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Mardi 1^{er} novembre 2005

**Standing committee on
estimates**

Ministry of Education

**Comité permanent des
budgets des dépenses**

Ministère de l'Éducation

Chair: Cameron Jackson
Clerk: Trevor Day

Président : Cameron Jackson
Greffier : Trevor Day

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ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES

COMITÉ PERMANENT DES BUDGETS DES DÉPENSES

Tuesday 1 November 2005

Mardi 1^{er} novembre 2005

The committee met at 1558 in committee room 1.

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

The Chair (Mr. Cameron Jackson): Good afternoon. I'd like to call to order the standing committee on estimates. We are here to begin up to seven and a half hours of estimates for the Ministry of Education. I'm pleased to welcome the Honourable Gerard Kennedy. Minister, you have up to 30 minutes for an opening statement. Do you have a prepared statement? If you do, we'd like to get a copy of it in advance.

Hon. Gerard Kennedy (Minister of Education): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm sorry, no, I just have notes for my statement, so I'll provide that in the best manner I can and hopefully in a way that allows people to follow and make inquiries.

The Chair: Very good. That's fine. We're in your hands.

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: It is a pleasure to be here. I'm joined today by Deputy Minister Ben Levin and assistant deputy minister Nancy Naylor. I want to say at the start that we have a very hard-working bureaucracy and support group at the Ministry of Education who have done a tremendous amount on behalf of students in this province, working with and forming, for the first conspicuous time in a long while, a real partnership with our education sector, comprised of our 72 school boards. I mention that off the top because it's no mean feat. It is something that I think every government probably aspires to but, for whatever reasons, one of the qualities of the environment that we found coming in was that that partnership didn't exist, at least not fully and certainly. Some would say the opposite conditions were in place in at least a large part of the province.

Part of our approach in education since gaining government has been to create a climate for student success. When I say "climate," that's not just programs, that's not just funding; it's also how the dynamics of education work best, and particularly what is the right role for the Ministry of Education, which, among ministries, is relatively small in the actual number of people who work under the aegis of the minister, but it is instrumental.

The outlook that we bring is characterized as the new 3Rs. The new 3Rs in education in Ontario are respect, responsibility and results. The first of those, in terms of respect, is how to get the best dynamics from the various

constituent parts of the education effort. That means everyone is involved, from parents to students, teachers, education workers, trustees, the school board administration, but not limited to what people have seen as those who work full-time in the education system or have an abiding interest in it. That simply isn't sufficient for us to be able to do the task at hand.

The task at hand and the reason why respect is so important is that we have to not simply do well; we have to make up for some time that was lost. Part of the context, and where we try and instil this environment of respect, has been where we had 26 million lost school days to students because of lockouts, strikes or protests; also, where we had a drain away from the consensus position of governments of all political stripes since Confederation, which is that publicly funded education should be adequate—should be excellent, in fact—sufficient that people send their kids to that system. We saw, for the first time since these statistics were kept, a significant draining away of kids leaving the system under the last administration. We understand that respect means we have to take into account the views of existing parents who may have made other choices under conditions of duress.

We felt it is very important to make that, first and foremost, the way we tried to bring together the significant capacities of the system, so we have made a number of initiatives in that regard. Last year, we terminated the supervision that was put in place by the previous government, which was proven to be without economic foundation. There may have been other, more political goals. The general outlook has been one of trying to extend respect to the trustees in that instance, to the people in each instrumental part of the system, by working as a provincial government to first of all declare that we're not the final authority. We don't have all of the answers when it comes to getting a complex system. It is, I think, important for the people of Ontario to realize that we have one of the largest cohesive education systems in North America, with two million students, 4,800 different schools, 72 school board administrations and a number of school authorities besides, and four different ways of expressing publicly funded education in this province. To be able to do that, we felt it was very important to try and build coherent working relationships. We feel that the first full school year we had, as well as the part of the 2003 year where we were able to make an impact, was about building a platform of

respect, stability and peace within the system so that it could focus on the real job at hand.

I would characterize what we have ahead of us as a turnaround year for this system. It is one where progress does need to be made. I think we spent our time in the first two years making sure that all the ingredients were in place, putting a number of the resources, plans and ideas forward so they would have time to generate those results, because that is not just an important element, in and of itself, and what it means for better student performance, but it also means that we have an ability to reconnect some of the public when we're able to do that.

That's what "responsibility," the second R, means to our ministry. We're taking responsibility and we're trying to define it better: What the provincial government actually does vis-à-vis the boards. We certainly accept that funding is part of that responsibility, but there are other elements to it as well. There is a certain amount of focusing that the system requires, there's creating the conditions and the environment in which people succeed. To us, those things matter as much as the investment. What we're asked today to look at is that investment. But of course you will want that investment explained in terms of a context—are we getting the results?—which I will turn to shortly. But certainly the responsibility taken by the provincial government has been significant. There's a \$2-billion investment that we've made because that was needed, in part, simply to stabilize the system after years of dollars being taken out—by attrition in some cases and by direct cuts in others—of an under-investment in education.

The interesting thing is that it stood in direct contrast to virtually every other jurisdiction. There was no other Canadian province or American state we could find that took money out of education in the preceding eight or 10 years except for the province of Ontario. The province of Ontario fell significantly behind in terms of GDP or population or student population or simply in terms of inflation-adjusted funding. Those are the kinds of things that didn't happen.

In terms of that responsibility, it was outlined quite clearly by Dr. Rozanski in his report to the previous government, where he added a number of things: the idea of responsibility and the idea of adequacy being part of that job; that role for the provincial government.

We have taken that responsibility but not limited it to the idea of funding, the \$2 billion that we've put in. We would hope it would be clear that every component of that very significant investment has a strategic impact. It's meant to. It's meant to make a difference, not simply purchasing a certain number of teachers or a certain amount of textbooks, but actually fitting together as a coherent strategy, improving the dynamics and building on the respect that we think we've been able to bring to the system. Our responsibility is certainly to do that, to respond to the discernable needs, and to do that in a way that makes sense.

I can give some examples that are conspicuous for this year. We have a second-year investment, for example, in

terms of class size reduction of about \$90 million in operations and up to \$30 million in capital, because we want to make sure that everything does fit in terms of this enhanced system. I think members of the committee will recognize that it means every child in JK to grade 3 fundamentally will have an improved learning environment. We will take the 18,000 classes that were over 20 and we will be bringing those down assiduously, and bringing those benefits to the learning environment right across the province.

It's part of what we call our Every Child strategy. The Every Child strategy is simply characterized: In our estimation, there is a need to see that every child by the age of 12 has significantly achieved their potential in terms of literacy and numeracy. That is a goal that we have. We've set an interim target for that, which I think most members are very familiar with, so every child should reach their potential. We've said that 75% can actually reach the provincial standard. There were numerous people who said to us, "No, you can't do that. Those results can't be moved." And sure enough, it's true, by conventional wisdom and conventional approach, there had not necessarily been success. There had been no target-setting. There had been no ambition put forward for the system. But we felt, again, it was part of our responsibility. We can't simply invest. We need to be looking for the kinds of strategic things that we need to help boards cause it to happen. That moral purpose of having and making sure matters to us quite a bit. We hope that 12 years old is something that everybody realizes is kind of a demarcation when it comes to the educational development of any child about to become a young adult, about to become pretty familiar with whether or not they've got the capacity to go forward. It's a time of pretty significant self-definition, and if that definition doesn't include academic success by then, we have an enormous task, in terms of the data we have from a variety of efforts, in terms of high school or post-high school, to try and recover that.

So we've made that investment and set those kinds of goals because the final R I'm addressing today, in terms of results, matters significantly. Being able to take up our responsibility and put this forward, I think, has made a great deal of difference in terms of the system being able to then get the permissions it perhaps strongly lacked before to be able to make some of these things happen.

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Just as I'd like to give credit to the ministry in terms of being able to pull together a coherent agenda and the supporting programs for that, I want to give credit to the sector, because I think there is already evidence, based on our first year and a half, that the investments, coupled with the commitment and the skill of the people working in the system, have made a difference.

For example, we came in at about a 54% level of achievement, if you average the various tests that are taken by students in the grade 3 and grade 6 environments, and we now are at approximately 62% in terms of their achievement. There is more to be done; there's no

question. We have 75% as a marker and we only have the next three school years to achieve that. But we do think it demonstrates already that the premise is sound and that there can be a focus addressed that the system can respond to.

When you unbundle some of those top-line things, you see that we have made progress in areas, for example, with high aboriginal populations—very strong turn-arounds. We've made some investments. Part of the dollars we've put forward have been for lighthouse programs. We're able to take an idea that is either working with a small number of students or one that has high possibilities of working with a small number of students and make that available to more students. It has worked.

In other words, in Ontario we've got all the ingredients we need to be able to bring this forward. It is very much a made-in-Ontario strategy. In some ways we are reinventing how education is able to have this focused capacity, able to work together.

But we're doing that not at the Ministry of Education—certainly not exclusively—but at every school board around the province. There are very few boards—I think we're down to about 12 now—that have not shifted themselves out and forward from the categories of having averages that are way below others. The movement is very significant. Hundreds of schools have moved forward in terms of their ability to reach the provincial target. It's not the number that matters; it's those students, their teachers, their education assistants, their trustees, deciding this would be important.

I think it's worthwhile noting, because we're here to defend and promote the kind of expenditures that are needed for education, not just because they're what every other country in the world that has aspirations for good jobs and good societal engagements for their citizens is doing, but because on the Ontario merits this is a good investment. That would certainly be the premise of my presentation to you: that the responsibility taken by the provincial government is inclusive of a very strong agenda that merits that kind of investment.

We realize that needs to be demonstrated, because it is a significant investment. There hasn't been an investment like this, of the kind that's been made in the last two years, ever in Ontario education. We didn't have the kinds of deficiencies that were there before or the kinds of stresses and strains, but at the same time, I think there's a very strong upside in terms of seeing how quickly the teachers, how quickly the principals, how quickly the different folks contributing to the educational achievement in this province have been able to show us evidence of things to go forward.

It does not mean in any way, shape or form that we've arrived or that we have any sense of accomplishment fully yet for the system; only that we have evidence that the kinds of things we put forward are bearing some fruit. I think it's very important, because it's been too easy to put "crisis" and "strike" and other things in the same sentence with "publicly funded education in Ontario," and much harder to put "success" in that sentence. I think

that's what people are increasingly experiencing at their local school, in their local boards and in their families, in terms of how their students are striving forward.

I think that's what we look at the remainder of our investments being: each of them unlocking some of the potential that students have.

