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Tuesday 25 April 2006

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Mardi 25 avril 2006

**Standing committee on
estimates**

Ministry of Education

**Comité permanent des
budgets des dépenses**

Ministère de l'Éducation

Chair: Cameron Jackson
Clerk: Katch Koch

Président : Cameron Jackson
Greffier : Katch Koch

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON
ESTIMATESCOMITÉ PERMANENT DES
BUDGETS DES DÉPENSES

Tuesday 25 April 2006

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The committee met at 1552 in room 151.

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

The Chair (Mr. Cameron Jackson): I'd like to call to order the standing committee on estimates for the year 2006. I'd like to welcome all members. This is our first estimate.

Before I call forward the Minister of Education, I want to report to the committee that as per our last meeting, I did write a letter to the Minister of Education enumerating some of our concerns. I'm pleased to report that the new minister was able to respond to that letter and we received the outstanding questions that this committee had been waiting for for a year. I want to thank publicly the minister and/or the staff who were responsible for getting those to the committee. I suspect that chronic problem has been resolved, so I want to thank you.

On that note, are there any questions before we begin? Seeing none, the committee has chosen—we've reported to the House and the committee has its committee selections. We will begin our first estimate, of the Ministry of Education, for up to nine hours.

Minister, we welcome you. Please introduce your table team and then, as is the custom, you have up to 30 minutes for an opening statement. We are now in your hands.

Hon. Sandra Pupatello (Minister of Education, minister responsible for women's issues): Thank you, Chair, and a very special thank you to the members of the committee, who were so kind as to select education for an in-depth review over the next nine or 10 hours. I was hoping you might want to make it a little bit longer because we have so much good news to talk about, but it is a great opportunity for us to talk to the people of Ontario and also to look at the issues that might be raised by opposition members, because I think it's in our best interest to watch what it is we are doing and see that we're doing the right things for our kids.

It is a new ministry for me personally. I want to especially thank my deputy, Ben Levin, who's sitting to my left. He is the deputy of education and comes very highly qualified to the Ministry of Education. In my first few weeks—well, my first few days, frankly; I think this is day 17, isn't it? It feels like a lot more. In any event, on day 17 or so, all I have heard is such wonderful news about the respect that the community in education shows to the deputy of this ministry that I am very proud that

we have that calibre here working for the public service of Ontario.

To my right is Nancy Naylor, very well known to many people across Ontario. She's our numbers guru, but the official title is the ADM of the business and finance division. I welcome Nancy here as well.

I hope, as you may have some questions where there is some specificity required, that I have the staff available to you to answer those questions.

Here with us as well is Didem Proulx, who is the director of the education finance branch. She is sitting just behind us here. Also here are Kevin French, the ADM and CAO of finance, and Noah Morris, who is also here from the department of finance, again assuming that there may be questions specific to certain areas, regions, boards. We'll do our best. I will say too that I appreciate the comments of the Chair. We're going to try to get information to you. If there's something that we don't have here, if you'll give us a little bit of time, we'll get some information to you.

To begin, I will say that the grants for this year have not been released and have not been extended to the boards at this point, so some of it will be speculative in nature, things that we're clearly thinking about at this point, issues that we're trying to resolve. So given that our budget was so much earlier this year and we are at estimates at this point already, that doesn't give us the opportunity to give you some of the information that you might otherwise have had if this committee of estimates had sat perhaps later in the year, as it has in the past, because the grants simply aren't out at this point.

Having said that for brief introductory remarks, let me get on to talk about education.

I am so excited to be here in this ministry at such a pivotal time in terms of change and excitement in education for the students across the province, in elementary and in high school. I'm very pleased to talk about our 2006-07 estimates. I think many of us who are in education are quite excited. The Liberal caucus is home to many, many individuals who come from the education field, either as trustees, as chairs of boards, as teachers, as principals—and all of us as students, certainly. We in our caucus all have a long-standing interest in what is happening in the education portfolio, so the 2006-07 budget that was tabled not too long ago was very exciting for all of us, but in particular it shows that once again this is an education Premier and we're intending to invest in our children. I hope that members from all sides of the

House will be very happy about that, because I know that these two gentlemen sitting here today in opposition have a vested interest in us doing very well in this portfolio.

The Ministry of Education's plan to promote a strong, vibrant publicly funded education system is focused on three goals: higher literacy and numeracy achievement; improved high school graduation rates; increased public confidence in public education. To that last point, I think it's important that all of us have the means and the tools to tell our story to the public, that in fact their investment through their tax dollars is going a long way to secure the future of this province. We've set clear and ambitious performance targets for all of these goals. We want to have 75% of all 12-year-olds meeting the provincial standard on province-wide testing in reading, writing and math by 2008, and we want to see 85% of our high school students graduating by the year 2010, or, to put that another way, we want to cut the dropout rate by half. That will mean thousands more students graduating, not dropping out. These goals may be ambitious, but they're essential for all of us. Our children need excellence in education to prepare for a successful adult life. Our province needs excellence in education to create the best skilled workforce that can compete with the world for the best jobs.

I had an opportunity to speak—my first speech as Minister of Education—to the Catholic trustees association in London this past week, and I told them a story about the University of Windsor's research excellence centre that focuses on automotive engineering. They rely, in their partnership with DaimlerChrysler, on excellence in the students in their engineering program, the lion's share of whom come from our high schools in Essex county. So it's really important that the kids right up to age 12 do very, very well to prepare them to continue to do very well through high school, because our local automotive industry needs that level of success. So what we do is feeding our local industry for their successful future.

Our government is committed to getting public education right, and that means implementing our Excellence for All agenda, which most of us took out on the road in 2003 and convinced the public that this was the way to go. Despite serious fiscal pressures, we are increasing our grants for student needs—the GSN funding—to school boards by more than \$400 million in this coming grant release, 2006-07. That will increase it to \$17.3 billion. By the 2008-09 school year, the province will provide an additional \$2.6 billion in funding to school boards compared to where we started in 2003-04. That is an increase of 18%. That makes it an average funding of almost \$9,300 per student compared to where we were at in 2003-04. Over the past few months we've introduced two new bills to help us achieve our goals. That's on top of the many strategies we've already put in place, from smaller class sizes to improved teacher training to expanded intervention programs for struggling students.

1600

In these first remarks today I'd like to share our efforts around literacy and numeracy and high school graduation

rates. If time permits, I'll move on to our strategy supporting safe and healthy schools. When we're through with the time we have allotted, I know the opposition members of the committee will be so excited for more that they perhaps would like to give me more of their time so I can continue to pass on the good news that is happening in education.

Mr. Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): We promise.

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: Right.

On higher literacy and numeracy achievement, I'd like to start down the path of success that every student should be able to read, write, do math and comprehend at a high level by the age of 12. That's what our goal is. I'm encouraged by the improvements in student performance shown in the grades 3 and 6 standardized test results released last October by the EQAO. This is the second year of overall improved results in the EQAO.

The result for the 2004-05 school year showed that an average of 61% of Ontario's grade 6 English-language students were meeting or exceeding the provincial standard in reading, writing and math. That's a significant increase from the average of 54% who were meeting the standard in 2002-03 under the previous government. In French-language schools an average of 70% of grade 6 students were meeting or exceeding the provincial standard in 2004-05, compared to an average of 62% in 2002-03, again under the previous government. Last October's EQAO results also showed that the gender gap between boys and girls in grades 3 and 6 is continuing to close, and this is very important. That said, we're very much aware that we've not yet reached our goal of 75% and that large gains become more difficult each year.

We're investing in the success of our students by initiating province-wide literacy and numeracy initiatives. We have some tremendous staff in our Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat who are setting the tone out in the field, and we are hearing tremendous excitement from our teachers, who are seeing the kind of commitment we're making to this area.

We've worked with school boards to create for the first time a coordinated effort across the province to help students reach their potential. The year 2005 saw more than 295,000 students across the province benefiting from 160 programs designed to improve reading, writing and math skills. The programs were coordinated by local boards and supported by an \$18-million investment by the province.

We invested \$39 million in 2005, rising to \$146 million by 2008-09, to hire 2,000 new elementary specialist teachers in key areas such as literacy, numeracy, music, arts and physical education. I know our Olympian member can appreciate the importance of physical education in our education system.

In 2005-06 we funded 66 local initiatives with the purpose of improving classroom instruction and addressing equity of outcome for specific student populations: for example, boys, black students, aboriginal students and special education students. These local initiatives

will raise the bar and close the gap in achievement for all students.

As well, approximately 16,000 classroom teachers and 4,000 principals responsible for children in the primary and junior grades will have received multiple days of professional training by June 2006.

On reducing class sizes: Reducing class sizes in the primary grades, JK to grade 3, is the key to giving students the individual attention they need to improve their reading, writing and math skills. Our goal is to put a real cap of 20 children per class in place by 2007-08. Nine times out of 10, there will be 20 students in each primary class. Exceptions will be allowed for the remaining 10% to provide some flexibility for boards. Up to three additional students will be allowed in each primary class as a result of enrolment changes—in-year changes, for example, as kids move—to minimize the number of split grades and avoid unnecessary transportation of students.

So far, 2,400 new elementary school teachers have been funded and more than half of Ontario's schools now have smaller primary class sizes. I think this is a tremendous achievement at two and a half years into our mandate. This was accomplished through an investment of \$126 million in the 2005-06 school year on top of \$90 million the previous year. We have to note that \$36 million of that \$126 million is to be used for new construction relating to the implementation of primary class size caps.

On the strategies for literacy and numeracy, to achieve better results for students, the government has spearheaded a number of other very important strategies. The government is directly engaging schools and school boards through our innovation at the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat. The secretariat provides professional development, targeted funding and expert collaboration with boards on local strategies to see that each child learns effectively. Our government has developed a boys' literacy initiative specifically geared to help improve boys' basic literacy skills. A specialized teaching guide called *Me Read? No Way!: A Practical Guide to Improving Boys' Literacy Skills* was distributed to teachers. More than \$5 million has been allocated to support boys' literacy projects across the province.

I just noticed that we need to have more women on this committee as well. I'm surrounded by boys here.

During the 2005-06 school year, teams consisting of teachers and principals from every school in Ontario had the opportunity to receive training in effective instructional practices to improve literacy and numeracy skills. In 2005-06, the Council of Ontario Directors of Education, that is, CODE, used a grant provided by the minister to fund 85 school board projects aimed at improving literacy and numeracy among students with special needs.

