



ISSN 1181-6465

**Legislative Assembly
of Ontario**

Third Session, 37th Parliament

**Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario**

Troisième session, 37^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

Tuesday 1 October 2002

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Mardi 1^{er} octobre 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
Greffière : Susan Sourial

Hansard on the Internet

Hansard and other documents of the Legislative Assembly can be on your personal computer within hours after each sitting. The address is:

<http://www.ontla.on.ca/>

Index inquiries

Reference to a cumulative index of previous issues may be obtained by calling the Hansard Reporting Service indexing staff at 416-325-7410 or 325-3708.

Copies of Hansard

Information regarding purchase of copies of Hansard may be obtained from Publications Ontario, Management Board Secretariat, 50 Grosvenor Street, Toronto, Ontario, M7A 1N8. Phone 416-326-5310, 326-5311 or toll-free 1-800-668-9938.

Le Journal des débats sur Internet

L'adresse pour faire paraître sur votre ordinateur personnel le Journal et d'autres documents de l'Assemblée législative en quelques heures seulement après la séance est :

Renseignements sur l'index

Adressez vos questions portant sur des numéros précédents du Journal des débats au personnel de l'index, qui vous fourniront des références aux pages dans l'index cumulatif, en composant le 416-325-7410 ou le 325-3708.

Exemplaires du Journal

Pour des exemplaires, veuillez prendre contact avec Publications Ontario, Secrétariat du Conseil de gestion, 50 rue Grosvenor, Toronto (Ontario) M7A 1N8. Par téléphone : 416-326-5310, 326-5311, ou sans frais : 1-800-668-9938.

Hansard Reporting and Interpretation Services
3330 Whitney Block, 99 Wellesley St W
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Telephone 416-325-7400; fax 416-325-7430
Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario



Service du Journal des débats et d'interprétation
3330 Édifice Whitney ; 99, rue Wellesley ouest
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Téléphone, 416-325-7400 ; télécopieur, 416-325-7430
Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON
ESTIMATESCOMITÉ PERMANENT DES
BUDGETS DES DÉPENSES

Tuesday 1 October 2002

Mardi 1^{er} octobre 2002*The committee met at 1547 in room 151.*

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

The Vice-Chair (Mr Alvin Curling): I presume we are ready to resume the estimates of the Ministry of Education. Last time we were here, as you know, 20 minutes were allocated to the Liberals. We had done five minutes, so we have 15 minutes more of the Liberals' time.

Mr Gerard Kennedy (Parkdale-High Park): Minister, I want to ask you what I started talking to you about in the House. We have with us today Jamie Mookerjea. She is the parent of a child in the Ottawa school board who was to benefit from a special-needs program that your supervisor has cancelled. I'm asking you very directly, were you aware that this program was cancelled, that there were children like her son, Jevon, benefiting, and do you agree that this program should be cut and taken away from Jevon and the other kids who benefited from it?

Hon Elizabeth Witmer (Deputy Premier, Minister of Education): I have now indicated twice in my responses in the Legislature that our government is very committed to special education. In fact, it was our government that actually introduced legislation that made the school system universally accessible to all children.

I've also indicated that certainly we would want to meet with this mother and her son, who I understand are here. I have two staff members who are prepared to deal with and respond to the concerns this individual has. We would be more than pleased to respond to her specific concerns.

Mr Kennedy: Minister, her specific response is a general responsibility that you have. You've said publicly—and this is why she wants these questions to be asked publicly—that there would be no children in the Ottawa board who would be hurt as the result of your decision. You sent the supervisor in. You have allowed or permitted or directed—we don't know which—the supervisor to cut this program.

Minister, can you tell us, do you agree with the cut to this program that is depriving Jevon and 31 other children? There are 31 other kids in this class and I want you to answer to them and to their parents. Do you agree with their program being cut, and will you work to restore that program and the other special-needs cuts that have happened in Ottawa at your direction or at least at your permission?

Hon Mrs Witmer: Again, I would recommend that our staff would meet with the mother in order that we can specifically make sure we receive the concerns and address them.

Mr Kennedy: With all respect, you have the facts in front of you. The mother has presented them. We have them documented here. We have an e-mail that says she was enrolled in this program and that the child was to benefit from this language training. You cancelled the program. Surely now that you have taken charge of these boards, it is appropriate that you be answerable for what happens in them.

Do you agree that this program should be cancelled? If you do not, will you help to restore this program so she can leave today knowing that? She's concerned that when you go behind closed doors with staff—you're the minister; you're in a position to provide the commitment to her and to the other children in Ottawa. If I may, you already provided that commitment and so did the Premier. You said no kids would be hurt. Jevon is hurting. It is now the end of September and he is getting no help with his language problem.

Will you make a commitment at least to see that he gets the assistance he needs? Will you give some form of assurance here publicly, as the minister who ordered these cuts? Will you say that Jevon will get the help he requires?

Hon Mrs Witmer: Maybe I can try one more time to say it in a way that the member is able to comprehend. We are quite prepared—I think I heard you say there was documentation available. I can tell you that our staff want to meet with this mother. We want to make sure that the needs of her child are addressed. We are committed to doing that. That's why I am suggesting that we would give the opportunity for the mother to meet with our staff in order that we can address the needs and concerns of her child.

Mr Kennedy: I want to ask you a direct question. I need you try to answer one of these questions. Was it your intention to take away services from children with special needs in Ottawa? Was that your intention in sending the supervisor?

Hon Mrs Witmer: I will just tell you one more time: we are happy to meet with this mother. We take the concerns that have been brought to our attention very seriously. We want to make sure that we would address the needs of her child, just as we would take into con-

sideration the needs of any child. Our government has worked very hard in order to address the concerns.

Mr Kennedy: If you won't answer the questions here in public—you wouldn't answer them in the Legislature; you're not answering them here in committee—what possible expectation can this mother have that you'll answer them in private?

The Vice-Chair: May I just say that it seems we're at loggerheads. I think the minister has stated she is prepared—

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): He's badgering.

The Vice-Chair: I'm not talking about badgering. The minister seems to have indicated she's prepared to have the mother meet with the respective—

Mr Kennedy: But with all respect, Mr Chair, that's a qualitative answer that says no, the minister will not answer the question directly. It's a way of avoiding the question.

Without challenging the chair in any respect whatsoever, it is important that the minister be given every opportunity to answer the questions. When successively questioned, she has avoided answering. I would ask for your help to help her to answer them.

The Vice-Chair: I'm trying to do that, Mr Kennedy. Would you be prepared that the mother meet with the staff of the ministry to resolve the matter in that respect, because the minister seems—

Mr Kennedy: Can you help me? Why is the minister not answering the questions today?

The Vice-Chair: She has emphasized, probably about four or five times, that's the direction she wants to go, if the mother is prepared to meet with the staff. I presume she's saying she refuses to answer beyond that. Is that OK?

Mr Kennedy: That is very regrettable. The Premier made a statement that was reported in a number of papers, including the National Post on August 29: "It is my understanding that no student who receives and qualifies for special education in Ottawa will be denied those services as a result of the things announced by Mr Beckstead," whom you hired, Minister.

Here's the child; here's the parent. They're here—at least she's here on behalf of her child—and you won't answer the questions.

I'd like to move on then. I can tell you we won't move on—

Hon Mrs Witmer: Would the mother like to meet with our staff?

Mr Kennedy: I'm not asking you a new question. You've taken up enough time not answering, unless you're prepared to answer the question.

Hon Mrs Witmer: Would the mother like to meet with our staff? Our staff are here, and we certainly want to make sure we can address the needs of her son.

Mr Kennedy: On her behalf, I'm authorized to say that she's prepared to meet, but she is disappointed that you won't answer the question. She would prefer that you answer the question here in public. That is her preference, expressed directly. If she had the opportunity

to meet with you, as you offered in the House—you said you would meet with her—she would tell you that directly.

Hon Mrs Witmer: We have staff available right now to meet.

Mr Kennedy: How can they give an answer if you won't give one here in public?

The Vice-Chair: Let's move on—

Interjections.

Mr Kennedy: For the benefit of the committee—

The Vice-Chair: Madam Minister, I understand that you're prepared to have staff meet with the mother some time.

Hon Mrs Witmer: Yes. We have two staff members here, both with responsibilities for special education. Obviously we're concerned about what we've heard, and we want to make sure that the needs of this young boy are addressed.

Mr Kennedy has indicated there's documentation here. We obviously want to work with this family in order that we can address those needs, and we're not prepared to play politics with this issue.

Mr Kennedy: Minister, there are 31 other children in this class. There are hundreds of other kids who are affected, and many more of them are prepared to come down to this Legislature. They shouldn't have to do that. It's shameful that you won't take responsibility for cuts you've enacted.

I want to ask you about some other areas of your responsibility. Before I do that, I want to note for the record that this is with reference to a program called the kindergarten language head start program. It was a program initiated by the Ottawa board to give children a chance to overcome their language difficulties, and it's been cancelled as a direct result of the supervisor's decision.

Minister, I want to ask you about the grade 10 literacy test. I want to know from you what program specifically you have in place that you've been referring to in the media today in terms of alternative diplomas. Is this something your ministry has researched and there's some data or some information you'd care to share with the committee today? Is there a specific plan about an alternative diploma that we could have tabled today?

Hon Mrs Witmer: I'm glad you asked us about this particular issue, because I think today we should all be celebrating. Our students and teachers in the province have worked very hard over the past year to ensure they can improve the basic literacy results. I can tell you, however, that we need to do more for those students who have not been able to achieve success. I have been meeting with school board trustees, school board chairs, staff of school boards, students themselves and teachers in classrooms in order that we can make sure the 25% of the students who did not achieve success this time will in the future. We want to help those students who are in need of additional support.

Mr Kennedy: It seems there's a no.

Hon Mrs Witmer: We've already invested \$25 million in remediation programs. I quoted from the Lime-

stone board about the fact that that money has certainly helped them improve their results. But having said that, there's still more we need to do. We cannot leave any child behind.

Mr Kennedy: I guess the answer is no. The answer is, there is no plan. I want to ask, Minister, why do you not have a plan? Your ministry had a practice test in October 2000, and even though it was a practice test and the EQAO said it wouldn't be used for comparison, it still showed a very grave problem. How can it be that we don't have a comprehensive plan?

Obviously you don't have a plan for an alternative diploma that can be shared with the committee; that is unfortunate. Is there any written plan, something that shows the ministry is taking seriously the 32,000 kids who right now face not graduating? Is there a detailed plan, something you can share with us to show that the Ministry of Education is taking the problems of these 32,000 kids with the utmost seriousness?

We have many experts in the room who are education specialists. Presumably they've been working on this issue since those first test results came out. Is there a plan that could be tabled for the benefit of the committee that we could see here today?

Hon Mrs Witmer: Mr Chair, I'm surprised. We have had a plan. We have been working now for many years to respond to the concerns of parents and the public of Ontario. They were looking for students to achieve academic success, higher standards.

Mr Kennedy: Minister, the question was about a plan.

Hon Mrs Witmer: That's why we have put in place the literacy test. That's why we have put in place the new programs on the early literacy and the early math programs—

Mr Kennedy: With respect, Minister, is there a plan?

Hon Mrs Witmer: —and we've invested about \$60 million. We have put in place \$25 million—

Mr Kennedy: Minister, this is a grade 10 test and those kids don't benefit. Could you table a plan?

Hon Mrs Witmer: I'm really sorry, Mr Kennedy, but you obviously don't understand. There has been a lot of work involved. There is a very comprehensive plan—

Mr Kennedy: What I've asked very specifically, Mr Chair, because this is our limited time in the opposition—

Hon Mrs Witmer: —and I'm going to ask the deputy to make further comments, because she has been involved.

Mr Kennedy: Deputy, I'll ask you then to direct your comments to my question. The question was, do you have a plan, an outline, a strategy that is written down that we in this committee, who are charged with looking at what you do with the funds that are granted by the Legislature, can see, a written plan on how to help young adults who are struggling to pass this literacy test? Is there such a plan in your ministry, and can you bring it here today?

1600

Ms Suzanne Herbert: There is a group called the Curriculum Implementation Partnership that is chaired by

myself and the dean of OISE, Michael Fullan. They have undertaken, through the subcommittee of the Curriculum Partnership, to do work in this area. They've been working on the—

Mr Kennedy: I spoke with Dean Fullan, and I understand that committee hasn't met for some time. Is there a plan that's generated?

Ms Herbert: It meets on a regularly scheduled basis, every four months. It has put together recommendations to the curriculum partnership which have been accepted by the curriculum partnership.

Mr Kennedy: Are those available here today?

Ms Herbert: They're not available here today, no.

Mr Kennedy: Is there anything else that looks like a plan for these kids that we could have access to in this committee? I think it's fair information to be shared.

Ms Herbert: I think we'd be happy to table our information on all the programs that we do on remediation. Those programs are public information.

Mr Kennedy: It sounds like there is no comprehensive strategy focused on these 32,000 kids, and I feel that's a very unfortunate gap in your mandate.

Ms Herbert: With all due respect, I would disagree with you.

