

Legislative  
Assembly  
of Ontario



Assemblée  
législative  
de l'Ontario

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## **Official Report of Debates (Hansard)**

SP-15

## **Journal des débats (Hansard)**

SP-15

### **Standing Committee on Social Policy**

Better Schools and Student  
Outcomes Act, 2023

Selection of estimates

1<sup>st</sup> Session  
43<sup>rd</sup> Parliament

Monday 8 May 2023

### **Comité permanent de la politique sociale**

Loi de 2023 sur l'amélioration  
des écoles et du rendement  
des élèves

Sélection des budgets  
des dépenses

1<sup>re</sup> session  
43<sup>e</sup> législature

Lundi 8 mai 2023

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Chair: Brian Riddell  
Clerk: Lesley Flores

Président : Brian Riddell  
Greffière : Lesley Flores

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## CONTENTS

Monday 8 May 2023

Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act, 2023, Bill 98, Mr. Lecce / Loi de 2023 sur l'amélioration des écoles et du rendement des élèves, projet de loi 98, M. Lecce.....	SP-373
Statement by the minister and responses.....	SP-373
Hon. Stephen Lecce	
Ms. Nancy Naylor	
Ontario Federation of Home and School Associations; Dyslexia Canada; Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation.....	SP-383
Ms. Teresa Lopez	
Ms. Alicia Smith	
Ms. Karen Littlewood	
Ontario Association of Parents in Catholic Education; Federation of Canadian Secondary Students; Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario .....	SP-393
Mr. Joe Perri	
Mr. Bruce Yu	
Ms. Karen Brown	
Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association; School Bus Ontario; Mr. Mike Ramsay .....	SP-403
Ms. Barbara Dobrowolski	
Ms. Nancy Daigneault	
Ontario Autism Coalition; Ms. Kathy McDonald; Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens.....	SP-412
Ms. Kate Dudley-Logue	
Mme Anne Vinet-Roy	
Ontario Human Rights Commission; Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association; Mr. Michael Barrett .....	SP-422
Ms. Patricia DeGuire	
Mr. Patrick Daly	
Ms. Nika Farahani	
Selection of estimates .....	SP-431



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON  
SOCIAL POLICY**

**COMITÉ PERMANENT DE  
LA POLITIQUE SOCIALE**

Monday 8 May 2023

Lundi 8 mai 2023

*The committee met at 0900 in committee room 2.*

**BETTER SCHOOLS AND STUDENT  
OUTCOMES ACT, 2023**

**LOI DE 2023 SUR L'AMÉLIORATION  
DES ÉCOLES ET DU RENDEMENT  
DES ÉLÈVES**

Consideration of the following bill:

Bill 98, An Act to amend various Acts relating to education and child care / Projet de loi 98, Loi modifiant diverses lois en ce qui concerne l'éducation et la garde d'enfants.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Good morning, everyone. I call this meeting of the Standing Committee on Social Policy to order. We are here for public hearings on Bill 98, An Act to amend various Acts relating to education and child care.

As a reminder, the deadline for written submissions is 7 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time on Tuesday, May 9, 2023. Legislative research has been requested to provide committee members with a summary of oral presentations and written submissions as soon as possible—followed by the written submission deadline.

The deadline for filing amendments to the bill is 5 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time on Thursday, May 11, 2023.

The Clerk of the Committee has distributed today's meeting documents with you via SharePoint.

To ensure that everyone who speaks is heard and understood, it is important that everyone speaks slowly and clearly. Please wait until I recognize you before starting to speak.

For virtual participants on Zoom, after I have recognized you, there may be a brief delay before your audio and video are ready. Please take a brief pause before speaking. In order to ensure optimum sound quality, virtual participants are encouraged to use headphones or microphones, if possible.

As always, all comments should go through the Chair. Are there any questions before we begin?

**STATEMENT BY THE MINISTER  
AND RESPONSES**

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** I will now call on the Honourable Stephen Lecce, Minister of Education.

**Hon. Stephen Lecce:** Good morning, colleagues. Thank you to the Standing Committee on Social Policy for this opportunity to appear as the first presenter during the public

hearings on Bill 98, the Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act.

First, I would like to take an opportunity to thank all members from both the government and the official opposition who have participated in the second reading debate, with a special thank you to parliamentary assistant Patrice Barnes, the member for Ajax, and the former parliamentary assistant, Matt Rae, for exceptional work in supporting the introduction of the bill.

I also want to thank the Deputy Minister of Education, Nancy Naylor, who's here with me this morning, as well as assistant deputy ministers Phil Graham, Andrew Davis, Yael Ginsler and Didem Proulx for joining us virtually to answer questions and for their work on this bill.

I'm honoured to speak with you today about the Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act and how it will help Ontario's students succeed and help our kids reach their full potential in a modern, changing, disrupted economy around us. If passed, this bill will propose legislative reform under four key statutes: first, of course, the Education Act; the Ontario College of Teachers Act; the Early Childhood Educators Act; as well as the Ontarians with Disabilities Act.

The legislation is designed to improve and modernize our publicly funded education system, with a key focus on student achievement and to help prepare them for the jobs of tomorrow. That means ensuring that young people have the curriculum to support them as they move forward into lifelong success, with good-paying jobs in whatever path they take. To accomplish this, the province has made significant investment in the education system, including a record \$21.7 billion for the coming 2023-24 school year. It represents an increase of 2.7%, or nearly \$700 million, over last year. That's an increase in per pupil funding, funding per child—an increase for transportation, an increase for mental health, an increase for special education. We're increasing investment in reading, writing and math with a \$180-million strategy to support students, to build the math and literacy skills that are foundational for their success. We're also supporting nearly a thousand specialized educators in the classroom on those two fundamentals alone. The Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act will build on the investments we've made and continue our progress in developing a world-class education system that is uniformly focused on improving student outcomes and to prepare these students for lifelong success.

I want to acknowledge our publicly funded school system and the people who are there for our students: our

staff, our educators, our parents, everyone involved in the enterprise of helping to support a child. Overwhelmingly, we do good work. We should say that with confidence. We're proud of the investments. We're proud of the metrics of success, including increasing graduation rates, starting at around 85% some years ago, earlier on in our mandate, to 89% just a year ago. That's a positive trajectory we are on together, colleagues, and it is at the highest levels it has been in recent history. It's a focus and an outcome we've targeted to lift everyone up. It's why, for example, we destreamed the entire grade 9 curriculum, removed the barriers that impede progress. It's why we've expanded new mental health supports—an appropriate time to give a strong shout-out to the member from Burlington for her exceptional leadership in Ontario—strengthening mental health literacy in the classroom for every child. And of course, as we've asserted in the past, going back to basics: The message there is to strengthen the fundamental skills that matter most, not in any way denying the importance of other skills development—social-emotional development, among others. But yes, we do believe foundational skills of literacy and math—those anchors need to be mastered in the classroom as the first principle.

But even with that progress, there are still 15,000 students per year who are not graduating from high school within five years. We know that non-graduates in the province have a 5% higher rate of unemployment, a 13% lower rate of labour market participation and lower incomes than the provincial average. So, simply put, graduation is key to meaningful, lifelong success for all children in Ontario. Certainly, that is the aim. It's why it is time for us in government to challenge the status quo. Part of that aim is to give these kids an equal opportunity for success.

In addition, some school boards have consistently lagged behind on key student performance indicators, including on EQAO assessments, on graduation rates and student attendance. It's why we've devised this plan. It's why we brought forth the Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act: to directly respond to these challenges, to ensure our system performs better and more efficiently and to clearly establish the unifying mission of our ministry, of our school boards, of our staff and our schools, and that is the advancement of skills that matter to the success of students throughout the education system and, frankly, well throughout their lives.

We introduced this legislation in response to an overwhelming desire of parents to see the system of education refocused on what matters most. Our plan, through this legislation, focuses on three consequential pillars. The first is to ensure more accountability, more transparency for parents; better governance and leadership of our school boards and our administrators; and a commitment to build schools faster and to use our real estate portfolio for the needs of our children.

Of course, the overwhelming emphasis is to drive better outcomes, especially in the areas of reading, writing, math and graduation and attendance rates. That helps to explain the premise, the impetus, the driving force for our why. It is to increase the standards and, frankly, help ensure we

see better student outcomes. That's what we're trying to achieve. It's a mission, I think, that should unify us in this House.

With respect to accountability and transparency, we know there are some school boards that are not consistently working toward the same priorities. We introduced this legislation, the Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act, which would establish a provincial priorities framework to ensure that all school boards across the province are focused on delivering the government's key priorities on student achievement.

I see this as the anchor of the proposed legislation, the capacity for a democratically elected government of the people of this province to be able to set student achievement priorities on school boards. Most parents would think we have that authority. We should have that authority to set out ambitious targets focused on student achievement. I think that authority to set out a clear, unambiguous commitment to student achievement, to higher grad rates, to higher success rates of reading, writing and math, to higher attendance rates—it allows the minister to send a signal to school boards that these education priorities are Ontario's priorities for each and every student, irrespective of where they choose to live or go to school. The legislation would, if passed, allow governments to issue those strategic priorities to boards at least once every three years to focus on that student achievement priority.

#### 0910

In turn, boards would be required to develop and to post trustee-approved plans consistent with these priorities and publicly report on their performance annually. Boards would also be required, for the first time, to regularly engage with parents for their feedback on these plans, as well as report on progress and on the results. Because this is about accountability. These plans would be developed with their communities and posted publicly, allowing the ministry to be able to benchmark success according to these provincial priorities and these student outcomes.

If any boards are struggling to achieve these provincial priorities, the government has tools to act, including the ability to deploy advisers to help them find solutions, to improve standards and to help ensure that these data points become part of our collective history, where we have better outcomes, meeting or above provincial standards.

I don't think that is a political imperative; I think it is a broader social imperative, an economic imperative to help lift up every child in Ontario, particularly those that have disproportionately not been meeting provincial standards. Often, there are systemic barriers that have created many of these challenges and it is our job to continue to counter them through legislation, regulation and through action, which is what the government is doing today.

In addition, colleagues, we're proposing to strengthen accountability to require school boards, via proposed regulation—we'll be consulting on this, but really, the aim is to be more transparent about their spending and how it supports student outcomes. We're spending historic amounts to fund Ontario's education system, so we want to make sure people know exactly where their tax dollars are being

expended, because often parents wonder where all this money goes. We can build up their confidence by letting them know exactly where we're spending their dollars and why we're spending them. We're proposing enhanced school board financial reporting on funding and spending, planned and actuals, while also taking steps to limit activities that could put them at financial risk.

School boards also play a significant role in the delivery of child care: 64% of our child care spaces are actually physically in and co-located in a school. It would be the right time for me to thank the member from Ajax for exceptional work in helping to implement our child care agreement with the federal government, which has allowed the province to cut fees by roughly 50% on average this year, with a commitment to build 86,000 spaces. We launched the start-up grants just months ago because of the leadership of the parliamentary assistant. I think this is really important as we try to make life more affordable for parents, for our education staff, for everyone involved in raising a young child.

Part of our strategy in the legislation is to help remove the silos that exist within government. One of these areas for improvement is proposing to formalize a requirement for school boards to co-operate with municipalities to both build child care and school planning for their communities at the front end. We're trying to create a culture where school boards work with their municipal governments, and likewise our child care division does the same.

We're on track to build 86,000 new spaces over the coming years to meet the needs of families. Because of our reduced fees for the people of Ontario, with a roughly 50% savings, anywhere between \$8,000 and \$10,000 per year per family, we know we're making a difference. We need school boards and municipalities to work together in good faith in the interests of building schools, including new child care spaces, working faster to build where the growth is.

We've spoken as well in this bill about the need for skilled trades to build those schools and to build the entire province, and to accelerate the pathways for some students who may not graduate in Ontario. Despite the increasing graduation rate under our government—and that is very good—there still is 11% of students who are not graduating in the province. I do believe in providing a path to a credential to lead students to a good job, to a productive life in this country. It's why we're looking at accelerating apprenticeship pathways into the skilled trades directly for some students, starting in grade 11 or 12. After our previously announced consultation, the bill will enable that transition. Of course, we will continue to consult to get this right, but this bill enables that transition.

One of the areas we hear often in the news is just about some of the challenges with respect to the governance of our school boards. This has been a reality in Ontario for many years under many governments. Approximately 700 trustees right now provide local governance over Ontario's \$32-billion publicly funded school system. We recognize there is inconsistency in the skills and training of our school board trustees. That's where the government of Ontario

can step in. We believe there needs to be provincial standards when it comes to the code of conduct to provide consistency and stability for those who rely on their leadership.

Disputes among school board trustees are, at times, costly. They're time-consuming, and they detract attention from the primary duty to promote student achievement. We've all heard of examples of dysfunction. That is not the norm in every community, obviously, but many of you have heard of Peel, where the province had to step in literally to supervise the board on the basis of school board trustee dysfunction. That is exactly what the report called it, and that's a problem. We just lifted supervision after many years, and that shouldn't have been a reality in one of the largest school boards in the country.

So we're proposing in this legislation to amend the Education Act to require all trustees to undergo professional leadership governance training so that they understand how to be effective and professional leaders in their space that's focused on student achievement too.

Additionally, we're going to require all boards of trustees to adopt a provincial code of conduct, finally standardizing codes of conduct, which currently vary from board to board in both content and in application. That is an issue in and of itself. The Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act would produce an impartial provincial integrity commissioner-led process to resolve code of conduct complaints across the province in a more fair, timely and transparent manner.