We've made significant investments in terms of special education. I've said to public audiences that I think that's one of the most important developments, and I believe it happened under a Conservative government in 1984. We started to recognize that every student deserved to have an equal chance at an education. We're not there yet in accomplishing that, but it is, I would say, extending citizenship to groups of students who belong in society, who can be as self-reliant as their potential will allow them, simply because that decision was made.

The ability to make that happen is still, at least in good part, ahead of us, but we have significant reforms taking place and investment has already happened. We put in \$165 million in our first year. We then put in another \$45 million last year, and there's another \$40 million this year. We recognize within our group of students the highest number of students with acute special needs of any education system. It matters because we are differentiating some of the needs that are out there in a more effective fashion, but still, our special education reform, which is led by my parliamentary assistant Kathleen Wynne and Professor Sheila Bennett, is making progress in terms of actually turning around from a process that was really based on what problems some of these students with special needs had and more into what kind of educational outcomes we can get, so that if somebody has a severe behavioural problem, what can actually work for them? We're putting ourselves in that business.

It's an instrumental role for the ministry to play, rather than having 72 boards solve that problem by themselves, but still letting the boards customize and tailor their programs to fit the students who are walking in the door. If there's another feature of the juxtaposition between our investment and the results we're trying to get in our taking of responsibility, it's been about that. It's taking a one-size-fits-all funding formula and actually conditioning it into one that now fits more of the reality that a very large province like Ontario has, so we have very significant components that recognize the rural differences in this province, and the urban differences are also featured now in terms of how the funding formula works. We are getting at some those specialized needs.

Members of the committee may be aware that about 75% of our funding is there for every student and about 25% is funding that targets particular outcomes we want to achieve, whether it's special needs or some of the other things we support for rural students and for those in urban areas. They are, I think, really welcome and useful additions in terms of how the system is now able to respond in the way it should, because the hazard of a unitary-funded system is that it could become non-responsive; it could simply be a one-size-fits-all and let the chips fall where they may. Well, those chips aren't

chips, in this case; they're kids. They're children and young adults who need to be recognized by their individual instructors, their teachers and their principals as having a certain kind of potential and a certain kind of need.

That individualized instruction goes to the heart of our two main strategies, which are the Every Child strategy I've spent some time talking about in terms of K to 6, and our student success strategy from 7 to 12. We really are trying to emphasize a platform that says we reach children at the time when they can best be reached, which we think is at the earliest age possible. We link very well with the Best Start program that has been brought in by my colleague the Minister of Children and Youth Services, in that expansion of early learning taking place, especially for four- and five-year-olds, and wherever possible within the school environment, with the smaller class sizes, and then with the interventions.

Some of the things we're able to put forward, I think, have been very strongly supportive of that—more specialized teachers—and they support our companion strategies, for example, of everyday physical activity, so we have physical education expanded. We have now agreed to have 2,000 more specialist teachers—600 this year—in our schools actually providing for that component. We do that, yes, because it's a good health initiative, in the sense that it makes sense to contribute, not to take over, not to do anything but what parents expect a school to do in terms of the development of students, helping with that in a significant way, as I think a lot of parents assumed schools were still doing or certainly experienced themselves and believed was partly the co-responsibility that could be picked up by the official publicly funded education system. So we're going to be able to do that and we're also instituting daily physical activity to make sure it is an everyday habit we start to acquire.

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I had the opportunity to spend some time in a class recently—I actually visited with the First Minister of Scotland—where they were doing the daily physical activity, and there were a couple of things that wouldn't be immediately apparent. One was that the kids are so interested in it, they ask for it four or five times a day. They love to do the daily physical activity and the teachers find it makes them better students, because even though there's a strong health implication, the best thing here is, it's good for learning. It also has an ancillary benefit: It's good for teachers, because it gets teachers up there, stretching and doing things at least a few times a week to supplement what's being done by the phys ed teacher. It is, we think, very linked to that goal of getting everyone to reach their potential, or a significant portion of it, in terms of their basic education and their foundational skills by the age of 12. That daily physical activity is a significant part of that, and we've been able to bring that together this year.

Our other main strategy that has had significant investment on our part is the student success strategy. Student success is simply taking a legacy that is, to me, as

consequential as any fiscal challenge that the province has as a number—in some ways more important, because it talks about as many as 15,000 additional students each year not getting a high school diploma and not making the transition to some form of recognized success, not achieving a meaningful outcome in terms of what they're able to get done through their high school career. For some of them, and for too many, unfortunately, it makes them not feel like they've accomplished anything in their entire education career because they didn't achieve that.

That took place because of a variety of factors which we've carefully tried to analyze in terms of where the problems are for Ontario students. Why would we have a 56% four-year graduation rate under the new curriculum brought in by the previous government compared to graduation rates of 68% at the low end and 83% at the high end for comparable provinces, and why would those factors be so much in evidence here?

We think we have many of the answers in terms of that particular challenge, and we're putting them together in terms of our student success strategy. We are looking at a variety of things, some of which we'll announce quite shortly in terms of more detail, but certainly we believe it's very important to, first of all, declare an interest in these students. That's why we will be bringing forward legislation that will raise the school leaving age to 18. In 1921, it was 16. It's simply that times have changed, and changed significantly.

But the real challenge is to have those students want to stay in school, to ensure that the curriculum has them learn as much as possible, so that they get to that meaningful standard that is our high school diploma. We believe that can be done. In fact, we believe there's already been some progress. We think our high school four-year and five-year rates have both improved by about four points. There was an increase from 56% to 60% after one year as a four-year graduation rate, and in the five-year rate it looks to be about 68% to 71% or 72%; so a similar kind of jump there.

But there's a long way to go, and every milestone along that way represents students whose futures are pretty much on the line. There is no really good outcome there for too, too many of the students who aren't able to achieve that diploma. We have a net job shrinkage of about 3.2% every year—fewer jobs for those of our students who don't achieve a high school diploma. So we understand very well that there's a lot at stake in terms of making sure that they get through.

A lot of the data we've used to inform our strategy are data that have been available to provincial governments for the last three or four years. It was particularly constructed by Dr. Alan King at Queen's University, and it tells us a number of things. For example, it tells us that the high school curriculum, for whatever reason, did not work from the beginning in terms of an entry for the students coming in from elementary. In fact, every minister has known that that grade 9 level where there was supposed to be some beginning differentiation, the ability of students to start to be respected as having

different ways of learning, would actually be expressed in terms of the program.

For example, applied math had very high failure rates: less than 75%. Even after two years of remediation, we can say we've only been able to get an extra five points of students passing the test that measures achievement in the curriculum, and the failure rates have been very significant in the actual courses. Only 3% of the students who failed applied math actually got their high school diploma subsequently within four years. It was a sentence to them of a certain kind of educational purgatory where they couldn't get their grade 9 credit; therefore, they couldn't achieve their grade 10 credit. Many of these students had to take this over and over again and it simply, for whatever reason—I guess maybe a different definition of what the provincial government should be involved in or really defies a full explanation—is now changed.

We put in place last year, the first year we could, locally developed courses that would allow students to make that transition, and now we have a new applied mathematics course. That math course, just to give you an idea, was a 93% match. So the one third of students who learn differently, who have always, and in all of our education systems, had an option available to them, had an option taken away because the course they were offered was 93% the same. It struggled significantly in terms of students being able to learn that, and the match we've put forward is about a 55% match.

I would say to all members of this committee to look at that curriculum. It is not in any way an easy math course. It is different, though. The way it was originally advertised and intended is that it goes more to tactile learning. It goes to more hands-on kinds of concepts and it is less dependent on abstract mathematics. It has a real-world application. These are students who can take that and apply it as technologists. There's a whole range of good outcomes in the future, but they simply could not do it because the course material wasn't put together for them in a way that was respectful of them. That was something we felt had to be dealt with, and therefore we did, but all the rest of the high school curriculum is intact and is there to challenge students. I will say this: that more students will take more math, will achieve more and learn more because we've made a better entry possible for them into their high school careers.

I would say as well that our overall thrust in student success is exceedingly important. We now have student success teachers available in every school this fall. That's to make sure we don't wait till grade 11 to learn when students are struggling. We will have a teacher whose job it is to carry a caseload of students who are academically struggling.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Garfield Dunlop): Minister, you have about four minutes left, please.

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: Thanks very much. That caseload we think is very important, to complement what's being done by guidance counsellors, to complement what's being done by principals and to really infuse

individual classroom teachers with that sense of respect for those students, because that's really where we think our biggest struggle is, which is unfortunately inherent in our system. There are outcomes that I think many of us went to school under that are being really done well within the system. We have some 33% of students graduating to university, but we can't say to the other 67%, "There isn't a good outcome waiting for you."

That's effectively what has happened because, with the difficulties for students in the applied courses, we've had a reduction in applications to colleges and we simply don't have the same number of students going through to that level of success. As I mentioned before, it's most conspicuous that we have a big jump in students who are not able to get a high school diploma at all.

Our approach there is to make sure that there is remedial and credit recovery available to students, that we're able to provide for them better learning in what they're doing.

There are also a number of other measures we think will help; for example, creating respect for apprenticeships in terms of making that one of the outcomes people strive for for job placements, with training that in our system today had kind of become an afterthought rather than something that was really there and had meaning, because in every respect we are going to ensure that a high school diploma has significant meaning. It must. There are no favours we can do for students by not making sure they learn, and because the curriculum wasn't sized to some of the different potentials students have and start to express by grades 9 and 10, we denied some of them. We basically, as an institution, were not respectful of what they had to contribute in the future, and that is going to change.

We will shortly announce targets for this as well because we think it is so vital that we find ways of moving students forward, that they're actually doing better in terms of their acquisition of credits and ultimately their acquisition of diplomas. We have made an investment there as well. It is a significant investment. There are 1,300 new teachers in our high schools. They're doing two things. They're providing support. For the first time we have class size limits. They apply for some of those courses of our most challenged students in terms of those who may struggle, but they also help to put limits on a wide range of courses because that was simply undermining some of the credibility of our education system under the previous funding and the previous way that support was denied to some of those students.

We have a strategy that incorporates as well some of the best learning we've been able to do. In the last two years, we've spent approximately \$36 million on a variety of projects. Again, this is getting the best out of the system. We have a tremendous amount of ingenuity and enterprise within education, so what is learned in Renfrew or what is learned in Windsor needs to be applied in Toronto or Hamilton or anyplace that the same or similar students are coming in the door. Those are the

kinds of things that have characterized our spending commitments in the last two years and certainly in this year going forward.