Mr Kennedy: Could we see such a plan if it exists?

Ms Herbert: I said I would be happy to table our public information.

Mr Kennedy: While I have your attention, could I ask for the other things that you said you would be tabling? There are a number of things we asked for a few days ago that you said would be forthcoming; for example, the costs of the supervisors and a number of pieces of related information. Is that information here today?

Ms Herbert: That information will be tabled for the committee or we can respond to it today.

Mr Kennedy: Is it here today to be tabled for the benefit of the members of the committee?

Ms Herbert: We'll be happy to answer those questions for you.

Mr Kennedy: I'm sorry, is it or is it not here?

Ms Herbert: I'm sorry?

Mr Kennedy: Is the information that you said you would bring forward here today for the benefit of the committee?

Ms Herbert: I'd be happy to answer those questions.

Mr Kennedy: We asked, and you agreed to provide it in writing. I don't know why—that would be stalling on your part for that.

Having learned there's not a plan, Minister, I would recommend to you that some of the approaches we have put forward are something that you might—

Hon Mrs Witmer: With all due respect, there is a plan. Obviously you don't wish to hear it.

Mr Kennedy: You have no plan, because you haven't tabled anything here whatsoever. Your platitudes aren't going to help 32,000 kids. They simply aren't.

Hon Mrs Witmer: Your leader said that all students were going to achieve 75%. I can tell you, with this literacy test, we're already here.

Mr Kennedy: You want to pay close attention, because we're saying there needs to be a 50% improvement.

I challenge you here today, and you can tell us if you'll accept the challenge, to set a target, to say that 90% of kids can pass that literacy test. Do you accept that? Do you? If you had a plan, you might.

Hon Mrs Witmer: We have a plan. Do you know what? I think that probably you should focus on the facts and not the fiction.

Mr Kennedy: It's unfortunate that you don't have enough effort being put forward by your ministry to put it forward to us at this committee that scrutinizes your expenses. The people of Ontario, and these parents and young adults particularly, are concerned about what will happen to them. We've seen not one piece of paper forthcoming from your ministry.

The Vice-Chair: The time is up. It is the time of the NDP for their 20 minutes. They are not here. I'm going to ask the committee—the NDP is walking in right now. They have 20 minutes. I know Mr Marchese is quite ready to present his 20 minutes just now.

Mr Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): Thank you for your indulgence, Mr Chair.

The Vice-Chair: I do have lots.

Mr Marchese: There's so much to say. Minister, welcome back.

Hon Mrs Witmer: You're welcome. It's always good to see you.

Mr Marchese: I enjoy seeing you too; here, in the House.

Hon Mrs Witmer: Everywhere.

Mr Marchese: Everywhere, exactly.

Can I ask you just a quick question? How many people are working with the supervisor here at the Toronto board of education at the moment? How many staff do they have? Do you know?

Hon Mrs Witmer: Do you know what? I'm going to let the Deputy respond to that question.

Ms Herbert: My understanding is that the supervisor has one staff that he's hired to work with him. Obviously, they have the potential to hire others to do additional work within the board at their discretion. That's part of their role.

Mr Marchese: Let me try to, by way of names—we have Mr Christie; McVicar, yes? We have Ross Parry, PR guy. We have Mac Penney. Is Mac Penney on this file or not? Directly, indirectly? Do we know? Does the minister know?

Ms Herbert: As far as I know, the first two names, Mr Christie and Mr McVicar, were announced by the government, and then there is a communications officer.

Mr Marchese: Yes, that's Ross Parry, right?

Ms Herbert: Right.

Mr Marchese: Is Mr Rosen back on this file?

Ms Herbert: Mr Rosen was the investigator for—

Mr Marchese: I understand that. Is he back on the file?

Ms Herbert: The supervisor may have asked for additional audit work to be done. That's entirely possible.

Mr Marchese: May have? Did? We don't know? We know?

Ms Herbert: He's the supervisor. He's authorizing the running of the board.

Mr Marchese: But you don't know what—

Ms Herbert: I do not personally know this.

Mr Marchese: Did someone from Rosen's office or connected to Rosen get hired, another accountant?

Ms Herbert: All I can say is that if the supervisor has asked for additional audit work to be done at the board since he's begun his task there, there may be staff doing audit work. That's entirely possible.

Mr Marchese: Yes, of course. What's your view, Minister and/or Deputy, about all this? Don't we have a lot of people on this file? How many people do you need? Rosen has already done his dirty work. Then we've got so many of these other people on this file. There are these PR people. How many people do we need to take care of this file?

Hon Mrs Witmer: Perhaps you could tell us how many people you think we need.

Mr Marchese: I can tell you.

Hon Mrs Witmer: I still remain in the position I took originally. I always think it would have been in the best interests of the board to have looked for a way to balance their budget and remain masters of their own house, Mr Marchese. That didn't happen. As you know, the recommendations that had been made by staff to balance the budget were not approved by a small majority of trustees. As a result, the recommendation was made to send in a supervisor.

Mr Marchese: Sure.

Hon Mrs Witmer: I think the supervisors are, to the best of their ability, doing the job that has been asked of them. They are bringing forward a plan to balance the budget.

Mr Marchese: I understand.

Hon Mrs Witmer: I know they've been meeting with staff, parents and trustees. I'm optimistic they will be able to move us forward in a way that continues to provide stability for the students of Toronto.

Mr Marchese: Are you aware what Mr Rosen had recommended should be cut to balance the budget? Could you tell us some of the things he wants to cut?

Hon Mrs Witmer: That report was, as you know, public information.

Mr Marchese: Yes.

Hon Mrs Witmer: It's going to be up to the supervisors at the end of the day to take into consideration what they're hearing from the community, the staff and the trustees, and of course take into consideration what was recommended by the investigator as well.

Mr Marchese: Is there anything Rosen recommended by way of cuts where you would simply say, "No, we can't do that"?

Hon Mrs Witmer: At this point in time, we have asked the supervisor to do the consultation with the community to best determine how we can balance the budget.

Mr Marchese: I understand that, but you see—

Hon Mrs Witmer: That report will be available at the end of October.

Mr Marchese: I know that. I'm not concerned about that.

Hon Mrs Witmer: I'm not going to try to speculate about what may or may not be, because the responsibility has been given to others to make those decisions.

Mr Marchese: I understand that. They could have balanced their budget. I agree with you. If they had done all the things Mr Rosen recommended, they could have done it.

In my touring on our document on our vision of education, we learned that the majority of boards have had to make cuts that were program related, and then at the same time had to dip into their reserve funds to keep their budgets balanced. Anybody can do that. What it means is doing two critical things: cutting programs and dipping into reserve funds. Does it worry you a little bit that they've had to do that?

Hon Mrs Witmer: In answer to your question, there was a budget that had been prepared by the director and staff of the Toronto board that the trustees had an opportunity to look at. There were the recommendations from Mr Rosen. At the end of the day, I think we're going to have to wait and see what the supervisor recommends in the way of how we move forward to balance the budget. I would hope we would continue to keep in mind, first and foremost, and always, the needs of the children in the classroom.

Mr Marchese: I agree with you. The needs of the kids in the classroom preoccupy me too. That's my concern. I have a problem about what we would cut from the education system and how that would affect the students and the quality of education, and you're simply not commenting on that. You're simply saying, "Well, the supervisors will look at it. They'll bring back recommendations and we'll see." It doesn't address my concern.

1610

I'm sure you're concerned about this too, because when they have to dip into reserve funds, it ought to worry you as a minister. It worries me as a former teacher and trustee and as critic for education, because reserve funds are there for a rainy day. They are collected over a period of time to deal with emergency matters that arise from time to time. For them to dip into that to keep their books balanced, to address your requirements, your funding formula requirements—you give them no choice. Does it worry you?

Hon Mrs Witmer: You know what? I would agree with you. I think we are both concerned about the student in the classroom. Having said that, we need to keep in mind that shortly after Mr Eves became Premier, our government certainly had heard people in Ontario speak about the fact that the funding formula needed to be reviewed. There were some concerns about whether it

was responding to the needs throughout the province of Ontario.

As you know, we did set up, within a very short period of time, a task force under Dr Mordechai Rozanski. They have been travelling the province. They have had many consultations with many groups. People have been very impressed with Dr Rozanski's sincere commitment to students.

I do anticipate, Mr Marchese, because I do share your concerns—we need to make sure there is fairness, equality and stability, and obviously we also need to make sure that there is adequate funding for students to meet their needs. We are working with Rozanski. He'll be giving us the recommendations in November, and we'll move forward from there.

Mr Marchese: I hear you. Obviously I realize that you and Eves are gently moving in a different direction, because you want to get rid of politics in the education system.

Hon Mrs Witmer: I do.

Mr Marchese: Yes, and all these trustees are so political.

Hon Mrs Witmer: No. Having been a trustee—and you have too, Mr Marchese—I would tell you that I think the majority of trustees do an outstanding job. They work very hard on behalf of the people in their communities.

Mr Marchese: But a number of people in your government—and I'm not sure whether you did this as well—have commented on the fact that these trustees in these three boards—Toronto, Hamilton and Ottawa—are really playing political games. They could have balanced the budget but they haven't, so they're playing politics. They're not worried about what's happening to their students; they're not worried about cutting programs that would affect students. They are simply playing politics. You don't believe that, do you?

Hon Mrs Witmer: Mr Marchese, it would be inappropriate for me to speculate on what may or may not have influenced anybody's decision-making.

Mr Marchese: Can I ask you about swimming pools? What do you think about them?

Hon Mrs Witmer: I don't know. What do you think about them?

Mr Marchese: I like them. I like swimming pools. Because I don't swim very well, you see, so I—

Mr O'Toole: They're very expensive. I don't have one in my house.

Mr Marchese: Neither do I, but swimming pools are good for people like me, because I don't know how to swim. I remember Harbord Collegiate—grade 9 or 10. Mr Beckett, my math teacher—we were there doing whatever training it was and he said, because he knew I couldn't swim, "Why don't you just jump into the pool?" He thought this is the best way to get this kid to learn, right? So I dive into the pool, but I don't end up on the other side where O'Toole is—I was about to say "thank God"—but I end up in the middle. I can't swim. Here I am struggling to get up, then I land in the middle of this pool and I go down. Mr Beckett is saying to just wait for

him; he'll swim. I go down once and I'm not calling for help because I'm brave, right? I also know there are a lot of people in the pool who wouldn't let me die—I didn't think. I go down three times and eventually somebody had to come and nudge me to the other side. You see, pools serve a great purpose in those schools. For me, at least, it was a good thing. You like pools too, don't you?

Hon Mrs Witmer: Well, if we are going to share personal experiences, growing up in Exeter, Ontario, I can tell you that we didn't have pools, but we did have the river. So I grew up learning to swim in the local river. We just made sure we didn't put our feet down, because there were things down there that you didn't want your feet to touch. As far as pools are concerned, we know that throughout the province of Ontario the majority of pools are probably operated by the local municipality. Here in the city of Toronto, I know that discussions have been going on with the city to see if they would like to assume responsibility for the pools, because pools are not within the funding formula at the present time. We're looking at other partners to assume some responsibility for those pools.

Mr Marchese: Ernie doesn't like pools, does he? He doesn't like chlorine, does he?

Hon Mrs Witmer: I would never speak for anyone else as to what they may or may not like.

Mr Marchese: But, Elizabeth, just to tell you something, in the old days the provincial government didn't fund swimming pools. Is that correct?

Hon Mrs Witmer: I'm sorry?

Mr Marchese: In the old days, when boards were raising a lot of their own money from their own assessments, they didn't get help from the province to pay for those pools; is that correct?

Hon Mrs Witmer: The only thing I can tell you is that there is no other board in Ontario that solely operates pools. I think there are pools that are operated in conjunction with municipalities, and that's the type of partnership we would be looking to see developed here in Toronto.

Mr Marchese: No disagreement about partnerships.

Hon Mrs Witmer: I don't disagree with you. You benefited from the experience.

Mr Marchese: Yes.

Mr O'Toole: He still can't swim.

Mr Marchese: No, I'm OK, John. I swim OK; not great, but I can survive; I won't die for 10 minutes.

I wanted to say to you, Elizabeth, that those pools were paid for by the taxpayers of Toronto. You agree. You know that.

Hon Mrs Witmer: Do you know what? I can't dispute that.

Mr Marchese: Because it's true. We, the taxpayers, paid for our swimming pools because we thought it was a good thing.

Hon Mrs Witmer: That's why, if Toronto assumes joint responsibility with the school board, they will still continue to be supported by Toronto taxpayers.

Mr Marchese: No disagreement. I'm going to get to that in a second.

Hon Mrs Witmer: OK.

Mr Marchese: The point is that you or a previous minister—Ecker, I know, didn't have pools in Durham, but we did. No one ever said, "We recognize that you Toronto residents paid for that out of your local assessment." No one has ever said that; not your former boss, Mike Harris; not Ernie currently, because he doesn't like chlorine; not you; not Ecker; no one. But it would have been right and fair to have said, "We didn't put in a cent as a province; they did."