The proposed legislation would also support directors of education through enhanced standardized training and by establishing the authority to make future regulations to introduce a standardized performance assessment framework for all directors of education. It would require boards to consider their progress on provincial priorities in their performance appraisals. We think that is important, creating some metrics—measurable ways by which we can understand progress or regression on those priorities, so that the focus remains on helping students succeed on the student achievement priority list.

Taken together, we think these reforms will enable more effective governance and leadership in our education system with a sharpened focus on the first priority, our principal why, which is to improve student outcomes.

There's been a great deal of discourse around capital assets around our schools, where we've made a commitment in this legislation to maximize our real estate portfolio for the benefit of our kids. School boards have roughly a value of \$64 billion in real estate. They're literally one of the largest real estate holders in the country. Currently, we don't have in the ministry a clear inventory of what is and what is not available for educational purposes. We don't really know what is being used for schools, what schools are being used for learning, and which ones are sitting empty or rented or being used as storage or administration. Some schools are being used as administrative buildings and many are rented out.

We need to understand the portfolio across the province—what is available to put to use for the benefit of

educational purposes. We have so many examples in all of our communities where boards are just longing for a parcel of land to build because they have explosive growth, but they are denied that ability either because market conditions are so expensive or because other coterminous boards are not prepared to sell an asset, a school that is literally sitting empty. I do think someone in this province has to take some leadership in saying, “Look, those assets should be put to use for the purpose of publicly funded education.” That’s why we’re here, in part to better use those assets and to help children access quality schools in their communities.

You will all know that we invest nearly \$500 million in major funding for new and improved schools as part of our broader capital commitments every year. It includes, by the way, about 100 schools being built as we speak, 200 in the pipeline in small towns and big cities across the province, and I know there’s many more to do. Coupled with the government’s commitment to build over 1.5 million homes over the next 10 years, it’s actually more important than ever that we get this right, that we maximize the use of our spaces and the tax dollars of Ontario.

If passed, the Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act would focus on building modern schools faster by better utilizing school capacity and enhancing accountability and transparency.

**0920**

We would establish a framework for property deemed “excess” and not needed to meet current or future pupil accommodation needs. Once identified as “excess,” the property could be used for the needs of other local school boards. And if it’s not needed by the other school boards, it could be utilized for important provincial priorities such as long-term care. This would allow us to make the best use of the land we have available and to make sure that school boards have the resources they need with respect to the growth.

Our proposed amendments would give myself, as minister, the ability to direct school boards to enter into arrangements to maximize the use of available class spaces, where appropriate, so that students can attend schools as close to home as possible. We’re committed to enacting this provision after meaningful consultation with school board partners. We really want to emphasize that, most especially with respect to this provision on school capital.

We’re also going to require school boards to collaborate with municipal planning authorities to ensure better planning for students and families across the province. To support the growing needs for school capacity in urban and high-growth areas where land is limited, we would establish a provincial framework that reduces barriers for boards to facilitate agreements for schools in multi-use buildings such as condo towers. Many members of this committee will—

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Minister, you have one minute.

**Hon. Stephen Lecce:** Okay. I’ll conclude, Chair, with a recognition that it shouldn’t take a decade to build a school.

This bill will allow us to fast-track approvals. It will enable and encourage joint-use projects. It will change the culture of sharing educational assets for educational purposes. Writ large, it allows us to meet the needs of growth across Ontario, as we have 300,000 individuals moving to the province every year for the next decade.

Overall, this bill, I think, helps to strengthen accountability, empowers the voice of parents, and refocuses the publicly funded education system on student achievement. We’ve received a great deal of support from many stakeholders and parents who have urged us to get on with this bill. So we appreciate the opportunity to present today and speak about our why and emphasize the importance of consultation on the way forward as a government.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Thank you for your presentation, Minister.

Do the members of the committee wish to allow more than one speaker from the Ministry of Education to present in person? All those in favour, please put their hand up. All those opposed?

The questions will be divided into two rounds of seven and a half minutes for the government members, two rounds of seven and a half minutes for the official opposition members, and two rounds of five minutes for the independent members of the committee. I will provide reminders of the time remaining during the presentations and questions.

Questions from the government? I recognize MPP Quinn.

**Mr. Nolan Quinn:** I know the minister still had some more remarks.

Would you want to finish your remarks before I ask a question?

**Hon. Stephen Lecce:** Let’s just get into the questions. Thank you for that. I appreciate it.

**Mr. Nolan Quinn:** Minister, Ontario schools have an incredibly powerful and important job to use provincial tax dollars and directions in order to help Ontario students acquire the life and job skills they need to succeed now and in the future. However, far too often, we see some school boards neglecting to improve student achievement. It is my belief, along with many of my constituents and colleagues, that there is no higher purpose for any part of Ontario’s education system than to support student achievement and increase their ability, skills and knowledge, full stop.

Can you explain how this bill will help to refocus school boards on improving student achievement and outcomes?

**Hon. Stephen Lecce:** I appreciate the question from MPP Quinn and an opportunity to expand upon why we believe student achievement outcomes need to be a critical anchor of our work in the publicly funded school system.

Both before the pandemic, but most especially after, we have all seen regression in some of the fundamental skills, life skills, the development of young people, literacy in mathematics. EQAO is a powerful baseline of assessment for grades 3, 6 and, most acutely, in grade 9, where we have seen a reduction in skills and in performance and scores. Educators in the classroom speak about regression around social development of children and their ability to communicate, to socialize, to collaborate, and we’re seeing some

behavioural challenges, mental health challenges and other issues in the classroom.

We have seen in some communities higher rates of absenteeism of students, and, of course, while we're moving in the right direction on graduation rates, we still have disproportionate levels and higher rates among some communities—Indigenous, Black and other racialized communities. So the aim today, the purpose of the bill, is to create a meaningful path for those kids most marginalized—but frankly, all kids—to optimize their full potential, to unleash their full potential, and to help at least get them at the provincial standards.

Any objective person who has seen the data, particularly in reading, writing and math—but there's other data points too—I think would come to a reasonable conclusion that the focus of the education system on the years going forward, in addition to supporting inclusive, safe schools and mental health and those elements that are critical—when it comes to academics, we need the systems, the school boards, the educators, every classroom to emphasize the improvements on reading, writing and math, because we have a patchwork of systems. Today, 72 local boards of government are doing, frankly, their own thing. As a minister, as a provincial government, our aim is to create some standards. We serve all families, and so that vision and some authorities have to be aligned with that to make sure that we can set those standards and create some public-facing metrics associated with improvement.

It's also partially why in this proposed legislation you will see an emphasis on better training of the teacher candidates, working with the faculties of education for the first time to synergize what they do with what we do to emphasize the front-end mental health special education, the signs of leadership and, of course, literacy and math, particularly literacy according to the new curriculum, which will be unveiled for this September, that aligns with the Ontario Human Rights Commission's Right to Read report, which called for that reform, called for a new curriculum, called for standardized literacy assessments of every child.

In short, I'd submit that the emphasis is to make sure that we better train the teacher, that we strengthen leadership development of our directors of education, that we improve the training of our trustees too—all of whom could refocus their energies on student achievement. I think if we do that, if we master those fundamental skills, the rest will follow. But I think, for many young people, we still see illiteracy. We still see a third of students graduating grade 12—they will get their physical diploma, but they will not be at the provincial standard, according to various voices within the literacy space. Dyslexia Canada has pointed at this data point: They may graduate, but they're not at the literacy level.

The question for parliamentarians is: Can we play a role, a constructive role, in focusing the system on lifting those standards? I think we can, and I think part of this legislation, as it's proposed, is to consult with and listen to the sector on the way forward, on how we do that. But the vision, the strategic imperative, is lifting those standards, and I think, honestly, there's a lot of support for that provision, especially from many parents who, at no fault of

the educator, have seen their kid—we see this around the OECD. It's not common in Ontario; it's not a phenomenon just here in Ontario. It's around the world. It's across the country. Data would suggest we're actually not the worst performer relative to many in Canada, but that's still not an inspiring benchmark. I think we want to be the leader. We want to help our kids graduate with a competitive edge, and that's why we think this provision, this authority, the ability of the province and the minister to set that authority, to benchmark success through a board improvement plan, which is publicly developed with parents and publicly posted—we now have authorities to make sure that school boards are actually meeting and fulfilling and aligning their local plans with the provincial priority. That is a good thing, and I think many families and children will benefit from that focus and that broader alignment.

**Mr. Nolan Quinn:** Thank you, Minister.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** I recognize MPP Pierre. 0930

**Ms. Natalie Pierre:** Good morning, Minister. Thank you very much for your remarks. This government was elected to deliver for the people of Ontario—

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** The government side has one more minute.

**Ms. Natalie Pierre:**—better outcomes for students and parents. I've heard from multiple constituents in my riding who have questions about how school boards are allocating funding.

Can you tell us exactly how increased school board transparency and funding will help parents and students succeed?

**Hon. Stephen Lecce:** We think transparency is important. It's why, in part, we recognize that \$13 of every \$100 of taxpayer dollars goes to school boards. We recognize it's a significant amount of individuals paying taxes for publicly funded schools. We just think it's a basic principle: Parents should see where the dollars go and the results of those investments. That's, in part, why we're suggesting that there will be better public reporting on funding.

We also believe part of this aim of transparency is also making sure we have the tools and the assessments in place. It's why we've launched, for September of this year, the largest-in-Canada screening assessment program. We want to democratize or create some sense of public transparency associated with—

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Thank you. The time is up.

Now we will turn to the official opposition. I recognize MPP Pasma.

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** Thank you for being here this morning, Minister. I certainly agree, both as a parent and as someone who has spoken to thousands of parents and teachers and education workers over the past year, that our kids are struggling with their mental health, with their social skills, with their education. What I'm completely baffled by, though, is the solution you've come up with, which is to direct school boards to do better with no additional resources to bring down class sizes, no additional resources to address the fact that half of our schools have no mental health resources at all, and no additional resources

to support the fact that many children with disabilities and special needs aren't actually even able to participate in our school system.

So I'm wondering, who specifically did you consult with before coming forward with this legislation, and what was the process of consultation?

**Hon. Stephen Lecce:** Thank you for the question. This coming school year, we have added over \$600 million in public investment for our schools. The increase is 2.7% of the GSN alone. Per student funding is up again. The overall Ministry of Education budget funding is up significantly when you compare to the former Liberals. You mentioned mental health: Premier Wynne, at the peak of spending in her election budget, was investing \$18 million in school mental health; it's \$114 million today. The estimates would demonstrate that. It's really not a matter of debate.

We're making those investments because we recognize the demands are rising, and frankly, the insufficiency of investment of the former government. We have for four-plus years been in government, and I will tell you, there isn't a member of provincial Parliament—I certainly would hope all parties, but certainly Progressive Conservatives—that has not heard from the people of Ontario, both in the last election and, consequently, since then, who have urged government to refocus the education system on fundamental skills and to modernize the Education Act that hasn't been modernized in a generation. It's been 25 years since any government has taken the time to really ensure that that act that governs the education of our kids is reflective of the needs of kids today.

So we have undertaken meaningful, serious consultation to the voice of a constituency that often feels most isolated and, frankly, subordinated in the broader public discourse, and that's the voice of parents. I think a lot of parents, to my colleague, feel like their voice, the majority voice, was really the least heard, and part of our why is because we think parents want legislation before the House. They want government to take action to reflect their priorities.

We have all consulted in a significant way with parents, with staff and educators. We met with subject experts. I mean, we don't receive legislative support from organizations as diverse as the Ontario Federation of Home and Schools Associations and the Ontario Human Rights Commission, to the Dyslexia Canada association, to the head of the Canadian Foundation for Economic Education—you don't get support from school board associations or Community Literacy of Ontario and many others—unless there's some sound reflection of the priorities of those organizations in the bill.

Obviously, part of our commitment going forward is to continue consulting. In fact, in the legislation, to my colleague, I will note that the legislation actually requires, in the statute, consultation, particularly on the use of joint-use schools, and that authority would come into play upon proclamation following a good-faith consultation. So I assure you, we have listened, to parents most especially. Their voices are heard. This is a bill that reflects their priorities. But I get your point: We have to keep listening, which is why the legislation is written and designed to

require government to do that on the going forward, particularly as we develop regulations and we start to contemplate using some of the provisions of the bill.

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** What I didn't hear in there was any process of consultation. I have emails in my inbox from thousands of parents across the province who don't feel that you've listened to them, who don't feel you've gone to them to ask what they want for their children. What they're saying is that they are seeing their kids in crowded classrooms of 35 kids or more; they're seeing their kids diagnosed with mental health issues but there are no resources to support them in school; their kids aren't able to go to school because they don't have an education worker that allows their child to go to school. You can't learn reading and math if you're not actually even able to be at school.

If you wanted our kids to succeed, if you wanted them to be able to make up for the challenges of the past few years, then why would you not start by actually giving sufficient resources to our schools to address these challenges, resources that actually kept pace with the rate of inflation instead of falling \$1,200 per child behind the rate of inflation over the last five years?

**Hon. Stephen Lecce:** Well, we do believe that we have to do both, right? We can invest more in the publicly funded school system and also concurrently expect more, and that's what the legislation is, the expectation part, and the investment comes from our budgetary investments annually. We have increased funding this year. We're proud to do that—over \$600 million additional funding for this September alone. We know there's more to do. It's why we announced \$100 million in literacy.