We know we've talked about turnaround teams, targeted support. Our turnaround teams program, with a budget of \$10 million, sends experienced educators and early literacy experts to provide tailored supports to schools where primary student achievement in reading

has been consistently low. Turnaround teams work with schools to identify needs and develop strategies and provide resources to help students attain the high level of literacy skills they need. Each school participates in the program for a three-year period. More than 100 schools participated in the program in 2005-06, and an evaluation of the program showed significant progress. As of 2005, 84% of schools in the first three phases of the program improved performance in the proportion of students at or above the provincial average by an average of 28 percentage points. I'll just say that again because I think it's remarkable: a 28% improvement in the grade 3 EQAO test during the period they've been in the program.

Early screening and intervention: Students should not have to "fall behind" before they get the targeted assistance they need to succeed. Screening, combined with the appropriate intervention tools, can help teachers identify the particular area of concern for an individual student and determine appropriate intervention. That's why the government has made an early screening and intervention tool available to all school boards. With it, JK, kindergarten and grade 1 students can be screened for potential learning challenges and given the help before it's too late. The early screening and intervention tool known as the Web-based teaching tool, WBTT, promotes early intervention through screening tools. It also has a database of targeted instructional strategies for the students who need them and a place for teachers to reflect on what works so they can build on student success.

The ministry, in co-operation with the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario, began making this tool available to all schools in September 2004. As this school year draws to a close, 1,184 schools in 58 school boards are actively using this Web-based teaching tool. This means that over 2,500 JK teachers, over 3,400 kindergarten teachers, 2,200 grade 1 teachers and 369 grade 2 teachers are using this tool to help their kids succeed, and over the next school year, the ministry will be working with the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario to increase the use of the tool among schools in the province. The LDAO will also be undertaking an evaluation of the project's success to date.

1610

Student performance legislation: That brings me to the proposed bill that is currently before the House. If it's passed in its present form, this bill will help us modernize Ontario's school system into one of the best in the country. The proposed amendments to the Education Act and the Ontario College of Teachers Act, 1996—I hope you've had an opportunity to see that bill—would provide the legal support necessary to improve student performance and build a partnership in education that is based on respect. I hope that what has marked the first two and a half years of this government in education is one word: partnership. If passed by the Legislature, the legislation in its present form would clarify ministry and board responsibilities related to those goals, particularly concerning student performance. I'd like to take a few minutes to review some of the key measures in the bill.

Teacher support: Starting with teacher support, we know that to improve student performance we must support the very people who deliver education every day. Support means revoking ineffective pen-and-paper teacher qualifying tests that didn't evaluate actual classroom experience. If the bill is passed, the requirement for teacher candidates to pass the qualifying test as a condition of teacher certification would be revoked. In its place we would introduce a positive second step for beginning teachers, giving them valuable in-class support during their challenging first year of practice. The new teacher induction program would address new teacher retention and development by giving them valuable mentoring by experienced teachers and practical on-the-job training. If approved by the Legislature, this program would become a requirement for approximately 10,000 new teachers each year. Currently, \$15 million has been allocated to all boards to begin implementing and supporting components of the program: orientation, mentoring and professional development and training.

The teacher performance appraisal system for new teachers would also be modified. If passed, successful completion of the new teacher induction program would require two satisfactory performance appraisals. The result would be better-prepared and more confident teachers. The previous government showed it didn't support teacher training, because it reduced the number of professional activity days from nine to four, even though the average across Canada is nine. If approved in its present form, the legislation would remove the cap of four PA days a year. We'll then be able to amend the regulation to increase the number of PA days to six per school year and require that some of the additional time be used to promote the government's education priorities. If we are to help our students, we must provide professional development for our teachers. We need to provide them with more opportunities for shared problem-solving and give them access to new, cutting-edge teaching techniques in order to improve student achievement, because better-trained teachers mean better-prepared students.

Board performance: In the area of board performance, the new authority would enable the ministry to set provincial outcomes and require boards to meet these outcomes. Because we believe we must work as partners in education, specific outcomes would be set in regulation after some significant consultation between the ministry and school boards. The legislation would help clearly define government expectations. This would in turn give school boards the flexibility to address local needs when implementing provincial initiatives.

On peace and stability—one more point about the student performance bill: Part of the ability of students to focus on learning arises from the era of peace and stability we currently enjoy. If passed in its present form, the bill would allow the extension of teacher agreements that expire on August 31 this year from two years to a four-year term. As you know, long-term peace and stability is the foundation for progress in education and success for students.

We're also showing respect for teachers through a revitalized Ontario College of Teachers. We envision a true professional body that has the confidence of its members and the public, and that would be depoliticized and have a majority of classroom teachers on its council to carry out its mandate. If passed, this legislation would give a tremendous boost to improved student performance.

On higher graduation rates: At the high school level, our student success strategy is focused on giving high school students more learning choices and helping more of them graduate. The reason is simple: There's more at stake than ever before. High school students need to get an education that is high-quality, meaningful and prepares them for a variety of post-secondary destinations.

The stats are compelling. High school dropouts earn roughly \$6,500 less per year than graduates. That's a quarter-million-dollar pay cut over a lifetime. Four out of every five prison inmates never finished high school. Leaving school early doubles your chance of being unemployed and makes you five times more likely to need income assistance. It's simply not acceptable that we're allowing 29% of high school students to drop out and face these limited choices and uphill battles.

Our student success strategy: That's why the McGuinty government is transforming and modernizing secondary schools through a \$1.3-billion student success strategy. It's ambitious, effective and essential to Ontario's future and prosperity. Launched in 2003-04, the first phase of the plan included board-wide student success leaders, innovative lighthouse pilot projects and upgraded equipment and facilities for technology education programs. This helped the graduation rate rise from 68% to 71% in one year.

Last year, we announced phases 2 and 3. The highlights include 1,300 new high school teachers, 800 of whom are dedicated to student success programs; a student success leader at every board; proposed legislation to keep students learning to 18 or graduation; new specialist high-skills majors as part of the regular high school diploma; expanded dual-credit programs to allow high school students to earn several credits through college, apprenticeship and university courses.

Ontario is now helping each student work toward a successful post-secondary destination, whether that's workplace training, college, university or an apprenticeship. It's time we had a 21st-century approach to learning that is relevant to today's student.

Ontario's graduation target: The McGuinty government is confident that the student success strategy will work. By 2010, Ontario will graduate 85% of its students, up from just 68% when our government took office—71% in 2004-05. That's a pledge to cut the dropout rate by half in the next five years.

Imagine the entire population of the city of Waterloo wearing caps and gowns. That's about 90,000 people, the same number of additional students we want graduating by 2010. In French-language secondary schools, the graduation rate in 2004-05 was 81%.

Expanded co-op: An important part of the student success strategy is expanding co-op education. The McGuinty government wants more students to reap the rewards of workplace learning so that they can test-drive their careers. As you may already know, students can now apply for up to two co-operative education credits earned after September 2005 toward their 18 compulsory credits. This will provide more flexibility to students who are working toward graduation and want the opportunity to gain a high-quality educational experience outside the traditional classroom. Every student should have the chance to gain the knowledge and experience that only a co-operative education can provide. We're strengthening our partnerships with the business community so that co-op placements will be available to all the students who want them.

Across Ontario, there are thousands of students benefiting from co-operative education. For example, grade 11 co-op students in Sudbury are learning valuable construction skills while working with a local contractor to build a small bungalow. In Niagara, a co-op student at Subluc Dairy not only gained practical, hands-on knowledge and a part-time job; he also got to deliver a newborn calf by himself on the day his co-op teacher came to visit. At Queen's University, a grade 12 co-op student is working as a research assistant in a cytogenetics and DNA research lab. The budding scientist is helping with clinical research lab work to study the genealogy of autism spectrum disorder. How exciting is that? These are just a few examples of the successful co-op placements that I've heard about recently.

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Remember, our government's strategy is learning to 18, not classroom to 18. We want students in an education environment that suits their goals and interests while furthering their learning experience at the same time.

It should be of no surprise to you that work experience in high school is highly valued by employers. The Ontario Chamber of Commerce has stated it's essential that employers engage young people in real-life work experiences when they're making career decisions. Ninety-five per cent of Canadian employers see work experience during high school as valuable; however, only 45% of high school students have it. Employers, co-op teachers and government all share the same opinion: Co-operative education provides a wealth of knowledge and experience that every student can benefit from.

Rural student success strategy—maybe you can let me know how much time I have left in my 30 minutes. Two minutes? Thanks. I have a host of examples from rural Ontario on some great strategies for successful learning that I will share with you in my next allotment.

Let me close now by saying that I have some tremendous staff who are here and available to answer some questions. I look forward to the commentary we might hear from members of the opposition parties, but I believe that despite a difference in political parties, we are here for the same purpose. I believe we are all here

for the children of Ontario and want to do better for them. We acknowledge that we have much work to do in education, some of it around grants and some of it around relationships with our boards, how we manage the financial dilemmas that often arise in providing the bread and butter of the schools, and in the meantime keeping our eye on the ball on the kinds of goals we set for all students, whether they be students in a classroom or students through special education, the kind of betterment we have to keep providing in education.

I will end by saying that education is supposed to change. It is supposed to be constantly changing, because that means it should be constantly getting better. I think we demand that for our children.

Thank you, Chair, for having me give opening remarks. I look forward to the next nine hours, and potentially 20 hours, being made available to our committee so we can share the good news and the work of our education Premier, Dalton McGuinty, with the public of Ontario.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. I noticed your staff winced at the thought of being here for 20 hours, knowing how busy they are when they're not at estimates.

I'd now like to recognize Mr. Klees for up to 30 minutes. We're in your hands.

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): Thank you, Chair. Before I get into my questioning of the minister, I'd like to make a request, if I could; I believe this is in order. There are some agencies, boards and commissions under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education and I would make a request to have available to us for questioning at this committee the chair and the executive director of the Ontario College of Teachers. I would also like to have an opportunity to do the same with the chair of the Advisory Council on Special Education, as well as the chair of the Education Quality and Accountability Office. So Chair, if I could leave it with you to arrange for that.

The Chair: We will contact them and advise them of our schedule period. It is my custom as Chair not to have them sit here, but to have agreement with all three parties as to which window we would have them here and for how long. We will perhaps resolve that after we adjourn today. It's been my custom not to ask them to sit through four days over three weeks or so, but to specifically say to them, "On this day, between these two hours, all and any questions will be put to you," and we only disrupt those individuals for that period of time. So if you'll entrust the Chair to do that, I will do it, but it's out of courtesy to these agencies. Some of these people are not full-time civil servants. They're paid a per diem, but they have other lives.

