes the \$65 million for new textbooks and learning resources. That's necessary because that helps us to provide the students with the tools they need to master the new curriculum. We've also made available the \$25 million for the implementation of a new early math strategy and an expansion of the early reading strategy. We did make available and announced \$350 million in additional funding for Ontario's public schools in May of this year, and then in the budget on June 17, we announced \$117 million more. This \$10 million for ISA assessments was allocated in order that we could complete those assessments in the parts of the province where people were having some difficulty in doing so. We also provided \$10 million in upgrades to provincial schools for students with disabilities.

I had the opportunity to be in Brantford on Friday and turn the sod for a new elementary school for the students there who may be blind or blind-deaf. Again, we want to make sure that those provincial schools are safe and provide the best learning environment for the students in the province of Ontario.

We also announced, as part of that \$117 million in the budget, a student achievement fund of \$20 million. We gave another \$20 million as a transportation grant.

We have also announced that we're going to be providing \$10 million in the way of professional learning resources for our teachers and principals, because we know that if our teachers are not able to have the skills and the resources needed to teach the new curriculum, obviously, they aren't going to be able to communicate with our students effectively. So it's important that we really do support our teachers in the classroom.

We announced there an early math strategy expansion of \$5 million, renewal assessments of \$17 million over two years and school renewal allocation of \$25 million.

So we are continuing to increase and have been increasing funding since 1997 every year. The total continues to climb. Just this year, it went from \$13.86 billion to \$14.26 billion. That's an increase of 2.9% over last year, while enrolment is projected to increase by only somewhere in the neighbourhood of about 0.4%.

In fact, I want to stress again the fact that about half of the school boards in the province are actually seeing a drop in students this year, yet they are going to be receiving an increase in funding.

But having said all of this, we know that we constantly need to review and take a look at the funding formula. We know there are still those in the province who have concerns, and we've expressed that we have concerns as well.

So we set up the Rozanski task force. I don't think we could have picked anyone better suited to head up this task force than Dr Mordechai Rozanski, president of the University of Guelph. He has shown himself to be an excellent listener. He is an individual who is dedicated to improving the quality of education for children in the province of Ontario. I can tell you, they have been meeting with stakeholders, they've been holding public meetings in a way that will enable them to develop recommendations that will enable us to build on the strength of the funding formula, but to make sure that it continues to be equal, it continues to be fair, it continues to be adequate and it continues to be a vehicle that enables us to see stability in our school system.

They're going to bring forward the recommendations in November. They've made great progress, and they've talked to a lot of people. His recommendations are going to influence the budget planning for the 2003-04 school year, and that is going to be when we also start to provide our school boards with multi-year funding, which is going to enable them to do much more effective planning than they have been able to do, and that's something that has been very well received by the school boards.

That's some of the information I can put on the table. I know Peter Gooch would have more detail, if you wanted more detail, Mr O'Toole.

**Mr O'Toole:** This is the micro kind of question, as I drive down. I look at the larger picture, the macro view, but I also look at the micro view, which is really a serious responsibility on behalf of the parents, students and teachers in my riding, to address specifically the equity. Whether there's enough money in the economy to provide every swimming pool in the world is another question.

**Hon Mrs Witmer:** I might just add here, Mr O'Toole, because I think it is important, I think I've heard Dr Rozanski say that obviously as he develops his recommendations, the issue of affordability is one that needs to be factored into the recommendations.

**Mr O'Toole:** Well, I'm just going to put on the record here, and if I'm interrupting I apologize. I'm going to look at the separate board individually, and I'm going to the research that I've done. In 1998-99, the first year of the student-focused funding model, the Peterborough

Victoria Northumberland and Clarington Catholic board went from a base budget of \$79 million to \$102 million. That's a 28.6% increase. Enrolment increased 12.8%, and funding for special education went from \$8.7 million to over \$10 million, a 14% increase.

Staying with the separate board in Durham—and these are also factored in for population growth, or student growth. It started in 1998-99. Total revenue: \$149.2 million. It went to \$170.9 million. That's a 14.59% increase. Total enrolment went up 2%, and their special education funding went up 5.67%.

Now, I know this is about students.

**Mr Prue:** What about the students in Toronto?

**Mr O'Toole:** I hope you include the transition funding when you talk about Toronto.

When I look at the public board—and there may be some questions here, and probably the essence of this is to ask a question. I'll try to make one up. Total revenue for the Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board went from \$246,127,000 to \$265,847,000, an 8% increase. Total enrolment went up—actually, the total enrolment went down 2.4%. Special education funding in that board went up 20%, from \$22.58 million to \$27.12 million.

**1550**

If I want to compare them now to the Durham public board—which has always been an exemplary board in the province. I would say they won the Bertelsmann Award. The former director of education there was the lead on the whole curriculum development, a very highly respected educator. Total revenue for the Durham District School Board went from \$381.4 million to \$432.4 million. That's a 13.37% increase. Total enrolment went from 61,503 students up to 64,401 students. So the enrolment is up 4.7%. Special education in that board went from \$38.1 million to \$45.5 million. That's a 19.3% increase in funding.

I can only go by the numbers. I see larger numbers and, in some cases, declining enrolment. I believe we're aiming toward equity. That equity may not be the same equity that Ottawa, Hamilton and Toronto think is fair. The students in our area are excelling, in my view.

I can only speak as a parent and a former trustee. It's personal. I don't mind putting this on the record. My youngest son went to a Catholic high school. He went to a public high school as well, but mostly to a Catholic high school. They had no gym, no pool, and no facilities in a rented school. My son just graduated from Brock University in public health. He was on two varsity teams, and his high school never had a gymnasium. This community did provide supports, and our family of course makes it priority one. Someone would say that I'm a privileged parent. I think I'm an involved parent. My wife, as a teacher, has certainly has been the primary educator in our family, in fact in his life.

I put to you that it's about the classroom and really focusing on the primary requirement of education, which is to teach children to learn, to give them the tools to learn, to give them the opportunity to learn and to mature in harmony with their environment. I believe that elitism

in education isn't really what we are teaching. We are teaching children, and I believe our teachers are well positioned to do that as professionals.

Once we can get rid of the union rhetoric and some of the other rhetoric that occurs, we can focus on making sure that we are providing equity in education and opportunity for children to learn, and on having the highest standards in the world. I believe that five years from now you, as Minister of Education, will be celebrating our excellence in teachers, our excellence in students, our excellence in achievements, and this province, you and I, will benefit from what you're doing today. I see it happening in my riding. I believe and trust that you're doing it for the province of Ontario, and Dr Rozanski, I think, will account to that.

Let's say that the GDP goes down. When our economy isn't strong, how do we continue to fund education properly?

If you'd like to respond just in a general sense—I know the pressures are there. They are there in transportation. I see an issue in transportation as well, the new technology investments and transportation solutions. I've heard for years in my riding multiple buses going down the same road. I know your initiative is encouraging boards to have co-operative busing scheduling. In fact, I wonder what busing logistics really has to do with the administrators within a school, whose main task is the curriculum component. There are service providers, like Laidlaw, if you want to use that name, and others, who are already prepared and doing logistics in terms of moving children safely and efficiently. What it would take is coterminous boards to coordinate their schedules for start and stop times of schools and classes, co-ordinating activities where there could be, within regions, outdoor education days.