There's just no province—I mean, if I look, to my colleagues, in BC, the New Democratic government in BC is not investing in a literacy program. They're not screening every child in senior kindergarten, grades 1 and 2. We are. We have the most expansive program because we follow the subject matter experts, which, in this case, was the Ontario Human Rights Commission through a Right to Read report. I hope we all will agree with the premise of that report, which was that the former Liberal government's curriculum was not ensuring all children were able to succeed when it comes to literacy, particularly kids with intellectual or developmental disabilities. So we're going to leverage the perspective of experts along the way. We're going to listen to parents.

But I would, respectfully, just counter with a notation that the investment in publicly funded schools is up. I mean, there are 8,000 more staff in publicly funded schools. There are 2,000 teachers being funded, 1,000 of which are for literacy and math this coming September alone; another 1,000, roughly—just under 1,000—on destreamed courses in the entire grade 9 curricula. I think that's going to really make a difference.

Look, in addition to funding more, because I think there's a constant refrain on funding, you talk about access to staff—

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** The official opposition has one minute left.

**Hon. Stephen Lecce:** There's a provision in the bill, to my colleague, just very briefly, that speaks to processing standards in the Ontario College of Teachers. I think one area where we would agree is that it shouldn't take twice the rate of our friends in BC to process and certify an educator from around the world. It takes more than twice the time, and so this bill will require a shortening of the days to certify so we can get more good educators in front of the classroom.

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** We have lost more teachers in the past five years than what your new investments will be bringing into schools over the next year. I think without providing sufficient resources to our school boards but telling them you want them to focus on student success is just setting them up to fail. I'm wondering if you can name one single school board in this province that is not interested in student outcomes and student success.

**Hon. Stephen Lecce:** Well, I can name 10 school boards that have been at the bottom quintile of performance for the last decade. When you have school boards who have for a decade—

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** That concludes round one. Thank you very much. We will now go to round—

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** I've got a question for you, Chair. I know I need the support of my colleagues, but seeing as the independents aren't here, could we have their five minutes? You don't get a chance to talk to the minister that often, and I'm wondering if my colleagues on the other side wouldn't mind us expanding our opportunity to talk to—

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Thoughts? You're okay with it?

**Mr. Matthew Rae:** I want to speak, Chair. I don't know, if I speak, if you've got to recognize me, Chair.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** We'll have a vote on it. Everyone for it, put their hand up.

**Mr. Matthew Rae:** I just wanted to speak, Chair.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Sorry, I can't hear you very well.

**Mr. Matthew Rae:** Thank you, Chair.

Respectfully, to my colleague across the way, the independent members chose not to show up. That was decided at committee beforehand. I don't want to speak for everyone on the government side, but I think—

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** So we will not be doing that. We'll be going to round two.

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** That's not the way it's done.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Okay, let's vote. Everyone—

*Interjection.*

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** I recognize MPP Martin.

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** Perhaps another way of proceeding, if the independents do not show up—because they may show up later—is to split the extra time between the two sides.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** I recognize MPP Gretzky.

**Mrs. Lisa Gretzky:** I believe that we're looking at, likely, the independents not coming. I think it's important

that we use up every opportunity and every minute we have in these proceedings—in any committee hearing—to be able to ask questions of the ministers when they do come, but also of any presenter, frankly. Everybody's time is valuable, including ours and every single presenter's. So I think it is important that we use up the time since the independents have given us the opportunity to use the time that they are choosing not to use.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Is everyone in favour of splitting the independents' time between the two groups? If so, please put your hand up—

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** Sorry, can we just qualify “unless an independent member shows up”—

*Interjection.*

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Yes, let's have a short recess.

*The committee recessed from 0941 to 0944.*

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Let's resume. Does the committee agree that if an independent member is not present, the time allotted to the independent member will be split evenly between the government and the official opposition? Okay, it's passed.

Let's go on to round two. The government will have seven and a half minutes. I recognize MPP Pierre.

**Ms. Natalie Pierre:** I'd like to just go back to the previous question that I asked to the minister. Just to rephrase, the question was around how increased school board transparency and funding and outcomes help parents and students.

**Hon. Stephen Lecce:** I appreciate the question. We spoke a bit about the necessity for greater accountability around spending. We spoke about student achievement, using baselines like standardized testing of grades 3, 6 and 9. The new Right to Read report recommended a literacy screener for senior kindergarten, grades 1 and 2 children. We believe that is important. Of course, we speak about the functional performance of school boards. These are complex, large, often multi-million- or billion-dollar entities. They have serious responsibilities for the safety and academic success of young people.

We also believe, for the directors of education, there's a role to play constructively in helping to improve accountability around what they learn and how they can be effective leaders in their space.

I think I want to turn to the deputy to just perhaps expand a bit on some of the accountability provisions that are considered for school boards and any thoughts on measures that I may have missed in my response.

**Ms. Nancy Naylor:** Thank you, Minister. I'm Nancy Naylor. I'm the Deputy Minister of Education.

I think one of the positive aspects of the bill is that it would provide for a standardization in terms of how school boards communicate with parents. School board websites and school boards do release a vast amount of information, but it's difficult for parents sometimes to understand the core operations of a school board. So the bill provides for the school boards to report to parents twice annually in a form to be outlined by the minister, but one that would be very inclusive and allow parents to participate, both in person and virtually.

The bill would provide that boards provide standardized reports on the funding they receive and how they spend the funding and on their plans for student achievement and how they are doing against those plans. It is expected that the minister would use his guideline-making powers under the act that would allow him to ensure that those are readily accessible and identifiable on school board websites so that parents could easily access that and that it would be standardized across boards so parents could compare the performance or the actions of school boards, especially if they have children in more than one board.

**Ms. Natalie Pierre:** Thank you.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** The Chair recognizes MPP Daisy Wai.

**Mrs. Daisy Wai:** Thank you, Minister and Deputy Minister, for your remarks. It is really helpful, and I'm thankful that our children will have accountability to know what will help them for their success.

As an immigrant parent, I came to Canada really for the main focus of the education of my children. I have four children and they are now grown up. I have gone through the hard time of not knowing how to help them succeed for the future. I have gone through the guidance counselor; I have gone through the school board and I myself didn't get too far. We've been working very hard to help our children.

I realize that my children are grown up, but I have grandchildren and we have the next generation that needs the support. I'm thankful that finally we have something that is in place to really focus on the success of our next generation of children at school.

I just want to know what mechanism will be introduced to ensure students are learning what they need to know in order to be successful?

**Hon. Stephen Lecce:** I appreciate that, MPP Wai. An important question about how we ensure the curriculum in front of our children is reflective of the labour market reality—where the puck is going. We've got to make sure that we are much more effective, proactive, aspirational and focused on understanding what are the needs and the skill sets, the competencies that a young person needs to succeed in the modern world.

It is entirely unacceptable that the former government last updated their math curriculum for grade 9, for example, in 2005—the year YouTube was launched, as I often remark; the year the iPhone was marketed. How is that possible, where the curriculum doesn't require mandatory learning on financial literacy, on coding? Doesn't include robotics, or even a reference to AI?

**0950**

It is a significant vulnerability for young people and their success if government doesn't do a better job of connecting the dots of the skills young people need to get a good-paying job, a career that provides dignity in their lives and purpose in their communities. When we notice the disconnect—the science curriculum, for example, was last updated in 2007; technological education, 2009; and the list goes on of many areas where they were five, 10, 15 years out of date.

So our priority as proposed in the legislation is for the ministry to set a requirement every three years for there to be a standard statutory-required review of curriculum in the province. Essentially, what I'm saying is, it will require the minister of the day to do their job. Every three years, they must ensure that the curriculum is reflective of the changing world around us, for the benefit of our kids, to ensure that when they graduate, they graduate with a competitive advantage—

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** The government side has one more minute.

**Hon. Stephen Lecce:**—knowing that those skills are critical.

It's why, in our curriculum review, we've updated math, science, technological education, the social studies curriculum and the language curriculum in English and French for this coming September. We're updating the technological education curricula in totality for September 2024, the course for 2023. We have updated the civics course, the careers course. We're updating careers again with new mental health supports, thanks to the member from Burlington and others.

The point is, we're on a roll to make sure that we are doing a much better job, a wholesale overview of curriculum, to make sure that it is labour market-responsive and, more importantly, that it gives young people the skills they will need to succeed in this economy.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** The Chair recognizes the official opposition. MPP Pasma.

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** To come back to this topic of consultation: One group I've heard from a lot over the past couple of weeks about a failure to consult is francophone education partners—the trustees, the teachers and education workers, and parents. Francophones have a legally recognized right of management over their education system; un système par et pour les francophones.

We've seen this government get into trouble before in trying to impose changes on francophone boards that don't allow them to continue to manage their education. Now we have a bill that's going to allow the ministry to impose priorities on francophone school boards without any recognition that they actually play a very particular role. At the same time, what we see is that they actually have better test results than the English system, so this is, if we're going to go with your rationale for the bill, trying to solve a problem that doesn't exist in the French system. We've seen it happen before, that the government tries to fix a problem in the English system that ends up creating disaster for the francophone system—which is the changes to the teachers' college and the funding, which has resulted in this huge shortfall of francophone teachers. The French system has over 1,100 teachers who are not qualified and kids who have eight or nine teachers in a single year because there are no teachers available.

How do we expect our francophone kids to be able to succeed when, on the one hand, you're not addressing the shortfall of French teachers and, on the other, you're now going to impose priorities that have no reflection on what francophone kids in Ontario actually need?

**Hon. Stephen Lecce:** I appreciate the question and agree with several premises in it, including that the French school boards have been historically higher performers relative to the English school system. It's a wonderful outcome, and it's something we seek to emulate across Ontario. The vast majority of students are not in those schools. So we really hope to provincialize or liberalize that outcome to every school, to every community—English and French, Catholic and public.

I will also just affirm our commitments to respecting the constitutional obligations for both French and Catholic minority communities in the province. The bill does consider and include a variety of steps to demonstrate respect to those rights holders, including, of course, consultation on, for example, the joint use of schools, as proposed upon proclamation, following a consultation up until December 31 of this year.

With respect to the access to staffing, it's a really important issue. It's a national issue. It transcends our government's time. It has been an issue for about 15 years in the country. Having said that, what this bill does do, specific for French schools—perhaps they're the biggest beneficiary of this, more than anyone else—is the reduction of processing time. Many new educators within our French school system are coming from the broader Francophonie. It's taking 120 days, sometimes half a year, to process a new educator from those countries who wants to come and work with our kids. Other provincial regulators and colleges of teachers in provinces like BC have cited doing it in 40-odd days, and yet it takes 110-plus days in this province. The legislation is designed to expedite and improve the efficiency of their approvals so that they can get approved into a classroom and make a difference.

Another component that we think is going to be very helpful when it comes to staffing is how we look at the faculties of education themselves. You did mention a decision of government related to the duration of a bachelor of education degree—that was made by a former government, just for the record—but having said that, I do agree that it has created some challenges with accessing staff, particularly French. We launched a French teacher recruitment strategy with unions, with school boards, with the community itself just over a year ago and added \$13 million of funding. We've seen some success, but I understand, and I agree: We've got to keep doing better with respect to accessing French-speaking teachers from the country and, frankly, from around the Francophonie.

The legislation, with respect to faculties of education, allows us to better train those teachers on the new language curriculum in English and French, on literacy and math, so that they can continue to be high performers in front of their kids. And, of course, we do seek better, even among school systems like in French, where we see higher performance—look at EQAO data in math. I will accept your point: They're doing better. But they still have seen net regression relative to where they were pre-pandemic, so we have to be aspirational for everyone. Even if the French system is doing better, we still want them to achieve, and frankly, we want to see those areas improve. I think that's why we brought forward the bill. It's across the system.

On the school cap, I will just say to my colleague that perhaps the biggest beneficiary of our power to say to a school board—it's the 25th anniversary of French schools in Ontario. It's a great achievement, and we're very proud of them. But many French school board members—and I'm sure they've said this to you too, as an education critic: Other boards aren't particularly always as, let's say, collaborative in their spirit of sharing the assets that they have. This will give me, or the minister of the day, the authority to say, "Look"—insert school board in the community—"you have a school. You're not using the school, but the French school system, which has had explosive growth over the past years, needs it." It allows someone to have that macro sort of lens to referee, essentially, when there's a legitimate educational purpose. The French school system, I assure you, will be a big beneficiary of that authority if it is used, and I really think it's going to help, frankly, give access to more teachers and more educational spaces for French and English kids.

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** Your portal for recruitment of foreign teachers only came up with 12 new teachers, so I'm not sure that the time to credential recognition is really the problem for the francophone board. What I'm hearing from francophone stakeholders is that they don't expect the provisions on property transfer to make any difference, especially because right now the legislation already requires boards to offer properties to coterminous boards first. I've heard you say several times now that the bill is required because of the need for schools to be shared with coterminous boards—

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** The official opposition has one minute left.

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** —but why do we have to have this open-ended process that the legislation sets out, in which you can dictate that the school needs to be sold to anyone, when the process already requires that the school has to be offered to a coterminous board? Why doesn't the legislation just say that you can force the board to offer to a coterminous board? Why do you have to have the right to be able to force a sale to anyone in order to accomplish the goal of transferring property between school boards?