What you did that created a problem in all this is that you took financing away from boards of education so they could no longer fund the swimming pools on their own, because you now have complete control. Do we agree?

Hon Mrs Witmer: The funding model has changed, Mr Marchese.

Mr Marchese: I know that. You centralized education financing. You took it away from local boards. All of a sudden these school boards have pools and you and Ernie say, "Pools are bad. We should be running schools. It shouldn't be part of what school boards do." That's what you guys were saying. But that's what they were doing, because they had local control. Now they have no more local control and you're saying to those communities, "We don't like it." Does that present a problem for you in intellectual terms of how I'm presenting it, or do you have an opinion one way or the other on this?

Hon Mrs Witmer: No, I'm listening with a lot of interest.

Mr Marchese: I know that. Then you talked about the idea of joint partnerships with the city of Toronto. The problem is, the city's saying, "We have a serious funding problem." I'm going to wait so that you—

Hon Mrs Witmer: No, it's OK.

Mr Marchese: You're saying the boards in the city of Toronto could work together.

Hon Mrs Witmer: Go ahead.

Mr Marchese: No, I want your undivided attention.

Hon Mrs Witmer: OK.

Mr Marchese: I don't mind waiting.

Hon Mrs Witmer: All right.

Mr Marchese: The city of Toronto's saying, "We don't have the money." Mel Lastman was just screaming at the federal government saying, "Great promises, but they don't deliver the money." They have the same beef with the province: "Great to have ideas, but we don't have the money."

Hon Mrs Witmer: I've just been given some information.

Mr Marchese: God bless the deputy.

Hon Mrs Witmer: On March 7, 2002, Toronto city councillors approved funding to keep the pools open. The city of Toronto will contribute \$6.3 million to the annual operating cost on the condition that the board contributes \$5.4 million annually. This funding allows for the con-

tinued operation of all 84 swimming pools, and of course that is under review.

1620

Mr Marchese: Sure. But a question to you and the deputy—I don't mind her participating, by the way—if the boards can't afford it any more, they've got a problem, right?

Hon Mrs Witmer: Don't forget that Rozanski is reviewing the funding formula.

Mr Marchese: Oh, he's looking at that. Right. We're going to have swimming pools in Toronto, so the kids at Harbord Collegiate can learn to swim.

The Acting Chair (Mr Steve Peters): Two minutes.

Mr Marchese: Steve seems to be very vigorous, I can tell. That's very good, Chair.

The problem I have, Minister, is that the city doesn't have any money. They're not going to let the swimming pools close; they can't. They have to put up money and they're doing so under duress. Secondly, they have to raise property taxes, and you've frozen the commercial-industrial tax portion, so they have to go after the homeowners. What is the city to do? They don't have the money. They don't want the schools to close. They're going to have to find the money that they're not getting from your government, so they're going to have to increase property taxes. Do you think that's the right thing to do?

Hon Mrs Witmer: Again, I will tell you there are discussions that are ongoing with the city regarding this whole issue. As I pointed out originally, in other parts of the province, pools are often operated in conjunction with local municipalities. The city has demonstrated a willingness to discuss this issue further.

Mr Marchese: But they're broke. They have no money. What do we do? They're saying, "We can't afford this," and they can't afford to close the swimming pools. So are we helping? Is the province helping out?

Hon Mrs Witmer: The discussions are ongoing, so I wouldn't speculate as to what may or may not be. Let's face it, regardless of who pays for the swimming pools, at the end of the day it's all coming from the same taxpayer. There's no magic pot of money.

Mr Marchese: Quite right, except that most people say property taxes are an unfair way to raise money, because people on fixed incomes can't afford some of those increases we are levying because of the download, the flushing down of responsibilities to the local municipalities. So they're saying, "Look, yes, there's one taxpayer, but if you are going after the people who have the least to pay because they're on fixed incomes, then that's an unfair way to raise the money." Would you agree or not agree?

Hon Mrs Witmer: I always have a lot of sympathy for people who are on fixed incomes. I think that's why our government has worked so hard to reduce all taxes. That's why we've seen job growth of about 954,000.

The Acting Chair: That concludes this round. We move to the government side.

Mr O'Toole: I just want to apologize to the members of the committee for the outlandish behaviour of Mr Kennedy in badgering—

The Acting Chair: Let's not editorialize and comment on individual members.

Mr O'Toole: The point is that you have to put these things on the record. As a member of the committee I feel it's indeed my duty to make it known that that's the mood of most of the committee members. If we're allowing the minister to respond to questions and I think acquiesce to meet with the family to try to resolve or at least certainly understand the demands Mr Kennedy was making—I really feel bad for the family being used as a political weapon by the Liberal education critic.

That being said, I had a couple of things. I want to pick up for a moment, if I may, on Mr Marchese's line of questioning. If I go back to the reforms in education during the time I was a trustee, which may seem a long time ago, the arguments are pretty much the same. They haven't really changed since Bill 82, I suppose, around 1982, the special education issue, anyway. There are still demands for more resources; no question. He brought up the important point, where did the education reforms really start, whether it's funding for pools or whatever the issue?

I have to give some credit to the NDP. They started the Royal Commission on Learning, which was a fundamental basis for reforming education. In fact David Cooke, who was then the Minister of Education, really was quite instrumental in starting the Education Quality and Accountability Office; he was instrumental in initiating the College of Teachers; he was instrumental in initiating curriculum reform; in fact, he instituted the first testing, all while he was the Minister of Education. We've simply made him one of the co-chairs of the Education Improvement Commission to bring those ongoing changes forward with some continuity and provided some service to the government in that capacity. So these debates, whether it's Mr Kennedy or whoever, are not new.

I think what we've done is added some stability and some confidence that education dollars would be spent on education. We've sort of called it classroom and non-classroom, but more specifically it's special ed. Much of that funding and some of the mechanisms weren't very accountable. I chaired the special education advisory committee, SEAC, when I was a trustee. I am quite familiar with the process and how it has subsequently changed. In fact, I could make the argument that the caseload on special education has quadrupled. There are more and more kids being identified who were never identified before. They just never did the IPRC, because under the act they were required then, if they identified them, to provide the service. The best way to avoid that is not to identify them.

Mr Marchese, let's go back. There were a couple of reports. The Fair Tax Commission talked about how you fund public education. There were disparities between the simple board I was on, which was spending about

65% of what Toronto and other assessment-rich communities were paying—in our community the assessment base was made up of about 12% industrial-commercial and the balance was residential, in Toronto it was about 50% industrial-commercial and 50% residential. It had a bigger base to spread a rich level of services on.

No one would argue with how important pools and other resources are, but I think equity in education is what's being missed. What's fair for Toronto and fair for all children is really what, I think, the minister is trying to achieve here. That equity was mentioned in the royal commission. It was mentioned in the Fair Tax Commission, most of which you should have been part of when you were the government. Of course you ran up such large deficits that you couldn't adequately fund any of it anyway.

I want to personalize this a bit. I think of when my son was attending Bowmanville High School, a ranked athlete, a ranked triathlete actually, went to a high school where there was a pool attached to the school. The pool was not available to the students because it was municipally operated. There was no co-operation between the two levels at all. He participated because he paid a fee. He joined the swim team etc. There were other children who were supported on the swim team through Rotary and Lions and in other ways. So there were mechanisms for making sure that opportunities were there for children who had the interest, and families and other charity organizations supported that as well.

At the end of the day, Mr Marchese, I would say it's about equity in education. We have to find a mechanism. That's what I think Professor Rozanski is doing, trying to find some equitable way of providing opportunities for all children in every part of this province. This has been a struggle for two decades at least.

I want to focus on one area that I think is quite important. I know it's important to the Minister of Education; I've heard her speak with some passion on it. That is special education. I know personally, and I would like to hear the minister respond on, the number of initiatives, the early literacy and other strategies that the minister has vigorously brought forward, funded and is delivering, whether it is textbooks, learning materials, recognition for teacher excellence. The whole special education initiative is a multi-year plan.

I ask you, Minister, to help us on the committee, and those who may read Hansard, about the initiatives you personally have committed yourself to on behalf of those vulnerable children in the sense of equity across this province. That's what we're looking for, making sure—for instance, we talked about the Ottawa case earlier. I watch this very rigorously. Ottawa specifically was spending almost twice as much as my board. I have children, parents with children who have special needs in my riding. I try to respond that I am arguing with the minister to make sure we get the fair amount of resources that are available.

What we need is equity. Ottawa, in my view, had a very rich model that I don't feel was sustainable for all

children in Ontario. Could you perhaps share the multi-year approach to special education resolve? I know it's \$1.37 billion now, the highest ever in my understanding, and it's not dependent on assessment-rich boards.

1630

Hon Mrs Witmer: It isn't any more. Really the objective is to ensure that all children in Ontario, no matter what their background might be or where they live or what challenges or advantages they might have, will have the same universal educational opportunity. That's what the funding formula is all about, and that's what the educational initiatives we have introduced are all about.

I guess I have to tell you up front that it really concerns me when people try to play politics with this issue. I had the opportunity, when I was a teacher, to teach children who had special needs. I know how hard teachers in the school work. I know how supportive parents can be. I would agree that we always need to continue to do more. We are identifying more students with special needs than ever before. We are serving students now in the school system who at one time simply didn't have the access to the school system that they need today. So they need very intensive support.

In fact we've asked Dr Rozanski to take a look at the whole issue of special education. Is our delivery of the special education services, the way we are doing it, the best that it can possibly be? We continue to hear concerns of parents and we hear, certainly, from teachers as well. I think we continually need to be evaluating the manner in which we respond to the needs of the students in the province of Ontario, so our minds continue to be open.

I also had the opportunity—because it was Dr Bette Stephenson, of course, who set up this whole initiative that allowed and encouraged students with special needs to have universal access. I was on the provincial special education committee. I'll tell you, there are very committed people in this province who are working together in partnership and co-operation in order that we can provide the best programs possible.

There has been a lot of progress made since 1995, and I just want to talk about a few things because I think you were interested in that. We've provided more than \$2 million to support the first phase of the Promoting Early Intervention project with the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario. Now here is an example of how a voluntary sector initiative built on partnership can re-inforce and support important province-wide policies like early identification and prevention.

You might be interested in knowing what's happening in PEI. There is now a recommended definition that has been put forward by the learning disabilities association, and there are proposed criteria for identifying children at risk. In fact I had the opportunity to speak to this association on Saturday here in Toronto. There is a dynamic screening and intervention model for senior kindergarten students. It screened more than 2,500 kindergarten students. We're looking forward to seeing the report on the pilot. My understanding is we are going to get it later this fall.

There is also now a Web-based teaching tool which is helping front-line teachers provide very effective and targeted intervention. You know, that is sometimes overlooked. We have excellent, outstanding teachers who work all day with special education students, but we have the classroom teacher, of course, who also needs to be trained in providing the best support possible to students that he or she may have in her class. So based on the initial results of the pilot, we are going to be providing almost \$1 million over the next two years to now fund phase two, because phase one was so successful, of this PEI initiative. It is going to enable those senior kindergarten children who were screened last year to be followed into grade 1 and to expand the Web-based teaching tool to help our teachers.

We really do hope that the research and the findings will help us to improve the strategies that we have already put in place to improve early reading and math skills. This fall, the representatives of the learning disabilities association will be sharing their findings with the early reading and early math expert panels. This is going to be a tremendously important step toward improving the ability of our dedicated teachers to reaching those children who have learning disabilities as early as possible. If I could go back for a minute to what we did at health, we set up the Healthy Babies, Healthy Children program in order that we could start to identify the students as early as possible, to intervene and support them in their lives in order that they can achieve their full potential.

What else are we doing? Our government is moving forward with a multi-year improvement plan for special education. We want to make sure that boards understand what is being expected of them, and we want to make sure they are all going to have the capacity to develop and implement new standards. It's going to take a little bit of time to get it right, because boards are at different stages of development. So you have the IEP reviews plus last year's report on special education by the provincial auditor. The good news is it shows that school boards are making the effort to implement the standards, but unfortunately there is still a long way to go. So we need to help them.

What are we doing? Prior to the start of the current school year, the ministry released an IEP template as a resource to assist our school boards. At the same time, we are consulting with the very committee I sat on, the Advisory Council on Special Education, and other partners on the development of sample IEPs and on updating the ministry's 1998 IEP resource guide. Above that, we are going to urge boards to establish mechanisms to internally review the quality of their IEPs, as was recommended by the provincial auditor. This experience with IEP standards and the review of school board special education plans will be valuable as we continue to review the work on program standards. I know it's a very complex issue, but based on the initial review of the recommended program standards, we believe that right now there would be a benefit in having further con-

sultation with our stakeholders. I am going to be announcing some next steps in January next year, as far as this process is concerned.

Let's take a look at coordinated services. We're moving forward with our coordinated services initiative. It's going to make it easier for parents to negotiate services for their children and ensure that students will not experience gaps in service. We're going to be working with other ministries. This is important, because we've had these silos and we've got to break down these silos. Education must be working with Comsoc, with health and with other key stakeholders, such as the LDAO that I mentioned, and of course with the advisory council.