Mr. Marchese: Chair, can I quickly ask you: What is it that you would be recommending that they do if you invite them?

The Chair: It is the custom of the committee, if there are requests for any agencies, boards or commissions that are served under the ministry's estimates that we're reviewing—it is in order to request their presence.

Mr. Marchese: To be here, if they want.

The Chair: They would be called upon to answer some questions.

Mr. Marchese: I see. If I might recommend, if the member would like those groups to be here, that would happen under his time, not mine, because I want to speak to the minister and the officers of the ministry.

The Chair: That's why I said to you we will work it out—all-party agreement—about how much time is required. So if the quality assurance committee is here and the government doesn't wish to ask them a question and you don't, then it'll simply be a matter of Mr. Klees's time. My job as Chair, supported by our clerk, is to ensure that there's equity in the amount of time used, but there's latitude in the standing orders to give each of the three parties fair access through this process. Is that clear? Are there any other questions? If not, then we will proceed. Mr. Klees, we're in your hands for your 30 minutes.

Mr. Klees: Thank you, Chair. Before I get into my questioning, Mr. O'Toole is here and he does have to leave. He has requested to put a question to the minister, and I'm going to ask him to do that now, with your permission.

The Chair: It's your time. If you want to yield the floor to Mr. O'Toole—

Mr. Klees: I do, as long as he yields it back.

The Chair: I will just sit back and watch.

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): That's somewhat of a risky proposition.

Hon. Ms. Papatello: Is this a Q and A or is it—

Mr. O'Toole: This is our 30 minutes.

The Chair: It's their 30 minutes. Mr. Klees is yielding to Mr. O'Toole. If he wishes to ask you a question and you want to take up the 30 minutes with an answer, you go right ahead.

Mr. O'Toole: Thank you very much for that, Chair. I appreciate being recognized by the Chair. I am or not?

The Chair: Yes, we recognize Mr. O'Toole.

Mr. O'Toole: Thank you very much. It's a pleasure to see you, Minister, in your new role. Congratulations.

There are really four issues in Bill 78 that have serious concerns with me. I know Mr. Klees will be outlining them, but they are of a serious nature, with respect to special ed, transportation, the salary grid gap, as enunciated by Peel and other boards—all boards will be in deficit by next year—and the impending role or diminishment in the role of the trustee.

That being said, my primary reason here is to recognize the French-language issues, certainly in Durham. It's a high-growth area, Minister, as you know. The request is before you. They've put it before you. In fact, I met with Sylvie Landry as well as Stewart Kiff. I have a couple of requests from the Durham French-language public secondary school, Whitby-Ajax area. I know Wayne Arthurs has met with these people, as it affects his riding. I'm sure he's supportive of this. I wouldn't want to put words in his mouth; he can speak for himself. Also, the request for a French-language public elementary school in Ajax.

This is an area where our government set up, under the funding model—there are those who are arguing with it. But there are four recognized providers in public education: public and separate, French and English. What kind of response are you going to give to that group that has the need and the desire to educate students in the primary language of French? I'm going to leave that with you because I do have another meeting, but out of respect for the people in my riding and the people I've met with, I'd expect somehow, either now or later, that you'd give a response. Thank you very much. I'll leave those two submissions for the minister. So I can say, for the record, through the researcher or the clerk, that you'll get a copy of them. I expect a response and to be copied on that, if I could. I have more to say, but Frank wants all the time.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. O'Toole. A copy will be sent to the minister and staff. Mr. Klees?

Mr. Klees: Minister, welcome, and I do wish you well as the Minister of Education. I feel for you because we understand full well that you've been left with quite a challenge by your predecessor. I'm not sure how you're going to deal with it, but perhaps in the course of the next few hours we can at least get to some of the issues that Mr. Kennedy has left you to deal with.

1630

Before we get into the specifics, however, I would like to get a sense of your vision as education minister for the province of Ontario. I'll put it this way: Do you believe that you are the education minister for all children and students in the province of Ontario, that you have responsibility for the education standards of all students in the province of Ontario?

Hon. Ms. Papatello: I think it's fair to say that this Premier is the education Premier. There's no question that, through all of my years in opposition—which was unfortunately too long: 1995 through 2003—we focused much of our attention on education because we saw the policies of the last government, which I viewed as very detrimental to the public education system. We didn't make any bones about that. We also acknowledged, through all of those years, that we had diametrically opposite opinions about public education. We're going to, in the end, agree that we won't agree on how your party valued public education, but we were very clear that we do value it and we believe that we need to instill that kind of confidence in the general public about public education.

Mr. Klees: Minister, my question was actually very specific.

Hon. Ms. Papatello: So when the Premier began all of his work to go to the people in 2003, our document was largely about education. In fact, a significant part of our platform was entitled Excellence for All and spent a great deal of our work—

Mr. Klees: Minister, my question was very specific, if you wouldn't mind. It was very simple. Do you consider yourself to be the education minister for all students in the province? Yes or not?

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: I think our platform speaks very clearly to that. We called our platform on education “Excellence for All.” That’s actually the name of it.

Mr. Klees: Thank you very much. So you do?

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: The Premier is also known as—

The Chair: Minister, you’ve given a great answer, and we’d like to move on.

Mr. Klees: Thank you. I draw your attention to page 3 of the estimates. Your mission statement states, “The ministry will seek relationships with the education sector and the public that are more interactive, more mutually influential.” By that statement, does that mean that you as education minister will in fact be seeking relationships with all stakeholders in the education sector?

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: I think if I use the last few days as an example, I have had an opportunity to meet with—I suppose you can’t count everyone in audiences; that wouldn’t be fair—tens and tens of representatives of people who have a significant stake in our education system. I like to think that our government as a whole, even before my coming to this ministry, spent an awful lot of time engaging our partners in education. I think some of the results are starting to be felt, but rather than this, it’s almost like we’re playing this game. If you just get on to the actual question at hand—

Mr. Klees: Would any stakeholders in education be excluded by you as education minister in dialoguing about education in this province? Would you exclude any stakeholders in education?

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: The best predictor of future behaviour is past behaviour.

Mr. Klees: If that’s the case, we have a problem because the former minister refused to meet with many stakeholders—

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: I spent the first 16 days seeing everybody.

Mr. Klees: —in education in the province of Ontario. I’m trying to get a sense of your direction as the minister.

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: Just ask your question.

Mr. Klees: Will you work with all stakeholders in education in this province? That’s my question to you.

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: In these next few—I don’t want to say “weeks” because we’ve not landed on the time of our grant release, but I want to be fair and tell you that we are facing some pressure to get information about grants out to school boards. So these next few weeks—we’ll probably actually be about two weeks later because of the attendance at this committee, but we’re trying to get our grants out. So the next month or so, I’ll probably be more limited, but in two and a half years as a minister of the crown I can’t think of whom I’ve not met with or whom I have specifically not met with.

Mr. Klees: Thank you. That’s encouraging. I’m sure that’s encouraging to many stakeholders who are watching these proceedings, because they haven’t been able to get to first base, many of them, with the former minister. So that’s welcome.

Minister, in your opening statement you said the following: “Students should not have to fall behind.” You

said that in reference to the early screening and innovation initiatives. Does this apply to all students in the province?

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: Again, I think it’s for every single member of this House to have an education system that works for all students. Maybe you need to be more specific in your question.

Mr. Klees: Does this apply to autistic children?

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: I think that, in fairness, especially any of our children involved in special education need to be certain that we do well by our policies so that our boards have the support they need to do the best for all our kids.

Mr. Klees: It’s a strong statement, Minister, “Students should not have to fall behind.” I agree with it. Unfortunately, your predecessor obviously didn’t take that to include autistic children in this province, so to hear you say that is encouraging. It’s encouraging, I’m sure, to parents of autistic children in this province who have been struggling to get the attention of the Minister of Education with regard to their specific concerns, their challenges. They have that desire. They don’t want their children to fall behind. So we look forward to working with you.

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: Would you like any comment on that?

Mr. Klees: I think you have. You have very clearly stated that you believe autistic children should not be treated any differently than any other children in this province. That is welcome, and we look forward to seeing that implemented.

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: I would be careful with that level of generality, because in fact that’s not what currently exists in the system, but I will say that in 1995, for example, or 1996, 1997, 1998—I say this to say the kind of systematic issues we need to address—if your government had poured \$100 million into the system just for autistic children, we would not have had the personnel available and trained and ready to deliver services to this group. That was the problem, and if this member opposite is aware, and I think you might be well frequented with this issue, it is such a huge systematic issue. There are so many issues around the quality of what we’re delivering that it’s not black and white. It is not a black and white issue.

Because I came from the Ministry of Community and Social Services, I have a vested interest in what happened with children going through the system, because when they turned 18, they would become an adult and move into the adult community system. The best we can do for them as children is what our communities need. I certainly watched for a long time, for many years.

I remember when one of your colleagues, Brenda Elliott, was the minister and the pressures she was under when the children’s ministry was then a part of community and social services. She struggled with this, and many have not got it right for many years. It is such a systematic issue, too, that it doesn’t fall to just one ministry to resolve or just one level of government. It is about

the institution of how we train people to work in autism, what is the best kind of intervention. Those are key questions.

Mr. Klees: Minister, thank you very much. What I hear you saying is that, as the Minister of Education, with your experience in community and social services, you understand the challenges of these families and that you're willing to work with them to ensure their children don't fall behind. We're encouraged by that.

I'd like to move on to the broader issue of funding. Your predecessor was very good at making funding announcements, and he did them well. One of the questions we asked was to get a listing of all the funding announcements and the implication of those announcements on a go-forward basis. What has happened is that there's only one failure in his announcements, and that is that he failed to make the appropriate funding announcements to go with the spending commitments resulting from the programs he announced. So I'm sure that by now, after all your briefings, you've found out that you've got a huge gap in terms of what the expectations are and what the responsibilities are at the board level to deliver programs, and the amount of money they have to actually deliver those programs. Do you have any idea what that gap is for 2006-07 between the commitments boards have to deliver programs and the actual funding that's being transferred to them by the ministry?

1640

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: I can tell you that we've invested over \$2 billion into the education system. Some of the schools in your own riding I think will tell you—

Mr. Klees: Minister, I'm sorry, my question is very specific.