Sharing those kinds of resources is absolutely critical. But they all want to stand as a little silo of excellence, whether it's the fancy board office or it's the fancy field trips that they're able to provide. I think it shouldn't be a function of how wealthy the parents are or indeed, as the fair commission on tax said, it shouldn't be dependent on how wealthy an assessment base you have to provide public education.

I can only speak with some insight into the four boards, in the public sense, that I represent. I do meet with the French component as well. They probably have more difficulties in that the students are spread over larger geographic areas and perhaps transportation is an enormous burden for them. But I believe the resources are there.

I see it in my own experience. My five children spent most of their time in portables. Since I've been elected in 1995—I was a trustee for two terms. I was at one new school opening, and Sean Conway was the Minister of Education.

**Mr Gerretsen:** And a great one he was.

**Mr O'Toole:** He was a good Minister of Education. I think that's why he's resigning; he's frustrated with you. He knows you're going nowhere. That's why he's leaving. He knows that Dalton is taking them nowhere.

But anyway, I want to get back on topic. Really, what I'm trying to say here is—that may be a bit strong.

**Mr Gerretsen:** On a point of correction: you're totally out to lunch.

**Mr O'Toole:** This is after lunch.

I'm quite sincere that they attended most of their time in portables. I'm so impressed with the new funding model for capital. It's almost as though they can't build the schools quickly enough. You've got to take some pride in providing the proper facilities and the right resources so they have the opportunity to succeed in life. What more can you give them? You should feel very proud of what your contribution has been. I trust this will only improve and every student will have an equal opportunity.

**Hon Mrs Witmer:** I certainly appreciate your comments, Mr O'Toole. It's always good to hear when children are having good experiences. I think what's really most important is to make sure that the maximum amount of money that flows to public education does find its way into the classroom. Really, that's what the funding model was all about. It was to ensure that as much money as possible was going into the classroom to meet the needs of the students.

But having said that, I just want to go back to something else you said. It has to do with the whole issue of funding. I think what I spoke to yesterday was the fact that in 1989, when I was chair of a school board, my number one priority was to somehow address the critical underfunding of public education. During that time period—I can remember Mr Conway was Minister of Education, and a good one—there was the same type of dialogue occurring. From time eternal in the past, school boards have always wanted more money from the provincial government, but I think we're looking to address that now.

**Mr Gerretsen:** I would just like to ask some general questions regarding some of the comments that were made here earlier today when you talked about affordability in relation to the economy. Let me put it to you this way. It is the impression of a lot of people out there—and it's something that I certainly concur with—that when it comes to the choices the government has made over the last seven years, the choice of tax cuts, whether they're corporate or personal, has been of a much higher priority to this government than providing adequate funding, whether it's for health care or education. Would you not agree with that, Minister?

**Hon Mrs Witmer:** I don't think you have taken a good look at the numbers. If you see the increase in health care funding in Ontario, since 1995 the level of funding has increased from somewhere in the neighbourhood of about \$17.6 billion to almost \$25 billion today—almost half of the budget.

**Mr Gerretsen:** Minister, we're not here to talk about health care. You darned well know that when it comes to health care, we're spending less as a percentage of gross domestic product in this province now than we did in 1995. We've gone from 5.6% to 5.3%. You made the statement that it's all a question of affordability.

**Hon Mrs Witmer:** I didn't say that.

**Mr Gerretsen:** When you're talking about affordability, you're talking about whatever the priorities of the government are. Anything can be affordable if the government places a high enough priority on it, and education simply has not been a priority to this government. This notion that somehow all the trustees in Toronto, Hamilton and Ottawa are out to get the government or that they don't look after the people's interest—they are elected individuals, just like you and me, and they are just as dedicated as when you were there in the late 1980s or whenever. To suggest that somehow all the good people are here at Queen's Park and not the elected trustees out there I think is doing a great disservice to the people of Ontario who elect all of us in one way or another. So when you're talking about affordability, it all depends on the priorities a government has set for itself, and your priorities over the last seven years have been tax cuts for individuals and corporations, when they should have been to put adequate funding into health care and education.

**1600**

Let me ask you this as a final question before I turn it over to Mr Kennedy, who is extremely knowledgeable about these issues. I get more calls in the area of education dealing with special-education situations or the lack of special-education assistants for special-needs children in school than any other issue. If you are saying there is more funding available, why is it that many of the young children who used to get special-education assistance in schools are no longer getting it, or the time that's being allotted to them has been severely decreased? Why is that? I assume your goal is that every child should be able to reach the maximum of his or her ultimate potential. Can you explain that? Explain that to the Frontenac board, the Limestone board or any of the other boards. Better still, explain it to the parents and students who used to get four hours a day of special-education assistance and now are lucky if they get an hour a day, if any at all. What do you say to them?

**Hon Mrs Witmer:** Let me just respond to some of the issues you have brought to the table, Mr Gerretsen. I just want to remind you that our government has placed a very high priority on health and education. I've certainly spoken to the fact that we have increased health care funding in the province despite the fact that we certainly have not received the amount of money that the federal government at one time had indicated they would make available.

I also want to just make you aware of the fact that in 1984—

**Mr Gerretsen:** In 1984? That's the Stone Age, for goodness' sake. Let's talk about the present.

**Hon Mrs Witmer:** —your Liberal government pledged to restore the province's share of education funding to a minimum 60%, on average, across the province. Do you know what actually happened in 1990, after you had been in office for five years? The level of provincial funding stood at 40%, more than six percentage points lower than what it was when the Liberals took office.

**Mr Gerretsen:** And that's by a tax-and-spend government. Thank you. Could you just address my issue, though?

**Hon Mrs Witmer:** I am.

**Mr Gerretsen:** What do you say to those parents of children who used to get special-education assistance and are no longer getting it? What's your answer to them? Why don't you give a commitment to them that every child who needs special-education assistance in schools will get it, will get somebody to help them?

**Hon Mrs Witmer:** We have made a tremendous commitment to special education. Maybe you're not aware of the fact that until we introduced the education funding formula, there was no guarantee that money that had been set aside for special education would actually go to the students. We've actually made it possible that all the money would be protected and would flow to the students. That is a tremendous improvement. Funding for special education has increased by over 17% since 1998-99.

We also realize there was a waiting list for the assessment of our high-needs students, and in our budget this year we have provided \$10 million. We've provided \$10 million to upgrade the provincial schools for children with disabilities.

**Mr Gerretsen:** Minister, you don't want to answer the question with respect to guaranteeing special assistance to each child who needs special assistance.

**Hon Mrs Witmer:** We have done more—

**Mr Kennedy:** No, that's not an answer. Mr Chair, if I might, I'd like to support Mr Gerretsen on that and I'd like to move on. We were hoping to get some kind of assurance from the minister that would be useful for parents. Instead, Minister, you cite an ancient Liberal government of some time ago.