**Hon. Stephen Lecce:** I appreciate the question. I just will note that there are 70 educators from the broader Francophonie that have been certified through that working group, as well as 500 qualified francophone teachers this year graduated from an Ontario university, so we're very proud of that. The trustee associations for the French-speaking school boards, public and Catholic, have recommended changes to the initial teacher training program, to their faculty program, which we've done, and they've actually called on us to speed up accreditation, which we've also done.

**1000**

With respect to our why on the power: Because the status quo has still created a deadlock between [*inaudible*], particularly for schools that need it for educational purposes in growth areas, so—

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Thank you, Minister. Does the committee agree to sit past 10 a.m. to split the time evenly? Anyone opposed? Okay. So we'll go back to the government. I recognize MPP Jordan.

**Mr. John Jordan:** Thank you, Minister, for your leadership with this bill. I think for every parent, etched in their mind is that first day they put their child on the bus or dropped them off at school, and there's a great deal of trust put in our educators. And yet, from time to time, we hear a horrific story where a child has been abused, and then what?

Can the minister tell us how this bill helps the Ontario College of Teachers maintain and strengthen the trust that is placed in our educators?

**Hon. Stephen Lecce:** I appreciate the question. Often schools will be a space where a child may spend more time with a teacher than necessarily their parent or guardian. It's just the nature of the working reality of parents today. It's an important expectation that their child is safe.

I also want to say that our teachers in our school system, our staff writ large demonstrate every day their care for kids. They're good people. They chose this vocation because they believe in the power of education to change the course of one's life, and I think that's very powerful and they deserve recognition.

Now, of course, in any profession, and this would not be an exception to the rule, we do have examples where individuals will violate that code of conduct, the law and their moral obligations to the safety of those they work with—in this case, vulnerable people, children. That's why we took action some years ago through the Ontario College of Teachers, and it's now being codified through legislative force: a zero-tolerance position. There's zero tolerance when it comes to an individual who has been charged with supporting, nurturing, educating a child, should they be charged and convicted of a Criminal Code offence dealing with, for example, sexual crimes against a child—a serious crime. They will, through this legislation, as proposed, never be able to teach in the province again. That's a reasonable expectation, that they should never be able to teach in a publicly funded school, and they won't, as confirmed through the legislation.

In addition to that change, we also will be publicizing the names of those individuals who are convicted, because I believe there is a public-interest argument to be made that you should be able to know if that individual has had a history of serious criminality.

Now, remember, the Ontario College of Teachers actually called on the government to do this. The genesis of these provisions didn't come from my office; the college of teachers actually recommended meaningful reform to their disciplinary committee, to their sanctions, and to the zero-tolerance policy, and frankly, I appreciate that advice that was implemented through regulation and now is proposed through legislation.

But what it also proposes to do is to expand the fine mechanism if employers fail to provide additional information to the Ontario College of Teachers on teacher discipline matters. It puts some obligation on the employer itself, the school board. It grants the authority to the investigative committee to refer a matter directly to the disciplinary committee where a member is convicted or found guilty of a Criminal Code offence that is also the subject of a matter of complaint. This is one of the strongest measures around members convicted of a criminal sexual

offence. We now have the disciplinary committee able to make a decision without holding a hearing or allowing the member to make submissions if they've been found guilty of a Criminal Code offence.

All of this is to say to you and to my colleagues that while we appreciate that the overwhelming majority of educators in our schools do amazing work, in any credible, bona fide regulator, they take the toughest approach to those who bring reputational disrepair and who harm vulnerable people. That's what a good regulator does, and I welcome and thank the college for their progressive support and proactive recommendation to government to take a zero-tolerance position.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** The government side has one minute left.

**Hon. Stephen Lecce:** I think the only other thing I would mention to you is that we have done this in addition to implementing this past September—for the first time in this province and country in our history, we have required sexual abuse prevention training of every educator, and we extended it to every early childhood educator. Both colleges had to do that. We're the only jurisdiction to have done that. We did it at the beginning of the school year, this past September, which is wonderful, and then new educators will be required to take that course going forward.

Look, it is a critical area, the safety of children, and I do believe it's another area where we can come together as parliamentarians to root out those who would impose harm on a young child and send a signal to parents: a stronger level of confidence that when their kids are in schools, they're going to be safe. It's, in part, why we required victims to be able to receive supports from those who perpetrate those acts.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Now we'll go to the official opposition. I'll recognize MPP Gates.

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** Thank you very much, Minister, in my riding, Niagara Nutrition Partners that feeds many schoolchildren have been forced to pause 16 programs in schools across the region because they haven't received enough funding from the ministry. Do you think hungry kids in my riding will be able to focus on the basics you are encouraging with empty stomachs, and can you commit to fund this program to at least the end of the year?

**Hon. Stephen Lecce:** Well, first off, I will note that the government of Ontario has increased funding for school nutrition programs—that's important. I think we are concerned when we hear of any child who's going to school without the basics. It's sad to hear that, frankly.

I know in your community, you're also dealing with many irregular asylum seekers, which only compounds the problem, and so I think what I can assert to the member is that we've increased supports for nutrition—it's done some through the MCCS ministry, but during the pandemic, where we saw a great deal of need, the Ministry of Education literally, in our own ministry, provided funding for those kids. We'll continue to make sure that those basic supports are there for children.

And look, if we want to help reduce the costs of working parents, the biggest driver of food costs, in addition to

inflation, is taxation, particularly the carbon tax. Let's oppose every measure to—

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** Minister, I'm going to jump in because I've only got two and a half minutes because my colleague wants to ask other questions.

This is a program that ran out of money. They have two months left in the school year. I asked this question in question period. Kids are going to school, and that program doesn't have the funds to provide it. And it has nothing to do with the asylum seekers. Asylum seekers in my riding are staying in hotels all over Niagara Falls. Their food, their lunch, their breakfasts and their dinners are all provided.

This is a program that is desperately in need of money. Kids that live in poverty, and most of them do, should at least be able to get breakfast and get nutritional food when they come to school. Can you please just take a look at it.

I've got one more question before I go because I've got a member's statement: The minister recently made an announcement regarding policy changes to help more students enter the skilled trades, particularly high school students. I understand these changes were not received positively by all those in the skilled trades. Could the minister discuss with me and this committee what unions representing skilled trades workers were consulted? Was Unifor's skilled trades department consulted on the changes?

**Hon. Stephen Lecce:** I will commit to raising this matter with my colleague the Minister of Community and Social Services, noting that the funding for nutrition is up at \$28 million, but I appreciate the concern you've cited and I will do that.

With respect to the skilled trades, there has been a wide level support for our announcement, including Skills Ontario, who attended the announcement and who celebrated the announcement with the government, who believe that there should be a path for some kids to enter into the skilled trades, particularly perhaps for those who will not graduate. For the 11% of children who will not be able to get their grad certificate, it is the aim of government to create a credential. We've meaningfully consulted many stakeholders, in the private sector and otherwise, and with respect to unions, many of whom issued statements. I believe I recall LIUNA being one of them issuing a public statement of support for this change.

They also strongly support the government's actions to require every student in Ontario to take a technological education course starting in September 2024—a long-standing request of many private sector unions in the skilled trades space. It's going to make a difference, particularly for the roughly 33% of women who are in those tech courses. We can help create greater pathways for girls in schools to take tech education.

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** Okay. Can I just jump in for one thing because I don't want to miss my member's statement—you only get one once in a while. I will say that Unifor was not consulted, and they also have a member that sits on the board of skilled trades, the new board, and they weren't even consulted on this.

So I appreciate the fact that you're going to take it up with Monte and go from there, but can I ask, through the

Chair—can you send me a response? You have my email and everything. You've used it quite regularly, so—

**Hon. Stephen Lecce:** Okay.

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** All right. I appreciate it. Thank you very much. I'll turn it back over to my colleague.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** I recognize MPP Pasma.

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** Super quickly: I think we've all heard from parents and stakeholders of children with disabilities that there are too many barriers and too many exclusions. Will you commit to at least tracking exclusions in schools so we know how many children are not able to attend school in Ontario because of barriers or a lack of supports?

**Hon. Stephen Lecce:** There are a few elements here to deal with—

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** That concludes the questions for today. The committee will recess now until 1 o'clock this afternoon to resume public hearings on Bill 98. Thank you very much. I would like to thank the minister for coming.

*The committee recessed from 1011 until 1300.*

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome back. The Standing Committee on Social Policy will now come to order.

This afternoon, we are continuing public hearings on Bill 98, An Act to amend various Acts relating to education and child care. As a reminder, witnesses have been scheduled into a group of three for each one-hour time slot. Each presenter will have seven minutes for their presentation. Following all three presentations, there will be 39 minutes of questions for all three witnesses, divided into two rounds of seven and a half minutes for the government members, two rounds of seven and a half minutes for the official opposition members, and two rounds of four and a half minutes for the independent member.

To ensure that everyone who speaks is heard and understood, it is important that all participants speak clearly and slowly. This morning I noticed that people were talking a little quieter, so if they could speak up that would be great.

For virtual participants on Zoom, after I have recognized you, there may be a brief delay before your audio and video are ready. Please take a brief pause before you're speaking. In order to ensure optimum sound quality, virtual participants are encouraged to use headphones and microphones, as possible.

As always, all comments should go through the Chair. Are there any questions before we begin?

ONTARIO FEDERATION OF HOME  
AND SCHOOL ASSOCIATIONS  
DYSLEXIA CANADA  
ONTARIO SECONDARY SCHOOL  
TEACHERS' FEDERATION

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** I will now call on the next group of presenters to please come forward: Ontario Federation of Home and School Associations, Dyslexia Canada, and the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation.

Welcome. As a reminder, each of you will have seven minutes for your presentations, followed by questions from committee members. I will provide reminders of the time remaining during the presentation and questions.

Please state your name for the Hansard, and then you may begin.

**Ms. Teresa Lopez:** My name is Teresa Lopez. I'm here on behalf of the Ontario Federation of Home and School Associations. Good afternoon, and thank you for having me today. I am pleased to be here to speak on behalf of our members from across the province.

By way of introduction, I would like to provide a short background of our organization to help give some insight as to why we believe it is so important to give a voice to our membership at this table.

The Ontario Federation of Home and School Associations, or OFHSA, as we call it, has been in existence for over 100 years—unbelievable, I know; you may not even know who we are. OFHSA works towards the goal of “the best for every student,” and to achieve this, we operate independently of school boards as a volunteer-driven, registered charity. OFHSA proudly represents the voice of our membership to all levels of government through various mechanisms. Whether it be within the local school, at the regional board level, or here to the provincial government, OFHSA is committed to ensuring that the education, health, safety and social well-being of children and youth are a priority for all.

Additionally, OFHSA offers programming that strives to improve the home and the school environments, such as promoting healthy relationships between parents, educators and school administrators. We offer educational programming, such as healthy eating and lifestyles, to support students, parents and care providers. In the past year, we offered over 32 events to support and drive parental engagement that included family cook-alongs, art nights, mental health discussions, family game nights and STEM activities, just to name a few.

All of us at OFHSA aim to promote the well-being, care and protection of children and youth and to obtain the best for each student according to their physical, mental, social and emotional needs.

OFHSA welcomes plans to invest funding in increasing support for math and literacy resources across the province. We are encouraged that the proposed legislation will put students first, echoing concerns of our members. We continually hear from parents and care providers who fear that their children are going to be left behind.

The proposed legislative changes will benefit our members directly by ensuring parents receive information about our rights within the education system. This is particularly important for our families with children with special needs. OFHSA believes parental engagement is crucial to student success, and the proposed legislative changes will help strengthen relationships between the home and the school through increased transparency and accountability.

The work we do at OFHSA is driven by our organization's beliefs. At OFHSA, we believe parents and guardians are willing and active partners with those delivering educational programs and services. We believe home and school

at all levels within the federation is an advocate for the students in the public school system. We believe cooperative and healthy environments in the home, the school and the community are necessary for the development of each student. We believe local, provincial and national networking is essential, and we believe effective communication is also critical.

Thank you. We are happy to take your questions—short and sweet.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Okay. The next presenter, please. Please state your name.

**Ms. Alicia Smith:** Thank you. I'm Alicia Smith, and I'm the executive director of Dyslexia Canada. Dyslexia is the most common cause of reading difficulties, impacting between 10% and 20% of all students. The good news is that for over 20 years, we've had the information available to prevent reading difficulties for over 95% of all students, including those at risk for dyslexia. The bad news is, we have yet to action this information in Ontario.

Just last year, the Ontario Human Rights Commission Right to Read inquiry concluded that Ontario is systematically failing students with reading disabilities and many other students. These students are at risk for significant lifelong difficulties, including underemployment and unemployment, poverty and homelessness, issues with mental health and addiction and becoming involved in crime.

The Human Rights Commission also concluded that the current approach is inequitable and perpetuates intergenerational cycles of poverty and privilege. When schools do not provide effective reading instruction, families who can afford it spend thousands of dollars on private tutoring. Their kids learn to read. This has created a two-tier education system and a permanent underclass. Fully 33% of Ontario students who participated in the last PISA assessment scored below the level of literacy that the OECD considers necessary to fully participate in the modern economy. That is one in three Ontario students who are being shut out of life's opportunities due to low literacy.