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We do believe that progress is going to be based upon a real focusing of efforts on these particular students going forward, but it is not to two-dimensionalize or in any way take away from an enlarged education. Our commitment as a government is to the intellectual, physical and emotional potential of students, and we've shown that with our healthy schools initiative. We will also be bringing forward an arts and education initiative. We understand that a premise, before we can even start to have kids learn, is about safe schools, so we have already brought forward some initiatives: a safe welcome program for elementary schools, and very soon we'll have an anti-bullying program in place and resources for every student affected by bullying. We'll also be reviewing the Safe Schools Act and making sure that we have devices in place that are respectful of students and are fair in every respect in terms of how they come forward.

I guess what I would say, Mr. Chair—and I don't know how much time we have right now. Is it—

The Vice-Chair: You're already over.

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: OK, I'm over. Can I just say this? We have a plan that I think is worthy of the committee's support and worthy of the investment the government has put forward.

The Vice-Chair: Thank you very much, Minister. I now have up to 30 minutes for the opposition to make a statement and/or questions.

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): Thank you, Minister, for being here. I don't think there's too much in what you've said in terms of the objectives you've set out that any of us would disagree with. I think we all want the best for our students. We all want to ensure that teachers have the resources available to them. But this is estimates and we're here to talk about where the money that is being committed to education is going and what the programs are.

The reason I'm going to give you this list of requests early is that it would give your staff an opportunity to collect this information so that it would come back and we could use it in the course of the next number of hours that we have allocated. So Mr. Chair, what I'm going to do is initially provide on the record this list of specific data that I would ask be tabled with the committee so that, in turn, we could get some commitment from staff in terms of the time that it would take to get this back to us.

First, Minister, I'd like an accurate reporting of the number of children in the Ontario school system broken down by board and authority who are identified for special education. If you use the fiscal 2004-05 figures, then all further requests that I make would, of course, be fulfilled using the data from that year. I want to do comparisons with the estimates that are provided here today.

Second, I'd like that breakdown of identified children to include the total transfer payments, board by board and authority, and under which special education programs of the ministry those transfers were made.

Third, I'd like a breakdown, board by board and authority, of the number of students in Ontario and their parents who are currently, as of today's date, November 1, 2005, under exclusion orders, using the Safe Schools Act as the basis for that exclusion.

Fourth, I would request a further breakdown of all those students under exclusion orders to ascertain which of those students are identified as requiring special education and, more specifically, which of them would be considered high-needs students.

Fifth, I'd like to know the dollar amounts, board by board and authority, attributable to those students under those exclusion orders.

Sixth, I would like to receive the data outlining, board by board and authority, the special incidence portion, the SIP funding, for 2004-05.

Seven, I'd like the minister to table the list of board and authorities that received effectiveness and equity funding in the 2004-05 school year and in what amounts.

Eight, I would like the responses sent from the minister to the letters sent to him from the Ontario School Bus Association, which are dated October 27, 2003; December 19, 2003; May 7, 2004; October 1, 2004; October 25, 2004; January 14, 2005; February 22, 2005; July 26, 2005; September 1, 2005 and October 6, 2005. These are letters that were sent to your attention, to the minister's attention. I would like to have tabled with this committee your responses to those letters.

Nine, I would like the responses sent from the minister's office to my letters sent to the minister on December 11, 2004, January 11, 2005 and two separate letters dated January 26, 2005.

Ten, at the request of my colleague Mr. O'Toole, I would like the response tabled with the committee that was sent from the minister to him in response to his letter to the minister dated June 3, 2005.

Lastly, I'd like the minister to table the response he provided to Mr. John Tory, the leader of the official opposition—to Mr. Tory's letter to the minister dated June 1, 2005, regarding a special needs child from Mr. Tory's constituency.

Minister, I look forward to receiving that information as quickly as possible. I see no reason why it can't be made available by the time the committee meets again. I think we have another date scheduled, November 15, and one prior to that. The 15th, I think, should give you sufficient time. I look forward to receiving that information.

Minister, I assume that you've reviewed the estimates for your ministry personally.

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: Sorry, the question?

Mr. Klees: Have you personally reviewed the estimates for accuracy?

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: I have, to the best of my ability.

Mr. Klees: In your review, did you find any errors or omissions that haven't yet been corrected?

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: None that I'm aware of.

Mr. Klees: Let me draw your attention to page 16, the line item referencing your salary. Is that line item correct?

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: I believe it's correct in the sense that it was deducted from last year, so that money wasn't paid, but that was a central deduction so the ministry paid it, and then, as you may know, because of the deficit that we inherited, all of cabinet took a cut in their salary of 25% of the minister's allowance. But that was a central deduction and not one accruing to each ministry. Aside from that, that is the charge to the ministry for that, but then there was a deduction made, as you're aware, of some \$8,000 or \$9,000.

Mr. Klees: So you're confirming that that's not what you got paid. You got paid less than that, did you?

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: That's right.

Mr. Klees: Is that the case with all of your colleagues? Everyone took that salary cut?

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: That's correct.

Mr. Klees: Minister, when was the last time you were on your ministry Web site?

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: I can't say for sure yesterday, Mr. Klees, but usually daily.

Mr. Klees: The purpose of the school board profiles on that Web site is what?

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: The profiles that are available are meant to be useful information to complement what individual boards are making available, and something which we in fact intend to expand upon and bring up to date.

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Mr. Klees: So it's intended to be "useful" information, as you said; I think that was your word.

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: There's work underway right now with the school boards in trying to lessen the burden of reporting; in other words, just to use your words, "useful information," because we ask a lot in terms of the overall number of reports and so on, and some of that is reflected in that report. So we would like to ask boards to be more timely and be able to serve, first of all, their local publics, but ultimately the accountability they need to the provincial funder as well. We're in discussions right now with them on how to revise all of that, because they have, I think pretty successfully, said, "There's a lot of overlapping burden that we have in terms of things that are required from us." That's one of the real problems we have. For local parents, local anyone, to have access to the activity of their board, there should be an objective way of accessing information in a timely fashion. There is a gap, because boards say the burden is such that they cannot do that. We have a project, overall, a transparency project that a number of boards have volunteered to be first in line with and the products of which—I can't give you a date right now, but at the next sitting, which would be tomorrow, I'd be happy to give you some kind of estimate on when that will be available to the public.

Mr. Klees: Minister, I'm concerned when I see on the ministry Web site the financial information or school board profiles, including variance reports that haven't been updated for public viewing since this government took office. Are you aware of that?

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: I am aware that the detailed reports—there is board-specific funding information. You may recall—that wasn't your area of responsibility—that they were always two years out of date when I was the opposition critic, sometimes slightly more than that. There is a shift in terms of how the core of those reports is being provided. I would like to see a modified version of that report up to date, and that's the basis of our discussion with the boards. Frankly, there isn't any reason why we couldn't have at least the standard of the previous government achieved. Again, I would just say to you, and I think you could confirm this with the local board or any of the boards that you're in contact with as critic, that they have a lot of difficulty, and we have to put up, obviously, information that they have verified. This is what we go through with all information-gathering that we do. There have been a few glitches, and I would say generally it's a few boards, not all, that have made it harder for us to post up-to-date, accurate information. We should be able to post, at least, I believe—is the 2003-04 outstanding, or 2004-05?

Interjection.

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: The 2003-04 year. I would like to see a much more revealing 2004-05, if that's possible, and that's what we're in discussion with boards about right now.

Mr. Klees: Your Web site now shows 2001-02 numbers. You're admitting that that really is not very helpful information.

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: I agree. Again, it was a practice, and there is a delay that I appreciate is real, but that kind of delay is not. There is up-to-date information available elsewhere, but the board profiles—which, frankly, to give credit to the previous government, have a format that is helpful, because you can compare boards and so on, but the information itself, some of it, is not as helpful as it appears to be on the face. So that's also what we're going after. I would not claim that it leads to fundamental misunderstanding. I think we have focused more of our effort, rather than going to the old format, on getting more timely information up to date.

Again, when we come back tomorrow, I can give you some idea of when that will be, but I'll also give you an idea of whether or not it is really feasible for us to bring that information as up to date as possible and whether there's anything in the way of that. To me, there shouldn't be any reason why we can't, as an interim measure.

Mr. Klees: You have the current information; it's just that it hasn't been transferred to the Web site. Is that right?

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: I would say that we have the information in the sense that there are always lingering problems to be resolved and so on. I think you know that

the generating form for that is a very extensive set of data. There are a lot of reports and a lot of things that are collected. This is the particular end-of-year thing that happens. For example—if I can answer your question, and I don't want to take up too much time—the so-called October report will come in this year around December, but some of those boards will take the next six months, even after that, to verify, and maybe even longer. I know there were particular points that were problems for some of the boards, some of it related to the boards under supervision, some of it related just to a general issue that we ran into.

We have most of that information, so we could still post it. I will let you know tomorrow whether there's any intractable barrier, why we couldn't bring it more up to date. Our ambition is a little different, though. That format we'd like to better, in a way, by having more information available. I will say that other parts of the Web site do have more up-to-date information available.

Mr. Klees: You're undertaking, then, to report back as to how soon we could get this information updated.

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: Yes, I will, tomorrow.

Mr. Klees: Thank you.

Chair, I have a number of other questions. I'm going to defer to my colleague to ask some questions. I know that he has some pressing issues that he wants to raise with the minister, so I'll ask my colleague to take over.

The Vice-Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Barrett.

Mr. Toby Barrett (Haldimand–Norfolk–Brant): Thank you, Mr. Klees.

I appreciate the opportunity to get up to date. I've been receiving information from a number of local organizations and organizations under the Coalition for Small Schools. Of course, their concern is the continued threatened closure of small rural schools, and certainly in my area, the Grand Erie District School Board catchment area, the threatened closure of rural high schools. I would like to get up to date.

This letter was dated September 6, for example, and they state in the letter that on May 9, 2005, you addressed hundreds of citizens indicating that funding for small schools was in the works. On May 12, as we know in this committee, you spoke in the Ontario Legislature: "We have an obligation to ensure that all Ontario students, particularly those in small rural communities, have an equal opportunity for a quality education. We have set aside money in this year's budget to help keep small schools open and more to help them to flourish." That was last May.

I'll continue further just to give you an opportunity to pull some of these figures together.

On Wednesday, June 1, you wrote a letter to the Greater Essex County District School Board's education committee. In that letter you stated, "We will also be making further announcements within the next two weeks on support for rural schools and, in particular, rural high schools."

So these statements have been quite heartening throughout rural Ontario. As I've indicated, my infor-

mation is as of September 6 of this year; I'm a little bit out of the loop. Was the funding announced last June?