When you were school board chair, you increased your local assessment every year you were the chair. You did that despite the fact that the provincial government of the day increased its share of funding above inflation and enrolment each and every year, something your government has miserably failed to do.

I want to pick up where we left off—and what Mr Gerretsen introduced you to—at special-needs kids. You claim you're giving them more money, but you claim that on the most specious of grounds, because you claim that compared to your own figures in 1997, when in fact every school board in the province is spending more on special education than you give them. They don't do that because they want to cannibalize another program; they do it because you don't provide enough money for special-needs kids.

But I want to ask you again the specific question, because you used the disingenuous device of the buzzer to get away from it before. Neither you nor the deputy would answer the question in full, and I want you to answer it here today. I want to know how many cases you have validated; how many individual children you, the Minister of Education today, understand are kids your provincial validators—these expensive people you pay to

look over the shoulders of the school boards—have validated; how many cases there are. I'd like a list by board. I'd like to know whether you will be funding those specific cases you've already validated right away, this year; whether you'll be doing that, and if you're not doing that, I'd like to know why not. So, Minister, first of all, could I ask you very specifically, for the benefit of the committee, can we get a list of the number of cases that have been validated?

**Hon Mrs Witmer:** I'm going to ask the deputy, Mr Kennedy, to answer your question.

**Ms Suzanne Herbert:** The review, as I said yesterday I believe, is not completed. So—

**Mr Kennedy:** If I can, Deputy, because that's where we left off, it's not completed because not all boards are done. But you set this up as a three-year review. You gave them as much as two or three years to get their review done, so surely that's not what you had in mind. Boards knock themselves out. I can quote to you from several boards here. You know the story, however. You know. You made them spend a huge amount of money to satisfy you. Now they've done that and I want to know, for the benefit of this committee—you want money for the Ministry of Education; we want to know how it's being spent and how it's being allocated. How many children have you validated from this new process that you made the boards go through? How many are there, and can we have those numbers, by board?

**Ms Herbert:** Mr Kennedy, maybe I should ask one of the staff to come up and explain the process, because—

**Mr Kennedy:** No, Deputy. I would like you to answer the question, please.

**The Vice-Chair:** Could I just allow the deputy to complete her thought.

**Ms Herbert:** I was just going to say that we don't validate children. We look at the process that a board has used to identify children for funding purposes, and those children receive funding through the spec-ed envelope that they get in their budget. It's not as if there is not money in the board for those children.

**Mr Kennedy:** Deputy, may I ask you, or if you want to bring someone else up—I want to ask this question very specifically: are you telling me that your validators are not examining individual ISA applications for individual students? Is that what you're trying to tell us today?

**Ms Herbert:** They review the ISA assessment that has been done on children.

**Mr Kennedy:** On each child. Is that not correct?

**Ms Herbert:** No, not on each child. They do a sample.

**Mr Kennedy:** On which?

**Ms Herbert:** Would you like me to have someone come up and explain the process—

**Mr Kennedy:** I would, but first I want an answer to my question. I want to know if there's a list—

**Interjection:** He doesn't want to know the truth.

**Mr Kennedy:** With respect, I would like to know the answer to the question: do you have a list, by board, right

now of the number of children you have validated through whichever process already, you've said these people meet the criteria? Do you have that information with you here today and could we have that? Could we have that information?

**Ms Herbert:** I'll say what I said before: the review is not complete, Mr Kennedy.

**Mr Kennedy:** I have asked a very specific question and, with respect, Mr Chair, I wonder if I could get a specific answer.

**The Vice-Chair:** One second. Let the deputy just finish off the thought.

**Ms Herbert:** The review is not complete, so until the total review is complete and we have a chance to assess the results of that—at that point the information will be public information.

**Mr Kennedy:** But, Deputy—or Minister, because part of this is a political question—you told the boards that if they validated these children there would be funding for these children. Some of them are there with millions of dollars' worth of special-needs cases. They went through your hoops, they have validated these children. Your people—you hire them, you call them validators—have done that and it astounds me that you don't know how many cases have been validated. Is that what you're saying, that you don't know how many cases have been—

**Ms Herbert:** Again, I said—

**Mr Kennedy:** It's in process. We accept your answer; it's in process. Do you know how many cases so far have been validated, or is it possible you don't?

**Hon Mrs Witmer:** Mr Chair, perhaps we should just review the process, because this isn't all children, and I don't know that Mr Kennedy really understands well the process that has been undertaken and the commitments that have been made. So perhaps we need to bring someone up here—

**Mr Kennedy:** Not instead of an answer, though, Madam Minister.

**Hon Mrs Witmer:** —who can let us know exactly how the ISA funding will be arrived at and how it's different from the amount of money that is set aside in the SEPPA funding. There is quite a significant difference.

**Mr Kennedy:** OK, Minister, I'm quite aware of the difference between SEPPA and ISA and I would like your answers and your co-operation with this committee, not your condescension.

If the ministry truly doesn't know how many valid cases there are in the province that have been through your process, I find that astounding. If you and the deputy are telling us today that we can't be told here in this committee and if the members opposite don't care, because many of these cases are in their own ridings, if they don't care and they don't want to support that request, that's their business. But, Minister, in my time I'm asking for an answer.

**Mr Frank Mazzilli (London-Fanshawe):** On a point of order, Mr Chair: Certainly there's no direct question-

ing here. The minister has said that there is a process and the member is making allegations about all kinds of members that are false.

**The Vice-Chair:** I'm sorry. That's not a point of order.

**1610**

**Mr Kennedy:** I presume that false point of order won't come out of my time, Mr Chair.

Minister, what I would then like to know, if you can't tell us how many validated cases you've got for this year, can you give us last year's cases? They haven't been published yet. Do you have statistics for the allocations last year based on validated cases? Can any of that information from your ministry be tabled here today? If you can tell us nothing about this very expensive process, if there is no data you are willing to share with us today on the ISA validation process, which I find astounding, can you at least give us the data from last year, your allocations per board, the variation between what they requested and so on? Could that information be tabled?

**Hon Mrs Witmer:** We can give the special allocation from last year. Again, I would just remind the member that in the ISA guideline addendum of 2001-02 and in other public communications, there was a commitment made to use the results of the ISA comprehensive review to base funding for special education on each board's demonstrated level of need, starting in 2003-04. Again, as the deputy has said, the review is still in process and the total potential impact of the comprehensive review will not be known until after the end of this year.

**Mr Kennedy:** That's an important point you've made and I'd like to ask you a question about it. What you've said there is that you are validating cases through this very expensive process that has taken away classroom resource people and teachers. You are doing that and you say you're going to look at it in the context of the overall amount approved.

Minister, for the last three years, your ministry has taken huge amounts of resources away from kids, and at the end of the day the money doesn't come back to those kids, because you've come up with approval ratings, some of which don't even change the amount of money that goes to individual boards. I think what parents out there want to know, and I presume members of all sides would like to know here, is that if you've already validated a large percentage of children, if there are already boards that have proven to you these kids are in need—in half of your statement you said “on demonstrated need,” and then you qualified it by saying you won't touch that demonstrated need until 2003.