The Right to Read inquiry identified several systemic issues that have contributed to these inequitable outcomes. Bill 98 seeks to address several of these. First, the bill gives the province the power to set provincial priorities for student achievement. School boards in Ontario that have made the right to read a priority have already made significant progress towards improving equity. For example, the Algonquin and Lakeshore Catholic District School Board added training teachers in the science of reading to their multi-year strategic plan back in 2019, when the inquiry was first launched. They created a five-year implementation plan, and they have continually and consistently communicated that plan and the importance of this work to both staff and parents. They have provided training, and they have used existing funding to purchase new resources like decodable books. They are now well-positioned to implement the new curriculum and screening guidelines that come into effect in September.

However, many other school boards have not been as proactive. While I know teachers in almost every school board who are working hard on their own to learn and prepare, many have reached out to me to tell me how

frustrated they are at the lack of clear and consistent communication and support that they are getting from their school boards. This lack of leadership has resulted in wasted time and money. A principal recently told me how much they regretted having spent thousands of dollars on new sets of levelled readers and assessment kits this year without knowing that these materials will be obsolete in September. This could have been prevented if their school board leadership had prioritized the right to read.

Secondly, Bill 98 gives the province the power to assign support staff to school boards that are not meeting strategic goals. How to teach children to read has been a polarizing topic in education for a very long time. In many ways, it's analogous to the vaccine debate. On one side, you have a large body of scientific research and evidence that clearly show that vaccination is good public policy. On the other side, you have a small but vocal group who are passionately opposed. They cite anecdotal information and cherry-picked data to suit their arguments. We would never allow public health policy or access to vaccinations in Ontario to be controlled by anti-vaxxers. However, for the last two decades we have allowed public policy and access to reading instruction to be controlled by a small group of individuals who reject the science of reading.

#### 1310

Some school boards still have leaders who are philosophically opposed to the well-established scientific fact that children learn to read best when they are taught to sound out words. In these boards, teachers are not being supported to prepare for the new curriculum. Many have even reached out to tell me that they have been actively discouraged from learning about the science of reading. In other boards, they have willing leaders but they lack the local expertise that they need to guide them through this transition. In either case, these boards would benefit tremendously from an outside expert being assigned to assist them.

Finally, Bill 98 gives the government the power to set standards for university teacher preparation programs. The Right to Read inquiry concluded that, for the most part, Ontario's faculties of education are failing to equip teachers with the knowledge and skills necessary to teach all children to read. This has not only perpetuated inequitable outcomes for our children, it has also had a negative impact on the mental health, job satisfaction and sense of self-efficacy of our teachers.

Over the past several years, I have been involved in organizing free workshops and training events that over 10,000 Ontario teachers have joined in. We regularly survey our participants and two things always stand out to me. The first is the teachers who are new to the science of reading who express anger. They are outraged to discover that this information has existed for decades but was not shared with them by the professors that they trusted or in the OCT-accredited additional qualification courses that they paid for.

Other teachers expressed feelings of deep sadness, grief and even misplaced guilt. I have lost track of the number of times that a teacher has broken down in tears, telling me

in detail about the specific students that kept them up at night, the ones that they poured their hearts and souls into trying to help but were unable to reach because they lacked this information.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** You have one minute left.

**Ms. Alicia Smith:** Thank you. Every teacher deserves to be empowered with the knowledge and skills necessary to teach every child to read, and our children deserve nothing less. Bill 98 gives the government the power to ensure that this will happen going forward.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Thank you. We will now go to our third presenter: the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation.

**Ms. Karen Littlewood:** My name is Karen Littlewood. I represent more than 60,000 teachers and education workers who make up the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, OSSTF/FEESO, a strong, independent, socially active union that works to protect and enhance public education and the rights of students, educators and education workers in Ontario.

Thank you to the members of the Standing Committee on Social Policy for allowing me to speak with you today. OSSTF/FEESO welcomes the opportunity to provide our feedback on Bill 98. Despite its misleading title, the Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act has very little in terms of supports or resources for students and seems primarily focused on the government giving itself more control over school board decision-making.

During my read-through, I did not see any sections devoted to how stakeholders in the public education system can better support students and make up for learning loss experienced during the pandemic. I also didn't see anything that will make up for this government's deliberate shortchanging of public education. The Financial Accountability Office has already shown that the education budget is underfunded by at least \$1.4 billion. Unfortunately, we can expect that shortfall to continue over the coming years under this government.

This year's Grants for Student Needs continue the underfunding with an increase of less than 1% in funding, which is far below inflation rates, meaning school boards' ability to provide the supports and resources students need will suffer.

Instead of investing in public education in Ontario, the government continues to play the blame game, refusing to take responsibility for the fallout for their ongoing underfunding of the system. Bill 98 focuses on streamlining and maximizing school capital assets instead of streamlining access to the supports that students need.

This government has overseen our public education system for five years now. They have had the responsibility to focus on student success and achievement, on preparing students for fulfilling lives and work journeys. But how have they handled this critical responsibility? By seeking to drastically increase class sizes; by forcing students to earn credits online, away from classmates, teachers and other supports. These are just two examples of how the

Ford government has ignored the preferences of parents. In fact, not only did they enact policies that were the exact opposite of what parents wanted, but they then tried to hide that information from Ontarians.

If the government was truly intent on listening to Ontario parents, they would invest in smaller class sizes and properly fund the supports and programs needed to ensure that every student in the province has the resources necessary to thrive, no matter where they live in this province. If the government truly understood how significant student mental health is to social, emotional and academic success, they would not have waited until three years after the pandemic began to announce any real increase in mental health supports for students.

The length of time and the number of young people and their families waiting for publicly provided child and youth mental health care in Ontario is at an all-time high. As front-line workers, OSSTF/FEESO members are heavily relied upon by students for help and assistance related to mental health.

Increasing the number of permanent, caring, professionally trained adults in our schools has been a priority for over a decade. All we need is for this government to listen and have the political will to put students' needs first, but instead we get Bill 98 announced with no prior consultation. Introducing legislation that mandates significant changes for a school year that is less than four months away with little to no implementation details does not sound like a government that plans ahead or one that understands the needs of students, nor the logistical realities facing Ontario's public education system. And like every single policy initiative from this government, it includes hidden regulatory powers that allow the government to put their thumbs on the scales in favour of wealthy property developers.

If the government wants to improve student success, they should start by consulting front-line teachers, education workers and their representative unions, as well as student groups and parent and community organizations. To fully appreciate what is happening in schools, the government should be actively engaging with all stakeholders; they should be holding proactive and ongoing consultations.

Yet, the Ford government chose not to consult with any education union that represents teachers and education workers prior to introducing this bill. Instead, the bill aims to increase ministry overreach into the autonomy of education workers, teachers and school boards—a tactic this government continues to wield despite how often it undermines the excellent work being done in the public education system. Given this government's record on education, Ontarians have little reason to believe that the government will use these new powers that they've given themselves to actually improve student outcomes and strengthen the province's public education system—and that should be everyone's goal, the government included.

Over the past five years, OSSTF/FEESO has written many substantive proposals, submissions and plans. We have commissioned reports. We have written letters to the

Ministry of Education and other members of the government caucus focused on improving Ontario's public education system and student success. All of these documents are publicly available, and they are included in your written submission that you have today.

On a positive note, Ontario's education workers and teachers will continue to try their best to support—

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** One minute left.

**Ms. Karen Littlewood:**—student success, even when faced with a government that ignores and dismisses them, as demonstrated by the development and introduction of Bill 98.

As the representative of over 60,000 front-line education workers and teachers, we hope the government will finally begin working with us in earnest so our schools can have the necessary resources and supports that our students deserve and need in order to succeed academically, socially and emotionally.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Thank you.

We will now start the questions. We'll start with, in round one, the official opposition. You have seven and a half minutes. I recognize MPP Pasma.

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** Thank you very much for coming to share your time and your expertise with us today. It's very much appreciated.

Karen, I'm going to start with you. It's always nice to see you, even if it's virtually. You touched on the topic of consultation, and I just wanted to be absolutely clear, because teachers and education workers, they're the ones who are in our schools every single day, who are on the front lines, seeing what is happening, what our students need, what challenges they're facing. Obviously, teachers have years of experience in pedagogy and professional experience in supporting children and understanding what children need. Were you consulted on this bill?

**1320**

**Ms. Karen Littlewood:** We found out about the bill being introduced—that there was going to be a press conference Sunday morning at 11. We learned of it with everyone else in the public and then watched the actual press conference at Queen's Park on the Monday—no consultation.

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** If the minister had taken the time to consult you and ask what kinds of supports our children need and what you're seeing in the classroom right now in terms of how our students are struggling, what would you have said?

**Ms. Karen Littlewood:** So I think we have to be looking across the province to see what's needed in different areas. I really appreciate what Ms. Smith said in her delegation, that different schools have approached things differently based on the supports that they have or what they are doing. And I ask myself, why is it like that in the province of Ontario where there are different supports provided depending on a school board's initiative? Why is there not that lead from the government saying these are the types of supports we should have everywhere? There are excellent programs happening in many places, but there is no individual funding to carry out what's needed in order to

provide those supports. We share many of the same concerns, but we'd like to be consulted in trying to figure out the best way to address them while meeting the needs of individual schools.

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** And one thing we know—we saw when the Grants for Student Needs came out that we've lost teachers over the past five years; I think it's an average of four teachers per secondary school in the province. That's more teachers than what we're gaining with the minister's announcement of new teachers to support math and reading.

Can you talk about what the impact of crowded classrooms is on the ability of our children to learn?

**Ms. Karen Littlewood:** Yes. Part of the reason why we've lost teachers is because of the increase in class size. The government, I'll remind people, wanted to change the pupil-teacher ratio to 28 to 1 in the last round of bargaining, and it ended up being at 23 to 1. That's why we have that significant loss, but we also have people leaving education as well, and what happens then is you miss out on the specialist teachers, the specialized programs. Programs end up being limited for the students. The student's choice is limited as well. We have great announcements about tech becoming mandatory, but we know for a fact that there aren't enough tech teachers in the province. There aren't enough being trained.

There are many challenges with meeting the needs of the students, but again, if you work together with the people working in education and with the stakeholders, there are probably some very good solutions that we can develop. But to be ignored and to just have an announcement like this where some of the parts of Bill 98 have to be implemented by September of 2023—that's not very far away. We know that our members will do their best, but it's really going to be challenging. So that lack of consultation has a long-term negative impact on the students.

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** Right. Thank you, Karen. And I think we share that concern, that tech credit for students might be a really good idea, but the supports need to be there to make sure that they have a well-resourced tech space that's safe, and also, somebody needs to teach that course, and right now, we don't have those tech teachers available.

**Ms. Karen Littlewood:** That's correct.

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** Another concern that I have right now: As a parent, I have seen my own children struggle with their mental health. I'm hearing that from a lot of parents, from a lot of teachers and education workers. Can you talk about what OSSTF is seeing and hearing in terms of children's mental health and how that's impacting their ability to learn right now?

**Ms. Karen Littlewood:** What we're hearing from the front-line workers is we have students who are in crisis and we don't know how to get them the supports they need. Currently, there are about 1,000 social workers across the province. There are 4,800 schools. If there is an event that requires extra support, obviously, the social workers are going to do their best to triage and to be there to support, but that means other students are not getting the supports that they need. We're hearing that when a student needs a

referral for a mental health support or a child and youth worker, they're waiting 10 days, 15 days, a month. Where you have parents who know that their child needs support, they're going to a hospital instead where we could be providing supports in a school where it's easily accessible by everybody on an equitable basis, but that's just not happening.

So you hear from the front-line workers, "I don't know what to do for these students," and it really hits hard, but it hits hard more the student who is suffering, and for the caring adult in the building to say, "I don't have anything else for you," how can that be an answer in a province like Ontario?

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** One of the things we know is that if the challenge can be identified within the school and supports can be provided there, it's often addressed far earlier than if it needs to wait for the child to get public health care at a hospital or if the parent needs to track down a private care provider.

My final question to you, Karen, is, do you have concerns that this bill allows the minister to set out priorities for the education system, but there's no additional resources? You've already covered the funding shortfall. We've talked about class sizes and mental health. Are we setting up school boards to fail if we set out priorities and none of these issues are addressed and there's no additional resources being given to actually address the challenges of the education system?

**Ms. Karen Littlewood:** I think priorities are important. I think to have a strategic plan is really important, to share it is important, to be accountable, but without the rest of the supports in place, what is the point of it? While we don't have members teaching in the primary grades, we do have members working there as educational assistants and early childhood educators.

It's great that the Right to Read—that the assessment is going to be there from SK to grade 2, but what are you doing with the assessment afterwards? Where are the supports that are needed? Where are the extra supports? And how is that going to happen when a teacher is going to do an assessment of their whole class—what's happening with the rest of the students? There aren't people to come in to help cover for that. We worry about the fact that you can set priorities and benchmarks, but if you're not giving the tools that are needed in order to get there, you're not going to go anywhere.

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** Absolutely. Thank you very much, Karen.

I want to turn to Alicia. I know we don't have much time, so I just want to say on the record already that I want to thank you for your advocacy and the work you've undertaken. It's really unacceptable that we haven't provided every child in Ontario with the support they need to be able to learn to read. I hope that is something that we can work on together, and that's something that I look forward to exploring further in my next round of questioning.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Thank you. We'll now turn to the independent member, who will have four minutes and 30 seconds. The chair recognizes MPP Shamji.