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: Yes, it was. Let me distinguish for you, Mr. Barrett. We had Good Schools Open funds at \$20 million, building on an original \$31-million investment. We did that despite the fact that Dr. Rozanski said \$50 million was the amount that should be put toward rural schools. The previous government, as I think you're aware, did that just before the election. We left that funding intact. We tried to make sure—it was a bit rushed in terms of how it was put together—that it could be improved on, but also it, by now, added another \$50 million. So the other \$20 million is out there, providing, we believe—and if you look at the intentions of schools and the outlook of most boards—a more reasoned approach. There was really almost a target put on the tops of rural schools in the past by a variety of things.

A number of things are also worth noting. There was, as well, an announcement that took place around a change in policy. The policy has been given effect so that there is no more reward for closing small rural schools, an inordinate number of which did close under the previous administration. So we have put both a financial protection and now a policy protection, not for rural schools at any sort of cost or in any kind of "no matter what school boards think," but rather, fairly. We think there should be a fair funding platform for rural schools. So we have advanced on that and we have put that funding forward.

We will have additional funding, even this year. We have been in discussion with boards, including Grand Erie and Windsor-Essex, about high schools in the rural context, and that will be forthcoming shortly. But I think you'll find that the small schools coalition and other groups are really quite excited that finally there is a response that recognizes what I think—I'm sure there were many voices in the last government, and in all parties, that agreed that we should not be funding schools in the same way; they don't have the same possibilities for economies of scale.

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The other part that I want you to be aware of: We've changed the facilities policy to make it more advantageous, and another part that will be coming forward will be how we restructure grants. There are some grants from the previous funding formula that are intended to help rural schools but miss. There is some of that on our agenda.

There will be an ability for high schools this year to work in our student success area in a number of ways to be more viable into the future. It will be a large number of schools. There are boards that are very excited in terms of what they can show us can be done.

You're aware, I'm sure, of the small schools summit that was held, hosted by the Upper Canada board, that we had people attend. Again, this is another example where we're working in partnership. Where boards and parent groups were almost always fighting, there seems to be a coming together in most boards.

I also note with interest, Mr. Barrett, that in your board they once were projecting—I was there many times as opposition critic—that numbers would only come down in the rural area. I think you're aware of that. Now, instead, they're seeing increases where they thought there weren't. I think that shows some of the probity we're trying to make sure happens when it comes to school boards, that they don't just look at the short term; that they look at—and this is what our policy asked them to do—are these rural schools, first of all, good for education? If they are, make that part of your capital planning and part of the way that the province will respond to you.

Grand Erie is a good case, because I'm not saying that the board doesn't have an ongoing concern, I know that they do, but in some parts of the counties of Norfolk and Brant they have actually found increases in population, where their own projections a few years before said not. This is the reason we're trying to get people to spread out how they make these considerations.

I think all of those things are important. There will be further steps that we'll take, but effectively what we've now started to have is a rural funding formula that allows rural schools to get a fair chance of showing that they can succeed and has taken away any artificial reward for boards to close them. There is more to be done, and the steps I've described will be coming shortly.

Mr. Barrett: You made mention of schools closing before the election. I lost one high school in Burford. Oftentimes communities do see the writing on the wall for students. By extension, their parents vote with their feet when they see, for example, something as distinct as a lack of course offerings.

Again, before the election in December 2003, you indicated a moratorium on school closure. A number of schools in my area and the Grand Erie area waited on that. I think of Caledonia's Seneca Unity and Brant's F.C. Bodley school. That moratorium was not mandatory. That moratorium was not backed by legislation. I don't know whether everybody understood that during the election. The moratorium was essentially a request to the school boards. We do have a situation where for both Caledonia's Seneca Unity and F.C. Bodley the decision was made by the board to close those schools in spite of the moratorium.

Again, referring to the Grand Erie board, last November there was a board report indicating that 12 elementary schools and three secondary schools are slated for closure. This is of concern. I'm assuming, unless there's new information, that this decision to close three high schools and 12 elementary schools is a decision made by the board, in spite of the additional money made available to rural schools, certainly in spite of the moratorium. Is that correct?

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: The school boards have a legislative authority to close schools that we've respected. But we've certainly been trying to turn around an attitude that got instilled under the previous government.

I met with the kids in Burford, and they were rural kids who felt very hard done by. They had an environ-

ment that was supportive of them, where they could take courses that were conducive to their future careers, and they had that ripped away from them. That's how they felt. It was a very unfortunate struggle that they went through. In only about six or seven schools were decisions made by boards in contradiction to that moratorium. We have tried to form a partnership with our boards, not tried to use a hammer in terms of getting cooperation, and tried to be respectful, as I'm sure you are with your local trustees around them being a form of trusteeship that we need to have operate at that level.

However, I would like to believe that Grand Erie—I cited the instance of a population surge in one area, but I'll say this about the funding we've provided and the overall outlook that we have: If they're going to bring forward 12 elementary schools, they're going to have to do it in a completely different way than they've done it in the past. The requirement there is that for the first time, they have to take into account what the value is to the community, what the value is to the local economy, what the value is to the student in their overall educational attainment and what the value is to the system. Those are things that were not required before in any significant way, and that's the protection, if you like, that rural communities have for the first time, because the viability of having specific funding for rural schools is part of an overall rural strategy that we believe is very important.

I regret any boards that went forward on their own in terms of this. We reviewed all of the circumstances that were done in the moratorium where the schools had not already been closed, and in fact in all cases there was some variance. By and large, boards have abided by that; they have changed their plans because we gave them a second look to take into account the funding, more so.

In terms of the future for the people in Grand Erie, I would like to believe that with the significant funding choices that they have and with the structural policy changes we've made, every viable, good school will stay open. That's my recommendation to every board: Keep the good schools open. Boards will be in a position to present their cases to us, because the school evaluation allows for that. They can show that a school really needs to be open because there aren't choices for it, and the evaluation is there. They can argue with us for the first time around funding, for example, which was never available before. That's something that we're setting up for a number of those circumstances—

Mr. Barrett: You're suggesting, then, and I think I'm aware of some of this, that boards certainly have the leeway from the Ontario government, or from the Ministry of Education, to make accommodation decisions beyond just funding or beyond just the number of students in the school. You used the phrase, "Keep the best school open."

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: Just to be clear, there is a new policy that they have to follow. The way the act reads is that the power, as I mentioned before, is the board's, but the guidelines are set by the province. Those guidelines have to be followed, or the actual decision isn't valid.

That's where we're providing a new approach that every board will go through, should they seek to close schools in the future.

Mr. Barrett: OK. Then you talk about keeping the best schools open, and as I recall, you also visited Delhi high school just before the election, at a time when it was threatened with closure. Delhi high school, in my opinion, is an excellent school, certainly with respect to my staff at Queen's Park and in my constituency office. I hire Delhi high school students over and over again. They know politics: They grow up on tobacco farms; they know how the world works and they know how government works as a result of the economic turmoil in that part of the country.

We've had an excellent community group working to keep that high school open, the CAUSE group, Citizens Against Unnecessary School Eradication, and this group has morphed into a new committee entitled CARE, Citizens Advocating for Rural Education. I've attended a number of their meetings. They have put forward a number of options to the school board beyond just numbers; they've put forward recommendations for the ability to offer community-based programs, even community college programs. Certainly, ideas have been discussed: shared staffing, for example, distance education, even the concept of cutting the building in half and using part of that infrastructure for other usages. Under the new and present approach of the Ministry of Education, would these kinds of ideas fall on fertile ground?

1700

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: Yes, they would. The policy we've already passed indicates—for example, we currently pay for about 100,000 spaces that boards aren't using. I know some of those are in Grand Erie. We pay to have them cleaned. We say that those spaces need to be eligible for some of these joint uses. We think that there are a lot of ways that this should take place.

There is also a student success component to how we look at the facilities, and we'll have more to say about that. Whether it's community colleges or whether it's community groups, one of the big ways that schools are going to be more successful with the kids who are dropping out is making sure that they find ways to be interesting. That's true for rural areas and it's true for urban areas. We provide some existing funding and we'll provide permission and further incentives to make that happen.

That's the kind of thing we're expecting to come back as boards file their capital plans with us to say, "Here's how we look at it." The first thing they're asked to do in that capital plan: "What educational program do you need?" because previously, capital plans were completely in isolation. So they'll be able to say, "Here in Burford"—or in any of the communities there—"Here's what will work educationally, and here's the kind of considerations that we need," on the capital side for example, and even ultimately, as we refine our rural overall formula, on the operating side as well. That is absolutely fertile ground and something that I think boards, which

have been used to doing it a certain other way for a number of years, are now starting to really get enthusiastic about. That's the most hopeful thing I can see.

I haven't sat down with Grand Erie of late, but I know that they're alert to this, because when we have, I have talked about that. There's a lot of difference of opinions on the board. Some say about rural areas: "They're going to get smaller; we've got to rationalize and do all of that." There are champions, as you know, on that board for rural schools, and I do see a good prospect there and in other places of concentration.

Part of that issue has been those joint urban-rural boards: How do we get them to find a consensus about how this should go? I think we've made that more possible. I won't get into any details, but the funding makes it possible and now the policy will as well.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister. I'd like to now recognize Mr. Marchese.

Mr. Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): Welcome, Minister. Thank you for coming here to this committee with the ministry staff. I'm going to get to the questions right away, and I would ask you, where possible, to keep your answers as brief as you can.

You spoke about physical education and its importance. Can you confirm or deny that 70% of our schools in Ontario do not have a physical education teacher?

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: Unfortunately, I don't think we actually know for certain. The count that is there is only of physical education teachers that take the place of another teacher, and that is not a complete count. The ministry, as we went to do our planning for increasing phys. ed. teachers, doesn't have a complete count for that. I'm not in a position to confirm—I think you're referring to some of the estimates that some other groups have made—but we hope to be in that position shortly, because part of how we'll be working with boards on a strategy to expand phys. ed. is knowing more precisely what we've got.

Mr. Marchese: You did say at a press conference that you thought it was a bit higher than 70%.

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: Yes, I did, basically because when we look at some systems, it is higher. Some boards have done a terrific job training—just to tell you, though, because it's an important part of your answer—teachers to be accredited but not full phys. ed. teachers. They believe in that and they promote that. I'm not prejudging them until we finish our healthy schools initiative and making this happen. That's the only caveat I would put on that as well.

Mr. Marchese: You mentioned that there are 1,300 new teachers. Can you tell me what these 1,300 new teachers are doing?

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: We will when we get our October reports. They'll be doing a variety of things. Sixty-five per cent of them are deployed to help students in need; what that means is students at risk and students who need an extra boost to be successful students. They are teachers who are teaching extra sections to bring down class sizes. They are teachers who have taken

assignments as student success teachers. They are teachers who are also working in some of the non-targeted areas to reduce class sizes. And some—

Mr. Marchese: And these are—

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: Sorry, just to complete the answer—some are restoring guidance and some are restoring librarians, because, as you may be aware, there's a kind of work load arrangement that was prejudicial against librarians and guidance counsellors. So those are the deployments that we expect to see.