Our discussion yesterday was, are you, as a relatively new minister, open to really fixing the funding formula or is it public relations? I think this is a very clear-cut example. Despite the deputy's lack of co-operation here today, you know about a certain number of cases in a certain number of boards that have been validated to your procedures. I guess what I would ask you in light of your statement is, is there any chance that we can tell these families who are waiting desperately to get assistance,

that you might move forward the date to approve some of these validated cases of kids who we know are in need? There are 40,000 more who are supposedly waiting now for assessments. These have been through the process. These are new cases that exist in board after board. Is there any chance you might fund those cases this year? You won't give us a list of how many there are, but could you at least tell us whether there's a chance that you could be convinced that those kids should get the support they need right now rather than be forced to wait until next year? Is there a chance of that?

**Hon Mrs Witmer:** First of all, I take exception to the comment made about the deputy being uncooperative. I think we have certainly endeavoured to respond to all of the questions that have been asked. In fact, an attempt was made, Mr Kennedy, to provide you with a more fulsome explanation of the ISA review and assessment process, since it was obvious there were some parts of the process that perhaps you didn't have a complete understanding of.

Let me tell you, we are the very first government—it was not the NDP, it was not the Liberals, it was the PC government—

**Mr Kennedy:** Minister, I'm sorry, I don't want to be rude but I would like to know if you would answer my question, please.

**Hon Mrs Witmer:** —that took the lead on assessing those students who have a need for intensive support and special needs.

**Mr Kennedy:** Minister, you are causing \$50 million to \$80 million to be expended, by the Ontario Principals' Council estimate, by the direct estimate of boards like Peel and York region Catholic; millions of dollars to be spent to satisfy your department whether or not children are in need. That's money that could and should be used to help those kids.

I want to know. You refuse to answer a direct question and, if that's your choice, we'll move on to another subject. But in case there is any chance of misinterpretation, will you, as the Minister of Education, look at the cases that have been validated of children whose needs are not being met today, who are above and beyond the approved levels for the boards that are out there with the responsibility of helping these kids? Is there any chance that you will supplement the amount of money available so these kids can receive help this year instead of your ordained target of next year? Is there a chance of that? I just really would like to know. You can tell us no, you can tell us yes or say you're not going to answer the question, but please don't take up more time.

**Hon Mrs Witmer:** Well, you know, Mr Kennedy, I think you would agree with me it is important to be thorough and it is important to do the assessment. Personally I would say to you that the whole issue of special education funding is very important. I would agree with whoever in this province thinks there's a need for more money. I hope we can get some more advice from Dr Rozanski, because one of the questions we've asked him is whether the current approach to funding

special education is the most responsive way to meet student needs. I think you've talked about the fact that maybe what we're doing isn't.

**Mr Kennedy:** I've asked your predecessor to consider doing it differently, and I was plumbing today whether you would be open to that.

**Hon Mrs Witmer:** I would simply say to you that I believe there is a need for more special education funding, and I hope Dr Rozanski will be able to give us a recommendation.

**Mr Kennedy:** Then what I will leave with you, as the Minister of Education—and I want to say this because parents out there will be watching your every word. Parents out there have children who went through tests and assessments that you prescribed. They thought they were doing that in order to get help for their kids, and those kids are sitting on the sidelines waiting. You're going to meet some of them next week, because we're going to bring them to committee.

Mr Chair, I'd like to move to another subject; I've asked a direct question two or three times.

**The Vice-Chair:** You have 10 seconds.

**Mr Kennedy:** Then I'll put them on notice that I want to ask about the advertising budget. I hope the answers will be more fulsome than we received on special needs.

**The Vice-Chair:** Mr Prue, 20 minutes.

**Mr Prue:** I now have a list of questions. I had time to sit here and think about them.

I'd like to ask a question specific to the ratepayers of Toronto; there's much being said on the streets these days. I heard with some interest Mr O'Toole saying that finally there's equity outside Toronto, but the ratepayers of Toronto see it in a slightly different way, as you must imagine. They see that the money that is collected, not in taxes, but in property assessments—and I want to separate the two—is flowing out of Toronto, and probably Ottawa, Hamilton and the larger cities, at a huge rate. Amounts of money that they are paying on their individual homes and properties, which they expect to go to education in their community, is not going to education in their community and is in fact going to education in other communities.

Can you tell me how much money is being raised from the ratepayers of Toronto that is being expended in other parts of the province?

**Hon Mrs Witmer:** I could have Mr Hartmann come up and perhaps respond to your question.

**The Vice-Chair:** Mr Hartmann, just identify yourself as you take the floor.

**Mr Norbert Hartmann:** I'm Norbert Hartmann, assistant deputy minister.

The amount of money that is spent in the city of Toronto for education in 2002-03 is \$1,984,828,420.

**Mr Prue:** Just do that a little bit slower.

**Mr Hartmann:** \$1,984,828,420.

**Mr Prue:** That's how much is being spent. How much is raised from the taxpayers in Toronto?

**Mr Hartmann:** Unfortunately, I don't have the breakdown between tax and grant revenue with me.

**Mr Prue:** Is it more, or is it less? What I'm hearing from many sources is that a lot more is raised than was actually spent within that city—\$2.5 billion.

**Mr Hartmann:** I would only be speculating at this point, but I don't believe \$1.9 billion is raised in education tax.

**Mr Prue:** Is that because a percentage is raised locally and a percentage is from the province?

**Mr Hartmann:** That's correct.

**Mr Prue:** Is it fair to say, then, that a lot more is raised locally in Toronto than in Durham?

**Mr Hartmann:** Again, I'd only be speculating, but I believe the assessment base in Toronto is richer than in Durham, that's correct.

**Mr Prue:** So the people who are raising the funds there would expect to see some of that money flowing out. Is that a fair assumption?

**Mr Hartmann:** My understanding is that money that is raised locally stays local and the difference between that and the entitlement under the funding formula is made up through a provincial grant.

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**Mr Prue:** Therefore, the residents and ratepayers of Toronto would be getting less per capita from the province of Ontario than other places to make it to the same—everybody has the same level now.

**Mr Hartmann:** No, that is not quite correct. Everyone does not have the same level. The level of funding depends on three factors. It depends first of all on the foundation grant, which provides a similar amount for an elementary and a secondary student in each of the boards in the province. Then there is an assessment of the context these boards find themselves in. Those under the funding formula are defined as special-purpose grants. Those special-purpose grants differ by board, depending on the demographic characteristics of that board. The third element is a new pupil place grant, and those differ by board as well, depending on the accommodation requirements for that board.

So if you were to calculate on the basis of the number of dollars per pupil, boards in the province do not wind up with the same amount per pupil. Those vary across the province depending on the demography of the province, the geography of the province and the types of needs that are specific to the areas.

**Mr Prue:** OK. All the boards in the province said the funding formula was not adequate, but three of them went so far as to say it was impossible without gutting education. They would appear to have formerly been three of the richest boards, and have now been reduced to being unable or unwilling to take the steps to, in their words, gut the education system. Is that a fair comment?