**Mr. Adil Shamji:** Thank you very much, Chair. It's great to have you sitting there and presiding over us.

Karen, it's always great to see you, and thank you for all that you and your members do. I wondered if I could ask you something. There is a schedule in this bill that is devoted to reducing sexual abuse against students and addressing sexual abuse against students by early childhood educators and teachers. Do you have any reflections on this schedule and does it require any improvements, or do you have any concerns about it?

**Ms. Karen Littlewood:** I'll just address a concern in particular to the Ontario College of Teachers, but then I'll answer your question too.

The college of teachers, when it was first formed, was described as being a self-governing body. It is anything but at this current point in time. The college really has very few teachers on it as well, and if you're going to be not only supporting the province and the parents of the province but also the profession, I really believe that the college should be self-governing.

Absolutely, we stand against any sort of violence, sexual assault, any sort of activity like that in the classrooms at any grade level, but I think when you don't have any sort of transparency within the colleges—we used to be able to go to the meetings at the college, but most of them are behind closed doors now. Again, it's a lack of consultation. There may be cases where you need more regulation. However, when you don't have an insight into how and why these decisions are being made or any ability to have any sort of input, it really becomes challenging.

Again, we'd like to work together to try and see how we can best address this and make sure that every child is safe when they go to school.

**Mr. Adil Shamji:** Thank you very much. You've raised innumerable concerns about this bill. Can you help me understand, from your organization's perspective, are there opportunities to improve this bill that would make it supportable by OSSTF/FEESO?

**Ms. Karen Littlewood:** Again, without the ability to question or get particular answers about it, it becomes hard. As I listened to the press conferences, both of them, and I heard there would be 1,000 educators across the province, 300 as part of a math action team and 700 for literacy, that's great, but right away, I say: Educator—is that a teacher? I know we need a whole education team in order to support students, but I believe the minister afterwards did reference teachers and then referenced 2,000 teachers. So I'd like to know where the supports are and how they're going to be implemented.

1330

We talk about 4,800 schools across the province and 300 members of a math action team. I hope that they're going to be able to address the historically underperforming 20% of the schools, but that's going to be challenging for 300 people to do.

I think where we need to start is looking at investing and making sure the supports are in place and doing more of a triage in the schools to see who needs what and where and to provide the framework from the government to say,

“This is what we expect to have provided as supports in a school. And where there are more significant needs, here's what we can offer as well for you.”

We need specialized supports, but we need to have the money there, and when the Grants for Student Needs—

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** You have one minute left.

**Ms. Karen Littlewood:** —don't keep up with inflation, we don't have enough money to keep the system going.

**Mr. Adil Shamji:** Thank you very much.

**Ms. Karen Littlewood:** You're welcome.

**Mr. Adil Shamji:** Next, I'd like to turn to Alicia and Teresa, both of whom spoke to this bill. I'm curious to note: It sounded to me like there are elements of this bill that you both support and like. Where are the opportunities for improvement? And what could make it even better?

**Ms. Teresa Lopez:** On behalf of OFHSA, we focused solely on the positive changes put forth for parent engagement and the voice of our parents to be heard, that transparency between the school boards and our parent groups and at the provincial level.

We're looking forward to being able to get back into the schools. Some have been closed off because COVID just brought us all down. So we're just looking forward to that hope that this bill will bring parents back.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Thank you for your comments.

We'll now turn to the government. They will have seven minutes and 30 seconds. I recognize MPP Jordan.

**Mr. John Jordan:** Thank you to all of the presenters. My question is for Alicia Smith of Dyslexia Canada. It's close to my heart because my youngest son had that challenge as well and he is quite successful. A lot of that is because of my wife's advocacy as well, which I understand you are familiar with.

The ministry has acted upon the recommendation of the Ontario Human Rights Commission with regard to early reading screening for senior kindergarten to grade 2 students. I'm wondering if you can comment on the impact you feel that will have on our education system.

**Ms. Alicia Smith:** I think early screening is absolutely vital to fixing the problems that we have in terms of the backlog in special education. We know from research that if we identify kids who are at risk for developing reading difficulties due to dyslexia or other causes of reading difficulties, and we provide early intervention, starting in kindergarten, we can prevent reading difficulties from developing and keep those children outside the special education system. That will free up special education resources for children who have more complex needs who really need it.

Currently, reading difficulties are the biggest category of special education resources in Ontario, so I think that screening piece is vital.

**Mr. John Jordan:** Thank you.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** The Chair recognizes MPP Barnes.

**Ms. Patrice Barnes:** I just want to address some of the things that were brought forward in regard to mental health

and the increase the government has made in funding for mental health, from \$18 million to over \$100 million currently in supporting the summer mental health programs, which we recognize have been brought forward—that we’re going to have students have access to mental health over the summer.

I also just want to talk about the additional \$100 million for the streaming supports for students, the dual-credit expansion programs and all these programs that have been added to education, to a point of a 27% increase from 2017.

My question for you, Teresa, is: You have seen this bill and both of you have talked about pockets of excellence in the education system. This bill is really targeting bringing forward and standardizing things across the province so all school boards, and ideally all schools, can have pockets of excellence for students. As a parent and as somebody that represents parents, what have been some of your concerns? How are some of those concerns addressed in Bill 98?

**Ms. Teresa Lopez:** We actually had our annual provincial conference this past weekend and the consistent message coming back from our members—our parents—was that there is inconsistent communication and processes across the province. One board will do things one way; one will do it another way. We are really looking forward to the strength behind the wording in the bill, where that message is going to start becoming consistent. We’re going to know where to go and look to find what our rights are as parents to advocate for our children in any situation, so we’re very hopeful.

**Ms. Patrice Barnes:** Thank you so much. A follow-up question—I have another question for Dyslexia Canada as well. You’ve seen the details of the bill as well, and we have really embraced the human rights Right to Read commission. What are some of the things that you think will be addressed in Bill 98 that you’ve been able to contribute to and have conversations about?

**Ms. Alicia Smith:** Again, I think the ability to set provincial priorities is very important. The minister has made it clear that the government wants to move forward with implementing the right to read, yet that hasn’t been taken up as a priority in every school. There absolutely are many schools in Ontario, not just Algonquin and Lakeshore—I could list off a bunch—that have taken it onboard in a big way and made it a priority. The amount of progress that they have made in just one year is really breathtaking, to be honest. They have trained teachers. They have already implemented screening board-wide. They have changed out resources. And the success that their students are achieving and the positive impact that it has had on the teachers in terms of their own self-efficacy has been outstanding. I want to see that happening in every single school board in Ontario, so the ability for the province to set provincial standards is a big one for me.

The other one is absolutely the teacher training piece. The bill sets out the requirement that faculties of education will provide teachers with training in specific areas and gives the government the ability to set regulation in that area. I would like to see some very specific regulations that

require faculties of education to train teachers in line with the science of reading. The OHRC found that that is not happening in Ontario right now. In our faculties of education, teachers are still being taught myths about reading like, “Let’s just wait and see,” “Some kids develop at their own pace,” “He’s a boy; boys take longer”—all these things. These are things that I’ve heard and thousands of other parents have heard in relation to expressing concerns about the reading development of their kids.

In reality, we’ve known for a very, very long time that the best window of intervention is when kids are in kindergarten and grade 1. When we’re being actively counselled to “wait and see,” we’re doing our kids a disservice. That information—it’s not the teacher’s fault; I’d just like to express that clearly. That is what they’re being taught in the faculties of education. That needs to change, and it makes me very happy to see that in the proposed bill.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** The Chair recognizes MPP Wai.

**Mrs. Daisy Wai:** I just want to re-echo what MPP Barnes has said. I am really touched by your passion as you relate how the reading will impact the students at a young age. How do you see this bill helping to give them a good future because they’re starting to do their reading at an earlier stage?

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** You have one minute.

**Ms. Alicia Smith:** Thanks. Absolutely, transitioning to a preventive model for reading, as is recommended by the OHRC report, will help kids get off to a better start with school and with life in general. Because we know that when kids struggle with early reading, it has a huge impact not only on their academic achievement but also on their sense of self and their mental health. It’s not uncommon for me to talk with parents of kids in grade 3 who are saying that they wish they were dead or refusing to go to school because they’ve been struggling with reading for so long.

This bill and the measures that the government is taking to ensure that we switch to a preventive model and we implement the recommendations of the Right to Read inquiry I think will go a long way to ensuring that kids get off to a really good start in school and also in life.

**Mrs. Daisy Wai:** So I would say that you’re in full support of this bill, then?

**Ms. Alicia Smith:** I’m definitely in support of those aspects of the bill. There are certain aspects that definitely fall outside of the range of Dyslexia Canada’s expertise, but the—

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Thank you for your comments.

We will now move to round two. The official opposition has seven minutes and 30 seconds. Go ahead, MPP Gretzky.

**Mrs. Lisa Gretzky:** I appreciate that you both came today to present, and to OSSTF as well.

I have a question for Alicia. I was a trustee with the public board in Windsor. I know how much boards struggle with funding, especially when it comes to special education

funding and helping students with exceptionalities, whether that is the ones that are struggling to learn or, in some cases, those that excel and need that extra support to continue to move forward. So I don't think that anyone, on this side anyway, would argue that, while the government talks about student achievement and helping those that need it the most, what we see when it comes to funding is actually boards are having to pull money from somewhere else, which affects student achievement in other areas.

**1340**

I want to ask you a question, because I'm fairly certain you know about these schools, about demonstration schools. What we have seen through successive Liberal and Conservative governments is that these schools are constantly under threat of being closed. And for those in the room who don't know what demonstration schools are, they are for students with severe learning disabilities. Many of those students have dyslexia, and they have those intense learning supports that they need for a year, sometimes two, before they go back to their home school in their community. These students are often bused outside of their community every week to stay in residence at the schools. I've toured all of them, and I've seen the incredible results that students have in these schools.

But what I've heard from families, time and time again, about these schools is about the constant threat of closure, but also the fact that the government does not themselves really advertise that these schools exist, and oftentimes boards and educators within the boards are told that they're not even allowed to tell parents about this, that it's up to the parents to research and come across this information on their own, or perhaps have another parent whose child has struggled and has gone to one of these schools or is attending one of these schools, and then the parent finds out about it and there's a process. Do you think that it really should be incumbent on the government—for them, personally, frankly, as a government—to be advertising these schools, but also to ensure that every parent has the info provided to them in order for perhaps more students who need that really intensive learning to be able to not only be aware of these schools but to be able to access them?

I just want to point out, the educators who work in these schools go in, they get the training they need and they take that back into our schools to try and provide supports. There's not nearly enough of them doing the good work. But I'd just like your thoughts as far as the fact that these schools that provide great supports are a big secret. It's not talked about. People are told not to talk about it, frankly.

**Ms. Alicia Smith:** I'm happy to answer that. There was a lot in your question, so I'm just going to backtrack a little bit.

The first part was about funding for education, and I absolutely agree that funding education is vital and that small class sizes are important. But I do want to point out to the committee that class sizes were reduced between 2005 and 2018, and it made absolutely no difference in terms of student outcomes on international assessments and on our EQAO assessments, if you look at the unassisted pass rates there. So those things are absolutely vital and

important, but we also need to make sure that teachers understand how to teach children to read.

Now, the educators in the demonstration schools do have that specialty training and knowledge, and that is fantastic; that has been a life-saving resource for a lot of people, absolutely. But I have to tell you, as the parent of a child who was in emotional distress because of his reading failure, the thought of having to send him to a residential school so he could learn to read was heartbreaking. So that needs to change. That knowledge needs to be in all of our schools so that every kid can access that information. That's how I would answer that question.

The thought about the transparency and programs—it's not just the demonstration schools that are kept from parents. Parents are not aware of the programs that are available in their own schools and in their own communities. We have an entire network of parent volunteers who are sharing that information, and the only reason we have it is because we've gone through it ourselves. So, absolutely, communicating that to parents is important. But the most important thing is making sure that every teacher in this province is equipped to teach every child how to read, including those with dyslexia. It's 10% to 20% of the population. It's not a niche thing that can be solved by a demonstration school that accepts 80 kids a year.

**Mrs. Lisa Gretzky:** Thank you. I'm going to pass it off to my colleague now.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Okay.

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** Thank you very much for that answer, Alicia. I'm wondering if you can respond to the comments that Karen made earlier about how screening is good and important but it's only a first step, and the resources need to be there in order to support children once we've identified that there's a challenge. Because of increasing class sizes and the loss of teachers and education workers, right now those resources aren't available. Aren't we once again setting up our kids to fail if we identify that they have a challenge but then don't actually provide the resources to help them learn once we've identified that challenge?

**Ms. Alicia Smith:** That's why teacher training as a part of this initiative is so important. As I said, the school boards that have prioritized the right to read have already started that teacher training. The teachers who have implemented screening in those boards have been provided with some support to help them respond to the screening data.

Another thing that Karen mentioned was: How are the educators going to do this screening? Who is going to watch the kids? I'd just like to point out that educators are already doing reading assessments on our kids. They're typically using assessment tools called PM Benchmarks or the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System, where they do sit with every child and do that assessment. Those assessments typically take between 15 minutes and a half an hour per child, and educators in most boards are doing them multiple times per year, whereas these screening assessments are actually quite a bit shorter. You can get through a screening with a child in about five minutes.

I would love for everyone to visit the IDA Ontario YouTube channel. We have a panel of teachers on there who implemented screening in their classrooms this year—

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** You have one minute left.