Mr. Marchese: These are 1,300 additional teachers over and above those who would normally be replacing teachers who are retiring etc., correct?

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: Absolutely.

Mr. Marchese: If you wanted to show me, for example—because you want to show me, I presume—that we actually have hired 1,300 new teachers, how would I find that? Where would I find it? Could you help me with that?

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: Well, we always like to be helpful. There's no shortage of willingness to do that. Basically, the board reports will show us the number of teachers that are there, and the way to look at whether they're actually net new is how they relate to the number of students. For example, if a board lost net students in high school and lost two teachers because of that—they would not have got them, because, as you know, the funding formula is driven by that—there could be two teachers made up that way. Each board will report the number, in this case, of high school teachers, and we can make that report available when it's presented.

Mr. Marchese: But you understand my difficulty, right? You say that 1,300 new teachers have been hired.

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: That's just this fall. There will be 2,000 eventually.

Mr. Marchese: But all I have is your word that says that 1,300 new teachers have been hired. I can't challenge it one way or the other because I have no way of knowing.

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: When the October reports are starting to come in—they'll be verified by December—hopefully for the vast majority they'll be in a shape that we can put out as public information. We are tracking very directly. In fact, there are staffing reports already in right now from boards that we're trying to sort through. It was an extra report we asked for, because we like to be helpful. We'd like to help you with the answer to this question.

Mr. Marchese: Good. So soon we'll know.

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: The staffing reports are a little more problematic than we had wished for, in the sense that they were an extra report we asked for, even though, as I said to Mr. Klees, we did it reluctantly. But there will be an ability to say—if this is what you're asking, and I think this is what you're asking—that Toronto or Grand Erie or any board had so many teachers allocated last year and has so many more this year.

Mr. Marchese: And we'll be able to see that?

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: You'll be able to see that.

Mr. Marchese: Wonderful. That's soon, in a couple of months?

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: Yes.

Mr. Marchese: All right. I want to talk, as quickly as I can, about the Safe Schools Act—you mentioned that; I'm interested in that, and so are you, I'm assuming—otherwise known as zero tolerance. Again, Minister, briefly, what are your views on zero tolerance?

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: I don't think zero tolerance exists in Ontario schools, and I'm glad it doesn't. I don't think that it's a policy so much as a slogan. I think what we have instead is a policy that is limited. I do not think of it as a complete policy. I don't think it assures safety in and of itself, because it doesn't have a preventive component.

Mr. Marchese: So it doesn't exist; it's just a slogan?

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: Yes, on zero tolerance. Well, it's been ascribed to this. Because there's discretion applied by the principal, just to be precise, it isn't meant to be and should not be in practice a zero tolerance set of rules.

Mr. Marchese: That's fine. The Human Rights Commissioner, in his report School Discipline and Discrimination, stated that there is a "disproportionate impact on racial minority students." He included in that report the fact that a number of students with disabilities are also disproportionately suspended from school. Do you have any views on that?

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: As you know, there's no data collected on racial origin or ethnic identity of students. There is, though, data collected—and we'll be making it public very shortly—around students who are identified as receiving special-needs services. When we put forward, as we are very shortly, a public review, we intend to make all the data available, because things are being said that aren't necessarily supported by data. But there is also the reason for a review, which is a need to find out.

What I would say about this is that I accept that there is a disproportionate impact on certain minorities. What I will not, though, take as a premise is that that tells us why or what we can do about it; hence the need for a review. I do believe our data will show also a disproportionate impact in terms of students with disabilities. We will have a little bit more hard information to share there. The explicit goal of this government is to get into the dynamics of education, in terms of why that should be the case and, again, what we will do about it.

Mr. Marchese: Last year, you promised a review of the so-called Safe Schools Act to begin in the spring of 2005. What happened to that review?

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: The safe schools action team, which is the group we've charged with a variety of aspects of school safety—outside of the people not involved in the school system to review—had reference group meetings in the spring and felt that they could not yet bring that review public. They encountered a lot of interest. There is a negotiation ongoing with the Human Rights Commissioner, for example, that we thought was successful in the spring and, unfortunately, still continues.

The preparations have taken place the way we said they would, but the public component will now take place this fall. We believe that it will be a better inquiry for the kind of information we've been able to gather and the kinds of preparation we've been able to do.

1710

Mr. Marchese: The public consultations are going to start when again, sorry?

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: We're going to announce the date very shortly, but it will be within a matter of weeks.

Mr. Marchese: What kinds of consultations are you having? What kinds of questions would you be asking people you're consulting? Do you have a sense of that?

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: We will be putting forward a consultation guide so that we can give people what the system knows in terms of the information it collects, and then basic questions around what I've already said as a summary, which are: Is this act doing everything that it can and are any of the responsibilities of the provincial government doing what it can for student safety? Is it fair? And a variety of related questions. It will be fairly simple. We're not trying to restrict this in any particular way, so we're going to give the possibility for all interested members of the public to participate in contributing their views on this. There is a part of this that I think comes from that qualitative aspect. It would be designed through a variety of ways, public hearings being one, to collect that.

Mr. Marchese: Do you think that the hearings you're going to have are going to give you a different result than what has been studied by the Human Rights Commissioner? What are you expecting?

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: The human rights commission cites studies in the United States. They have no data. They've only looked at some of the unfortunately not data-driven results of hearings that were held in Toronto. We respect that that effort has taken place, but there was no data collected by the human rights commission. They didn't make a finding so much as to say that they had a concern, and they have addressed that concern most recently to both the Toronto District School Board and our ministry. But it isn't a study in that sense; it isn't based on an examination of the facts.

Mr. Marchese: So what are you expecting from this study? What do you think will come out of it? You must have some feelings around it.

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: My feeling is that we need to be able to deal with, in detail, the experience that the set of rules that come under the Safe Schools Act have exacted. We also need to get from the public their sense of how they want our schools to be conducted. My own view is that we need to make sure that we are being fair, because that's the only way to make sure you have safety, but I'm going to wait to hear from the public around the balance of views that come forward.

We're also going to hear from people in the education system. There have been things thrown around about the Safe Schools Act that don't fully reflect the kind of effort that principals and teachers are making to be fair, nor

does it reflect the kind of changes that have taken place in the last couple of years. But I think it's important that the public hear that for themselves. I'm not in a position to say—

Mr. Marchese: OK. I want to ask you a question, such as whether you're willing to rule out anything in and of these discussions. Taking away the right of teachers to suspend: Is that on the table or not? Is that the question you will be asking?

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: I think you know it's not in use at all. It's a token kind of thing if it was to be in action. We want to take substantive action. We're not interested in taking—

Mr. Marchese: Sorry, not in use at all? Teachers don't—

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: There are no teachers suspending students, by and large. It was a decision that teachers made as a group. It's not really in practice.

Mr. Marchese: Taking away the right of principals to suspend: Is that on the table or not? Are these the kinds of questions you might be asking?

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: As you may know, and if I may refer back to Mr. Kleess' question, principals have always had a right to suspend under exclusion, and exclusion is not part of the Safe Schools Act. I'm sure it was just a word difference that was there. But they've always done exclusions, and those are not recorded. So the ability under the trespass act and under a variety of statutes has been there.

I would say that we've made no advance determinations about the outcomes, and the evidence I'll offer you is that when the safe schools action team reports on bullying, you'll see an immediate response from the government and you'll see something similar in terms of this, but I don't know yet what they're finding in terms of the hearings. These are serious inquiries and reviews that they're doing.

Mr. Marchese: Will restoring funding to youth counsellors, community outreach officers or social workers be part of those discussions as it relates to the Safe Schools Act or not?

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: We have already done some of that, so we will certainly be looking to see what can be done for a rigorous program of prevention.

Mr. Marchese: Will that be part of the discussion or part of the consultations?

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: I can't see how it can't be. I believe it will be. But I don't accept your premise. The idea that we haven't already restored isn't accurate.

Mr. Marchese: There's no premise; I'm asking you whether or not that's part of the discussion. There's no premise.

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: OK. I'm just correcting it to the extent that more is required than we've already done. That is possible.

Mr. Marchese: I didn't ask that question.

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: But you said "restore," and we've already done a lot of that.

Mr. Marchese: Do you know the facts around restoring around the province in terms of who had them and what you've actually done by way of direct funding for that?

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: What we've done—and I think you're aware of this—is put in \$165 million to learning opportunity grants, simply because it wasn't collected as information. We've also targeted a few places, like Toronto, because they struggle with an overall fiscal situation.

Mr. Marchese: Is that part of the \$165 million?

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: Sorry, there was a \$180-million increase in the learning opportunity grants that are targeted to demographics. That's what we've done since we've come into office.

Mr. Marchese: And that prescribed that they should be hiring these people, or that was just at their discretion?

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: No. As a former trustee, Mr. Marchese, I think you would agree that we believe that local trustees, particularly those who deal with urban environments, need to have choice. It's a big question, and one we're also dealing with with the boards right now: How much should we control the LOG grant and how much should we let them respond to that? But I think what you should want to know is, how much real capacity did each board have with it and then what did they do with it?

Mr. Marchese: OK. That's fine.

Mandatory alternative programs for all suspended students: Is that on the table as part of the discussion? Yes or no?

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: Again, because I've given a previous answer and I can save you some time, nothing is off the table in terms of that. If you want, I can give you a commentary, but I don't want to use up your time, unless you'd like me to.

Mr. Marchese: No problemo.

I want to get to special education. You did not provide any new funds for the high-needs students in 2004-05.

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: Yes, we did.

Mr. Marchese: Sorry?

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: We did.

Mr. Marchese: You did?

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: Yes.

Mr. Marchese: You're sure of that?

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: Yes. We provided \$45 million in additional funding and we paid every bill. In other words, what we said to school boards was—

Mr. Marchese: OK. I understand. Let me quote something.

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: Well—

Mr. Marchese: No, no, I hear you. I want to quote something to see whether or not it jibes with what you're saying. This is a memorandum to directors of education from the deputy minister, Ben Levin. On the first page, he says, "First, no new funds were provided initially for high-needs students in 2004-05."

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: If you'd like to share the memo, I'm happy to have a look at it. In essence, what we did

was create a fund based on the previous government expensing dollars late in the school year. School boards had \$100 million that they were not spending and they indicated they didn't have plans to spend. They already filed their preliminary estimates and said, "We're not spending that." So what we did—

Mr. Marchese: Minister—

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: No, I want to make this clear: The \$46 million came from that fund, and it's new funding.