**Mr Hartmann:** That, I understand, is their claim.

**Mr Prue:** And your claim?

**Mr Hartmann:** On that I don't have an opinion.

**Mr Prue:** Perhaps the minister does.

**Hon Mrs Witmer:** I think what you need to keep in mind, Mr Prue, is the fact that the public in Ontario have supported the move to a student-focused funding formula

that provides equality and fairness of educational opportunity to all students regardless of where they live and also regardless of which of the four boards they attend. I think that has been well supported.

I think what we need to take a look at now is making sure we make whatever adjustments or modifications are needed to the funding formula to respond to any concerns that might be out there as to how we can make it more fair, more equal and how we can ensure it is adequate and contributes to stability in the system. We've basically got a different funding formula today than we had in the province 10 years ago, where part of the money that was raised was through local taxation.

**Mr Prue:** I'd like to go next to the whole issue of the supervisors in those three areas of the province where there are supervisors. I probably know the Toronto case best, because I don't often get a chance to read the Ottawa or Hamilton papers. It's been estimated by people in Toronto, particularly the board and parents, that about \$1.5 million is being expended for supervisors and their staff in the three boards in Ontario. Is that the approximate cost?

**Hon Mrs Witmer:** I can give you the cost, Mr Prue. The salaries of the supervisors in Toronto—

**Mr Prue:** I'm familiar with those. It's \$185,000 and there's another one around \$180,000.

**Hon Mrs Witmer:** No, Mr Beckstead is \$170,000 and Dr Murray is \$166,000.

What additional information are you looking for?

**Mr Prue:** They also have staff and other people. I'm just trying to get a ballpark figure of how much it's costing for all the staff that has been hired to oversee the trustees in these three boards. Those costs alone are in excess of half a million dollars.

**Hon Mrs Witmer:** I would have to say to you that it's really quite regrettable that the board didn't choose to balance its budget. If they had chosen to work with the provincial government, work with us to balance the budget, as the chair and the vice-chair and some of the other trustees of the Toronto board wanted, there would have been none of these extra expenditures.

**Mr Prue:** That's fine, but I'm still trying to find out what they are.

**Hon Mrs Witmer:** I don't have any additional information. The deputy may.

**Ms Herbert:** The only other issue I would add is that we know that each of the supervisors has decided he needs some communication advice in addition to the staff at the board. That's the only other cost I'm aware of.

**Mr Prue:** They don't have any other paid advisers to look at audit books or secretarial work or any of those things?

**Ms Herbert:** Not to my knowledge.

**Mr Prue:** The next question I have relates to—I trust I still have some time.

**The Vice-Chair:** Yes.

**Mr Prue:** Terrific. The next question has to do with those wonderful half-page ads I saw about a week or 10 days ago. I saw them everywhere. Again, the estimate I

heard was about \$1.5 million. Is that coming out of the school boards' budgets, where they are affected? Is it coming out of the government of Ontario's budget? Is it coming out of the Conservative Party budget? Where is that coming from?

**Mr Hartmann:** Those monies are coming out of government revenues.

**Mr Prue:** Out of Ontario government revenues. OK. They're not coming out of any of the individual school board revenues?

**Mr Hartmann:** That's correct.

**Mr Prue:** When I look at the estimates briefing book, I can expect to find that next year in the central government expenditure account. That's where I'll find it next year? OK, that's fine.

I want to deal again with the ISAs. The ISA itself is quite a complex form, I understand. I've never actually seen one but I'm given to understand from people who work in the system that it takes a huge, inordinate amount of time to fill one of these out, about 14 hours of staff time to fill out each assessment record. Is that correct?

**Hon Mrs Witmer:** Do you know what, Mr Prue? I just want to tell you right now I would certainly agree with some of what you've said. I think it has been a very complicated process. What the ministry staff have attempted to do, in co-operation with others, is to find ways to make the process easier, more predictable and more responsive. I would maybe ask the deputy to speak to what we've done in order to speed up the process.

**Mr Prue:** First of all, is it true that it's 14 hours? When I heard that, I found that hard to believe. That's two whole working days. If staff made \$50,000 a year, that's like \$1,000 or something.

**Ms Herbert:** I think the answer to that question is that it varies depending on the individual child and the amount of time and the exceptionality the child has. So it varies in terms of what the particulars of each of the ISA reviews requires. Because this subject has come up a couple of times, I'd be happy to have the staff person responsible for this come up and walk you through the process.

**Mr Prue:** Sure.

**Hon Mrs Witmer:** Mr Gooch?

Don't forget we're dealing with students who need intensive support. I think Mr Gooch can tell you exactly what happens. I had some of the same concerns that you did originally.

**Mr Peter Gooch:** My name is Peter Gooch. I'm the director of the education finance branch in the Ministry of Education.

The question is, if I understand it correctly, what is involved in producing a report to the ministry for ISA funding.

**Mr Prue:** For one student.

**Mr Gooch:** For one student. What we ask school boards to do is to provide us with documentation that they would normally need to have on file to run a good program for an individual student. We ask them for a professional assessment. Remember, ISA is about stu-

dents with extremely high needs. ISA eligibility criteria are profiles of students with various kinds of exceptionalities, whether it's learning disabilities, intellectual disabilities or behaviour problems. So a student with that level of need should have a professional assessment from a psychologist or a physician and that would be something a school board would normally use to develop a good program for that student. We want to see that assessment.

The second thing we want to see is evidence of related difficulties. So, for example, if the student being claimed has a behaviour problem, we would normally want to see documentation that should be in the student's file about that behaviour problem. You might want to see a suspension report or an incident report.

The third thing we want to see, and our validators go and look at, is the student's individual education plan. We want to assure ourselves that the plan the board has put in place—and remember, an individual education plan is about that individual student. It's an educational assessment of that student's needs and that student's strengths, and a description of the interventions and the program that the board will put in place for that student. So we want to see those three things: assessments, evidence of related difficulties, and an IEP. That's what our validators look at.

In some instances, school boards don't have all that documentation in place and they have needed to go and get assessments, or they have had to do some work to clean up their IEP for that student. Again, as the deputy said, it will vary from student to student. It depends on how good the management practices of a board are whether those files are in good shape to start with.

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**Mr Prue:** The example I was given was the Greater Essex board. They were the ones who said that it took approximately 14 hours, on average. That board produced 380 reports for this school year. That's the equivalent, I would think, at 14 hours, of about three person-years, working flat out doing nothing else but that, at whatever wages that costs. They're owed some \$3.4 million that they haven't seen.

An additional problem they have is that they believe they have many more students who should be the subject of such reports, but they simply do not have the time, the money, the staff or the wherewithal to wait for a year to go into the process, so they're missing kids. Is that happening out there?

**Mr Gooch:** I can't comment on the Greater Essex board, because I'm not familiar with the details on that board.

**Mr Prue:** Any board. Is that happening because the forms are so complex, so cumbersome, so time-consuming, so staff-intensive in terms of time that some kids are not being documented who should be?