Our first priority is to develop a set of guidelines for school boards that will promote better coordination of services for children as they go through the transition from preschool to the school system. These guidelines will help ensure that we build on existing interventions and that schools are ready to receive the children who have benefited from these programs.

Today we are spending \$1.37 billion for special education. I would just add here that this money continues to be protected, and that's important, because before the introduction of the funding model, oftentimes the money was not necessarily going where it was intended. We have increased special education funding by over 17% since the model was introduced. It was designed to ensure that the resources were invested where they mattered the most: on behalf of our students.

Our goal has not changed, but, as I mentioned to Mr Marchese before, we have heard concerns from parents, school boards, teachers and students about the limitations of the current funding formula. As I said at the outset, that's why we have Dr Rozanski doing the review. That's why he's taking a look at the current approach to funding special education, in order to make sure that what we're doing is really the most responsive way to address the needs of our students. We, of course, look forward to the work he is doing.

I just want to add that Lynn Ziraldo, the chair of the Minister's Advisory Council on Special Education is on the task force stakeholder advisory committee and that Dr Rozanski actually spent one whole stakeholder session on the issue of special education. This is an important issue for our government, and Dr Rozanski will give us his recommendations in November. I have to tell you that I am looking forward to seeing how we can better meet the needs of special education students.

These are a few things we are doing.

1640

Mr O'Toole: There is absolutely no end to the commitment, just listening to your comments. I just want to make a comment on the record; it is so important to me. I know the commitment to school renewal and new pupil places is almost half a billion. This has been a real boon: in fact, the whole Durham region has benefited from the new school funding mechanism. I just want to personally invite you to the official opening this Friday of St Francis of Assisi Catholic elementary school in Newcastle. I

know you would love to be there, Minister, and I know you are busy, but I certainly have every regard that if you were available you would be there.

With the moment left, I have to come back—I'm paying some closer attention to the fuzzy Liberal plan on education and Dalton's fuzzy math once again. There's always some substance one should listen to. Even when it's probably not well thought through, you can always listen to they're thinking about. I certainly find some of the things they say interesting, but not very accountable.

Mr Marchese: Give some examples.

Mr O'Toole: Well, one of the things is that Dalton's new plan has the unfortunate ring of Liberalism to it that it's not funded. I am wondering, Minister, in the brief time remaining—hopefully, there isn't that much left. The Liberal plan doesn't mean they'll deliver. I always think of a promise made, a promise kept. Their promises mean nothing, absolutely nothing. In fact they usually are—I can't use the word "lies."

The Acting Chair: Sorry, Mr O'Toole, your time is up.

Mr Kennedy: It's interesting that Mr O'Toole has to look at Liberal plans, because there aren't any Conservative ones, as we learned earlier today.

The question and the opportunity earlier, Minister, was to be accountable for you decisions with school boards, particularly with special education. You've allowed money to be cut there and allowed children's futures to be at least somewhat harmed, and you're in a position to do something about that.

Minister, I believe you will know there are special education cuts being recommended for Toronto as well. There are special education teachers—\$4 million—and education assistants—\$1.7 million this year and \$8 million next year—who will be lost to classrooms.

I want to put on the record for you the fact that right now in Toronto schools there is a woman whose son, James, has an EA for 29 days. They are advised they are going to lose that person. This child has Down's Syndrome and has been through a number of assessments, and they have no assurance there is going to be the assistance for this child to succeed. They say, and I kind of feel embarrassed that they have to make this argument, but after hearing Mr O'Toole—don't worry; we're getting around to some people in your area too—I see that he believes everything works, that this is fine. There is no advocacy on the other side for this to work. But Andrea Adams is putting us into the real world. She says her son James is not getting the best attention, just as we learned earlier, Mrs Mookerjea's son Jevon isn't either. Those services have been taken away.

So I want to ask something very specific that hopefully you could provide this committee with. Who in your department is talking with the supervisor in Ottawa who made those cuts, and the one in Toronto who is going to decide on the future of Ms Adams's son? Is there someone present today who could speak to us about their current status and so forth? How are you supervising the supervisor, and who is closest to the

decisions that are being made? Where in the ministry do those supervisors report, and could that person come forward to answer some questions?

Hon Mrs Witmer: We would be pleased to have the ministry spokesperson address the issue and the question that has been put to us.

Ms Herbert: Our person who works on the special-ed process is meeting with the family right now.

Mr Kennedy: My question was actually about the supervisor and the decision to cut special ed that was made in Ottawa. Who is the person who liaises with the supervisor, to whom the supervisor reports? Eventually it's you, Minister, but who in your ministry is the liaison with the supervisors in Ottawa, Toronto and Hamilton? Which level of staff is that coming to, and is that person available?

Ms Herbert: The supervisors asked for assistance from the ministry as they began their jobs, so we do have an ADM who can speak to the role, which is a support role for the supervisors.

The Acting Chair: Would you mind stating your name for Hansard once again, please?

Mr Norbert Hartmann: Norbert Hartmann, assistant deputy minister.

Mr Kennedy: Mr Hartmann, in terms of the way your ministry interacts with the supervisor, when did you become aware of the cuts in Ottawa? When did he inform you?

Mr Hartmann: If I recollect correctly, on about August 27.

Mr Kennedy: And when was that in relation to the public announcement of those cuts?

Mr Hartmann: About the time it was made.

Mr Kennedy: OK. Does that imply that you don't have a role in looking at the cuts that are made by the supervisor?

Mr Hartmann: Our role is an advisory role to answer technical questions, to make sure the requirements of the act are followed, to make sure the supervisor is aware of the kinds of background that needs to be available for his decision-making process. But we do not oversee the actual decisions of the supervisor.

Mr Kennedy: So if the government of the day says, for example—if you were here earlier, Mr Hartmann, Mr Eves made an undertaking, two undertakings in fact, one about school closings and another one about special education. Are you saying the ministry is not in a position to see that the supervisors don't exact those kinds of cuts?

Mr Hartmann: The supervisor is certainly made aware of what the requirements are, but we don't have any form of veto power.

Mr Kennedy: How are the supervisors empowered? Do they have a contract with the ministry? Under legislation, what powers are they utilizing? Are they using the powers of the board? What kind of powers do they have?

Mr Hartmann: They are the delegated the powers of the board by the minister.

Mr Kennedy: In other words, without any recourse by the ministry in any way, shape or form?

Mr Hartmann: There is full delegation of power.

Mr Kennedy: Full delegation of power. So what that means—and I won't ask you to interpret this, because I don't want to put you in an unfair position. I'm interpreting myself, and there may be a factual way that this could be proven wrong and I'd appreciate the correction. Basically, if Mr Eves says he will make sure that something like special ed doesn't get cut, he's technically not in a position to make that assurance. Is that correct?

Mr Hartmann: You're right. That is an unfair question.

Mr Kennedy: OK. In essence, you're telling us that the supervisor is making cuts and only has to listen to what the minister or the Premier want but can make whichever cuts he deems appropriate to make.

Mr Hartmann: The minister has delegated her powers and the powers of the board to the supervisor.

Mr Kennedy: OK. In the current situation you obviously have some ongoing liaison in this role. Is that correct with the Hamilton and the Toronto supervisors?

Mr Hartmann: That's correct, Mr Kennedy.

Mr Kennedy: What do you anticipate is the time at which the public and yourself, in this particular role, will learn about the cuts they may be proposing for the children and those boards?

Mr Hartmann: It is our hope there would be a plan presented sometime this month for how to bring these boards back to financial health.

Mr Kennedy: Do you anticipate that those actions, whatever the recommendations are, will be of the same nature as Ottawa; in other words, you'll learn of them the same day they're made public? Is that roughly what you would anticipate?

Mr Hartmann: The requirement is to bring forward a plan.

Mr Kennedy: But would the plan be similar in kind to the one done in Ottawa, which included cuts to certain services?

Mr Hartmann: At this point, that would be speculation. I'm not sure, Mr Kennedy.

Mr Kennedy: OK. But a plan would come forward. You wouldn't have advance input into that plan, you wouldn't give them reaction, because you've delegated the power.

Mr Hartmann: I simply provide them advice as to what kind of technical background they will require.

Mr Kennedy: Substantially, you're saying that the supervisors, in their delegated power, could take or ignore that advice. They're able to act unilaterally in this regard.

Mr Hartmann: As I indicated previously, they have the delegated powers.

1650

Mr Kennedy: I guess I'm wondering, is there any other route by which—let's say theoretically that the ministry wanted to have something happen on behalf of Mrs Mookerjea, for example, and she had a supervisor in

place. What would she have to do to be able to restore a program? Let's say that in good faith the supervisor cut a program but it turns out that several hundred kids are being harmed. If the minister wants to see that program restored, is the minister and is your ministry in a position to request that the supervisor restore those programs or not?

Mr Hartmann: The supervisor certainly has the discretion to change his mind on any issues that are brought to his attention.

Mr Kennedy: But the discretion is all on the supervisor's side; there's no discretion on the minister's side to reassert her powers, which she has delegated, and make decisions like that. Is that correct?

Mr Hartmann: The act does provide for the minister to revoke certain powers of supervision.

Mr Kennedy: I see. Is that a regulatory thing that would have to happen, or is that discretionary to the minister?

Mr Hartmann: The way I understand the act to be written, the minister has delegated powers and the minister can remove delegated powers.

Mr Kennedy: In other words, she could specifically say, "I'd like to reassume powers in terms of special education," for example? Could it be that specific?

Mr Hartmann: I'd have to check with legal counsel as to whether it could be that specific.

Mr Kennedy: Could we get whatever information you can provide to us on that account so we could better understand this interesting mechanism between the ministry—very specifically, because I know you're very busy with this role and so on, I'd like to know the legal basis under which the minister would be able to act or not act in this regard.

Mr Hartmann: I can certainly provide you with the provisions of section 3 of the act.

Mr Kennedy: I guess there's a concern it raises for me and maybe other members of the committee. I wonder, is the ministry then not in a position to exercise due diligence? In other words, having dismissed a board of a number of people—12 or, I think, 16 and 22, different sizes in the different cities—having decided that they weren't doing their job, now we have one person in their stead doing the work. My concern is, if the ministry is not in a position to know ahead of time what the supervisor has in mind, how is the minister, and indeed the government, in a position to protect students?

I think some people there think of it as kind of abstract—there are trustees or whoever in charge—but they really think the minister is now in charge. Just to make it a fair question for you, what steps can you take, what steps have you been taking, to satisfy yourself that the supervisor is at least roughly on a responsible track and not making decisions that might cause you to recommend to the minister to do something different?

Mr Hartmann: I think I indicated that the requirement on the supervisor is to present a plan for restoring financial health. That plan will be—

Mr Kennedy: You stipulate that is a plan. Maybe I can explain a little bit. In Ottawa there was a plan and there were cuts, there were decisions made. Nothing has changed. In other words, the supervisor in Ottawa could cut some more programs if he liked. Is that correct?

Mr Hartmann: Technically, he could.

Mr Kennedy: Could the supervisors in Toronto and Hamilton also? Is there any restriction on them at this time?

Mr Hartmann: The restriction is in the terms of reference for those supervisors. Item 3, I believe, of the terms of reference specifically indicates the presentation of a plan.

Mr Kennedy: Is it different between the three cities, then? Is Ottawa somewhat different from the other two?

Mr Hartmann: No, it is not.

Mr Kennedy: OK. So technically, then, I guess the Toronto and the Hamilton people could exercise their discretion, but you would expect them to have a plan, as you would expect eventually from Ottawa as well.

Mr Hartmann: That's correct.

Mr Kennedy: But so far you don't have a plan from any of the cities? Or do you have a plan from Ottawa currently?

Mr Hartmann: No, we do not have a plan.

Mr Kennedy: OK. So you had some cuts made in Ottawa without a plan—

Mr Hartmann: Not the overall plan.

Mr Kennedy: Not the overall plan, but some immediate cuts were made. Do you anticipate—I'm asking for your knowledge, and if it's confidential you can tell me it's confidential—that there will be cuts of a similar kind made in Toronto and Hamilton, based on what you know currently?

Mr Hartmann: At this point, I could only speculate.

Mr Kennedy: You can only speculate. In other words, you don't have positive knowledge one way or the other. OK.

In terms of the plan that's being presented, will that plan be made public? Is that a plan that can be shared with this committee? Even though I think we'll be finished with estimates at that time, do you have an expected date for that plan?

Mr Hartmann: The first portion of the mandate of the supervisor is to consult with the parents, the trustees and the general public, and then present that plan.

Mr Kennedy: So the same plan you would see is the plan they would see in those communities. Is that correct? Or would there be a different document that you would get, more detailed or less detailed?

Mr Hartmann: At this point, that hasn't been finally determined.

Mr Kennedy: I guess what I'm wondering here is that it's a bit curious that in essence there is no direct means that you can do more than advise. You're not in a position of positive knowledge about the actions of the supervisor.

Mr Hartmann: If I left that impression, I left the wrong impression.

Mr Kennedy: Please correct that.

Mr Hartmann: We're certainly being advised as to what they're going to be doing through that planning process.