The Chair: Mr. Klees, this is only going to work if you each speak one at a time. You asked the minister a question. The minister is in the process of answering it. It may not be to your satisfaction, but I have to let her finish, just as I have to let you finish your question without the minister interrupting. This is not the first time this has happened, but let's try and be patient and listen. You've chosen to engage in questions, and that is your right, but if you're going to ask questions, I've got to let the minister have time to answer, within reason. If she goes on and, in my opinion, isn't answering, I'll interrupt her. You have the floor, Mr. Klees.

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: The total, though, is available in all the documents that have been tabled, in terms of what we were spending in education in 2003-04, what was spent in 2004-05 and 2005-06, and now, having tabled the 2006-07 budget, you can see what our prediction is to spend. If you go back and look at our actuals, then you can do your own comparisons to see what in fact has been spent.

Mr. Klees: In that case, if we could go to page 37 where it refers to the education grants, you mentioned earlier that your total commitment is \$17.3 billion in grants for student needs. What I would like to do is get from you an indication—just a breakdown because I can't find it. Perhaps you can get some help from your

people in terms of how these numbers work. You commit \$17.3 billion in grants for student needs. I'd like to refer you back then to page 21, where we have the overall ministry administration. We have, on page 17, the capital summary, and on page 16, the operating summary. Can you help me to understand how your \$17.3 billion squares with these numbers in terms of total expenditures?

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: There's about \$6 billion, as you would know, that comes to boards from the local property taxes. That money is raised by them, targeted to education, and then sent to the boards of the taxpayers' choosing. With that amount and an additional amount of about \$5 billion to \$6 billion that goes out the door to school boards through grants for student needs, it leaves about \$1 billion to be used throughout the ministry in a whole variety of ways. Part of that, for example, that is left within the ministry is the operation of the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat, which is a new secretariat. It has been extremely successful, but never mind, that's a qualitative discussion.

Where the money is: You've got a big bulk of the money that comes through, obviously, the Ministry of Finance to us to boards, a big chunk that also goes to boards from the tax assessment, and then there's the helpmate that the ministry is—through our field offices, for example, through our secretariat, through the various supports we have to boards, to parents etc. So essentially that's where your money is: \$12 billion going to boards, \$6 billion from the tax base, \$1 that is the supporting structure of the ministry. So you're at \$18 billion, the lion's share of which is going to boards.

Mr. Klees: And that \$6 billion is allocated on what basis? How does that \$6 billion then flow through these grants?

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: We don't have the detail of the grants for you yet, because the grants for this year have not gone out, so there may be changes over last year. That's why it's a little unusual to come before estimates committee before the grants have been announced, because we won't have some detail that you'll look for because it's simply not been announced, it's not out to boards yet. If you want to look at what has happened historically, that has gone out the door, a taxpayer will select English public and that's where their taxes will go. Some will select French, whatever. That money then gets divvied up and sent to those boards. We do the sorting out of what's gone to what board. That's incorporated, so we know what those boards have all received, and that's accounted for.

Mr. Klees: With regard —

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: Do you want more process information?

Mr. Klees: No, I think what I'm looking for specifically is, when those funds are directed or sent to the school board and the school board receives X number of dollars, what dictates how those funds are then spent by the school board? How is the school board guided in terms of the spending of those tax dollars?

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: I'm going to ask Nancy Naylor to give you some more detail on the financial account-

ability, and then I'll finish with some information about what has happened recently in terms of accounting practices, which you probably will be aware of as a former cabinet minister, and what was coming down the road with the accountants across the country suddenly deciding that their deficits are our deficits and their surpluses are our surpluses. That has changed the nature of our relationship as well.

Ms. Nancy Naylor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The minister's description is correct, that municipalities pass property tax revenue directly to school boards. That revenue is pooled with operating grants that are received from the province, and the overall budget for a school board is determined by the formulas in the grants for student needs, the regulation under the Education Act. So the overall \$17 billion that is provided as school board revenue consists of the operating grants from the province plus the approximately \$6 billion that school boards receive from property tax.

Your question was, how is that used? The grants or requirements of the Education Act to provide certain services, such as certain class sizes, transportation and that kind of thing, determine what guidelines the school boards use to spend that money.

Mr. Klees: Thank you, Ms. Naylor. What I'm trying to get at here is the transparency or the integrity of that process. How much assurance do we have that funds that leave the Ministry of Education as one of these grants—let's take, just for example, the learning opportunities grant. It leaves the Ministry of Education as a learning opportunities grant and is transferred to the local school board. So there's a clear intention of where that money goes. What assurance do the taxpayers have that in fact that money is going to be spent within the context of the learning opportunities grant? Do we have that assurance, or do you have concern that that money may well be utilized in some way other than a learning opportunities grant and the purpose for which that was intended? Either the minister or Ms. Naylor.

Hon. Ms. Papatello: Clearly, I'm getting a handle on all of this. This level of detail is something I certainly wouldn't have known the detail of in another ministry. But what I do know is that all boards are using an interpretation that works for them. Boards are hoping to have as much flexibility, with the formula that your government provided for them—I have heard over the last 10 or 15 days or so, since being named minister, about some significant areas of concern with the formula that your government provided them. They tell us that what they require is flexibility. So we are hoping that in our discussions with them now, as these new grants go out the door—we need a couple of things. One is an accountability for things that are going to be our priority. I think the former minister made it very clear what those things were: We need to see test scores going up; we need the dropout rates going down; we want to see primary class sizes going down as well. So we're starting to look for those kinds of benchmarks in schools.

Mr. Klees: Minister, would you agree that there is something fundamentally wrong, if not outright dis-

honest, if there's an expectation on the part of the taxpayers that funds are released to school boards under certain grants that are very clearly defined in terms of their purpose, and the school board utilizes those funds for other purposes? And isn't it even worse if in fact that is being done with the knowledge and the understanding of the Minister of Education, knowing that the school board is going to be applying those funds, say, for salaries as opposed to the intended purpose of a learning opportunities grant?

1650

Hon. Ms. Papatello: I guess the board would respond to you by saying that it depends if the salaries were going to be for higher emphasis on literacy because of the standards that we are demanding. So then they'll say, in order for us to accomplish that, that's what we need to do.

In the end, I think what you strike at is the heart of what the relationship is going to be between the ministry and the board. Yes, we need to have a kind of accountability that says, "Here are our goals. Here's the money we're prepared to put into our goals. We need you to make this work." What they're telling us is that there is an inherently fundamental flaw in the formula that the Conservative government gave them several years ago and that each year was never amended or improved, so that we now, in the last two and a half years, are grappling with in particular a few areas that you probably heard of as well, because you mentioned teachers' salaries. The Conservative government set a benchmark in the technical papers that come out with the formula that is dramatically lower than what the actual salary is out there. Now, I appreciate that your government had a different view of teachers, certainly, and of how to spend government advertising, certainly, but it was an inaccurate figure. So of course, from day one of your funding formula the boards were scrambling to figure out how to pay the real cost when you didn't apportion enough in the formula for the real cost. I get that. You don't need to be in the ministry very long to figure that out; it's in the technical papers. The number is the same number that you, at the cabinet table, and your government actually approved in the regs.

Mr. Klees: I hate to interrupt you, Minister, but you have answered my question. I would hope that you as minister would address that and ensure that you get some more accountability into them. Your government has been there for two and a half years, and if that formula was so flawed, the question I have and many people have is, why haven't you done anything about it? You've continued to operate under what quite frankly—and I agree—is an outdated benchmark. It should have been adjusted. It was always intended to be adjusted to deal with the current situation.

Hon. Ms. Papatello: Do I get to interject with an answer, Chair?

Mr. Klees: My last question to you—

Hon. Ms. Papatello: You better ask me a question about that, Frank.

Mr. Klees: My last question to you is this: When you transfer funds to school boards, for example, for language grants or learning opportunities grants, what census information is the board using to determine the number of students and the need in a particular school board for those grants? Can you give us that factual information? What year of census information are you using for that purpose?

Hon. Ms. Papatello: I'll get that information for you. I know we use the census for some things, and a whole bunch of demographic information, apparently from different sources, depending on what is currently available. But I'll provide a list for you on that, if I can.

Mr. Klees: Okay. And when could I expect that?

Hon. Ms. Papatello: As soon as I can. I don't know what your standard is, but I'll do my best.

Mr. Klees: Well, your standard is a year later. That's not mine.

Hon. Ms. Papatello: Hey, that's not fair.

Mr. Klees: Actually, in fact my last question would be, do you have any idea why it took your ministry a year to get us information that we specifically requested at estimates a year ago? Why would it take so long? Was it intentional? Was it incompetence? Which of the two was it?

Hon. Ms. Papatello: I think that in the future, as long as I am in the chair, you should direct all your questions to the minister, and any of your comments about the ministry would be directed to the minister. So if there is a minister who didn't respond to you, then you should take it up with the minister.

Having said that, just to answer your previous question, when your government came out with the formula, it was already outdated, and you, after seven years, still did not update the formula that you created. So two and a half years is some time, but it's hard to get out from a hole of eight years in two and a half, and we are doing our level best to make things right in terms of accountability, assisting boards to deliver not just what they want but what we want, and frankly, Frank Klees, I think what you want. I believe that you, sir, want lower dropout rates, higher literacy and numeracy scores and smaller class sizes. It's just one of those things, that finally we are having a qualitative discussion in education, and I'm very excited about that opportunity.

Mr. Klees: I want all of those and I also enjoy responses to my questions, so when can I expect that information regarding the census?

Hon. Ms. Papatello: I can't tell you, but when I see you in the House tomorrow—

The Chair: Thank you. I'd like to recognize Mr. Marchese for up to 30 minutes. We're in your hands.

Mr. Marchese: Minister, what I'm going to do is make some statements in response to much of what you said, and when I'm done with that, I'm going to ask you some questions.

First of all, to talk about Bill 78—and I'm not going to take too much time for that bill because I did my one-hour lead in the House, and we're going to take this bill

for committee hearings, so I'm not going to take too much time to talk about that except to make reference to your point, which said—by the way, Bill 78 is the bill you call student performance; so-called. What you said is, this is a bill that shows respect for teachers through a new, invigorated college of teachers. What I want to say to you is that what you have created is a college of teachers that has one extra teacher in that body, and that's not bad. It's better than having 50-50, but it's 19-18. There are 37 members and there's one extra teacher in terms of the numbers. That tips the number of teachers on that board. So that's okay. It's not as much as Gerard obviously wanted, but clearly the former minister was having pressure from the Tories and was worried about them. But at least he put one extra teacher on the board, which makes it seem like they have control and, to a great extent, they do. Hopefully, nobody gets sick; hopefully they'll always be there to have that control.