**Mr Gooch:** Our view is that it's an appropriate thing for boards to do, to focus their resources on the students who have very high needs. Our view is that they should have the kind of documentation that we're asking for readily available.

The reality is—and I can't deny that—some boards have had to put a great deal of staff effort and to focus their staff effort upon collecting that information and improving the information that's there. But that information is what they need to run a good program for each one of those students.

I've also had school board staff tell me that the ISA process, though it's been difficult, onerous and has required a lot of effort on their part, has improved their management of those files. It has improved the communication between special services like psychology and social work and the special education departments, and it has given boards a much better sense of who their high-needs students are and whether their distribution of resources is appropriate.

**Mr Prue:** For a board like Essex, that needs probably three person-years to fill out these forms, how many extra resources has the ministry given each of the school boards to fill these forms out?

**Mr Gooch:** Again, the kinds of things the boards need to do are things that they should be doing on an ongoing basis. So we have expected them to deal with the requirements of the ISA process with the staff they have in place to do assessments and to write IEPs.

**Mr Prue:** Were they required to do that before this year or these last couple of years?

**Mr Gooch:** Yes, because they have to do IEPs and they should be producing documentation of difficulties and they should be doing assessments.

**Mr Prue:** To the same extent as they are doing now, for 14 hours?

**Mr Gooch:** The ministry has provided also the additional \$10 million to help provide professional assessments.

**Mr Prue:** OK. How much time do I have?

**The Vice-Chair:** I'm so generous, you've got about two or three more minutes.

**Mr Prue:** I've got two more minutes. I'm having fun here now that I've figured out the process.

The next question I have relates to the assessment of buildings. Again, I go back the Greater Essex school board, that has told us that the Ministry of Education is spending some \$17 million to assess buildings that have already been assessed by district school boards. Is that in fact true?

**Hon Mrs Witmer:** Do you know what? There's a very good response and Drew is going to come up.

Mr Prue, I want to thank you for the interest that you've taken in the ISA process.

**Mr Drew Nameth:** My name is Drew Nameth. I'm the director of the business services branch in the Ministry of Education. In the budget speech in June this year, \$17 million was committed to evaluate the condition of each and every school in the province, and do so on a consistent basis across the province. We have put in place an accountability framework in the year 2000 to require boards to provide us with information on school condition.

As we looked at the information that we received from boards—and that information is incomplete; we don't have information on every school as yet—it was quite apparent to us and to other board staff that looked at this information that boards were using different yardsticks, that some boards were measuring their schools in quite a different way from other boards. The intent of the initiative is to take a look at each and every school in the province on a consistent basis so that we can measure the needs, the amount of money that is required to renew each of the schools, and get good, solid, comparable information that can be used to make future decisions around funding in the province.

**Mr Prue:** Were the schools not—

**The Vice-Chair:** I think your time is going to run out this time. Mr Miller.

**Mr Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka):** I'd like to thank Mr Prue for his questions. They were certainly very worthwhile questions. I've had parents come to me with questions to do with ISA and special education, and I found his questions useful.

I have four different boards in my riding of Parry Sound-Muskoka—the Trillium Lakelands board, the Simcoe county board, the Simcoe Muskoka Catholic District School Board, and the Nipissing-Parry Sound Catholic District School Board. I have also had four children attending public school in the Trillium Lakelands school board, although one has now moved on to post-secondary education, and I've got to say that the three that are still there are having a great experience. They're doing very well and benefiting; I think a lot more than their father did from his education.

I would like to congratulate the minister on her positive approach in building on the strengths of the student funding formula and trying to get the best for all the kids in Ontario. But I am the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Northern Development and Mines, and I do have a northern riding, so I'm wondering how the student-focused funding formula responds to the needs of small boards in northern Ontario and rural Ontario, and if the minister might be able to talk about that funding formula, if it has any special adjustments for the northern Ontario boards or the small boards and rural Ontario boards.

**Hon Mrs Witmer:** First of all, there is a recognition that boards in northern and rural Ontario do have some higher costs, and so we do try to provide them with some additional financial support. But I want to congratulate those boards because I can tell you they have quietly gone about their business of balancing their budgets this year and yet they have faced the same type of pressures as some of the larger urban boards. But they've done what they always do and they've been able to balance the budget.

Having said that, we have provided to the rural and northern boards, through the remote and rural allocation funding, a tripling in the way of funding, from \$40.3 million in 1997 to a projected \$117.6 million for 2002-03. That's an increase of 192%. Also, we know that

some of these school boards in the north and the rural part of our province are experiencing declining enrolment. But you know, when you have declining enrolment, it doesn't mean you suddenly have no costs for staff. So we've allocated an additional \$17 million in the way of declining enrolment adjustment. We've also added \$6 million for transportation costs for boards with declining enrolment. So we do believe that the \$17 million and the \$6 million are going to benefit the students in remote and rural boards. These boards will see an increase in funding, even though they're seeing a drop in the number of students.

**1640**

We've also added \$23 million in permanent funding to the transportation budget, and then we added another \$20 million in the June 17 budget to support a new funding model for transportation. That is really going to encourage school boards to work together to best serve the needs of the students in their community. Remote and rural boards with declining enrolment are also going to benefit from top-up funding, which allows boards to continue to operate schools that are not at 100% capacity by adding a top-up of as much as 20%.

The small schools funding does provide additional financial assistance toward—

**Mr Gerretsen:** On a point of order, Mr Chairman: The minister seems to be reading from a document. I wonder if she would be prepared to table that document with the committee so that we could all have the benefit of it and study it later on as to what exactly is in it.

**The Vice-Chair:** If it is extensive, we may do that. I don't know now long the minister will be.

**Hon Mrs Witmer:** It's all going to be in Hansard.

**Mr Gerretsen:** I'd like to study it before that, because questions could be arising right from her document. Could you table that document you're reading from, the entire document?

**Hon Mrs Witmer:** I'd certainly be happy to give you the information. It's information—

**Mr Gerretsen:** No, I want you to table the document.

**Hon Mrs Witmer:** Anyway, what we're talking about—

**The Vice-Chair:** I think that is a no, actually.

**Hon Mrs Witmer:** What we are talking about is an increase in small school funding. We have more than doubled, again, the amount of money from 1997—\$26.7 million—to a projected \$70 million in 2002-03. That's an increase of 102%. I know Peter Gooch has further details on what we have done in the way of helping those schools in remote and rural areas. Would you like to hear from Mr Gooch?

**Mr O'Toole:** Oh, yes. He's excellent. Most staff are.

**Mr Miller:** Certainly, yes.

**Hon Mrs Witmer:** Maybe he has a document to table, John.

**Mr Gerretsen:** Maybe he's got some information. I find it curious that you're answering his questions and Mr Prue's questions but none of our questions. Now

there's a question for you: why aren't you answering the questions of the official opposition, Minister?