The Chair: Minister, you will have up to 30 minutes in a few short minutes to expand at length. That's the purpose of you having your half hour. With Mr. Marchese's questions, if he's satisfied, and if he indicates to the Chair, then we'll ask you to move on. That's why you have that half hour. I'm sure you will take note, and you'll be able to give a more fulsome answer at that time.

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: Sure.

Mr. Marchese: I'm assuming you would be familiar with the document. It's a memorandum sent to the directors by—I'm quoting from this page: "First, no new funds were provided initially for high-needs students in 2004-05." You're saying \$45 million was provided.

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: An additional \$46 million went to boards.

Mr. Marchese: Obviously they're two different thoughts.

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: It's just the answer to Mr. Klees's question, the efficiency and the effectiveness fund.

Mr. Marchese: Perhaps, the deputy might—he's writing a note, or he can speak for himself.

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: What are you asking? I don't understand the question. I'm happy to answer it—

The Chair: Cut off the mikes.

Mr. Marchese, the minister asked you for a copy of the memo. He said he'd be pleased to respond to it. It would be extremely helpful if you could at least tell the deputy what the date of the memo is, the nature of the memo, and then he may have a reference for it, and that may be helpful. Please proceed.

Mr. Marchese: I would have thought that the deputy would know of the memo.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Marchese. Please proceed.

Mr. Marchese: A memorandum to the directors of education from Ben Levin, deputy minister, dated March 31, 2005. Subject: special education funding.

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: We'll look at the memo, but I would say right now that it's out of context. We'll make sure that the memo's here. If you'd share it, we would get it quicker and we would answer quicker. Whatever you like.

Mr. Marchese: I will do my best to give it to you for tomorrow, if that would be fine.

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: I'll answer it in my own time if you give it to me now.

Mr. Marchese: I need it. I might refer to it, sorry.

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: OK.

Mr. Marchese: But I'm sure he can give you a copy.

On June 5, 2002, you asked the then Minister of Education Elizabeth Witmer why none of the extra \$100 she allocated per student for flexible funding was spent on special ed. You asked her how she dared not to allocate any funds. I want to read that you:

Hon. Mrs. Witmer: In fact, there is an extra \$100 per student for flexible funding that could be used by boards as they saw fit to respond to the needs of students in this province. That was a very significant announcement. We are committed and that's why we're going to be reviewing the funding formula.

Mr. Kennedy: None of it was for special education, not one dime. How dare you?

Hon. Mrs. Witmer: Again I would say to the member opposite, we have been increasing special education funding on a regular and significant basis. I would suggest to you that you take a look at the facts and stop with the fiction."

I ask you the same question: How do you dare do this? But what you're saying is that you provided the money, and what I read is that you didn't. We'll have to deal with it somehow, I suppose.

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Hon. Mr. Kennedy: What we can do is provide you with what's on our Web site, which is the grant line that shows special education and, more importantly, it would show the spending and that spending has gone up, because there were two sources of funding this year: one from our regular grant line and the other from the education fund.

Mr. Marchese: We'll get to those. I have questions.

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: Since the time I asked that question, funding has gone up 65%, \$365 million.

Mr. Marchese: That's fine. I haven't asked that. Let me ask you some questions—

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: But you don't want to ask out of context, I'm sure.

Mr. Marchese: You'll be able to answer some of these other questions.

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: I'm not sure, are you asking a question or not?

Mr. Marchese: No.

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: Just to clarify, Mr. Chair; I thought it was a question.

Mr. Marchese: How many special education full-time equivalent teacher positions do we have this year, last year and the year before? Can you provide those numbers, by any chance?

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: We can give you resource teachers. I can tell you, off the top of my head, that we've hired 4,000 new education assistants, and those will show up in the staffing numbers.

Mr. Marchese: I didn't ask about ed assistants, but full-time equivalent teacher positions.

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: I'm going to consult with my officials to see if we collect that degree of speciality around a certain teacher, because each board uses a different definition and we permit that.

Mr. Marchese: Perhaps tomorrow?

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: Which year are you interested in?

Mr. Marchese: All I know is that if you have full-time special ed teachers—if you're telling me that they all use different names for special ed teachers, that puzzles me. As far as I know, they're all special ed teachers if they're teaching full-time special ed.

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: No, there are differences. You know this; I know you know this. There are resource teachers and there are classroom teachers. But I will say this: Our basic report will show—

Mr. Marchese: I'm talking about classroom teachers here.

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: All the money for special ed has to be separately accounted for, so we will have that to show, but in our October report, essentially. But we will be able to show that. There are integrated classrooms, as you know, there are self-contained classrooms and there is one-on-one attention. If it's the body count—if you're looking for further evidence of the additional funding, if that's the root of your question, then I'm sure we'll be able to provide that. But it won't be until what they call the October reports are done in December that we can give you this year's numbers. We would be happy to share with you last year's and you will see that there has been a significant increase because, as I mentioned, there's a significant increase in funding.

Mr. Marchese: OK. That's great. So we'll be able to see this year's in November-December, and last year and the year before, you have.

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: We can get you staffing numbers—

Mr. Marchese: With the breakdown, as you indicated, in terms of self-contained, withdrawal and all that; right?

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: Again, ours might aggregate. As long as you understand that they will include all of those. You asked for full-time positions. The answer is yes. I'll have to find out and report back to you, perhaps tomorrow, in terms of what degree of detail we know at the ministry.

Mr. Marchese: OK.

In August 2004 you announced that you planned to make changes in the way in which Ontario education funded and supported special ed students. You said you would replace the old model with a new one. Can you tell me what those changes are?

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: What we've done so far is put an interim model in place. What it does is put the responsibility, but also the trust, on to the board. So every board is able—and, we believe, capable—to identify new high-need students at the same time they're absorbing the 65% increase in funding, so that net new students—those who leave and those who come in new—if they have services they're providing, then we're giving them those dollars. We're asking for assurance directly from the director that these services were provided in that amount incrementally and then we're paying the bills. So what we have in the interim is a very simplified system that tells you a little bit about where we're headed.

We're headed for a system that will rely more on boards being able to get outcomes and boards being able to describe educational needs as opposed to medical needs, which a lot of the last system had in place. We have asked boards to use streamlined versions to identify within, because we don't want the kind of paperwork that happened, that was inflicted, really, on students and families. They are doing that, in varying degrees, in their boards right now.

The new system is intended for the next fiscal year, and a special education working committee, which involves boards, teachers, principals and so on, is currently working on that and will report on that over the course of this year.

Mr. Marchese: OK. In terms of the changes you will implement, will you be specifically asking school boards to reduce their special education incidence rates to a number lower than they currently have?

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: The idea of those incidence rates being up or down would not be part of our outlook. Our outlook will simply be on whether or not students are getting educational advancements from the extra funds we're providing and whether the best techniques are being used to help those children learn, which has not been a question posed previously by the provincial government.

Mr. Marchese: Thank you. As a result of the changes you're planning to implement, is the number of students who are formally identified as needing special-ed help going to decrease?

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: That's too early to tell. I think there is a real aversion to the kinds of processes that went on before. I have to say, and I hope you don't mind this, that Mr. Klees asked some questions about attributable funds, but he may be aware that the previous arrangement that existed before is that the money isn't attributable to students; it's just a proxy.

I would say that we would try to lessen the burden of identifying students; we would not try in any way to lessen the services they need to learn. There are a number of very interesting ideas being discussed at the committee right now, but because they haven't been resolved yet, I can't report to you, only to say that we're not reducing services, which I think is what really matters.

Mr. Marchese: OK. During the Mike Harris government, we were all appalled at the rumours that the special education incidence rate was to be lowered by decree. The percentage they talked about was 12%. Is it true that in the month of September, members of the special education secretariat told special education superintendents that your ministry is asking boards to lower their incidence rate to 8%?

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: No. That's impossible. Let me just say why: The part that funds boards has nothing to do with 12%; 12% is the application of the SEPPA funds. Those are not students who are necessarily identified.

Another point to Mr. Klees's question is that we serve kids even if they're not yet identified because we don't want them to wait if they need an assessment. But 2.8% is the part that previously used to bring dollars to the

system. I'm just trying to help here in terms of—no one authorized, to the best of my knowledge—

Mr. Marchese: That was my next question.

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: —or unauthorized has done anything of that nature.

Mr. Marchese: That was my next question: Has anyone in your government, be it officials, deputies or political operatives, informed boards of education that they must lower their incidence rates to 8%?

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: I'd have to ask you, Mr. Marchese, if you've got specific information, because it's unfathomable to me, given the wide and intensive nature of this discussion within our ministry, that anyone could so misconstrue anything for that. If there's a specific incident that happened, a conversation, a report, anything, I'd be very happy to know about it, because it doesn't, on the face, sound possible.

Mr. Marchese: So you're basically assuring us that you will not be asking boards of education to lower their incidence rates to any number other than the special education students they have identified.

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: What we'll be asking boards to do is adopt the best techniques, justify only that they are using those best techniques for students—and we have 12 different exceptionalities within those allotted individual needs—and that the education plans really get fulfilled. There isn't anything around that that has to do with incidence rates coming down. I really have to say, I don't know what your source of information is; it doesn't sound like anything I would see as part of our future.

Mr. Marchese: That's good to know.

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: I don't even understand the question, in the sense of, why would we? Why would we do that?

Mr. Marchese: Let me just read from the same memo of March 31 from the deputy minister to the directors. On page 2 it says:

"Meanwhile, for 2005-06, we must continue to make efforts to change special education practices in ways that make the system more sustainable, while also protecting the interests of children. Many boards are already taking steps to change modes of identification and services delivery in accordance with the best emerging thinking and research."

What do you think the deputy means by "sustainable"?
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Hon. Mr. Kennedy: I'll ask the deputy, because he's here. He's welcome to address that. My opinion is simply that we have increased system funding by an historic amount relative to any other education system. "Sustainability" means that we have to make sure that subsequent increases are tied to educational outcomes, because when we look anywhere else, there is no parameter of the kind of funding that we've got. That, we think, is a fair corollary to have in the system. If you'd like the deputy—

Mr. Marchese: If the deputy has a different answer, that would be fine; I would like to hear it.

Mr. Ben Levin: It would be surprising. I would agree with the minister entirely that the challenge in special

education is to shift our focus from the feeling that finding more problems brings more money to a situation in which we can serve children effectively using the best evidence we have about what will bring good outcomes.

Mr. Marchese: I understand the idea. Implicitly, or explicitly, what you're saying is that teachers were simply finding problems that may not have existed.

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: But teachers were only a small part of that: There were whole systems set up to magnify issues in terms of saying that their medical needs or assessments drove their eligibility for funding, and unfortunately, coming back to Mr. Klees's distinction, it didn't mean that those students, those selfsame students who got poked and prodded, got the services. It wasn't attached.