What you've created in that bill that I believe is highly disrespectful and suspect is a public interest committee. Remember, this college of teachers does two things: (1) It pulls a licence away from a teacher, and (2) it probably provides some professional development for all the boards. I think that's a good thing, by the way. I find it crazy that we have a whole body of people involved in doing those two things, where boards can easily pull a licence away from a teacher. In terms of providing professional development, boards could do that, but it's nice that this college of teachers might provide some centrally managed professional development. These are the two things that this college does. I find it amazing we have such a body to do so little.

But then your former colleague, the now gone Mr. Kennedy, created a public interest committee made up of—

Interjection.

Mr. Marchese: Sayonara, Minister. You're going to create a public interest committee of three to five people who are going to be highly paid to basically administer the oath, because now teachers are going to have to take a public interest oath, a provincial oath. They already have to take an oath in this college of teachers, but you're going to force them to take another oath, a public interest oath, which is the new provincial interest oath, and you're going to have this body, the public interest committee, administer that oath and the contraventions of the oath, blah, blah, blah. Highly paid individuals to do what? I just don't know. God bless you, Liberal government, for creating yet another level of bureaucracy to oversee this college of teachers on the basis of I don't know what, except it's going to provide jobs to somebody. To do what? Administer the oath and presumably to show respect for teachers. That's why you have this new body, because you want to show respect for teachers through this invigorated college of teachers.

I hope, Minister, you look at this insanity your former minister has created and see the light and make some of those changes. You might be able to do it. Who knows? On the other hand, you might just have to keep the bill as

it is, and Marchese will attack you and your government in committee, which I promise to do.

The other comment you made is that you have a commitment, your government has a commitment, to make sure that 75% of students up to age 12 are going to meet and/or surpass the provincial standard. I don't know whether you were a teacher before—I don't think you were—and you don't have to be a teacher to know this.

1700

Interjection.

Mr. Marchese: Yes I was. What I've been saying in the Legislature is that this was a crazy promise that you made, that your former minister made, that your government has made, because you can't keep it. I'll tell you why.

I know you're going to pay close attention to it now that you're the minister—I'm very pleased that you are—because we're going to enjoy this battle, you and I, around issues like this.

The former Conservative government introduced this Education Quality Assessment Office to undermine the educational system. Then they used that office and those tests to show first of all that the system was broken and then to show that once they introduced this test, test numbers and grades would simply go up. Do you see, Sandra?

You might be aware or not, but when Gerard was the critic, he understood that they politically—they, the Tories. Whenever I say, to the public watching, "they," I mean the Tories here. They politically manipulated that test in order to increase the numbers. Gerard knew that and Marchese knew that. We both attacked them when they released the numbers four, five or six years ago, whenever it was. We said that the way they were increasing the numbers—and not through qualitative changes in the educational system, but you manipulate the test. Lo and behold, for your government to be able to get to this number, from 55%, 56% that the Tories had us with to your now getting to a 61% and so on—what I've been guaranteeing through articles that we are writing and statements I make in the House is that you're going to get to your goal. But the only reason you're going to get to your goal is because you're manipulating the test. It's a political manipulation of how you get to that goal. You can say all the blah-blah you want about how you're getting there but this is what we've said.

We've said that in the last test that students wrote they used calculators to compute mathematical questions. Your minister in one of these committees denied that. We know from teachers that you couldn't use them before, but in the last test they did use calculators. It's good advice from staff so that you're well informed. You're already up to scratch; it's beautiful. These students, for the benefit of those watching, now can use calculators. We've been hearing some gossip about the ministry possibly wanting to get rid of calculators but I think they can't. It's an interesting thing to witness. But that's gossip. We'll deal with that another day.

The test was 12 hours long and they reduced it to six. It may not be a bad thing. But instead of having students

suffer 12 hours, now you've shortened the time to six. What they have allowed, the EQAO, is to permit students the whole length of the long day if they need to finish that test, which they couldn't do before. And you've made some of the questions simpler based on our discussions with many teachers who have done this and marked—I know, Sandra, you find it difficult to cope with, but as I endured your half-hour, I'm just going to almost finish these statements and then ask you questions so we can engage each other.

What I'm saying to you is, the way you're increasing your numbers is to manipulate the test. You don't like to hear it and your friends don't like to hear it, and you can smile about it and say, "Ha, ha, ha," about all the money you spend that's making the difference and all these thousands of teachers—and I'll get to that in my questions—that you've hired is making that difference. But for the benefit of those watching, it's the manipulation of the tests that's increasing your test scores and raising the standard.

Third, the flawed funding formula. The Tories introduced a funding formula that was flawed. You, Minister, know that. Your former colleague who was the minister then knew that. Marchese knows that. And what Marchese is telling today is that you're still using the same Conservative funding formula that was flawed and continues to be flawed. You can accuse the Tories all you want, but after you've been in government for two and half years, if you know that the funding formula is flawed and you haven't changed it, you're just as guilty as they.

You can even attack the NDP government, as you often do, even though you weren't here and you don't know what we did or didn't do. But it doesn't matter. You'll continue to attack whoever you want, and you will. But the reality is two and half years, and your education Premier and your former education minister have not changed the funding formula. And do you know what? You're not going to either, and you should. But I could be surprised by you. Who knows?

Here are my questions to you, Minister. The Dufferin-Peel Catholic board posted a deficit for this year. How many other boards are currently posting deficits?

Hon. Ms. Papatello: Thanks so much for all your commentary. I have to say that.

Mr. Marchese: No, no. Those were just statements. Now to the questions.

Hon. Ms. Papatello: I appreciate your comments because I know you're a teacher by trade and that you have lots of friends who are still in the business.

The Chair: Minister, I have to interrupt you. You have a 30-minute period, which will start soon after 5:25, in which you get to formally rebut any of the commentary. Mr. Marchese was very specific. He just asked you how many school boards, to your knowledge, are currently carrying a deficit.

Mr. Marchese: That's right.

The Chair: I've had considerable experience with Mr. Marchese. That's the way he likes to do his estimates. As Chair, I'm going to support him.

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: The answer is that it's probably changing daily because the boards, as you know, have a rolling kind of budget as they go through the year. One board's position, for example, that you've asked me questions about in the House has changed again in the last couple of weeks from two weeks ago. There is a handful that are suggesting to us that they are above the one percentage point on deficit, but in the main, as you know, it does change regularly and we're working with all of our boards.

Mr. Marchese: Okay. So the answer is that it's changing daily. How many boards projected deficits in the initial estimates they presented to you?

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: I can't tell you that but I'll have that for you shortly.

Mr. Marchese: I wouldn't mind the deputy and others answering. That would be very helpful.

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: The answer is none.

Mr. Marchese: So in the initial estimates they presented to you, no board—none.

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: Right.

Mr. Marchese: How many boards are in negotiations with you around their budget deficits?

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: Six. There is a total of 72 boards and we're talking to six boards.

Mr. Marchese: The Toronto Star reported in February that it's the Toronto Catholic, Upper Canada, Wellington, Bluewater, Algonquin and Lakeshore Catholic. Are these the ones? Is there any one I missed?

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: I can't tell you that. You may have missed one.

Mr. Marchese: Deputy, do you know? Anyone else?

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: We'll get you a list, if you require it, but that may encompass some of them.

Mr. Marchese: By the way, Minister, I don't mind if the deputy or others answer, because they obviously have the knowledge—you've been here a short while; I don't expect you to know all the answers—so we don't have to bring it another day if they know it.

How many boards dipped into reserves this year to balance their budgets?

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: I can't tell you this now but I may soon.

Mr. Marchese: What about the deputy minister? Does he know?

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: I'll get you some information if I can make it available to you. As you know, some of the questions you're asking speak to the accountability and transparency of financial information in our work with school boards, and I can tell you that in my own discussions with some of the specific school boards, some of the questions that I ask around the difficulties they're telling us they're having lead me to say that we are going to have an era of greater transparency where some of this will be very obvious.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Marchese: If I can, to the deputy minister: Do you know the answer to that question?

Mr. Ben Levin: I don't at the moment, no. We'd have to look that up.

Mr. Marchese: Other people work for you who probably deal with these issues. Does anybody else know?

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: I'll get some information to you. I'd rather not do that today.

Mr. Marchese: So I'm going to ask you questions and then you'll give me the answer another day. What if I have different questions? You'll just send me the answers, write the answers? What are you going to do?

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: We have 10 hours—

The Chair: Excuse me. I will just state for the record that the process is rather simple. We have a researcher taking down the questions. The minister's staff are taking down questions. It's an expectation that we'll have those answers tomorrow before we begin, and where it's a custom and a courtesy that if the deputy is in a position to answer, he'll answer.

Mr. Marchese: Thank you.

The Chair: I didn't take away from your time when I gave this explanation. I just want to make sure it's clear that the expectation from the Chair and this committee is that you'll get those answers in writing before we begin tomorrow.

Mr. Marchese: Thank you very much. How many boards have completely depleted their reserve funds?

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: I can't tell you that right now but I'll see if I can get you that information.

Mr. Marchese: Could you provide a breakdown of all the boards and how much they have dipped into reserves this fiscal year and last?

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Hon. Ms. Pupatello: If we have that information available, I'll try to make it available to you. As I said earlier, as we go through the year with boards, their budget changes regularly. So to use Dufferin-Peel as your example earlier, their position in November changed in February and changed again as we've been sitting with them in April. To give you the accurate information means that we'd have to have the very latest of the current position of that board, which has changed.

The Chair: Mr. Marchese, if I can be helpful, it's usually customary to pinpoint the day on which the boards are required to file, and that becomes the threshold day. If that's of any assistance to Mr. Marchese, those are a matter of public record and they are a composite of all boards on that day.

Mr. Marchese: Thank you.

With regard to the investigators you sent to the Dufferin-Peel Catholic board, what was the charge per hour, or on what fee basis were the investigators paid?

Ms. Naylor: We paid expenses. One of the investigators was hired as a ministry employee, one was hired on a secondment from the board association he was working with, and their expenses were fairly modest, actually.

Mr. Marchese: Do you have a number?

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: We can get that for you.

Mr. Marchese: But she knows.

Ms. Naylor: Not off the top of my head.