Mr Kennedy: Can you tell me a little bit more about that? Do you speak to the supervisors directly daily? Is that the kind of supervision, or rather advising, that goes on from them to you? What kind of terms of reference do they have in that operational sense?

Mr Hartmann: The request from them has been to be provided with advice from the ministry as to what would govern the actions they would take.

Mr Kennedy: Are they asking for an opinion about the advisability of certain action, or just the legal basis under which they may or may not take actions?

Mr Hartmann: They are asking for the technical requirements of the actions they are proposing to take.

Mr Kennedy: But just to be clear, because I did ask you before and I hope I elicited the answer you wanted to give me, which is, they aren't coming to you for approval. They are not saying, "Mr Hartmann, does the minister and the ministry agree these things should be cut"? That's not happening.

Mr Hartmann: No, they are not asking me for approval.

Mr Kennedy: So in essence, then, the supervisors are on their own, determining whatever they would like to do, and the minister would have to take positive action to change that outcome.

Mr Hartmann: They have delegated authority. That's right.

Mr Kennedy: Thank you for that. I wonder if I could ask you about the special-ed cuts that did take place. They weren't part of a plan, but they were within the powers of the minister. After the fact, now that that decision has been made, do you sit down with some of your other ministry staff and evaluate what they have done? Do you do some looking at it and say, "This is what happened in Ottawa. This is what they did"? Do you evaluate that and then give them some feedback, or do you just let it stand as the decision is made?

Mr Hartmann: We certainly provide an overview and understanding of the actions that have been taken for the ministry, so that they're aware of what's happened.

Mr Kennedy: Would that include an opinion? Would you say back to them, "We approve of this. We didn't like that. Could you explain more about this"? How would you characterize it?

Mr Hartmann: Certainly the latter.

Mr Kennedy: The latter being—

Mr Hartmann: "Explain more about this."

Mr Kennedy: Yes. So if I am getting this correctly, at no point does the supervisor know whether the government approves or doesn't approve of certain things he's doing, at this point.

Mr Hartmann: Not from me, Mr Kennedy.

Mr Kennedy: Right. But on your behalf, liaising—does that preclude that the minister may express those opinions directly to the supervisor then?

Mr Hartmann: That would be a fair question for the minister.

Mr Kennedy: OK. Minister, have you been in contact with the supervisors in each of the three cities?

Hon Mrs Witmer: I did. I spoke to them yesterday to see the progress they were making and to see if they were going to be able to achieve the target of the end of October in presenting us with a plan as to how they were going to be implementing a balanced budget. All of them indicated that they had been meeting with staff, trustees, parents, and parent councils, and the work was well underway. They were confident that they could be in a position to present us with a plan that would allow for the schools to continue to operate within a stable environment and also to balance the budget.

Mr Kennedy: Minister, you heard earlier Mrs Mookerjea's problem, and some of your staff are verifying the documentation and so on. In essence, someone was offered a program and the program was then taken away and the child is, in 30 days, without any assistance. If you wanted to do something about that, according to what we have heard described, you are not in a position, unless you take back delegated powers, to change that. Have you given any direction personally to the supervisors about what to cut and what not to cut or what to improve and what not to improve? Has any direction come from you to those supervisors?

Hon Mrs Witmer: Mr Kennedy, I have delegated the power to the supervisor. I look forward, at the end of this month, to receiving the plan. The terms of reference are that the supervisors would prepare a plan to return the boards to a balanced financial position. They have been asked to seek the advice—it says this right up front in the terms of reference—of the board of trustees, the staff, the parents, in any matter the supervisor deems appropriate, including the establishment of board committees.

Mr Kennedy: Yes, but the implication of that seems to be that in the case of Ottawa and Mrs Mookerjea's son, they made those cuts. They didn't necessarily seek advice. In other words, your liaison got the information the same day the public did. What's to prevent that happening again and again?

I just want to be clear in my question. You've asked for a plan. If the supervisor who wants to speak to you, they can. But you've made public statements—I guess this is where I would really like you to help us out. You and the Premier have made public statements that there will not be harm to children, there will not be cancellation of special education programs, there will not be school closures. Are you in a position to stand behind those statements, or is it really just up to the supervisor?

1700

Hon Mrs Witmer: We are going to look forward to receiving the plans from the supervisors at the end of the month. I can tell you that in Ottawa the supervisor actually did a couple of things. He lifted the hiring freeze on teachers. I understand that 140 teachers were hired and placed in the classroom. I think that is good news. I think the actions that were taken there were obviously

based on the advice of staff. The special education teachers were redeployed in the classroom to benefit the students across the board.

Mr Kennedy: But the positions were eliminated, Madam Minister, and Mrs Mookerjea's son lost out, as did—well, hundreds of other kids have lost programs they were promised.

I guess I am just wondering, are you in a position to assure us that there won't be special-ed cuts here in Toronto or in Hamilton, or school closings? Could you answer that question? Are you in a position to ensure that there aren't further special-ed cuts in Ottawa and new, similar cuts in the other two cities?

Hon Mrs Witmer: I'm not going to speak to the plans or what may be contained in the plans, other than that I am confident the supervisors will consult with the parents and with the staff and with the trustees in order to ensure that we can deliver the best programming services to the students in the respective boards of education.

Mr Kennedy: Minister, it doesn't seem that you can assure that—maybe Mr Hartmann can tell me. Can you table for this committee a status report of the boards? The minister mentioned how there had been a hiring freeze while all this toing and froing had been going on. I understand there were some 300 teachers who were needed, and obviously some of the positions were eliminated; that's why the programs disappeared. But in the other boards, are there similar problems? Are we behind the eight ball here? Are there positions unfilled in the Toronto or Hamilton boards? Are there questions about services being offered? If so, are you aware of those services? Is there a report on the status of those boards that your ministry has?

Mr Hartmann: We don't have a formal report at this point. What is going on at this point in those boards is that the supervisors are doing the consultations with the parents, the teachers and the administrators, and have not yet presented reports on those issues.

Mr Kennedy: But are you personally aware—

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, Mr Kennedy. Mr Marchese?

Mr Marchese: I was listening to John O'Toole earlier talking about how excited he is about all these equity programs, how finally you brought equity to the educational system. He is so excited about that. He talked about how the NDP—

Hon Mrs Witmer: Well, if you don't live in Toronto—

Mr Marchese: You're excited. I hear you.

Hon Mrs Witmer: —you're excited. And if you're a member of the French boards, public and Catholic and French Catholic, and if you are living in a remote board, it does mean that everybody does have equal access to services—

Mr Marchese: I was going to get to that.

Hon Mrs Witmer: —because Toronto and Ottawa did have a rich assessment base.

Mr Marchese: But he talked about the NDP having deficits, and what could they do with such deficits?

Obviously, everybody was starving. What he doesn't know is that we, in 1991-92, increased education funding beyond most levels, which included Liberal and Conservative funding levels. We increased funding to our post-secondary institutions and elementary and secondary institutions by almost 9.5%, 10%. We never get credit for that—not from the teachers, not from trustees, not from the parents, not from you, not from John.

Hon Mrs Witmer: I'll give you credit today, Mr Marchese.

Mr Marchese: You see, we need a pat on the back, right? We did this in a recessionary period because we felt that education had been so underfunded for so many years that we had to do that. Looking back, it was a serious problem, because we were helping at a time when we had diminishing returns. But we did get whacked for that. We didn't get praised; we got blamed.

The problem that you experienced, different from what the NDP experienced, is that you faced surplus years: no recession, good economy, lots of money coming in, welfare diminished, reduced to fewer numbers because people were working. Then you slashed benefits even more in a good economy where rents were going up and inflation was still steady and these people weren't doing so well. But people are working; you have less costs in welfare. You have surplus dollars coming in. You have a good economy where most people would wonder, if you have such a great economy, why most people are languishing, complaining, feeling somehow the cuts you've made in health, education, social services, environment, natural resources. All these cuts have been sustained in a good economy. This is what's troubling to me. You bring about so-called equity for all in a good economy, where now what we're experiencing is everybody feeling equally hurt, equally feeling the pinch.

We have some Catholic boards, who were doing better than before, saying, "We're hurting." They're not saying, "God bless you, Elizabeth." They're saying, "We're all in trouble." In concert with public boards, they're saying, "We are all in trouble in a good economy." So I wonder what is happening.

I wanted to ask you: when People for Education and the Elementary Teachers' Federation do their studies and show cuts in a whole variety of fields, such as cuts to librarians—would you agree or disagree that there have been losses in the educational system of librarians and time for library services, in our high schools mostly? Do you think that's true or not?

Hon Mrs Witmer: I'll just respond by saying up front—because there were a couple of statements that were made that were factually incorrect. For example, there have been no cuts to health care. Since our government was elected in 1995, we have increased the health care spending from about \$17.6 billion to \$25 billion. I think that's important, because it's been done at a time when we haven't been seeing the additional support from the federal government that, as you know, the Premiers across all of Canada are asking for.

I would also just mention to you that as a result of the policies that were introduced by our government, we have seen a job growth of about 954,000. More people than ever before have access to jobs. It's these jobs that are going to allow us to continue to fund our health, educational and environmental needs.

As far as the Catholic boards are concerned, I'll just read from their press release: "Catholic Trustees Tell Education Task Force Funding Model Brings Equity to Ontario Students." A quote from Louise Ervin, the president of the association: "This model is a significant improvement for all students who attend school within assessment-poor boards. These include Catholic, French and rural ... boards as well." Having said that, I think it's also fair to add that she also states that more money is needed to cover the current costs.

We have set up the Rozanski task force to respond to her concerns, the concerns of these boards and the concerns of others. We've acknowledged the concern, and we're doing something about it.

Mr Marchese: Have there been cuts to librarians?

Hon Mrs Witmer: Pardon?

Mr Marchese: Have we seen cuts to teacher-librarians?

Hon Mrs Witmer: You and I both know that staffing decisions are made at the local level by local school boards.

Mr Marchese: Right. And have there been cuts?

Hon Mrs Witmer: Again, you'd have to undertake a review. I'm not so sure that the methodology that had been presented by a couple of the groups is accurate. In fact, we've had difficulty trying to reconcile their numbers with some of the information that we have. We always need to be very careful and cautious as to the methodology that may or may not have been used.

Mr Marchese: OK. I'll get back to that. So you don't admit there have been cuts, but you do admit boards make that decision.

Hon Mrs Witmer: Actually, I've just been given the information. Funding for librarians and guidance counsellors is going to go up from \$294 million in 1997 to approximately \$315 million for the 2002 school year.

1710

Mr Marchese: Is going to go up or went up?

Hon Mrs Witmer: Is going up.

Mr Marchese: Is going up. OK.

Hon Mrs Witmer: I would hope it's flowing right now.

Mr Marchese: That's great. What about music teachers, gym teachers and tech teachers: up or down?

Hon Mrs Witmer: I can't speak to that, but I can speak to the note that says funding for professionals and paraprofessionals—this is an area where you and I would agree there's a need—for social workers, child youth workers, is going to increase from \$235.4 million in 1997 to approximately \$300 million this year.

Mr Marchese: It's going up this very year?

Hon Mrs Witmer: It's going to be going up to \$300 million.

Mr Marchese: Were there cuts to this area before?

Hon Mrs Witmer: No.

Mr Marchese: Social workers didn't disappear in the Toronto board of education.

Hon Mrs Witmer: No. Again I would just hearken back to what I said at the outset of our conversation.

Mr Marchese: It's a decision of boards.

Hon Mrs Witmer: Local boards make decisions as to how they can best spend their resources.

Mr Marchese: Have there been cuts to education assistants at all in the boards?

Hon Mrs Witmer: Again I believe that's a decision that is made by local boards, but you might be interested in this quote, because you quoted People for Education.

Mr Marchese: Secretaries? I'll come back to it.

Hon Mrs Witmer: Kidder said, "The good thing this government did do ... was to say that what's available in one place should be available everywhere, that it was very important that funding be fair across the province and that there be curriculum that was fairly standardized."

Mr Marchese: Sure.

Hon Mrs Witmer: Do you know what? That's good news.

Mr Marchese: That's good news, yes. What about cuts to secretaries? Any cuts?

Hon Mrs Witmer: Again those decisions are made by local boards. I don't have the data.

Mr Marchese: And vice-principals?

Hon Mrs Witmer: I don't have those data.

Mr Marchese: Principals?

Hon Mrs Witmer: The deputy's telling me that we increased the funding for principals two years ago by \$10 million.

Mr Marchese: That's amazing. ESL?

Hon Mrs Witmer: It was increased. I know I have just—

Mr Marchese: Increased? Just amazing.

Hon Mrs Witmer: We can have somebody come up, Mr Marchese.

Mr Marchese: No, I've only got a couple of minutes. All these brilliant people—

Hon Mrs Witmer: OK.

Mr Marchese: I just want to know generally. There have been increases to ESL.

Hon Mrs Witmer: There have been increases in funding.

Mr Marchese: Isn't that amazing.

Hon Mrs Witmer: If you think you didn't get credit, we're not getting credit either. I'm glad to put them on the record here.