Mr. Marchese: So you're now going to—

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: I'd answer it this way: There were absolutely flaws with the previous system, which is why we've suspended it. There was a tremendous misuse of time—

Mr. Marchese: So, your point is that you want to tie money to educational outcomes. Is that correct, Minister: yes or no?

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: Mr. Marchese, 1.3% of the students got ISA funding in 1998-99, and that is now 2.8% in 2004-05. It's an enormous change.

Mr. Marchese: I was just asking a different question: You want to tie money in special education to educational outcomes. Is that correct?

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: We want to tie school boards, in all of the funding they get from the province, to educational outcomes, and we're not granting an exception for special needs.

Mr. Marchese: What does it mean, "tying money" to educational outcomes? What are you saying, actually?

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: What it means is that boards will need to justify funding on helping students to learn, and that the kinds of plans they put forward and the kind of techniques they adopt will have that resulting outcome.

Mr. Marchese: So, if students are not learning on the basis of the tests that they have to write, or what? How do you do—

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: There is a group of pretty able people working on what these are, but clearly it needs to be said that none of this will penalize students. It's the systems that have to become more focused on those outcomes. What we're saying to boards is that if you propose, for example, as you may be aware in the previous system, \$27,000 more, you need to show us that that money actually went to getting more outcomes for students, and specific outcomes.

Mr. Marchese: We assume that once students are identified and money flows, those teachers are actually doing the job. What I hear you saying is that if the outcome is not what you want, then they don't get the money. Is that what I'm understanding?

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: No. What you're talking about—the teachers are doing the job. There are many situations where there aren't the right teachers matched up with the

right students, where the teacher training hasn't been there. There's been a big turnover in special-needs staffing. Those are the kinds of issues that need to be dealt with. The dollar has had to be reckoned with; I spent a lot of time with the House critic on that, but now double the number of kids are identified, from 1.3% to 2.8%, the funding is up 65%, and the difference in that is that the severity of which—

Mr. Marchese: I will get to the funding increase.

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: My point to you is that it's different. Therefore, what we're saying now is that the next task is to make sure those dollars have the impact they're supposed to.

Mr. Marchese: We'll come back to those questions. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Marchese. Minister, you have up to 30 minutes to respond to any of the questions that have been raised.

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: Because we did a question and answer, I tried to the best of my ability to do that at the time. There are a few things I would just say in terms of the information expectations for Mr. Klees. He mentioned and requested identified special education. Just to be clear, at the discretion of principals and special education teachers, we do permit special education services to be provided even though they haven't been formally identified. In fact, it was under your government that that was made possible so that there isn't a delay for assessment.

Also, some parents are very worried about stigmatizing their children. So the answer I'd prefer to give you is the combination of identified and served children, so the children who are receiving services. Out of that 12%, I think something verging on 2% may be children who are not identified because their parents wouldn't let them; they didn't want an IPRC—that identification, placement and review committee—formal hearing, but they did want to see what could be done if some services were provided. That's an important distinction.

Similarly, in terms of exclusion on the safe schools part, I would just say that exclusions are not the same as expulsions or suspensions and that what we can give you is data on expulsions or suspensions. I don't think we are able to give you exclusions as a practice because this is a many-year-old practice on the part of principals, and it isn't based on the Safe Schools Act. You said "the number of students excluded under the Safe Schools Act," and I just want to say that I think you'd be content with suspensions and expulsions because those are the terms that apply under the Safe Schools Act. Is that fair?

Mr. Klees: Chair, if I could respond.

That is fair. What I'd like you to do for me, though, is to help me understand more fully what exactly the difference is, and perhaps you can more fully describe for me what an exclusion is, then, and when that comes into play.

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: Essentially, there's a power of principals under the act to exclude when they think the overall well-being of students requires it. Like any proprietor of a business, the property is in the custody of

someone, and under the Trespass to Property Act it's the principal. The principal decides who can set foot on the property, who are the right people to be there.

It's something we'll be looking at tangentially to the Safe Schools Act, but it has been there for a long period of time and it is a local kind of practice. We are aware—the reason I'm acknowledging this—that there are students with special needs, and their families, who are concerned about the exercise of that. So we're looking at how that might relate to some of our inquiry.

If I may, Mr. Chair, I'm just saying that maybe, in writing or in the next round, I can get anything else from the member.

I would say that, in general, we're going to put out as much information about safe schools as the system is able to have and verify. We're just going through that process now with the boards: talking to them, making sure that the data we put out don't misrepresent. As I had mentioned before, this whole data exchange has been a long-standing burden on the system and we're trying to find ways to get better at it, because these are questions that should be asked and answered. Some of that is still ahead of us.

Similarly, just to let you know, the dollars we spend on special needs are not attributable to students when they go to the boards. Boards are able, under rules provided by your government, to become eligible for, let's say, 10 students or 100 students, but they are not required under the old rules to spend that money on those 10 or 100 students. Whether or not there should be any of that—people variously call it Velcroing or attaching, and you had mentioned attributing—is part of what the reform group is looking at at the special education working table.

So just in terms of expectation, that's how that works. What we will provide is the amount of dollars that were generated by student eligibility, which I will assume is pretty close to what you were looking for.

Mr. Klees: With your permission, Minister, could I get a clarification? Are you telling me, then, that exclusions as exercised by principals—you either don't have the information as to the number of exclusions or you're not prepared to provide that to us?

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: In terms of exclusions, there are no data kept. It's something we're looking at as part of our inquiry right now as to whether we can start to find out about the incidence of that and the exercise of that. We're in the process of learning that now.

If I could, then, I'd like to turn to other points that were raised, although not to preclude—most of what both the honourable members have requested are very specific pieces of information, and that says that they'd rather have that than any sense of commentary from me. But what I will say on the special-needs portion, because it was certainly part of the interest expressed by the member for Trinity–Spadina, is that that is an area I would like to see widespread discussion on. I'm proud of the fact that we're a province that attempts what we attempt. There is, unfortunately, no jurisdiction elsewhere that does such a vastly superior job—some would

say, even a better job—that we can borrow from. We're going to have to do a made-in-Ontario way of reckoning with how we extend citizenship to these students and what is reasonable for them as individuals, as families, to expect from us.

That is a tough question because it's relatively new. It's only 20 years. The Americans have about 10 years on us in terms of the time that it's been legally required to try to find ways to educate students, regardless of extensive special-needs background. We did this in 1984. It may have started a little bit earlier, but it came into effect in 1984. So we have a 20-year history of working on this, and we only have the last seven or eight years of trying to coordinate this as a province-wide response. Some of it, frankly, as medical technologies advance, as students with increasingly complex needs have come forward, has taxed the school system. As a minister, I don't think it's a failing to say we don't know everything about how to best respond to each one of those. I will state that it is our ambition to know what we need to know, to pool the expertise we have in the province to make that available, and to be able to make sure that those are the practices that are in place in school boards. It's quite a significant project to be able to do that, but it is something that we believe the funding will do.

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I was just addressing the funding. When we came into government, we were presented with a request from school boards that was \$110 million above and beyond what Dr. Rozanski said was required for special needs, which was a \$250-million increase. We're now talking 365 million new dollars in the course of two years. We looked at that, to comment a little further on some of the discussion that preceded, and we did see issues with that. We did see that it became a funding-driven system. For example, most regrettably, in some places, if a child needed an assessment, and maybe their presenting educational problem was not that great, they might go to the back of the line, not because that assessment couldn't be made available, but because it was more valuable to the system to assess some other child who had more severe needs, because they would be severe enough to generate funding. This became a contortion, in my view, within the system, and one that I think we quite properly have now suspended so that it doesn't take away. One estimate was that as much as \$50 million of staff time went into the construction of those forms, not including the full cost of assessments, because many of them are paid for in the health system. This became a mini-industry within education, so we then, I think quite properly, have said, "Look, that isn't the right focus. We do need to know about needs, but we need to pay for the educational attainment of students and put less money into these delays and this whole conversation." The last government did make a shift, encouraged by Dr. Rozanski, but ultimately that became a shift that really hit some of the problem parts of the design, which said, effectively that you can go fishing for dollars.

Parents have welcomed the focus on results, we believe, and so have the superintendents of special edu-

cation. People are working pretty collaboratively right now, trying to find a way to get that expressed. How do we know, for somebody who's intellectually challenged, someone who has behavioural problems, someone who has autism, someone who has any presenting difficulty—once we've confirmed that in an educational sense, what are we doing about it, and how good are we at it? Where's the research to back that up? How effective can this be? Those are the kinds of things that we think our education system needs to do, whether it's the 2.8% that have extra-special, conspicuous high needs, or even the 12%. It's just all part of education these days.

That's why, for example, we've brought in a teacher induction program this year. What we hope to get at is supplementary training for new teachers, because one of the highest things on their list as new teachers that they say they don't get enough of in the pre-service programs in university is knowing about the particular needs of students. If there's a signature for what we're trying to do in education, it's more individualized attention, and this, I guess, is the most conspicuous part, these very strong individual needs. People are more easily familiar, I know, with exceptionalities like blind and blind-deaf and people who have physical impairments, but there's a whole range of needs. If we recognize them early enough, there are actually good, strong educational interventions we can do. The whole thrust of this program, since 1984 or so, is that they can attain a much higher degree of self-reliance, a much higher degree of self-attainment than has been possible before.

I think all the parties agree that that's a great objective, but as we look at where the system sits today, there's still a significant distance we've got to go if we're actually going to do that in a functional way across all of those challenges. I'm sure we're going to find that there are some limits, but at the same time, we think there's a lot that can be gained just by making sure that boards don't have to flounder—in some cases themselves, especially some of the smaller boards—to know what is the right response to those students who are coming in the door.

So we look forward to that. It's one of the working tables we have. The teacher induction program is underway this year and it will give first-year teachers a second professional step. Previously we only had a year of university training, about 32 weeks of class preparation and then in-classroom, split, depending on the faculty. So 75% of our teachers had that one year of preparation. The royal commission in 1994 said we should be looking to extend that, but we should do that in a way that provides on-the-job training. So that's what we're doing. We're basically formalizing, through a \$15-million program, on-the-job training for those new teachers. We're giving them mentors, experienced teachers who are qualified to help them deal with the challenges. For example, classroom management: You can be assisting in the classroom when you go through your teacher practicum, but you're not necessarily learning what it's like to be in charge of that classroom.

Dealing with parents: Similarly, you might attend parent-teacher nights during your university preparation, but you're not the person who has to respond, one after another, to those particular needs and the particular ways that they're presented by a whole variety of parents, and you should be good at that.