Mr. Marchese: How could you know it's modest, then? How could you know it's modest if you don't know?

Ms. Naylor: I remember doing the contract. I just don't remember the exact numbers; sorry.

Mr. Marchese: When did the ministry receive the investigators' report?

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: I think the former minister received the report the week before he moved from the ministry.

Mr. Marchese: The week before—

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: He moved from the Ministry of Education.

Mr. Marchese: Does the deputy know the date when they received the report?

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: I'm trying to think of the day that my whole world changed here, Rosario. Hang on a second. It was the week of April 6.

Ms. Naylor: The report was received the morning the minister released it.

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: I think you're probably getting to a point here, so if you get to the point of the questions we'll try to figure out what information you need based on this question. Whatever you're driving at, we're happy to tell you.

Mr. Marchese: Okay, I guess you'll know now. Can you explain why you posted it to the website and distributed it to the media before you shared it with the trustees?

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: In think, in speaking to the chair of the board of Dufferin-Peel Catholic personally, he would have preferred to have more time before. He apparently received the report at the same time as it was posted. It wasn't before; everything was at the same time. I don't think that the chair was available to go through the detail the moment that it became available to him either, because it's a volunteer position for him.

Mr. Marchese: His letter of April 7 was sent to you. It doesn't say that they received it at the same time. His letter says, in the fourth paragraph, "The board, having received the report only late in the day on Tuesday, April 4, barely two business days ago, has not yet had an opportunity to meet and consider the impact of the board's recommendation."

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: Yes. In fact, his report was made available to him at the same time. He didn't have the time personally to see it at that same time. I appreciate his voluntary position as chair.

Mr. Marchese: If Peter Ferreira is the chair, he didn't receive it at the same time.

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: In fact it was made available to him at the same time. I think the point you're trying to make, that I happen to agree with, is that he probably could have done better in response to media questions if he had had an opportunity to read the report. The way things happened, it wasn't the case. I will tell you that my conversations with the chair in the last few days have been very accommodating.

Mr. Marchese: No. I know, but my point is that you talk about a relationship of respect, and so my question is, you posted it on the website and distributed it to the media before you shared it with the trustees—that's my point.

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: Actually, no, I didn't do that. In fact, all of that was before I was named Minister of Education. I think if you do have specifics about that kind of detail, you might want to address that with the former Minister of Education.

Mr. Marchese: Peter Ferreira says, "It is our understanding that the ministry was in possession of the report for several days before its release, providing ample time for the report to be shared with the board, yet the ministry chose to release the report to the media and post it on the ministry website before sharing it with the board. We consider this approach to be disrespectful of the parents of Dufferin-Peel." You're saying something different and your deputy is saying something different as well.

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: I'm saying you should direct your questions to a former minister, because in fairness, everything that preceded me in my relationship with the board is exactly that: It preceded me. I anticipate, much like the response I've had so far from that board, a very positive relationship.

Mr. Marchese: Does your deputy have knowledge of this?

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: My deputy was not involved in the—

The Chair: The question is to the deputy.

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: No, the question is to me, actually. I think I refer the questions to my staff if required.

The Chair: No, the Chair can direct them and the member can direct them to—

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: The reality is that that was a relationship between the minister—

Mr. Marchese: The Chair is speaking. He's speaking.

Interjection.

Mr. Marchese: Actually, the Chair was speaking while you were talking at the same time.

The Chair: It's fine. We can call a recess; we can do whatever we want.

Minister, members have the right to ask a question of a member of your staff, and we appreciate your co-operation.

Mr. Marchese: The minister was just coming on board and—I mean, the deputy minister has a great deal of knowledge. Having been a former minister, I know they are in full possession of much, much knowledge. I'm just asking him whether he was familiar with this letter and the report and when it was posted, why it wasn't shared. Are they wrong? Is the chair wrong?

Mr. Levin: I was certainly not aware that the report had been posted before it had been made available to the Dufferin-Peel board. My understanding is that it had been given to the board before it was posted on the Web. But I

do know that the former minister had spoken with the chair of the board about the report—

Mr. Marchese: I know that.

Mr. Levin: —before it was posted and before it was officially transmitted. They had a discussion about it by telephone. So the contents of the report were not a surprise to the chair.

Mr. Marchese: I know they talked, but in terms of what was issued on that website—I know the minister talked to Peter Ferreira, but putting this on the website before giving the board notice of that report I think is disrespectful, as they said, and it contradicts your point about building a relationship of respect.

On April 6, you told the Legislature, Minister, with regard to the Dufferin-Peel Catholic board, and I quote you, “This government has never been about program cuts and we’re not about to start now.” But you’re trying to force the trustees to make cuts, are you not?

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: No. Actually what we’re trying to do is encourage this board to balance its budget. As this member knows, this is a board that received over \$100 million in new funding and has had an enrolment increase of 3%. So with a 3% increase in enrolment and a 19% increase in funding, we’re asking some very basic questions. I hope this MPP took the time to actually read the report that was done by the investigators that went in there—

Mr. Marchese: I’ll get to that.

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: —because I think some of the information outlined some \$22 million in ideas to help them achieve, but they are now looking for far less than that in terms of balancing their budget, which is why it’s such a hopeful situation.

Mr. Marchese: This member has reviewed the report; I’m happy that you have too.

On page 31 of your investigators’ report it states, “We find that the board was right when it said that there are funding inadequacies in the areas of salaries and transportation... balancing the budget in these circumstances will almost always result in a reduction of services provided by the school boards.” What’s the difference between a reduction of service and a cut?

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: Again, I’ll go back to the days of the development of the funding formula. From day one, the Conservative government identified a salary, in the technical paper that supports the formula, to be less than the actual salary paid. Again, with that government having delivered \$2 billion in cuts, two and a half years will not give us the time to do two things that I know are of interest to this member as well. You can’t climb out of the hole of appropriate levels of funding for the number of kids we have, plus mark the kind of qualitative improvement that we want in the system, in a short three-and-a-half-year term. We absolutely will need our next term of government to move even further in the area of student success in Ontario.

Mr. Marchese: So in terms of my question—what’s the difference between reduction in service and a cut?—we don’t get an answer to that; we just get an answer that

says, “They caused a funding formula problem, and we just can’t solve it in two and a half years.” Okay.

Your investigators recommend that as secondary enrolment increases at the board, the additional funds generated by new students be put towards deficit reduction and not new services for those students. That’s on page 18 of that report that you read, Minister.

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Hon. Ms. Pupatello: If this—

Mr. Marchese: I haven’t asked you the question. Maybe I should reread it, because you were talking to the deputy. My question again is: Your investigators recommend that as the secondary enrolment increases at the board, the additional funds generated by new students be put towards deficit reduction and not new services for those students. That’s on page 18 of the report that you so thoroughly read. Does that strike you as being compatible with Dalton McGuinty’s vision for education?

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: I can tell you that this board, despite how you’d like to characterize our relationship, is doing very well in the area of primary class size, for example. They are hitting targets; they are middle-of-the-pack in the area of test scores—

Mr. Marchese: But I didn’t ask you that; I’m sorry.

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: But those are the kinds of qualitative targets—

Mr. Marchese: I’m sorry, but—

The Chair: I’ll give you more time.

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: —that we insist on boards meeting. So I have to tell you that you’re selecting your targets, and I’m suggesting that the board is doing extremely well when it comes to student success and we want them to do better. So, yes, they have issues around balancing the budget; they need to get at it. If you were to look at that report that you say you’ve read, it suggests a higher-than-average board administration. In this day and age, with our focus on quality for students, it means that they do have some work to do, and I make no bones about that.

Mr. Marchese: I repeated the question twice, and I’m going to repeat it again. If you don’t have an answer, just say, “I don’t have an answer.” Your investigators recommend that as the secondary enrolment increases at the board, the additional funds generated by new students be put towards deficit reduction and not new services for those students. Do you agree with that?

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: I will tell you that this board has to meet our qualitative demands, as every board does; and they will use this report—and you need to remark, as well, that the investigators are people with long legs in the education community who have a remarkable track record. They weren’t auditors or bean-counters just looking at numbers; they were people from education who said, “Their issues are entirely manageable.” He was very pleased to see that he was able to come up with some samples, for example, for a deficit that frankly may be less than 1% by the time our ministry officials finish working with them in this next week.

Mr. Marchese: So you say—

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: This is entirely manageable for this board.

Mr. Marchese: You say that the board must meet your qualitative demands. The question I asked you was that if there are more students and they will generate extra money, it should not be put to new services. That is a qualitative issue; it means that those students are not going to get the benefit of a qualitative demand that presumably you would want as a minister. You're saying it should deal with its deficit. Is that what you're saying?

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: I suggested that the board does have to balance their budget, yes.

Mr. Marchese: And that's a qualitative demand? Is that an educational requirement?

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: I will tell you that the board submitted a deficit plan; they suggested that they might have \$15 million of a deficit. That is no longer the case today. In fact, one week later they are significantly lower in the number that they're projecting—to the extent that, in the scope of the Dufferin-Peel Catholic board's \$700-million budget—that's the size, the sheer size of it—we're talking far less than \$15 million now. This is an entirely manageable number. I don't know if your intervention caused this to be more political than it ought to—I'm not certain—but this is an entirely manageable number. And if we have good people that are working there, we will manage this issue with this board. I am totally confident of this.

Mr. Marchese: I'm asking very specific questions. I don't know what you think I'm getting at. If you don't know what I'm getting at, Minister, you've got a problem understanding it. If you tried dealing with the questions, I think it would be a lot easier.

Your investigators recommend increasing the average class size in secondary schools. Is this acceptable to you?

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: If the board decides that they are meeting a qualitative standard that they've set out for the students there, I think that they will make choices. What this board has suggested, which frankly all boards have suggested, is that they want to maintain flexibility with the funding formula created by the previous government that was inflexible, that caused enormous trouble for them, to get at the kind of quality that they're looking for. Last Friday, I chatted directly with several of the trustees of this board. They suggested some of the alternatives that they would prefer to look at, and I'm suggesting that finally we're having the kind of dialogue that we need to have with this board. I'm very happy about that.

Mr. Marchese: I don't know about that dialogue, but your investigator is recommending increasing the average class size in secondary schools. Does that sound like a qualitative standard to you?

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: I will tell you that this board's history is that they are actually below the cap size of 20 already in the JK to grade 3. They're doing tremendously well on this score.