Mr Marchese: It's great. I want to say to the public that might be watching, because there are a few people watching, that there must be something terribly wrong going on. There are all these studies. The Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, People for Education, do these surveys and show these great reductions. Clearly they're wrong, because in most cases—

Hon Mrs Witmer: I said we have not been able to reconcile some of the methodology. We don't know where or how they get their figures. That's not saying all the numbers are a question mark, but some of them definitely are.

Mr Marchese: Could I ask, you do have a methodology that you like? Is there one?

Hon Mrs Witmer: No, not that we like.

Mr Marchese: You're only questioning somebody else's methodology?

Hon Mrs Witmer: It's difficult to reconcile the numbers with some of the information we have. I've got the ESL.

Mr Marchese: Oh, yes.

Hon Mrs Witmer: Funding for ESL in 2002-03 is projected to rise to \$168.5 million, an increase of \$57 million or over 50% compared to 1998-99, so that's very good news.

Mr Marchese: It's great news to hear. I wanted to ask you, are you keen on perhaps having a method, methodology, survey, that you like, that the deputy likes, that you think, that she thinks, is correct in order to properly assess what these people are saying, because somebody's wrong here.

Hon Mrs Witmer: I think we need to make sure that whatever methodology is used is transparent.

Mr Marchese: Quite right. Do you have one?

Hon Mrs Witmer: We certainly do have one. I mean that the information we give is transparent.

Mr Marchese: Do you have a survey that you do like, that you think is great?

Hon Mrs Witmer: I think, whatever we do, we need to continue to be accountable to the public and it needs to be transparent.

Mr Marchese: I agree with that. I agree with transparency a great deal. Can you share the figures that you get with me, whatever methodology you're using, whatever survey you're using, so that we could just compare?

Hon Mrs Witmer: The deputy tells me it's all on the Web.

Mr Marchese: What's the address?

Hon Mrs Witmer: We can also specifically get them ready for you.

Mr Marchese: That would be so good. Because all of these people out there—

Hon Mrs Witmer: We'll do that, because I want us to get credit. I'm now giving you credit for your—

Mr Marchese: Exactly, because I find it so strange that everybody is out there screaming—parents are screaming, teachers are screaming. It's like something's wrong.

Hon Mrs Witmer: The thing is, though, we sometimes overlook the fact that we're responding every day to the needs of more than two million students. Our teachers are doing an outstanding job.

Mr Marchese: God bless them.

Hon Mrs Witmer: We have very supportive parents and we need to start celebrating our successes, Mr Marchese.

Mr Marchese: I agree with that.

Hon Mrs Witmer: I'll tell you, there are thousands everyday.

Mr Marchese: I agree with that too. No disagreement with that.

Hon Mrs Witmer: I think we also need to take a look at helping to restore the morale of our teachers—

Mr Marchese: I agree with that too.

Hon Mrs Witmer: —and celebrate their hard work and their dedication.

Mr Marchese: Let me ask you a few more questions. I want you to share that great information with me, because I want to give it to parents.

Hon Mrs Witmer: I'm going to.

Mr Marchese: I want them to understand how good you are.

Hon Mrs Witmer: Let's just talk about the fact that based on the input of the public, this is what's happening in education.

Mr Marchese: Exactly. I want to give you credit.

Hon Mrs Witmer: They need to take credit for it.

Mr Marchese: I want that information so I can give it to the parents and say, "Look, we've been fooled all along. Somehow we're inventing all these things, these problems. They're not really problems. My God, the ministry and John O'Toole are fighting out there to give you equity and quality. Why are you whining and complaining? Something is wrong. Here are the facts." So I'm glad that it's coming to me.

Hon Mrs Witmer: Do you know what? The majority of parents are quite satisfied. Again, I would just encourage us to focus on the positive.

Mr Marchese: I agree. I want to be positive. I'm tired of being negative.

Hon Mrs Witmer: There are more things to be done and we can do a better job always, but let's not forget our successes.

Mr Marchese: I agree. I get so drained having to be so negative. It just exhausts me. It's a real problem. I'm going to try to change.

It was interesting to hear Norbert Hartmann say, "restoring financial health."

Hon Mrs Witmer: Balancing the budget.

Mr Marchese: I like that. It's interesting. I'm not sure how he meant that, but what I get from that is, restoring financial health equals balanced budgets. Right?

Hon Mrs Witmer: There's been a law on the books since 1933 which speaks to that, Mr Marchese.

Mr Marchese: Oh, I know. But it's interesting that restoring financial health is synonymous with balanced budgets, even though it will mean all those cuts that your Rosen person and others have recommended, which I think will affect programs.

Hon Mrs Witmer: But we don't know what may or may not happen.

Mr Marchese: I can guarantee it.

Hon Mrs Witmer: We don't know.

Mr Marchese: But I can guarantee it.

Hon Mrs Witmer: But we don't know.

Mr Marchese: Those cuts have to be made in order to balance the budgets.

Hon Mrs Witmer: Let's not talk about it then, because—

Mr Marchese: I'm negative. You're right.

Hon Mrs Witmer: No, I'm just going to remind you that the supervisor in Ottawa actually lifted the hiring freeze and made sure that at least 140 new teachers were hired.

Mr Marchese: Is he nuts, or what? We have a deficit out there. What's he doing? He should be cutting.

Hon Mrs Witmer: Responding to staff and community.

Mr Marchese: Well how's he going to balance the budget? I don't get it. He's restoring—

Hon Mrs Witmer: So let's talk about the good things.

Mr Marchese: No, I'm concerned about restoring financial health, Norbert. I'm concerned about those balanced budgets. I'm worried. You better look into that, because if he's hiring again, I don't know, or lifting that freeze, I don't know what he's going to cut.

I have a couple of questions about salaries and benefits. What I'm aware of, having done a little tour of Ontario, is a lot of boards are saying, "We're short of money for salaries. It's going to be serious this time around."

Hon Mrs Witmer: Yes, I've heard that too, Mr Marchese.

Mr Marchese: Catholic boards and public.

Hon Mrs Witmer: French and English.

Mr Marchese: Everywhere. They're saying, "We won't be able to negotiate very well or fairly with our employees, because we don't have the money." They put the blame on you. OPSBA puts it at \$590 million or so; we talked about this briefly last week. That's a lot of money. Others estimate it's probably close to a billion bucks.

A number of people who went and made their submissions to Rozanski said this, and according to public boards, 60% of their shortfall is due to your government's ridiculously low benchmark for salaries and benefits. How are you thinking of fixing this problem in the next little while?

Hon Mrs Witmer: First of all, I would concur. We have heard this issue. It's been brought to our attention. I guess the issue is probably larger than what you speak to; that is, we're also hearing from parents and students who are concerned about the collective bargaining process and the impact that might have on our school year. So you've got a lot of people expressing concerns.

As you know, Mr Marchese, about 80% of the educational funding does go for salaries of staff in one way or another. I think both the Premier and I have acknowledged the issue, and we're looking forward to the Rozanski report.

1720

Mr Marchese: It's good that you're acknowledging that we have a problem, because soon we're going to have labour strife.

Hon Mrs Witmer: I think this year in particular, with the double cohort, it is incumbent upon all of us, whether we're government, parents, opposition parties or the bargaining units—

Mr Marchese: To try to fix it.

Hon Mrs Witmer: —to try to reach a resolution.

Mr Marchese: I agree.

Hon Mrs Witmer: The last thing the double cohort students need is to lose time from class.

Mr Marchese: Elizabeth, can I ask you—

The Vice-Chair: Two minutes.

Mr Marchese: How many? Two?

Hon Mrs Witmer: So you're going to supply me—

Mr Marchese: Elizabeth, don't take all my time.

You're acknowledging that we have a shortfall here, but if we've had a great economy and you've been so equitable with everybody, where is this money going? How come they've been so short all this time? The boards are short of money.

Hon Mrs Witmer: For the salary negotiations?

Mr Marchese: For salaries, yes. Where did it go?

Hon Mrs Witmer: Again, let's be perfectly honest. The benchmarks haven't changed, so we need to look at the benchmarks, and Dr Rozanski is taking a look at those benchmarks.

Mr Marchese: It's good that you're acknowledging that.

I want to talk briefly about the double cohort, because I might not get another chance. Alan King has done some studies for you.

Hon Mrs Witmer: Yes, he has.

Mr Marchese: You commissioned them, yes?

Hon Mrs Witmer: I understand my predecessor did.

Mr Marchese: The deputy says yes. I think they found that 80% of the students had the intention to go to university. I believe that's what that study shows. I'm not sure if the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities has the information that you've had access to. Are you aware that she told the public that your government is ready for the double cohort based on a 60% figure as compared with the 80% figure your ministry has obtained?

Hon Mrs Witmer: I'm going to ask staff to come up here. We do have an answer, Mr Marchese.

Mr Marchese: God bless. I know you have the answers. Sometimes you keep them to yourself; sometimes you share them.

Hon Mrs Witmer: I'm happy to respond to you any time.

Mr Grant Clarke: My name is Grant Clarke. I am the director of the secondary school policy and programs branch.

Mr Marchese: We understand from that study that 80% of the students have the intention to go on to post-secondary education, but the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities is using a figure of 60%.

The Vice-Chair: Quick question, quick answer.

Mr Marchese: How do we explain that discrepancy? Don't you share this stuff with the other minister? You've got a problem here, no?

Mr Clarke: If I might, I believe what you're referring to is the story in the National Post about the 80% of students who—

Mr Marchese: Based on the Alan King study, right.

The Vice-Chair: In about 10 seconds.

Mr Marchese: Give him a chance.

Mr Clarke: In fact the summary of information on the study which was conducted last year shows that only 73% of the pupils who are taking courses to prepare for university plan to go to university. We do know that students' plans change as they move from the junior grades to the senior grades, so in subsequent studies we will be looking to see how those plans change. This will be information that is shared and in fact has been shared with the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities.

Mr Ted Chudleigh (Halton): Minister, I hope you're enjoying Tuesday afternoon as much as I am. It's a wonderful way—

Hon Mrs Witmer: I'm having a great time.

Mr Marchese: I'm so glad you're enjoying yourselves.

Hon Mrs Witmer: It's always good to listen to Mr Marchese.

Mr Chudleigh: It's a wonderful way to get our message out and tell people how positive things are in the schools. There's so much negativity around. I know the former questioner is not a negative person by nature, and I'm sure he was enjoying the positive aspects that are happening in education today.

I'd like to ask you a couple of questions and talk to you about student-focused funding. I have a number of rural schools in my riding: Pineview, Stewarttown, Percy Merry, Brookville, to name a few. As schools depopulate, they quite often have a problem balancing their budgets, because other costs stay the same when students depopulate. I guess my concern is that if there's enough depopulation in these areas, these schools are threatened with closure. There's a certain aspect to rural education that you don't get in a city or a town school, and I would very much like to see these schools stay open in the future. I wonder if you could talk about what kinds of flexibility student-focused funding might have in our educational system.

Hon Mrs Witmer: I think it is important to address this issue. We probably should acknowledge right up front that the ministry's own projections concerning enrolment show that we are going to continue to see a decline over the next few years. As you've said, Mr Chudleigh, there is concern on the part of people like yourself, parents, students and school boards, because when the enrolment declines, revenue decreases, and the costs to educate the students don't necessarily change.

So this past year, in recognition of and in response to the concerns we heard, we have actually introduced a totally new allocation to help boards that have less revenue because of declining enrolment—we're seeing it

in the north and in the rural parts of the province. We're moving forward in a way that the costs of boards do not decline in a way that matches their declining enrolment. We know that some of the costs can be easily adjusted. But some of the fixed costs, such as heating and lighting, are not going to change just because you've got fewer students in a classroom.

We set up a working group to look at this whole issue of declining enrolment. It was set up in the fall of 2001. We wanted to make sure we could deal with that gap between revenue loss based on per pupil funding and a board's ability to reduce its costs, some of which I've just indicated are fixed—heating and lighting. The working group we set up recommended a declining enrolment adjustment that would give boards two years to reduce their costs in keeping with reduced enrolment.

Remote and rural boards with declining enrolment, however, also benefit from what we call top-up funding, which allows boards to continue to operate schools that are not at 100% capacity. The top-up is as much as 20%. I can tell you that this is a real boon to the rural and northern schools that are particularly impacted by the declining enrolment issue.

Peter Gooch has additional information. He's done a lot of work on this, and I know he'd like to give us some further detail on how the funding works.

Mr Chudleigh: This deals with individual schools within the boards, or not necessarily? The Halton board has a huge array of schools, everything from highly populated Burlington-Oakville to rural Massagawaya—if you can spell it, you get an A.

Mr Peter Gooch: I can't spell it.

Hon Mrs Witmer: Mr Gooch can give us some further detail.

Mr Gooch: I'm Peter Gooch, director, education finance branch. The funding has a number of mechanisms in it to deal with the issues you've raised. As the minister said, this year we introduced a new allocation to the model, called a declining enrolment adjustment. We sat down with mostly business officials in boards from around the province and looked for a solution that was based on a good analysis of the problem. We worked very closely with school board officials, who of course understand the impacts of declining enrolment on their operations.