**Mr Miller:** Mr Gerretsen, you have to stop talking in order to get a question answered.

**Mr Gerretsen:** I stopped talking.

**The Vice-Chair:** OK, proceed.

**Mr Gooch:** I would say to Mr Gerretsen that the ministry does publish extensive documentation about student-focused funding. There's a wealth of information on the Web site and in our technical papers and so forth. The question is what student-focused funding provides for schools that are in northern Ontario or are remote or rural, and there are a number of components of student-focused funding, as the minister has outlined in brief, but I can explain a little bit more. We do have a very extensive database in the ministry of where schools are, their size and their enrolment. We do provide funding to boards that have small schools, because it does cost more to provide a program in a small school because there are fewer students, of course, to generate per-pupil funding to pay for teacher costs and all the sorts of things that go into that. We have a very transparent formula, and it uses a number of factors, including the number of pupils per grade in a given school, how far apart schools are, and we generate an allocation for very small schools throughout the province.

We also look at how many principals a board can fund on our benchmarks and compare that to the number of schools they have. If they have a lot of smaller schools, it's hard for them to generate funding for principals out of the normal foundation grant, so we provide an additional amount of \$10 million to provide additional funding for principals and vice-principals to school boards that have a higher proportion than usual of small schools. We also then provide an allocation for remote and rural boards, and we use factors there. Again, we look at the distance away that each board is from a major urban centre, because one of the things that drives costs for boards is moving goods and services and people around. So we look at a distance factor. Also, in the 2001-02 school year we introduced a new measure for remote and rural boards that looked at school dispersion. We used the technology that's now available through geographical information systems to be able to calculate very accurately the average distance between all the schools of a board and the board office and the distance among all the schools. That gives us a very good index of how far apart the schools are. That means, again, it turns into a good estimate of the board's costs, because they need to move goods and services and people around those schools. So we use that factor in the remote and rural funding.

Finally, we use a small board component as well, because a board is a board whether it has 5,000 pupils or 50,000 pupils. The scaling factors mean that it's hard for a board to generate out of a per-pupil basis all the funding they need to run their board, not just for their central administration but their school administration as well.

So that gives you a sense of the factors we use. The minister gave you some numbers about the growth in the total geographic circumstances funding that we provide. In 1997, we started with \$67 million. In the current school year, our estimate is that about \$187.5 million will go for geographic circumstances funding for boards; a significant increase, and something that really helps them manage their costs.

**Mr Miller:** Thank you very much for that detailed response.

I have a question to do with the Trillium Lakelands District School Board. I had a meeting with some parents a few weeks ago to do with special education and the ISA process. When they were speaking with me they had some information from the school board itself that they showed to me. On the cover it said, "This school board is being underfunded by the province of Ontario by \$13.5 million."

I'm wondering if that's factual, first of all. If the actual numbers for the Trillium Lakelands District School Board could be explained to me, I would appreciate that.

**Hon Mrs Witmer:** I will ask the deputy to give you that information.

**Ms Herbert:** Funding for Trillium Lakelands has increased from \$140 million and change in 1998 to \$146 million in 2002-03, which is an increase of about 4.8%. During that same time, their enrolment has declined by almost 800 pupils, from 20,924 to just over 20,000 this year, a decrease of 4.65%. Also, their flexible funding increased from \$3,367,000 in 2001-02 to \$4,934,000 in 2002-03, which is an increase of 45% over that time period. Their special education funding increased from almost \$12,300,000 in the first year of student-focused funding to \$13,736,000 this school year, which is an increase of 11% in that same time period.

They've also benefited from some additional money this year, including \$2 million in local priorities funding; \$933,000 as a declining enrolment adjustment to reflect the fact that they have to manage through a declining enrolment period; \$53,000 for transportation funding due to declining enrolment; \$67,000 in learning opportunities grants; and \$114,000 for school renewal. The whole total of that package was \$3,750,000.

**Mr Miller:** So there have actually been some substantial increases in funding for the Trillium Lakelands District School Board, even though their enrolment has declined by almost 5%.

**Ms Herbert:** That's right. As well, they received almost \$700,000 for textbooks out of the initiative that the Premier announced earlier this spring.

1650

**Mr Miller:** One transportation question: certainly I've had a few bus companies, especially last year, concerned about funding for bus transportation for school boards. You were speaking earlier about a new process that's going to be used to determine transportation funding. I'm wondering if that's increasing in the next year in this year's estimates.

**Hon Mrs Witmer:** The amount of money for transportation funding?

**Mr Miller:** Yes.

**Hon Mrs Witmer:** Yes, it is increasing, as we've indicated here today. We do want to have that new funding model for transportation up and running. Part of Dr Rozanski's report also takes a look at the whole issue of transportation and how we can start to encourage all boards to work together in a way to more effectively and efficiently deliver transportation by working together, as opposed to two or three buses driving down the same road.

**Mr Miller:** That would seem to make a lot of sense, I would think.

**Hon Mrs Witmer:** It does.

**Mr Miller:** I know Mr Mazzilli wants to ask a question, so I will pass it on to him.

**Mr Mazzilli:** Minister, thank you. I've learned a lot from Mr Prue's questioning also. I just want to go to the board-by-board allocation of the \$10 million for ISA assessments. One of the things that I've heard—did we not have a grip on how many special-education children we have in the province before this process? Is that what you were trying to come up with?

**Ms Herbert:** I think the process was designed at the beginning to make sure that we had identified all of the very-high-needs children in the province. ISA is designed to reflect and support exceptionally high-needs children in the province and we wanted to make sure that we and the boards had captured and recognized, if you like, for funding purposes, all of those children.

**Mr Mazzilli:** And that project was obviously over three years and then to come up with a strategy on how to deal with those numbers.

If I look at the example that Mr Prue used about—obviously these processes are exhaustive, but the Essex board received \$169,892, so \$170,000, for approximately three people doing these assessments. Would that cover the cost of staff doing those assessments?

**Ms Herbert:** That was a one-time allocation for this year to assist them to finish and complete any of their assessments; that's correct.

**Mr Mazzilli:** So classroom resources shouldn't be touched as far as these assessments with this type of funding?

**Ms Herbert:** It should help them add to their resources. They will, of course, have to use the people who have the expertise in the boards—their special education teachers and their psychologists, if they have some on staff or who they contract with—because those are the local people who know the children best.

**Mr Mazzilli:** Obviously at the end of this process you're going to have some numbers to work with, and that's why you're asking Dr Rozanski to come up with a strategy on how to fund special education properly.

**Hon Mrs Witmer:** That's right. The task force has an opportunity to take one more look as to how we can best support these students, Frank.

I think the other thing that Mr Gooch touched on that's really important is that prior to this process of assessment being put in place, different school boards had done

different jobs of assessing students. The reason some school boards are having more work to do is because some of the information that should have been available in regard to assessment of students had not been done. In this way, again, all students in the province are going to be undergoing the same type of assessment and will then be provided with the same type of human and financial support. So it's a very important process and, again, it will ensure equality of opportunity when it comes to programming and services.

**Mr Mazzilli:** So what you're saying is that before you can solve the problem, you need to identify the problem.

**Hon Mrs Witmer:** You need to identify it and you need to make sure that all children in the province go through the same type of assessment process. Unfortunately, different boards were approaching this differently.