**Ms. Alicia Smith:** —and they share how that experience went throughout a series of webinars that we've hosted. They can clear up any of those questions.

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** Thanks, Alicia.

A super quick question for Teresa: As Lisa mentioned, the funding that boards get for special education is so much less than what boards are actually spending on special education. The needs are much higher than the funding. That's one reason why we see such diversity in approaches between boards and what various boards are spending and what various boards aren't, because boards have to make choices all the time. They can't do everything.

Do you feel that increasing the funding so that boards can actually meet the needs of every child would be an important component of actually being able to standardize education across the province?

**Ms. Teresa Lopez:** Oh, jeezers. If we all had all the money, right? If we could support everything. Right now, the fact that this proposed legislation in the last—

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Thank you for your comments. I have to cut you off, I'm afraid.

Now we'll go to the government—or independent member, sorry.

**Mr. Adil Shamji:** Not yet.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** I apologize.

**Mr. Adil Shamji:** Thank you very much, Chair.

Teresa, would you like to finish the response to your answer?

**Ms. Teresa Lopez:** No.

*Laughter.*

**Ms. Teresa Lopez:** You know what? There are so many needs. I imagine across the province, our boards are struggling to determine what the needs for all students are on any given day. The fact that they're adding some additional support for mental health, which we know is a big, key player in everything, especially math and reading—if they don't have those essential skills from the get-go, they're struggling for the rest of their school careers. So if we can get these core tools funded and pushed through and get these kids on the right track early, I think it will all play through. Hopefully, we can start to see a society that gets a little more positive, and the parents can support their children as well as our staff and students.

**Mr. Adil Shamji:** Great. Thank you.

Alicia, when we were on the last round of questions, I was asking if there are any explicit additions you'd like to see to the bill or any further opportunities to improve this. Do you have any thoughts on that?

**Ms. Alicia Smith:** Sure. I'd love to see the regulations around teacher training be very specific and include specific language from the OHRC's Right to Read report. They do have recommendations related to what they think that teachers should be learning in university, and I would love to see that language included in the bill.

**Mr. Adil Shamji:** Great. Thank you very much.

On teacher training, there was something I wanted to touch on, specifically around—and perhaps Teresa or Karen, you may be able to touch on this. I noticed that there are some requirements around increased training and performance reviews for directors of education specifically. I'm curious to know what your thoughts are around how the directors of education are performing right now, whether they're performing in a satisfactory way, and what specific changes we might call upon, if any, to improve that performance.

**Ms. Karen Littlewood:** I'll just jump in and say that I really believe that a director of education should come from education, and that's not always the case. There was an example of that within the GTA in the last five years or so, where there was a director who came from outside of education and it was really not terribly successful. So I think that's really important.

But we also have to acknowledge that there's a massive turnover happening right now with directors of education as well, because we're all heading to that age of retirement and people are moving on to something else. I think a lot of the issues we will see will be based on the fact that there is a lot of turnover happening at boards at the senior staff level.

**1350**

So, sure, if we can have some more training and more support. We need all players to play a part in this, so that means the government setting out some standards. As Alicia said earlier, maybe we do need a little bit more of a push to have the government say, "Yes, you need to be implementing the Right to Read report as well," but also to have those other additional supports that are needed from the government, but then at the board level and then right down to the actual educator. It is really important.

I don't think we should just be focusing on teacher training and the faculty, but we need to be looking at the professional development that's needed for the people who are currently in the system—

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** You have one minute.

**Ms. Karen Littlewood:** —and being able to provide supports for that, and that does come at a cost as well.

**Ms. Teresa Lopez:** As parent members, we are happy for the proposed legislation and holding directors accountable and perhaps being consistent across all boards across the province so all of our parents know expectations and what rules they are supporting.

**Mr. Adil Shamji:** Okay. Thank you very much.

I'll try to ask this one as quickly as possible: The bill allows the removal of a qualification for a teacher if their licence has been suspended for three years or a shorter period of time as prescribed by regulation. Karen, can you speak to that? For example, is there a significant number of teachers whose suspensions are lifted and do return to teaching after that time period? Do you have any reflections on this provision in the bill?

**Ms. Karen Littlewood:** I would imagine the college of teachers would probably have much better data than I

would have anecdotally right here and right now. But no, I think often what happens is—

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** That's the end of that. Thank you.

We'll now go to the government, who has seven minutes and 30 seconds. I recognize MPP Pierre.

**Ms. Natalie Pierre:** Thank you to today's presenters. I have a couple of questions, actually, for Alicia, so I'll start with the first one. Can you tell us what educators have shared with you about the practices of the science of reading?

**Ms. Alicia Smith:** Oh, I'd love to. Teachers who have attended our workshops and training events over the last several years are very enthusiastic and optimistic about having this information and bringing it into their classroom. Many describe it as like the missing piece to the puzzle. So when they start to learn about it, they realize it makes so much sense and it helps them to put everything else that they're doing into context.

When we talk about adopting practices aligned with the science of reading, I think it's really important to keep in mind that that is not just one narrow part of literacy. The science of reading is the really entire body of scientific research that informs how people learn to read, why some people struggle with reading and what instructional approaches are best for all individuals, as well as what can be adapted or intensified for kids who are struggling.

The feedback from teachers who have had the opportunity to have that professional development has been really positive. It can be overwhelming, though, I will say, and so teachers really do need to have support, and they need to have job-embedded professional development so that they can really do that learning, because it has been excluded from their education to this point. It's also not included in the Ontario College of Teachers accredited additional qualification courses, including the reading specialist and special education courses. I know numerous teachers who have completed both of those and didn't learn what they needed to know to teach kids to read. I hope that answers your question.

**Ms. Natalie Pierre:** It does, thank you. And then the follow-up question: I'm curious if you've experienced resistance when it comes to implementing the science of reading.

**Ms. Alicia Smith:** Oh, yes, lots, actually. I would direct anybody who is curious to look at the official statement from Western's faculty of education, which wrote a scathing statement about the Right to Read inquiry report, including criticizing the science of reading—actually, science itself—and the very existence of dyslexia. They called that into question as well.

Interestingly, there was another statement that was signed by a larger group of professors from Western very much in favour of and in support of the Right to Read, because there is some fantastic research that is part of the science of reading that's happening at Western; it's happening at a number of our faculties of education. Unfortunately, the research of those professors has not generally made it into the teacher faculties and isn't being translated to our teachers,

so there has been this big disconnect. We've had some really fantastic reading research that's happened right here in Ontario and, frankly, it was very upsetting to me when I found out that that had not trickled down to our teachers.

**Ms. Natalie Pierre:** Just out of curiosity, when were those research papers written and published? Do you have any information on how old that information is?

**Ms. Alicia Smith:** The science of reading?

**Ms. Natalie Pierre:** Yes.

**Ms. Alicia Smith:** The scientific study of reading goes back probably 60 years or more. One really interesting paper—or not even a paper, a review—was Ontario's own expert reading panel, which published in 2003. So in 2003, Ontario's assembled expert panel on early reading came to the conclusion that the most effective way to teach children to read words is through systematic and explicit instruction in phonics. But in 2006, the Ontario government put out a language curriculum that instead said that we should teach children to read words using the whole-language three-cueing idea, which is this idea that children will read words by using context clues like pictures or familiar word order, syntax or just looking at the first letter. That's a very old idea that came out of a paper from the 1960s that was, interestingly, thoroughly disproven at OISE in the 1990s. Yet it ended up in our curriculum in 2006 and it's still being taught to teachers in our faculties of education today.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** MPP Barnes.

**Ms. Patrice Barnes:** Thank you. I'm just going to read this quote, and I want to get each of you to comment on it, actually. This quote came from the Royal Commission in 1994: "One complaint that we heard, repeatedly, was that the public education system no longer seems to be responsible to the public.... There exists widespread unease that schools have become a kingdom unto themselves, with little need to report to parents or to the world at large what they are doing with our kids, and whether they're doing it successfully."

That was from an NDP Royal Commission from 1994. What are your thoughts on that? Because this bill was introduced with the idea of really bringing back transparency and accountability and getting parents back into the system and being a part of their learning, which we know research shows that that helps kids to be more successful. So I just want to get your comment on that, and yours as well.

**Ms. Alicia Smith:** Sure. I guess I'll go first. I think that absolutely rings true today as well. There is very little accountability and communication when it comes to explaining to parents exactly how their kids are doing with reading development. I've seen IEP goals that are set that are so vaguely written that parents have no idea what they mean, and when I translate it for them, what it actually means is that your child started the year reading three years behind, and by the end of this year, we expect that they're going to be five years or four years behind. That's what it kind of means, often.

So there's not a lot of clear and consistent communication with parents. I hope that by moving to evidence-based

screening measures and reporting that data to parents, parents will have a much better understanding of how their children are actually doing with reading.

**Ms. Teresa Lopez:** From a parent-member standpoint, as most of you are parents, you know that every school has a different experience, and we are hopeful that this legislation is going to add consistency across every board in the province. Regardless of how small or big your board is, your experience at every school should be consistent. As a parent, I should be able to go in and say, “My child is struggling with reading. How can you help?” Will I get fluffed off? Will I be supported? It depends, right? So we’re hoping that this legislation with the wording is great.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** You have one minute. I recognize MPP Martin.

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** Thank you to the presenters. I just wanted to ask: Teresa, you mentioned something about the importance of parents having information, particularly for parents who have children with special needs—also, something very close to my heart. So I’m just wondering if you could tell us what you think is going to help in this legislation. I think there’s reference to a parent handbook, information for parents about what they can expect.

**Ms. Teresa Lopez:** Yes, so right now, if you recognize that your child is struggling, not going through the normal channels like everyone else, you can reach out to your teacher and your principal and the learning support staff. Depending on their experience, they might have the knowledge to share with you. Next step, you go to your superintendent, your trustee. Again, depending on experience—

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** I have to cut you off there. I’m sorry.

I would like to thank our presenters for their involvement. If you would like to submit any written materials to the committee in addition to your presentation today, the deadline for written submissions is 7 p.m. eastern daylight savings time on Tuesday, May 9, 2023. Thank you for coming.

1400

ONTARIO ASSOCIATION OF PARENTS  
IN CATHOLIC EDUCATION  
FEDERATION OF CANADIAN  
SECONDARY STUDENTS  
ELEMENTARY TEACHERS’ FEDERATION  
OF ONTARIO

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** We’ll now move on to our 2 o’clock presenters: the Ontario Association of Parents in Catholic Education, Federation of Canadian Secondary Students, and the Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario. I’d like to welcome everybody. As a reminder, each of you will have seven minutes for your presentations, followed by questions from the committee members. I will provide reminders of time remaining during the presentations and in questions. Please state your name for the Hansard, and then you may begin.

The Ontario Association of Parents in Catholic Education first, please.

**Mr. Joe Perri:** Okay.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Please state your name, sir.

**Mr. Joe Perri:** My name is Joe Perri. So I can begin?

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** You may begin. Just speak closer to the mike.

**Mr. Joe Perri:** Closer to the mike? Okay.

Good afternoon, committee members. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on aspects of the proposed Bill 98, a proposal for the Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act, 2023. My name is Joe Perri. I am here on behalf of the Ontario Association of Parents in Catholic Education.

The intention of education should be to prepare our young citizens for adult lives of purpose and fulfillment and to live in harmony with society. Digital learning platforms and web conferencing software have advanced the ability for teaching and learning many traditional subjects at an exponential rate. At the same time, digital distractions of all manner are impacting the lives of our students, affecting their mental and physical health and making it harder for them to focus on gaining knowledge and skill-building.

The Right to Read inquiry demonstrated how important it is for boards to focus on the latest research to help each individual child achieve their best, based on science-driven approaches to teaching instruction. There needs to be a stronger focus on getting back to the basics, such as reading, writing, math, as well as adapting to the new tech world. School boards need to be focused on engaging students in literacy, math and practical skill-building for our students that will prepare them for the current needs of the Ontario economy.

Every child is special. Each student deserves to be challenged appropriately and have their learning style accommodated, whether they have a registered exceptionality or not. With the current system, a parent’s suggestions are not necessarily respected. A greater sharing of information from home and school, with the intention of bringing out the very best performance, health and well-being of the student, should be encouraged.

Moving to recommendation number 1, we have here that parent involvement is at an all-time low due to the aftermath of the pandemic and the restrictions that came with it. In fact, many parents have reached out to us informing us that they still have yet to be involved in their schools as they once were, either through volunteer opportunities in the class or simple pizza lunches. It has been proven that with parent involvement and engagement, it leads to student success. An engaged parent can support their child better, as they have the tools and resources that they need to do so, providing parents with examples of parent involvement at home, in the school and, in the case of the Catholic schools, with their parishes. Promoting parent engagement is integral, and targets not only new parents to the system but also ensures that parents remain

engaged as their children transition to high school, when most parents stop being involved.

Parents are also faced with learning the ins and outs of the system, and it can be daunting to some, especially those that are newcomers or that speak another language or are new to the overall system. When issues arise, this is when we as an organization hear the most from our parents, as they do not know how to address the concern or who to turn to when they are not being given support or direction on how to elevate their concerns that have not been addressed properly.

The levels of hierarchy that many parents have to go through to have an issue or concern addressed varies by school board, but usually it is very overwhelming for the parents to understand. In many instances, when parents have been able to reach out to senior staff or a trustee, their concerns have been swept away. In some instances, parents are told that they cannot pursue a matter further and that that is the end of it.