Those are some of the things we see being picked up in additional professional development for these teachers. So rather than have their first year be a very difficult year, a burdensome year—because sometimes new teachers get some of the tougher assignments; they have to learn the whole curriculum. If you're a tenured teacher, you've now been through the curriculum a few times, and that saves time. You've got a big advantage on these new teachers. We think that has to be officially recognized in the system, and therefore new teachers will receive that. They'll get a proper orientation and they'll also be evaluated.

Previously there was money spent on a pen-and-paper test, which 98-point-something of the teachers who wrote it passed. What we think is better instead is a classroom evaluation by the principal. That will be conducted twice in that year. It will be developmental in nature, so that if you don't do well, you'll get some further development, because we also want to get at the situation that can exist out there where if a teacher is struggling, they may not pass their probationary contract. The problem with that is, they may never get the full attention to become a good teacher. They could catch on with a board that has more trouble recruiting teachers. We think it's all of our responsibility, the province as well as the board, to make sure that every teacher gets support to become a good teacher. Those are the kinds of things we're doing already.

Further, though, is that we want to be able to provide support, and we put this out in a paper last year to say, "We want to provide support at each stage of professional development to teachers." That's another set of programs that we're trying to put together now. We have, again, a working table drawing on teachers, school boards, principals and parents, and they are currently addressing, what are those other kinds of things that should happen? You can be a teacher for 10 or 20 years and you still need renewal. You still need to have access to the latest learning.

We have a progressive grid within education that incents teachers for the first 12 years, but beyond that we need to find other ways of making sure that learning is taking place. The expression of learning is itself the result of a learning aptitude on the part of teachers. A lot of them do it, they do it out of pocket, but we want to find a way to support that so that the quality of what they're able to provide is kept up.

We think we also need to take some of the responsibility for making sure that—just like new teachers need to be encouraged, so do continuing teachers. For example, at one time we were losing one in three new teachers. We believe that has now changed significantly, and that saves the system. When it was one in three new teachers, it cost us \$30 million a year in lost recruitment

and lost training expenses for those teachers, so that, to us, mattered quite a bit.

Similarly, we had, for a few years at least, a record number of retirements that took place. It was due in part to pension changes but also to some sense of dissatisfaction on the part of experienced teachers. That has now come back significantly. That saves us some of our training costs. That saves us in some of the expertise that we're able to deploy.

In addition, we understand that already, even as we're putting more formal policies together, the teacher rates of short- and long-term disability have come down dramatically as the stresses in the system have been reduced and some of the teaching conditions have been better aligned with the challenge of the students coming in. We think that's important because it saves money for the system and it says that we, the province, are giving our boards, who are the direct employers, a chance at doing the job they are required to do, which is to be the best employers possible.

Unlocking the potential of teachers is certainly part of our agenda, but there are other education workers as well who we think matter and are important, and we have tried to work with boards on that. I mentioned before 4,000 education workers who have come into the schools in the last couple of years. Matching them up with the right kind of training is very important because they are, not exclusively but by and large, matched with students who have particular needs. There has not been a rigorous program for that. We have a \$25-million fund with the Council of Directors of Education which is going to address the training needs so that we are identifying best practices, we're able to train the staff to do it, because that's the only way that the system changes. In years past, people would bemoan that a lot of our investment goes into people, but this is, of course, a people endeavour. It's like high research industries; it's like service industries. You've got people there, and that's the nature of it. The question is, what use are we making of that?

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We've added about 2,400 teachers to lower class sizes and 1,300 teachers, as previously discussed, for our student success initiative. There are 600 new specialist teachers this year, on the way to 2,000 when fully implemented. We think these are good investments, because what we're basically doing is starting to match some of the quality things that are happening in other parts around the world. We note that Alberta is also now trying to match us in terms of a class size reduction. There are a lot of jurisdictions that recognize the inherent value of not just letting students get lost in the crowd, but of getting the most amount of individual attention that you can to students at the earliest age possible. Our Every Child program is doing that. We do think, even though it's our sequence—we started with elementary; we felt that was where the most difference could be made, and we've now really been ramping up in terms of student success—that it's also about giving individualized attention. Those 14- and 15-year-olds who have become

discouraged with school need to have some kind of response that tells them that they matter. It isn't as simple as saying "the trades"; that's not what we have in mind. More of them could go to university. Conversely, some of the ones we have going to university who struggle in their first and second years maybe should have taken the trades instead. In fact, half of the people who go to our colleges have university preparation, but they came to realize that that's the best place for them to be.

We're looking for quite a different culture in our schools. One thing we would say—this is not a criticism, only a truism—is that almost everybody who works in them is university-educated, so you can appreciate that we don't have quite the culture of those other outcomes. Yet 67% of our students are going to an outcome—a college; an apprenticeship, although not as many as we would like; the workplace; or, most unfortunately, especially if they don't have a diploma, unemployment—and there simply isn't the same recognition that the better destinations for them are just as valid as a university for some. Part of it isn't something we can lay at the feet of the full-time people in education. Those of us who are parents develop this. Out of all the OECD countries, it's only ourselves and the Americans who have 70% and 80% of our parents wanting our kids in university. It's a mindset that we have. We would say to parents, "Look, be as ambitious as you possibly can for your kids, but be respectful of them. Respect what could be the best ambition for them."

I think everybody around this table knows, in terms of talking to local industry, the shortages we have in well-paid and sometimes very highly challenging careers in the trades and in some of our higher technical aspirations. We're short of those people. We need to be able to make our high schools do a completely different function. To us, it's something that our high schools can be capable of.

We invested \$45 million, for example, in the technological fund, so that instead of walking into your alma mater and finding they use the same equipment in shop class they did when you were there, they're likely now to have more state-of-the-art equipment, and, more commonly, in partnership with industry. They're working with our community colleges, but they're also working independently in some of the communities, where industry takes a real interest in leveraging the investment we have to make sure that students, for the first time, are working on modern tool and die, modern AutoCAD, modern kinds of things that will actually show them what happens. So there's a whole range of things that we're pretty excited about the possibilities for, but they are going to take some time to develop.

The basic approach we've brought to education is that while lots can be done—and some of the results we're showing, whether it's the fact that there seems to be some turnaround in terms of the dropout rate and the school graduation rate, or the fact that there are better reading, writing and mathematics outcomes for more students, are really just the most conspicuous part—what is underlying that is a sense that our education system really can reach

a wider range of people, that we don't have to be satisfied with saying that there's a 33% good outcome and the rest we're really feeling sorry about. We can customize more for some of these other students, and we can get good at it. I think it's a message that our business folks have been asking for for some time. They want to know what a high school diploma really means to them and whether it's really addressing their needs or not. I think that this is the kind of challenge that we have.

I will say, for the curriculum, that it has inherent in it some of the possibilities for that, but it hasn't necessarily been realized. For example, there are 165 courses you could take, but none of our schools, let alone our rural schools, are in a position to offer them because there are far too many. So what looked good on paper is tough in terms of realizing it, so some of our strategies going forward have to be about how to get the right courses available and how to make sure that students can get matched.

I would not say that any previous government tried not to include students. In fact, if you look at what then-Minister Johnson said, if you look at what then-Minister Snobelen said, it's quite the opposite: They said, "We're going to bring in this new curriculum because we want more kids to go to college and we want more to get high school diplomas." Unfortunately—we have to agree on the facts—that didn't happen. That's no longer important, but what is important is what we are going to do about it.

Part of it is, in order to not have a confirmed trend of kids not achieving, we need an attitude shift. I think that's the quickest thing we can do. It may sound paradoxical: Usually changing attitudes takes a long time. I think people know the truth of this, though. They know that they've got to be encouraging of these students; they know that we've got to give more than lip service to these other outcomes that people have.

Part of the thing that we've talked about is the way we can do that officially. Moving the school-leaving age to 18 is one part, but so is having actual program incentives for students that take place within their curriculum. Co-ops are probably the most important of these in terms of engaging in a situation. Let's look at who is at risk to leave: Something like 43% of males, a little less for young women, are leaving because of jobs and work-place, and then there's another higher percentage because of the inadequacies of education, as they perceive them. If we're going to compete with that job at a fast-food place, we've got to provide some real incentive. I think we just have to accept that challenge.

People have asked the question, quite rightly: What can we do in terms of some of the problems that people perceive around the attachment of certain youth to education and to their futures? Again, we've got to compete for those kids and just clear up what it is we are offering them. We've got to ask ourselves that question. That offer looks a lot different, unfortunately, in grade 8, where everybody's pretty enthusiastic, than it does by grade 11, where we've got what Dr. King talked about in

his report. He said that the curriculum and the way it was managed created an environment of discouragement for kids. About the grade 9 applied course he said that there's very little evidence that learning took place in those classes, and yet it existed for four long years.

The overall ambition of the government is to reconnect a wide swath of the public with education. Like any important public service, it requires public investment. The only way we can do that is if people care about its outcomes. We certainly believe that on the surface everybody cares, but I would say, too, that there are a lot of us, maybe even a whole generation, who have taken education for granted. That is a big issue. Some of the very success that previous generations have had—I'll certainly cite Mr. Davis, who did a lot of important things in terms of the education system. There isn't that same kind of energy there now, and we simply have to have that if we're going to have schools that are going to compete.

All around the world, there are investments being made in K to 12 education, in preschool education and in university education, and this province has not kept pace. Our investment per GDP has not kept pace, our investment per student didn't keep pace. We're making some of that up. What estimates is looking at today is the latest in what is an overall, four-year, \$8.3-billion investment. It's a very significant boost to what can be done. But I would not say that the investment is the most important part of it. Yes, it will increase funding by some 14.5%, but what will matter most is that at the end of it, and maybe there are even some signs of it now, we will have a consensus on how education can be improved in this province.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister. Before we adjourn, I do need to bring to your attention a matter of some delicacy. In my seven years as Chair, we've not come across this, so I just want to share with you that this is an all-party committee of the Legislature. Its rules are bound by the House leaders. We still have outstanding questions from your last estimates. As I say, in my seven years, I've never come up against this, but we have notified your staff. I would like you to look into this. We have sent notes to your ministry and we've referenced it once before on this occasion.

I would like you to take that under advisement. If you could make that the first order of business when we come back tomorrow, it would be appreciated. You are a former Chair of this committee, and I would appreciate—

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: As former Chair, I would say it wasn't entirely foreign to happen, but I wouldn't want it to happen under my ministry. I will undertake to see what has happened to those responses, and endeavour to try to get whatever's outstanding to you as quickly as possible.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

This committee stands adjourned until immediately following routine proceedings tomorrow.

The committee adjourned at 1759.

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Mr. Trevor Day

Staff / Personnel

Mr. David McIver, research officer,
Research and Information Services