**Mr Mazzilli:** I thank you. I'll pass it over to Mr O'Toole.

**Mr O'Toole:** I appreciate it. In special ed, clearly all of us do want proper resources there. It's really trying to find the template—the actual uniform assessment system is what we're trying to get.

I can tell you, as a trustee, I chaired special education for four years and worked with many really caring parents and staff and found there was inconsistency between boards. When I was a director on the trustees' association for the province, it was then, back in 1982, when they introduced special education funding, and it was recognized—I think it was Bill 82 at the time, I'm not sure, but that funding was actually done by a Conservative government. So it's just taken us—there were those 10 lost years there where you couldn't achieve what we're trying to do now.

I know there's \$1.37 billion spent in special ed, the highest ever in the province of Ontario. This isn't just the Kool-Aid language; these are the genuine numbers that you need to hold to benchmarks. As government over the next 10 years, we'll certainly be looking at having progressively the right amount of funding for the right amount of students.

I just want a couple of other fundamental things put on the record because I know the minister sometimes is encouraged to hear the right numbers. In fact, I get them from her. When I think of an issue and it talks about small rural schools, I can't help but think of my riding of Durham—in everything I do, really, because that's where I'm elected, hopefully. But we have a couple of schools, Minister, and they're not really rural remote, they're in the Durham board, and one of them is the best secondary school in this province. I think it has about 140 students: Cartwright secondary school, a wonderful school. There's 100% participation in that school by parents and staff, and the staff should be commended. They really work outside the language of the local contract. Mr Verness, the music teacher, is just an inspiration. All of this black armband stuff, he's not into that. I wouldn't say he's a supporter of this government, which isn't really important, but he puts his students first. But I am working on him, making sure of that.

But I guess the point is that I'm concerned about that Cartwright school. Quite honestly I'll be fighting, and I can pre-warn you on this, for that board because it doesn't fit the nice little packaged template we have. This is where you need to have that flexibility.

The last thing I want to put on the record, though, is that the number of school closures often comes up. It's a misnomer. The average number during the Liberal reign was that about 34 schools a year were closed. Sean, in all respect, we're below that.

**The Vice-Chair:** Well, you're going to have to do that some other time.

Madam Minister, I'm going to ask your indulgence for five minutes. Is that OK with you? I know you have to leave at 5:00. It's going to go to Mr Gerretsen. After the five minutes, we will adjourn. Is that OK?

**Hon Mrs Witmer:** That would be fine.

**The Vice-Chair:** Mr Gerretsen, I'll give you five minutes.

**Mr Gerretsen:** Just two issues, very quickly. It's unfortunate the government members today—you should hire them all as your PR agents, but that's beside the point. He talked about his Trillium boards. Here the board has put on paper, if I understood Mr Miller correctly, that they are being underfunded by 13.86%. I cannot imagine a board doing that if they really didn't believe that was the case. So it's like we get one side of the story here, and you're saying they're not, but we don't really know anything about the other side of the story. It would be wonderful if we could get those boards in here as well and listen to their side of the story as to how they figure they're being underfunded.

Let me just ask you very quickly about something you said very early on in your presentation, that the budget this year has gone up by 2.9%. Enrolment has only gone up by 0.4%. I would suggest to you that the cost of living has gone up by much more than 2.5%, being the difference between the two. As a matter of fact, the CPP increase this year was 3% and the cost to senior citizens who live in long-term care homes in this province has gone up by 15% as a result of the policies of your government right now. So I don't think you're doing anything all that much for education if in effect the amount that you've increased the budget hasn't even come up to whatever the cost-of-living increase has been for this year, or, if so, just barely so.

With that, I will leave it to Mr Peters, who has the last four minutes of my five minutes.

**Mr Steve Peters (Elgin-Middlesex-London):** I thought she was going to comment.

**Mr Gerretsen:** Would you like to comment on that?

**Hon Mrs Witmer:** Oh, did you want to give me a chance?

**Mr Gerretsen:** Absolutely. I was under the impression that you only answered Mr Prue's questions and your own government members' questions.

**Hon Mrs Witmer:** No, no.

**Mr Gerretsen:** I'll tell Mr Kennedy that you finally answered a question. What's the answer?

**Hon Mrs Witmer:** I just want to let you know one more time that we announced last year that we were going to give boards—

**Mr Gerretsen:** Announced. “Announced” is not the same as spending.

**Hon Mrs Witmer:** I know. We announced we were going to give boards \$360 million this year.

**Mr Gerretsen:** How much did you give them?

**Hon Mrs Witmer:** Do you know what we’re actually giving them? Four hundred million dollars. So we are giving them \$40 million more than we said we would, and do you know what? We are spending more on education than we ever have before.

**Mr Gerretsen:** Only 2.9% more than last year. Those were your comments.

**Hon Mrs Witmer:** I have to tell you that we are going to continue to make sure we provide support to our students.

**Mr Gerretsen:** Tell that to the parents and students who need special education assistants in this province, because they don’t believe—

**Hon Mrs Witmer:** That’s why we set up the Education Equality Task Force.

**Mr Gerretsen:** And in the meantime, 40,000 kids have already been assessed and there’s a need there and you’re not doing anything for them, nothing whatsoever.

**Mr Peters:** Minister, I’m hoping that when you review the funding formula, you recognize that there is more to this province than Toronto and that you need to really recognize the rural communities. Your school, where I think you first started to teach, was West Elgin. West Elgin doesn’t meet the threshold of 900-odd students but that school is such an important part of the community. Lord Dorchester, another school in my

riding, doesn’t meet that threshold of 900-odd students. Arthur Voaden in St Thomas is the same thing.

So as this funding formula review is taking place, and I recognize that you’ve got the geographic circumstances grant in place, but how do you alleviate the fears of people in those communities—West Lorne, as an example—who say, “Boy, our school doesn’t meet the threshold”? School boards are saying that they’re going to have to look at the potential for school closures. How do you alleviate fears, or what are you going to do to alleviate fears at West Elgin secondary school, because it doesn’t meet that threshold—the potential is there for a future for it?

**Hon Mrs Witmer:** I think you raise a very good point. We need to remember that there are 72 boards in Ontario. They’re not all in urban communities. We have the rural boards, we have the isolated, remote boards in northern Ontario, and I guess we want to make sure that Dr Rozanski takes a look at that, and I know he is, in order to ensure that the funding can be appropriately distributed to those boards, and takes into consideration the rural, the urban, the remote factor, the geographical issue, whether it’s a small board or a large board. I would agree with you that some of these schools don’t meet the present criteria but they are important to the future, and in some respects the future economy, of that particular community.

Yes, my first job was at West Elgin. I was proud to be a teacher and I enjoyed it.

**The Vice-Chair:** The estimates committee stands adjourned until Tuesday. Just for housekeeping, five minutes of the Liberal time has gone. They have another 15 minutes when they resume on Tuesday, immediately after routine proceedings. We stand adjourned.

*The committee adjourned at 1702.*







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