Mr. Marchese: What this investigator—someone you know very well, you said in the Legislature—is recommending as a way of dealing with its fiscal problems is

increasing the average class size in secondary schools. You're proud to say you're reducing it at the elementary level, but are you okay with increasing the average class size in the secondary school as a way of dealing with the deficit?

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: I will tell you that this investigator—two investigators—made several recommendations and I think that we may have—

Mr. Marchese: I'm going through them.

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: I think there were about 19 or 20 recommendations.

Mr. Marchese: I'm going to go through a few.

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: And so you should.

Mr. Marchese: They're all here.

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: I think if their deficit were of the magnitude that they may have imagined initially—the investigators made more recommendations for more millions of dollars of savings.

Mr. Marchese: But you don't have an answer to my question. My question is very simple. You don't have an answer, is what I'm getting.

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: No, the investigators made a number of recommendations to assist the board.

Mr. Marchese: I know that. But I ask you specific questions, and they're very simple.

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: The board was investigated by these two individuals. These two individuals have a long history in education. They tabled a report of recommendations. The recommendations are not the ministry's recommendations.

Mr. Marchese: You're quite right. When a minister hires an investigator, with the trust that they have in the investigator, and that individual makes recommendations to deal with a deficit that clearly affects education, you've got a problem in terms of how you are going to deal with it, because he's saying they need to make program cuts. You keep rambling about other things rather than answering the questions.

Another recommendation made by your investigator, someone you know very well, says that your investigators recommend firing vice-principals to achieve savings of \$2 million. How many vice-principals would have to be dismissed to achieve these savings?

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: Again, this investigator made some 20 recommendations. This individual is from education. His recommendations are not mine. They both tabled 20, various things that they could look at.

Mr. Marchese: I know. I'm going through them.

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: I think you should go through them.

Mr. Marchese: Minister, I—

The Chair: Mr. Marchese, one minute.

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: I suggest to you—

Mr. Marchese: I find it difficult that you find it difficult to comprehend. You're a minister of the crown. If you can't understand my questions, we are in trouble.

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: I think that if I had been the investigator, I might have come up with a separate list.

Mr. Marchese: Do you believe the vice-principals serve an important role in the school setting or are they superfluous?

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: [*inaudible*] ... becoming a smaller issue every day.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Marchese.

Mr. Marchese: We will come back to this, Chair. Thank you so much.

The Chair: I appreciate that.

Minister, we now have until 6 of the clock. If you wish to do any commentary—

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: Is this all my time?

The Chair: —you now have 30 minutes. It's hard to believe, but you're there.

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: Stop looking so excited about that.

I brought a number of notes, and you'll forgive me for wanting to refer to my notes, because there's so much good news in education.

But I do want to respond to a couple of comments that have been made here. One of them was made by an educator, an individual who is a teacher by profession and member of the NDP. He suggested that our government is somehow skewing scoring and all of this. Can we be clear? The last government set up this testing. First of all, the member opposite was suggesting that they somehow tainted the results. I've got to be honest with the member from Trinity-Spadina: They absolutely did not skew the results—because the results were poor. If they were going to use them to advantage, I think the Conservative MPPs here would admit that they didn't do a very good job of skewing, if they were going to skew them. Not only that, over their term, the numbers didn't go up. You would have shown, at minimum, a constant increase, and in fact it stalled. So no, the numbers weren't skewed. I would love to be able to say that that's what the previous government had done.

Moreover, to this particular MPP who is asking about our ministry and whether it's politicizing the use of testing etc., the EQAO is chaired by none other than Dr. Charles Pascal, who was the Deputy Minister of Education under the NDP government, in particular selected to work with Dave Cooke, another MPP from the Windsor area of that time. I find it surprising that he would make commentary around the politicization of scoring and testing, but I think that is a worldwide discussion. I will tell you that our own government has scoured the world to see what is happening in education, to know that we're doing the very best, the very latest and the most innovative in education.

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You mentioned something as well about a calculator. I have to say that for many years now students have been using calculators in classrooms and on tests. I'm not at all surprised that they were being used in any of that testing. We're probably surprised because we're of a different age, frankly. We had to memorize our times tables, and I'm not certain that they continue to do that. Some of the

members might have been using an abacus, frankly, when they were going through the system. I don't know.

But in any event, I want to say that, overall, it has been two and a half years, and I'm tremendously proud of our record in that time. I can tell you that in discussions with people, some of them are saying, "Okay, let's stop and take a breath now. We've got so much great change; let's take some time to internalize all of this," and yet just now is the time that we've got to start laying on the accelerator and say, "We're not done yet. We have more to go."

Setting a goal of 75%, achieving 70%, on those literacy scores—I think we need to go higher, and I think that may well be in our second mandate. I certainly hope we have that, because that's not what we had under the last government. We had 52% of our kids scoring at that level. That, in my view, is an appalling level of success. Not only that, it was very reflective of the mood of the time, and I think it's fair to say that our mood in education has changed dramatically. There is a hopefulness today in that classroom.

I've been going to classrooms since my own election in 1995. I have gone relentlessly more than once a year, twice maybe. At the time, it was grade 10 classes, and I'd go to talk about government. Now I'm going to grade 5 classes to talk about government in a whole different way, but in any event there is a dramatic shift in how people feel in that classroom. We had teachers here today at Queen's Park who brought in their classes and I asked the kids, "What do you think about your teachers here?" They were cheering with their teachers. I could see that the teachers were smiling—teachers prepared to go the extra mile.

We've got some markers that I say we should use to score how well we're doing in developing our partnerships. We have had thousands of teachers who during these past summers have given voluntarily of their time to come in for training to prepare for the next school year. That is telling, in my view, of how people feel about what it is they're doing. Here's what teachers have said to me: "Finally, I feel like I'm being appreciated. I feel like I'm being treated with respect. I feel like I'm being treated as a professional." I think that's important. That's the only way we're going to be able to call them around the table and use their expertise to say, "How are we going to do better for those kids?"

I started early on to say that we had better be changing. Education is a constant changing, roiling kind of an organization. My deputy knows this better probably than most in the area of educational thinking, the philosophy of education, what's happening. He has been a deputy in other parts of Canada, affiliated with OISE here, which leads the nation in thinking about how we get that education right. I think it's fair to say that, as he travels all over Ontario and meets face to face with teachers, it's palpable, the excitement that's out there.

I've brought with me and I expect to share with you over the course of these next 10 hours during this committee—many of you are maybe regretting that you ever

called this ministry to estimates, but I have a host of good-news stories that I'm going to share with you, some of them in your own ridings, stories of success of programs and what it means for kids.

If the Chair could just share with me how much time I have left now.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Wayne Arthurs): Twenty-five minutes, Minister.

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: Oh, I think I'm going to have time to get into so many of these good-news stories even now, as soon as I have them sent over to me.

On what would be considered student success and what our plans are for student success, some of the things that we've done in funding lighthouse projects, really great ideas that are going out there that need just a little bit of seed money, a little bit of investment to get a tremendous result, where we're taking kids in rural parts of Ontario, urban communities, what we call "lighthouse projects" that we're going to say, "Are these working? Is this something that should be spread out across Ontario?" because it works.

In the area of co-op education: some very creative partnerships out there.

I'd like to talk about the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat as we move forward in these 10 hours of estimates, because I think it's time we started talking about quality in education. We have an education leader in Avis Glaze, who runs this secretariat. She is a force to be reckoned with in education. I heard of her long before I became Minister of Education. Everyone marvels when they interact with this woman. She has a way to turn the light on in that classroom and have teachers so motivated with these great concepts of getting kids to read and understand numbers. This simply has not been the focus before in education.

In fairness, the Conservative education ministers have been focused on the finances. Quite frankly, they weren't elected on education policies, so of course we didn't get any, other than us, being very particular, looking at the bottom line for education and seeing the cuts happening in education. It wasn't about the quality. I do believe that that is the difference in our government.

Our education Premier has a magnificent story. If you don't mind my telling it, I'd like to do that.

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): What if we did?

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: I think you're going to enjoy this story.

I want to tell you why my Premier is the education Premier. This is important. We had a woman who, in about the 1920s, arrived in Ontario. She had six children; small girls, all of them. Her husband left her, and she was left to clean houses to get by with six kids. One of those kids got married and had 10 more. One of those kids became the Premier of Ontario.

I want to know how in Ontario in one generation you have a family, uneducated, poor, struggling, scrambling to make ends meet, that manages to have that child who will go on to university, become a nurse by profession,

who marries another individual of a similar background whose child becomes the Premier of Ontario. That's our Premier today, Dalton McGuinty.

The only reason that that happens in this province is the public education system. If you want to know what drives the Premier, why public education is at the very root of what we are going to do as a Liberal government, it's because of that story, because our public education system, as excellent as it is, levels the playing field for every kid. No matter where you come from, whether your parents are poor, whether they work or don't work, it doesn't matter. We're going to level the playing field and give that kid every single opportunity to achieve that child's dreams. I think that's very telling.

I'll tell you that I never heard a speech about any of those goals or that quality in the public system from the last government. I respect they weren't elected on that as a platform, but there are some fundamentals about what government is meant to provide that I think are telling about our whole society, and one of them is about education. It is one of the most important services delivered by the Ontario government. I think we're doing very well for that.

The story of our Premier, where in one generation we can watch that kind of leap and achievement—we have a Premier with three university degrees, with a tremendous level of professionalism, who worked while he was going to school, who worked when he was in university, who managed to afford university tuition. All of those 10 kids in that McGuinty clan had to work, but all of them managed to achieve the level of education of their choosing. Most of them achieved one or more university degrees. I just think that's remarkable.

All of us will have a story. Just because of how young Ontario still is in the scope of the world, we all have that same kind of story. All of the people who left northern Italy, where my family came from, came post-Second World War with no job. They came for economic reasons. There was very little carpentry going around in northern Italy to keep my father there. He wasn't able, in any way, to achieve a serious public education in that country, but I'll tell you what he expected of his own kids: that we would achieve the very highest level. Frankly, in those days there wasn't going to be much opportunity to say no to that either in our family. The point was that he wouldn't have been able to afford it, had it been in a different country, but he could because he was in Ontario.

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I think that's very telling that in one generation in my own city, in my own family we have that kind of a leap from where most individuals receiving at least a grade 3 in one generation can leap to a university-level education in one family. I find that utterly amazing with all the opportunities that are afforded to our generation, first-generation Canadians. Most of our battle is telling the story about public education and what it means for Canadians.