The first thing we did was look at all the different allocations in the model and determined what kinds of costs the boards have that could be adjusted readily when students decline. Perhaps the simplest example is the cost of teachers. Boards have a lot of flexibility. They have a maximum average class size that they have to achieve, but they can have different class sizes as long as they meet that overall average in the board. School boards and principals are very experienced at aligning classes to bring the number of teachers they receive funding for very close to the number of teachers they need to meet our standards. The funding is designed to let them do that. Teacher costs are a huge part of what every school board has to pay, and because teacher costs can be

matched pretty closely even when enrolment is declining, that's not a big cost item for boards.

The committee looked at every allocation. As the minister said, we looked at school operations. Of course, you need to continue to heat, light and clean a school. If a school loses 10 students, it still needs a principal or someone to provide the principal's functions.

1730

Again, based on all that research, we came up with a formula that we believe reflects very closely how quickly school boards can adjust their costs, through a formula very transparently laid out in our technical papers. We can go there and see all the calculations that are provided. I'm proud to tell you that the formula the government eventually approved was in fact the formula the working group recommended. So we were very pleased to be able to work closely and collaboratively with the boards and come up with an implementable approach.

The formula is there. As the minister said, it provides boards with additional revenue over a two-year stream. In this current year it'll be calculated in the way that's laid out there, but next year, in the 2003-04 school year, they'll get half of what they got this year, plus whatever the formula brings in next year as well. The intent of this is to give boards an ongoing source of revenue to give them more flexibility so they have time to adjust their costs to the declining enrolment.

The last thing I'd mention is that every year, of course, we announce the funding. One of the things that achieved a very high degree of approval from school board officials, trustees and people we spoke with around the province was this adjustment, because it does in fact respond to the costs they have in a way that they recognized would help them meet those costs.

Mr Chudleigh: There's also an aspect in school funding that's called local priorities, which is, I think, a budget item that allows a school board some flexibility in how they spend some money. I wonder if you could indicate what percentage of a school board's budget this might be and what areas they could allocate these local priorities into.

Hon Mrs Witmer: I'm going to ask Mr Gooch, since he's here and he's done such extensive work on the funding formula, to respond to that, Mr Chudleigh.

Mr Gooch: The local priorities amount is developed on a per pupil basis. It's a per pupil amount on what's called average daily enrolment, which is really a measure of full-time students. The percentage that each board would get would vary because, as you've heard in many instances, student-focused funding provides not just a foundation grant, of which the local priorities grant is a part, but boards also receive special-purpose grants for their various circumstances. So some boards receive more special-purpose grants than others. So there's not going to be a uniform percentage in each board, but it could be perhaps 3% to 4% of their operating funding, depending on the board.

As the name implies, the grant is there to give boards flexibility to deal with the many choices that they're

faced with. When it was introduced, it was explicitly indicated that boards had indicated they had both cost pressures and also wanted to make programming decisions about things like library, guidance, textbooks and so forth. So boards have flexibility about where they spend it.

Mr Chudleigh: Staying with the funding formula, I've got a couple of schools in my riding which are empty and have been empty for some time. This negatively affects the board's ability to fund education in other areas, as I understand the funding formula. How can it be that the school board, although there are active buyers for both of these schools, can continue to carry this inventory of classrooms with no one using them, both of these schools being empty for some years?

Hon Mrs Witmer: I'm going to ask Drew Nameth to respond to that question, since he deals with facilities.

Mr Chudleigh: Drew has been extremely helpful to me in the past. He's an excellent employee of the ministry, I might add. I say that in the presence of the deputy, Drew.

Mr Drew Nameth: And of Hansard too. Thank you. Again, my name is Drew Nameth. I'm director of the business services branch in the ministry. Decisions regarding the disposition of surplus school property are the responsibility of the local board. A board may choose to retain a property for any number of reasons. I'm not familiar with the schools in your riding.

Mr Chudleigh: Speyside. Does it ring a bell?

Mr Nameth: I honestly can't recall, I'm sorry. Decisions regarding disposition are the responsibility of the board. There are incentives within the funding model for them to dispose of surplus properties. The capacity of that particular school would be removed from the inventory that's used to determine grants for new pupil places, so the disposition of that school makes it available to another school board that perhaps could use it in that part of your riding. It would generate dollars for the board to construct school facilities where there are enrolment pressures in the jurisdiction.

Mr Chudleigh: It's hard to understand why the board hasn't done that.

Mr Nameth: I honestly can't speak for the board.

Mr Chudleigh: There have also been a number of reports in the media over the last month or so, as children go back to school, that schools have been dirty; they haven't been clean. Of course, we know that children perhaps aren't the most careful people in the world to come into a place and wipe their feet, but cleanliness goes beyond a little mud at the front door. I haven't noticed that in the two high schools I've visited. I visited one public school last May—nothing in June—and two in September, but I haven't noticed them being unclean. Is this a local issue? With all the various spending reports you've talked about—local priorities, flexible student-focused funding—where does the priority come from to keep a school clean, or dirty?

Mr Nameth: Again, the maintenance of school properties is a local decision. We are also quite concerned and

interested in the cleanliness of individual schools. That's one of the reasons why, in 2000, as part of the accountability framework for pupil accommodation, a school facilities survey was developed whereby information is collected on the perceptions of various groups within the school as to the cleanliness of the property, the general condition, the comfort, air quality issues, temperature, noise, access issues and security etc, information we've compiled on a school-by-school bases. We're looking for five groups within each school to complete the same questionnaire: one to be completed by the principal of the school, another to reflect the views of the teaching staff, a questionnaire to reflect the views of the non-teaching staff, another to reflect the views of students and a final questionnaire to reflect the views of the parents. That survey was conducted in 2000 and 2001 and is underway again in 2002.

In the first two years of the survey we received over 19,000 responses, which is a response rate of approximately 80%, which we think is quite good. The results of those surveys indicated that approximately two thirds of the schools in the province were rated as either good or excellent across the board. Ninety-eight per cent of the schools scored satisfactory or better. So in general, I think it's fair to say that people are satisfied with the cleanliness and general condition of the schools.

Mr Chudleigh: Good. Moving to new schools, I've got some very rapid growth taking place in Milton, Georgetown, Georgetown south and one area in Burlington. There seems to be a difference between the way the Catholic board responds to the demand for new schools in an area compared to how the public board responds to the need. There seems to be a lag time of at least a year, sometimes a year and a half, when the public board has to bus students somewhere else before they build a school.

Do the accommodation grants that are available take into consideration the prospect of a number of new homes—perhaps over 1,000 new homes—coming into existence in September, with a percentage of those homes accommodating people who are potentially students? Does it take into consideration those kinds of events?

1740

Mr Nameth: The grants for new pupil places, as they are referred to, are determined generally by subtracting the capacity of the board's schools, as they existed in 1998 when the funding model was introduced, from the board's enrolment. If there is a positive gap between enrolment and capacity, the board would be eligible for grants. As enrolment goes up in response to new development, the grants will automatically increase. The boards are certainly aware of enrolment trends within their jurisdiction and the regulations governing the calculations of these grants, and therefore are in a position to respond much, much more rapidly to demographic changes in their jurisdiction than they had been under the previous funding model.

Mr Chudleigh: That would take into account the fact that 1,000 new homes are going into an area? They

respond to the existing enrolment, you mentioned, but if that existing enrolment is going to increase with 1,000 new homes in an area—

Mr Nameth: The grant will automatically go up as the—

Mr Chudleigh: As the building permits are issued?

Mr Nameth: Well, as those buildings are built, families move into them and students are enrolled in the schools of the board. Boards are certainly aware of that. They have the ability to plan and respond very quickly to those enrolment pressures and build what we've been referring to as just-in-time schools. They can respond very, very quickly. I think you mentioned that the Halton Catholic board seems to be responding very quickly to those enrolment pressures.

Mr Chudleigh: They do. They react extremely well, and I literally get no calls regarding that board and its operation. But the public board doesn't seem to have that same projection ability or ability to respond as quickly. It doesn't deal with the—I guess what you're telling me is it isn't the fault of the accommodation grant or—

Mr Nameth: I don't believe it is. One of the things that our accountability framework requires boards to do is develop a long-term plan where they look at current enrolments and projected enrolments in comparison with their existing schools to identify areas with enrolment pressures and develop strategies to respond to those. So all boards operate under the same rules, and how each board responds is up to it; they make their own decisions.

Mr Chudleigh: Thank you very much. I really appreciate it.

Mr Kennedy: Minister, I'd like to just let you know that Ms Mookerjea met with some of your staff and left wondering what the purpose of the meeting had been in the sense that staff was not able to give her any new direction about the status of her son. There was a response that said, "They promised to answer the phone but they can't guarantee that the phone will be answered at the school board." I guess I'm just wondering—and I know you do not have the advantage of speaking to your staff—if Ms Mookerjea could depend on you directly for some follow-up response, because there are a lot of families and a lot of children who are in the same position.

I guess my question to you is, does Ms Mookerjea represent to you an issue, a problem, real people that you would look into? We heard earlier you're constrained in this regard, but I guess I'd like to ask you on her behalf—and also, by the way, there was a picture she'd like to have back and I'm wondering if your staff could supply that to her; the one that she wanted to share with you in the House—she came here believing she was representing a number of children who have fallen through the cracks, who have lost services. There is no resolution of her situation, but I guess, as importantly, she wants to know if you will be looking into the general situation further or do you just see her as an isolated case, and has she not succeeded in getting your attention to the larger issue?

Hon Mrs Witmer: Mr Chair, I think Mr Kennedy is being somewhat unfair. He obviously has information that I'm not privy to, and I think in all fairness we need to give the deputy the opportunity to review the situation, as it has been presented, and I have asked her to undertake to review whatever happened in the meeting and to report back.

Mr Kennedy: On this small point, Minister, do you see this as a situation—do you accept Mrs Mookerjea's appearance here at some difficulty, coming from Ottawa on her own initiative, representing other parents? Do you understand that there are many children who are affected and many families, and will that be, at your direction, also the subject of the deputy's follow-up? Is that possible?

Hon Mrs Witmer: Mr Speaker, not knowing what may or may not have happened in the meeting, I think it is inappropriate that we would discuss what may or may not have been put on the record, what might have happened. I would simply ask that the deputy would follow up. I would certainly assure you that we will do our best to address the concerns that have been brought to our attention.

Mr Kennedy: Well, I think Mrs Mookerjea was looking for something more specific, Minister, that it's unfortunate you're not willing to provide.

I'd like to ask you now about the statement you made earlier, I believe, concerning parent input. There is a representative of a parent group in Toronto here today and I gather they have requested meetings with you and with the supervisor you appointed, who, we learned earlier today, is able to make these decisions on his own. They're wondering, is it your direction that the supervisor should be meeting with parent groups or is that simply a good thing that the supervisor should decide on his own? Which would you say is your intent to—

Hon Mrs Witmer: I'm going to ask Mr Hartmann to come up, but I would just quote from the supervisor's terms of reference. They include keeping parents, trustees, staff and members of the public informed about what's happening but at the same time seeking the advice of trustees, staff and parents in any matter the supervisor deems appropriate.

I'll ask Mr Hartmann, who has had much more involvement, to speak to the process.

Mr Kennedy: I'm sorry. It was about your direction, Minister. Is it your direction personally that they should be meeting with parent groups? Is there some guidance you can give to parent groups when the supervisor refuses or declines to meet with parents? To the knowledge of this group and other parents on this board who have lost their trustees, there haven't been any meetings. There certainly have not been extensive meetings with parents, and we're just wondering—perhaps we can find out—is this being monitored? I was trying to find out from you, Minister, do you expect that to be carried out? Do you expect parent groups to have access to this all-powerful supervisor? Do they get to meet with him or not? I'm wondering if you can say whether it is part of

your intent that the supervisor does meet with parent groups and that they should expect some success there.

Hon Mrs Witmer: First of all, I think we need to keep in mind that trustees still can continue to do what they've always done, and that is to facilitate and make sure that when there are problems within their constituency, they work with their parents and students in order to help resolve those issues.

Again, I would go back to the supervisor's terms of reference. The supervisor's terms of reference include seeking the advice of board trustees, staff—

Mr Kennedy: Minister, we've heard this once already and that's the only reason I interrupt. Mr Chair, I was just hoping the minister could tell me whether that leaves it up to the supervisor. The supervisor can decide if he wants to or doesn't want to meet with parents, and I guess I was hoping for something more positive from the minister, that she would, if not direct—as we heard before that there are limitations on how she can direct the supervisor, but does she believe that the supervisor should, or is the supervisor entirely able to decide that in his own right? Minister, if there is an answer to that, I'd appreciate it. If there isn't, I'd like to move on.

Hon Mrs Witmer: The supervisor has the opportunity to seek advice on any matter he would deem appropriate, and we would hope that he would make those decisions.

Mr Kennedy: OK. We're getting a picture here, Minister, of a supervisor who can do pretty much whatever he pleases, and I guess that's at least a concern.

I want to bring you, Minister, to a specific question that has been raised at this committee before, and perhaps there's a specific staff person who could deal with it. I'd like to know who at the Ministry of Education approves the content of advertising done by the ministry. And before you pass that on, I'm wondering if you could tell me very specifically how much money you're spending this year on advertising, and if you could refer us to the part of estimates where that can be found. Can you advise us in that regard, please?

1750

Hon Mrs Witmer: I'm going to ask one of our staff who would have that type of detail to share it with you.

Mr Kennedy: Maybe you would like to introduce yourself. Go ahead.

Ms Donna Marafioti: My name is Donna Marafioti and I'm the assistant deputy minister of corporate services for the Ministry of Education. Just in terms of your first question, I think you asked about the approval mechanism.

Mr Kennedy: My first question was, how much money is planned to be spent on advertising by the Ministry of Education in any of its programs this year? Do you have an answer for that?

Ms Marafioti: I do. There are two current plans that we have around advertising. The first one is a newspaper campaign, and the total cost of that campaign for this year is \$174,000. That includes the ad buy, \$158,000, in addition to the creative costs, which are \$16,000. There's also the TV advertisement campaign, which began on

September 3. The cost of that advertising campaign is estimated to be \$2.71 million, which again includes the cost of the ad buy and the cost of the creative costs.

Mr Kennedy: Could you table those figures for the committee? Further, could I just ask—

Ms Marafioti: I think I just did.

Mr Kennedy: Yes, but could it be tabled in writing? I'm sorry. I should be more specific. Is that possible?

Ms Marafioti: Yes, we can do that.

Mr Kennedy: Also, could you tell me, is this the full extent of advertising that the ministry will conduct in this fiscal year? Is that correct?

Ms Marafioti: This is the advertising that is planned at the current time.

Mr Kennedy: Can you tell us where, in the various approvals we are to make, this advertising will be charged, which account and so forth?

Ms Marafioti: Absolutely. In the estimates book, under ministry administration, you will find, along with other costs, the costs associated with the communications branch and the operation of that branch. There could be some very modest costs related to advertising that are contained in ministry administration. Most of the costs are in the policy and program area.

Mr Kennedy: So we see, for example, on page 31 that you're planning to spend \$8.1 million on transportation and communications.

Ms Marafioti: That includes many things, but the advertising costs can be incorporated into that area as well.

Mr Kennedy: This committee has asked for, and it's been agreed to supply, detailed information about past expenditures to do with advertising and estimates last year and also the year before. I'm wondering, when you table this information, can you provide us with comparisons of past expenditures on advertising by the Ministry of Education?

Ms Marafioti: I do believe that year, when we were here, we did table in Hansard the costs of advertising for last year, and I can provide that to you.

Mr Kennedy: The Hansard information was incomplete. I'm wondering what was undertaken at different times by your ministry, and I hope there isn't an issue of availability here. It was actual written summaries of the amount of money that you've spent on advertising. Is that available?

Ms Marafioti: I believe we can provide what was provided last year in terms of the cost of campaigns and what I've provided to you today.

Mr Kennedy: I would appreciate the last two years, if possible. Is that OK?

Hon Mrs Witmer: That's not a problem, Mr Kennedy. We would be more than pleased to provide that information to you.

Mr Kennedy: Can I ask then, in terms of approvals, are you the person who actually approves advertising campaigns; in other words, the civil servant who agrees that this money can be spent in this fashion?

Ms Marafioti: In the material that we tabled with the clerk of the committee, Mr Kennedy, you asked for a

copy of the guidelines that indicate the approvals that are required around advertising campaigns. So you do now have a copy of the Management Board guidelines.

Mr Kennedy: I do, and using that I'm still left with two questions I'd like to follow up with. But in terms of who signs off on the content—there's a lot of information about how you hire an advertising firm, but I'm wondering, who in your ministry decides that the content is acceptable and determines and authorizes that this money will be spent on this campaign to further the goals of the ministry? Who is that?

Ms Marafioti: I do believe that the Management Board guidelines—

Mr Kennedy: Can you refer me there and tell me what the answer is?

Ms Marafioti: Sure, I just have to find that part of my book.

Mr Kennedy: I take it from your answer that it's not yourself?

Ms Marafioti: I think you're asking two different questions, if I understand you correctly. One is the authority to approve the cost of a campaign—

Mr Kennedy: Yes, and one is the content. That's correct.

Ms Marafioti: In terms of the cost of the campaign, the requirements are set out in this directive, in terms of what level of approvals are required. So that is in this directive.

Mr Kennedy: OK. I guess what I would like to know, though, is that when it comes to content, and there were no guidelines that I could find in what you gave us, if the content is deemed to be partisan, does the public service have guidelines about whether or not this content can be subject to approval if it's of a partisan nature? Obviously we don't expect, despite the reference in the estimates book to the Conservative platform—and I'm sure it was just an inadvertent and small error that that would take place. We would like to believe there are checks and balances. I'm just wondering, would it be the deputy or would it be yourself we would look to to exercise that scrutiny on behalf of taxpayers that no government parties of any stripe would take advantage of a ministry advertising program? I presume that means someone's signature is on the appropriateness of the program.

Ms Marafioti: I think that we can point to the—

Mr Kennedy: Could we use the current campaign as the example? Who approves the campaign and signs off at that magnitude?

Ms Marafioti: In terms of the amount of money, the sign-off on the particular campaign is covered off in the directives that we have in front of you, and we are following the Management Board directives and making sure that those directives are adhered to in terms of the way our ministry is handling these matters.

Mr Kennedy: What I'd like to do is just quickly change to a different topic, if I may. This may require Mr Hartmann, and I'll perhaps come back if I have time available for this question and certainly will bring it up tomorrow.

I'd like to know if the minister is directly aware, and if not the minister, then Mr Hartmann, that apparently appraisers have been sent to look at the art collection that exists at Humberside school, which happens to be in my riding. It's art that was done by the Group of Seven for Humberside school. There's a concern reported by people at that school that the board has formed some kind of intent with respect to the artwork. I'm just wondering, because we talked earlier about the monitoring and reporting going on, is the ministry aware that the supervisor you put in place is in fact conducting these kinds of assessments of artwork?

Hon Mrs Witmer: Mr Hartmann would be prepared to respond to that.

Mr Kennedy: Do I take it, then, that you're not aware of this particular initiative?

Hon Mrs Witmer: I am not.

Mr Kennedy: OK. Mr Hartmann?

Mr Hartmann: No. We have no direct knowledge of an appraisal for those purposes, but it may well be, and it's only speculation, that the appraisal is being undertaken for insurance purposes as well, which is an exercise that most boards that do have valuable art collections, like the Toronto board in particular—

Mr Kennedy: This particular item I'm familiar with is a mural that was done at Humberside. You may have seen it.

Mr Hartmann: I'm familiar with it.

Mr Kennedy: It's actually an impressive piece of art for a number of reasons.

Mr Hartmann: It certainly is.

Mr Kennedy: I'm going to ask you pre-emptively, then, because we know it will be a while before the minister or the ministry gets its opinion expressed in terms of the supervisor's actions: I'd like to know, would you permit the supervisor to sell off that artwork if it was a recommendation in the plan that comes from the supervisor? Do you have a point of view on that? Minister, with all respect, it's simply, do you agree that that art should stay where it is, in the schools?

Mr Hartmann: That is a decision the supervisor would be making.

Mr Kennedy: On his own, without any input from you? Right here on the record there's no opinion on the part of the minister or the ministry that that art should be saved and kept in place. Is that correct?

Mr Hartmann: I've received no information about any direction that is being contemplated.

Mr Kennedy: Minister, is there any direction or opinion that you could offer us on this particular subject?

Hon Mrs Witmer: Mr Kennedy, I don't have any knowledge of what may or may not be in the Toronto schools. Anything that you're suggesting here is information that I certainly have no knowledge of.

Mr Kennedy: Thank you, not for the answer.

Specifically, I want to say myself for the record that the Humberside paintings are invaluable and it would be a travesty if the ministry was to put them in hock to pay for some of the cuts you're putting through.

I'd like to ask, again around advertising: we didn't see in the guidelines, and I'll ask this one more time, specific directives around what the public service can and cannot sign off on with regard to partisan content. I'd like to know, either from the deputy or from the responder, whether those exist and whether we could see those.

Ms Marafioti: Again, Mr Kennedy, the guidelines we're working with are the guidelines that are from Management Board of Cabinet. The operating premise here is that the ministry would not be involved in partisan advertising.

Mr Kennedy: I appreciate that premise. I guess what I'm asking for—because arguably there have been partisan-type ads emanating from the ministry, paid for by taxpayer dollars. The line that you point us to comes out of elementary and secondary policy and program delivery. Can you put a study in front of us for this particular program, then, that shows how that program will benefit children in school? Does the ministry undertake that kind of assessment, and could it be shared with this committee, of how you're spending that \$2.7 million in television and, I believe, something around \$1 million in newspaper? Do you have a study that you've undertaken as due diligence ahead of time to show how this will be beneficial?

Ms Marafioti: When you're talking about a study, basically, if you're asking for something different, which is what kind of parent information would we have, we can certainly look at what kind of inputs—

Mr Kennedy: No, no, I'm asking very clearly, when you spend millions of taxpayers' dollars on advertising, do you assess ahead of time, and if you do, can we have that assessment, how this will benefit children? Do you propose what the outcomes will be? Presumably you have some positive outcomes in mind, and if you do, can we have that advance assessment, how you propose that that is helping children get better educated in this province? Is there something you will table with us today?

Ms Marafioti: We can look at what other inputs the ministry has that do provide information about, you know, advertising and the benefits of it and what the focus of that advertising should be.

Mr Kennedy: There's no specific document for the campaign that you just referenced?

Ms Marafioti: Pardon me?

Mr Kennedy: There's no specific document for the campaign, none whatsoever? So the money was just spent without any preparation, any advance study?

Ms Marafioti: Not along the lines you're suggesting.

Mr Kennedy: Wow. There's money left, according to the budget line, of eight-point-some million dollars. You articulated there is only one program you're talking about now. You're saying there's no other advertising that's being planned or contemplated by the ministry at this time whatsoever?

Ms Marafioti: The numbers that I've provided you with today include the plans for advertising that are currently underway.

Mr Kennedy: Currently underway. Are there any other plans in future?

Ms Marafioti: Not that I'm aware of.

Mr Kennedy: Can you tell me whether the Premier's office becomes involved in your advertising campaigns? Is there any direction or interaction with the Premier's office around advertising campaigns? May I have an answer?

Mr Ted Arnott (Waterloo-Wellington): Mr Chairman, is it past 6 o'clock?

The Vice-Chair: It is past 6 o'clock, and Mr Kennedy is wrapping up in about a minute.

Mr Kennedy: May I have that answer?

Ms Marafioti: I'm sorry.

Mr Kennedy: The Premier's office. Are you in contact with the Premier's office around advertising campaigns within the ministry?

Ms Marafioti: The ministry staff are not in contact with staff in the Premier's office.

Mr Kennedy: So these are done within the Ministry of Education and yet there are no documents or plans within the Ministry of Education specific to this campaign.

Ms Marafioti: We have guidelines that we're working within that are from the Management Board of Cabinet. We do have procedures in place that have us working with cabinet office. There's no contact with the Premier's office for ministry staff.

Mr Kennedy: Is there somebody specifically in cabinet office who coordinates that? Is there a specific person who coordinates with you on advertising?

Ms Marafioti: I'm not sure, because I'm not the communications director at the moment. I'd have to look into that.

Mr Kennedy: Who is that person?

The Vice-Chair: Thank you very much. I've been very generous; it's time to end. We stand adjourned until tomorrow after routine proceedings.

The committee adjourned at 1804.

CONTENTS

Tuesday 1 October 2002

Ministry of Education E-113

Hon Elizabeth Witmer, Minister of Education
Ms Suzanne Herbert, deputy minister of Education
Mr Norbert Hartmann, assistant deputy minister,
elementary/secondary business and finance division
Mr Grant Clarke, director, secondary school project
Mr Peter Gooch, director, education finance branch
Mr Drew Nameth, director, business services branch
Ms Donna Marafioti, assistant deputy minister,
corporate management and services division

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES

Chair / Président

Mr Gerard Kennedy (Parkdale-High Park L)

Vice-Chair / Vice-Président

Mr Alvin Curling (Scarborough-Rouge River L)

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay / Timmins-Baie James ND)

Mr Ted Chudleigh (Halton PC)

Mr Alvin Curling (Scarborough-Rouge River L)

Mr Gerard Kennedy (Parkdale-High Park L)

Mr Frank Mazzilli (London-Fanshawe PC)

Mr Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka PC)

Mr John O'Toole (Durham PC)

Mr Steve Peters (Elgin-Middlesex-London L)

Substitutions / Membres remplaçants

Mr Ted Arnott (Waterloo-Wellington PC)

Mr Doug Galt (Northumberland PC)

Mr Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina ND)

Clerk / Greffier

Mr Trevor Day

Staff / Personnel

Mr Larry Johnston, research officer,
Research and Information Services