I'm glad that the member opposite agrees it's a great story and a great reason for us to be huge defenders of

public education. While we're talking about that, talk about why, in the last campaign of our government, when we became the government, we were so opposed to the introduction of private school tax credits. If we don't fundamentally get that piece right for public education, we can't even begin to look at those other opportunities. I'm not denying the availability of it existing in Ontario—it certainly does—but where our tax dollars are going to go is into a public education system for that levelling of the playing field, and it is going to be at an excellent level. It's not going to be mediocre. I think that's important to note.

The Premier announced last year, sometime in these past 12 months, and we'll be bringing it forward in this next year, the notion of the Premier's awards in education. What a great concept that is, where the Premier himself is going to be involved in targeting publicly those educators who are excellent in their field. I'll tell you, and I know you're smiling at this: This would never have happened if your government had still been the government, because the comparison is pretty stark. We had a Premier in the past who used taxpayers' money to fund advertising that really undercut the profession of teachers.

That was then. Today in Ontario, we have a Premier who's launching excellence awards in education. That's the difference. That's where we've come from. I think that also is very telling. It's important because it says, "That's what we're about."

I appreciate that it may be difficult to hear that we've had a rough history over the last 10 or so years. Let's remember that the cuts started in 1993 under an NDP government. In 1993, they all lost 5%. In budgets of that size, that is a significant amount of money. Again, there was no targeted type of cutting. It was just across the board, "Deal with it as you will," which is what the NDP government said to all of their transfer partners, and that's fine. It was very unhealthy. Then we got to 1995. At that time we were at about a \$14-billion total in the area of education, and there was just an out-and-out cut of \$2 billion. Again, no rhyme or reason or where it was going to come from; no review on how that was going to impact on the excellence of the quality of education for the child.

Here we are today with a significant plan called Excellence for All, which is now being implemented: a serious attempt, in very short order, to make the quality of education what it is we talk about. I know we need to talk about policies that boards have to contend with, flexibility of grants, what line to take what money out to make what work, but in the end it's going to be about primary class sizes being lower than when we started by a significant amount because our hard cap is at 20 and we've got about a 90% mark to reach that target, with 10% left for flexibility.

We're going to have fewer dropouts. Our Learning to 18 strategy is a significant challenge, and we're going to meet that challenge because it's important. It's not going to do any more for kids to leave without a high school graduation because we know what happens to them in the

future. So this is key. We're going to have better literacy and numeracy results; end of story.

I want to say that, two and a half years into the mandate, the former minister was driving this kind of change in this ministry, and it was working; establishing relationships with parents to say, "We know the bricks and mortar are important. Yes, the bread and butter of running the school system is important too. But we'd better get our eye on the ball about the system, which says we're going to have smaller class sizes for those primary grades so we have better one-on-one with our kids; we have better test scores—literacy and numeracy; and we have a lower dropout rate. We are going to restore public confidence in the public education system.

I think that is an important goal for us as well. Seventy-five per cent of the people in Ontario have no attachment to the public education system; they don't have kids in the system. Twenty-five per cent of us do. Twenty-five per cent of us had better believe that the system their kids are in is excellent, and the other 75%, all of whom are paying taxes for the benefit of these kids, have to know that their tax dollars are being well spent.

Are we going to have issues around whether a board spends too much in administration and not enough to drive to that lower primary class? Absolutely, we are. I'm prepared to have that discussion. We've come a long way between boards facing cuts and boards facing readjustment of budgets when they get tons of new money—that's the era we're in right now. This isn't a discussion about deficits across the board, cuts across the ministry. We've poured \$2 billion into the education system, so one board that is talking to us right now about having to balance a budget has \$100 million extra. This is a tremendous amount of money. Just to put this in a little bit of perspective: \$100 million in a total budget of \$700 million. I am not about to spend a lot of time arguing about why it is completely responsible for that budget to be balanced. Let's just make that clear, because that is a ridiculous amount of time to politicize a \$5-million to \$15-million deficit over a \$700-million budget.

I hope that parents who are watching this particular parade right now about that one board start to turn the channel, as they say, on what's going on when it comes to, are my kids graduating and at what percentage, are the literacy and numeracy test scores going up for my kid, are the primary classes smaller? That's what we want parents to ask. I don't think they're going to be prepared to talk about all the issues around the bread and butter of the schools, because do you know what? It's our job to get that part right. We'd better get on to those bigger issues, because that is the difference between a kid getting into university or not. How well that kid is doing at age 12 is going to matter in whether they get their choice of university, and their choice of university will depend on just how limited the scope might be for the field of study that child might want to have. I don't believe we should be limited in any way.

I know that some want to talk about whether it's important to focus on whether you're a B student or a C student. I bet, though, that every one of us will agree that

if your kid is an A student, your kid had better be getting As and our system had better be working to make that happen. If your child is going to achieve a C, then it's about time our system can say proudly that it is so excellent that every single opportunity is available to that kid regardless, because that kid will reach his or her potential.

I think it's time we had those discussions with parents. So when you hear that we have this whole parent engagement strategy, it really is the kind of discussion we have to have with them. Yes, the bus has to arrive; yes, the kid has to get to school by bus properly; yes, the board has to afford its transportation policy; yes, we need to do the bricks and mortar well; yes, we've got to address a salary gap that's been out of whack since the Conservative government created a funding formula that was never accurate in the first place—I agree. But if boards are going to come forward with those kinds of conversations, I'm asking the same questions that I'm asking of us as a government: Are we achieving smaller class sizes? We'd better. Are we getting better test scores on literacy and numeracy? We'd better. Are we having lower dropout rates? We'd better. As long as we're all doing that, we're going to roll up our sleeves and deal with those issues about the bread and butter of the system. Yeah, yeah, we'll get all that. But in an era of billions of dollars in investment in education, I don't accept that we can't balance our budgets in school boards.

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With this accounting change across the government where we now have adopted the deficits of our major transfer partners out there, their deficit is our deficit. So do you know what? As a ministry, we have a vested interest in making this work for every single board. I like to call Dufferin-Peel Catholic my new favourite board. I actually found the trustees there quite engaging and quite committed to those students. I am totally committed to working out the issues they have at that board, despite others wanting to make this some kind of political football or a war to see who can get in the ditch and fight the hardest. Frankly, I think I can, but that's beside the point. I think what we're going to realize is that we have absolutely no use for that. We're not spending time doing that; we're just going to get to work.

If the Chair would let me know how much time I have available, I want to wrap up.

Interjection.

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: Ten minutes? That's fabulous.

Interjection.

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: Eight? Great. I have eight minutes, Chair?

The Chair: Five.

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: Five. I think he's taken a few minutes from me.

The Chair: You're not coming up for air, so I thought I'd give you some time.

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: I'm clearly excited about the job at hand, and I hope that becomes obvious to all the committee members here.

For two and a half years, what was really important to me was how my Windsor schools were doing; that's the area I have represented for the last 11 years or so. I have to tell you again that whether it's in the schoolyard, whether it's parents, whether it's the directors or the staff at my boards in Windsor, there's a real hopefulness, a look on teachers' faces that says, "I love being here."

Do you know that our success is causing some other problems? For example, when we do our calculations on how many teachers might retire over time, we've actually miscalculated. They're not retiring. Where they had an opportunity to move out early, which they were frankly doing in droves under the Conservative government, that is stopping now to the extent that it's causing us some issues. Nancy has to do a lot more work with her eraser to change the numbers because they're not retiring because they're happy to be in that classroom. I think what actually brings them to education, which quite frankly is like a vocation—you're not going to be there for the money; you're pretty well capped. Let's say it like that. They're staying because they actually know they're making a difference.

I saw a teacher on Sunday night at the Distillery in downtown Toronto who ran a program called Shakespeareance. It was fantastic. They took these kids from the Toronto school board and with five practices, five short rehearsals, they did this exposé on Shakespeare. My deputy was there. It was a tremendous opportunity to see. They take that show on the road and go into tens of schools each year in different areas around Ontario and get everybody excited about the written word. As complicated as Shakespeare can be, they have a way of getting kids excited about English literature, excited about Shakespeare, and they literally bring those words alive for them, and the kids are totally into Shakespeare. I'll bet the bunch from our generation could have used Shakespeareance in their lives. We would have been a lot better if we had had that kind of excitement from that teacher. I guess that's the point.

I went to chat with the people in that audience and I said, "Our government believes in art, music and phys. ed. in our classrooms. It's all part of education." It's not just about the three Rs, like the last government liked to say; it's about everything. It's about developing creativity in those kids to make them think.

I remember the Mike Harris years. Do you know that a group of CEOs came here to Queen's Park and held a press conference? They were CEOs of some of the biggest companies in Canada, and they came here with one message. That one message was, "I'm an arts student." That's what they said. Do you remember that? They came to say, "We only hire people who have the ability for creative thinking." These big CEOs from these companies were able to stand there and defend that in their history of education because arts and music and phys. ed. and all the creativity that comes from putting that in the classroom also meant we were going to get better students.

It was at least five or six years ago, right at the height of the cuts the Conservative government was making to

education, when those went by the wayside almost right away. So I've got to tell you that it's pretty exciting to have a Premier who believes that those belong back in the classroom, that we develop these young minds in all kinds of different ways. Just think about the kinds of CEOs we're going to have in the future because of it.

I have to say that what we have had in about 10 years of education, the first ones that I was a representative to watch, is a whole generation of children who know things like the definition of "work to rule." That's your legacy. How awful is that? I've got kids in my own family who can define "work to rule." I never knew what that was. That was not my history in my school or in those years, and yet that's what kids today know, because in those Conservative years, we had year after year of disruption after disruption and instability with our teaching profession.

That hasn't happened since we got here. That has meant more and more time for peace and stability to be effective so that all that time can be poured into what

they really want to be doing with kids: raising literacy and numeracy numbers, really focusing on that creativity around kids, doing the kinds of things that kept people like me in school at all, which is all extracurricular activities, whether it was sports or drama or whatever. That is where we're getting back to, and it is a very exciting time to be part of a government that is doing that.

I probably should end my remarks now and tell the colleagues from my own party how excited we are to be the government that is delivering this for kids. In 10 or 20 years, all of us are going to look back and say, "This term was the watershed moment in education." Now that we're stepping on the gas, we are not slowing down. There is some monumental change going on, and it is all positive. Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. This committee stands adjourned until immediately following routine proceedings tomorrow in room 228.

The committee adjourned at 1756.

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