In the proposed board communication with parents and guardians, 27.3, we would like to see the ministry set out a charter of rights of parents, working with groups such as OAPCE. At one school board, such a charter was created and informed through the hard work of parents, but unfortunately, it got shelved and watered down to a statement of principles and buried away.

The protocol for school boards in relation to parent complaints must be simple and easy to use. We believe that matters should be addressed by those closest to the issue when dealing with school-level complaints, but over the last number of years, it has been nearly impossible to get attention and seek resolution.

Recommendation number 2: School boards should be required to keep track of complaints and issues and provide reports on the average timelines in dealing with these matters, also summarizing what top concerns have been escalated. There needs to be school board transparency regarding funding. Sometimes money is given to the board for specific initiatives and not all the money is spent accordingly. Many schools do not have access to the technology that is so needed in many classes and at times parents are given the task to raise funds to purchase extra technology.

With respect to information and reports re school property, 193.1, we must recognize that land is at a premium, especially in urban centres. Property needs to be retained for the public good, ensuring that schools remain hubs of their community. We would like to see more work with school boards, with municipal agencies and other partners to develop and keep land in public hands—

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** You have one minute.

**Mr. Joe Perri:** —while ensuring effective use of sites and buildings. It is amazing that in the city of Toronto, land keeps getting sold, yet we see all kinds of signs on the various development sites that there will not be enough room to accommodate new students to the closest schools.

Code of conduct, 218.2: We applaud the minister for attempting to remove the politicization of the code of conduct votes by the board of trustees. Recommendation number

3: There needs to be a process whereby members of the public can bring forward a legitimate concern of a breach of the existing trustee code of conduct. This will maintain that all trustees work toward a common goal of accountability. Parents need to be given the right resources and tools in order to understand their right to advocate for their child and their right to receive a fair and quick resolution to any issues or concerns.

Transparency and—

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Thank you for your presentation. I'm sorry, I have to cut you off there.

We'll now go to the Federation of Canadian Secondary Students. You may begin.

**Mr. Bruce Yu:** Thank you very much, Chair. It's a pleasure to be here this afternoon. My name is Bruce Yu, and I am the executive director for the Federation of Canadian Secondary Students/la Fédération des élèves du secondaire au Canada, a registered Canadian charity that advocates for the interests of high school students across Canada.

Je tiens à remercier les membres du Comité permanent de la politique sociale de nous avoir donné l'occasion de commenter une législation très importante qui vise à changer l'éducation ici en Ontario.

The federation welcomes Bill 98, the Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act, and we are pleased that it has passed first and second reading in the Legislative Assembly.

When I think about education in Ontario, I'm always brought back to the guiding language in the Education Act, that every board shall promote student achievement and well-being. That tenet, to me, needs to be central in any piece of education policy-making. I think the bill does an excellent job of advancing that principle.

When I read through the language of Bill 98, the key theme that stands out to me is accountability—accountability for trustees, accountability for the director of education, accountability for how school boards spend money, all to ensure that our students receive the best education possible.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Would you please speak closer to the mike.

**Mr. Bruce Yu:** Sorry, yes.

One of the major propositions of this bill is that, if passed, it would empower the minister to make regulations setting provincial priorities and to benchmark school boards on their progress toward those goals. Families have the right to know how their school board is performing, and if their school board is underperforming, they deserve to know how their board plans to get back on track.

As an organization, we hope the minister is going to be extensively consulting with various stakeholder groups on the development of these provincial priorities. As an organization, we also hope that student achievement and well-being, namely student safety, are included in the list of priorities established by the minister through regulation.

**1410**

With regard to the accountability of the director of education, one of the most important responsibilities of any

board is to hire the CEO. The Education Act clearly identifies hiring and reviewing the performance of the director of education as key responsibilities of each board of trustees. It is our view that amendments to the Education Act, which allow the minister to provide regulations guiding performance appraisals of the director, are going to help trustees in furthering their objective of ensuring the director is accountable to the students and families of the board.

In addition to serving as executive director for the federation, I also had the pleasure of being student trustee for the York Region District School Board. In that time, I took a particular interest in school board governance. I can say, unequivocally, that the changes proposed in Bill 98 are going to strengthen school board governance in Ontario.

During my term as a student trustee, one of the matters that came before the YRDSB was an investigation into the breach of the trustee code of conduct. As part of that debate, I vividly remember a trustee accusing another trustee of not supporting a sanction against a trustee because the first trustee felt that the second trustee was aligned politically with the trustee under investigation. The board, which was supposed to act as a quasi-judicial body, became a political body, which, to a certain extent, is inevitable given the fact that the board of trustees is a popularly elected political institution.

The bill addresses this problem by empowering the integrity commissioner, which is a neutral third party that some boards have, but not all boards currently have, to impose sanctions instead of delegating this to the board, which would certainly remove some of the politicization around the process. At the same time, there's also an appeals process built in, so if there are disagreements among the board or the trustee being investigated there is a panel of integrity commissioners who can make a determination.

As an organization, we are supportive of this new model, because it ensures our trustees, who often do find themselves in the ideological minority, are not at the whims of the majority, which I think is particularly important given some of the controversies that have taken place in both the Waterloo and Toronto district school boards.

We feel it would be beneficial for the bill to clarify the right to judicial review and include that if a decision of the panel does undergo judicial review, the standard of review would be correctness. Under the Supreme Court of Canada's Vavilov decision, the default standard of review would be reasonableness, unless specified otherwise in the legislation. We would stipulate that, given that the sanctions imposed by the integrity commissioner or the panel effectively temporarily suspend the ability of a trustee, a duly elected official, to exercise the duties of their office, decisions of that panel should be held to the higher standard of correctness.

With regard to financial accountability, in our education funding consultation brief that we submitted to the ministry last November, we spoke about the importance of responsible expenditure of funds. Students are concerned that school boards are spending taxpayer funds on speakers and consultants who end up charging high hourly rates

with no tangible outcomes. Quite frankly, that is unacceptable. Every single dollar spent by a school board should either advance student achievement or student well-being, ideally both. We're very glad to see that Bill 98 proposes amendments to the Education Act that, if passed, would give the minister the authority to make regulations prescribing conditions on the expenditure of board funds.

When I think back to my campaign as a student trustee, one of the things that I heard over and over again from students was that the curriculum is outdated and needs to be modernized. In particular, I heard that students felt the careers curriculum needed to be improved and that the science curriculum did not address some key technological developments. We're very glad to see that the bill, if passed, would allow the minister to issue guidelines around the revision and review of curriculum.

Fundamentally, Bill 98 empowers our education system to be flexible and it empowers it to be responsive to the needs of our students and the needs of the workforce, which ultimately gives Ontario students a leg up when it comes to getting into the job market. The federation welcomes Bill 98, the Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act, because it puts the students first and builds a culture of accountability in our school boards.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on this item.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Thank you. Now we'll go to the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario. You may begin.

**Ms. Karen Brown:** Good afternoon. My name is Karen Brown. I'm president of the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario. I would like to start by thanking the committee for the opportunity to speak to you on behalf of 83,000 ETFO members who work in Ontario's public elementary schools.

On April 17, Minister of Education Stephen Lecce tabled Bill 98, with the stated objectives of refocusing the education system and improving outcomes for students in Ontario. This legislation was developed without input from ETFO or any other education union. In its communication to stakeholders announcing the legislation, the minister indicated that Bill 98 is significant and transformative, and asked that feedback on the legislation be provided to the ministry by May 16. The fact that these public hearings will be completed before input from education stakeholders has been granted, let alone properly considered, strongly suggests that the government is fully intent on ignoring input that runs counter to its agenda.

Bill 98 is indeed significant and transformative—however, not in the way that the government has portrayed it. This legislation would have the opposite effect of what the government has claimed its objective to be. If adopted, Bill 98 would set public education back decades, undermine student outcomes, diminish accountability and transparency, and lay the groundwork for further privatization of public education.

Schedule 2 of Bill 98 contains significant changes to the Education Act. At its core, schedule 2 would centralize control of public schools in the hands of the Ministry of Education, stripping school boards of the ability to tailor

programs and supports to the communities they serve. It would also remove safeguards that ensure transparency and accountability in how public education is delivered.

Schedule 2 would also allow the government to force an unprecedented sell-off of school sites, the impact of which will be felt for decades to come. Forcing school boards to sell school buildings and properties is short-sighted and could prove costly in coming years as communities change and the need for new schools arises. These decisions should be made at the school board level, where the needs of the communities impacted can be considered.

It is difficult to fully assess the impact that schedule 2 would have. It would grant the government broad regulation-making powers, leaving future decisions about curriculum review, resource allocation, programming, building of new schools, disposition of school board assets, conduct of trustees, equity programs, mental health supports and nearly every aspect of the delivery of public education in the hands of the Minister of Education and out of reach of students, families, educators, elected trustees and communities that would be impacted.

With regard to schedules 1 and 3, they introduce amendments to the Ontario College of Teachers Act and the Early Childhood Educators Act. A core set of changes is common to both statutes. It includes provisions broadening the availability of counselling for sexual abuse victims and changes that expand the actions the investigations/complaints committee may take following an investigation to include requiring a member to complete remedial training or education. ETFO supports these limited changes, which are contained in sections 1 and 5 of schedule 1 and sections 6 and 17 of schedule 3.

Some of the remaining changes to both college investigations and discipline raise serious concerns about procedural fairness. Schedule 3 also contains changes that are unique to the OCTA; among these are changes to how members can regain registration if they are suspended for non-payment of fees, non-payment of penalties or failure to provide the required information. Currently, members have a right to re-registration if they pay the necessary fees or provide the required information. Under the changes proposed, if a member is suspended for three years or more, the registrar may revoke the member's registration. To be able to teach again, a member would be required to reapply in accordance with the regulations. This three-year period can be shortened by regulation.

Ontario is currently experiencing a teacher shortage. Every day in schools across the province, there are unfilled teaching assignments. Not having qualified teachers in classrooms adversely impacts student learning. The change proposed would create additional barriers to members returning to teaching. The only possible explanation for new rules authorizing the revocation of members' registration after an administrative suspension for three years, or even a shorter period, is the collection of more fees.

Finally, schedule 3 introduces a new provision with respect to the accreditation of post-secondary professional teacher education programs. Under the amendment, programs can only be accredited if they enable students to

acquire knowledge of the Ontario curriculum, particularly in relation to math, reading and literacy. This new provision appears to be part of the current government's focus on so-called basic education, whereby "basics" does not mean understanding how students learn and the best ways to teach. Rather, "basics" are a list of subjects that can be added to or taken away from at any time.

Implicit in the government's focus is an assumption that teacher programs—

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** You have one minute.

**Ms. Karen Brown:**—are not already equipping teacher candidates with the skills, knowledge and judgment needed to teach math, reading and literacy. This assumption is not supported by the evidence regarding student achievement in these areas. Inserting a new provision to highlight specific subjects is short-sighted. It reflects a lack of respect for teachers' knowledge, professionalism and skills, and a lack of understanding of the teaching profession.

**1420**

ETFO recommends that the government withdraw Bill 98 in its entirety and engage in a meaningful consultation process with education stakeholders. The changes that are contained in sections 1 and 5 of schedule 1 and sections 6 and 17 of schedule 3 should be introduced in a separate bill.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Thank you.

We will now go to the government for questions. You have seven minutes and 30 seconds. I recognize MPP Rae.

**Mr. Matthew Rae:** Thank you to all the presenters, in the room and virtually, for your presentations today. I know the committee appreciated them.

My question is for Joe. As Joe is probably aware, and the government side and the opposition are aware as well, we continue to invest historic amounts in our public education system, billions of additional dollars each year. Given that school boards now are entrusted with \$32 billion annually—taxpayer dollars, obviously—do you believe it is appropriate or necessary that there are reasonable and transparent measures in place to ensure that taxpayer dollars are spent as they should be?

**Mr. Joe Perri:** Yes, that's one of the pillars that we feel is in perfect alignment as far as accountability and transparency on all levels—at the school level, at the trustee level, at the board level—that there is a system in place to track and have the follow-up in there and the checkpoints in there to make sure that those funds are being allocated where they were intended to be allocated.

Those are some of the issues that we are seeing now. Some of the funding is actually getting allocated on a board level somewhere else, and oftentimes they're misallocating it and misusing some of those funds. So we are in full support of that, and we do feel that it is a pillar that has to be moved forward for the benefit of education.

As you said, there are historic amounts of money being invested in education, so there's no excuse in terms of why we don't have a better system based on the fact that the funding is there; it's just a matter of putting the controls in place to capture and to monitor how we're doing that, and it's on every level. The trustee level is a big one, as well, obviously, but we also feel that it doesn't detract from the trustee or the board level, from those folks doing their

tasks. We feel that it creates a system to make it easier for them to work within, and to know their responsibilities and the accountabilities that are in place there.

That's our answer.

**Mr. Matthew Rae:** Thank you for that, Joe. Sort of switching a little bit again, but with transparency and accountability: Have parents raised concerns that they feel like their voices aren't being heard? And if yes, in your experience, can you tell us why it's important to have parents at the decision-making table, especially, as we alluded to in my previous question, around the amount of money, as well?

**Mr. Joe Perri:** Yes. That is actually one of the biggest things that our organization does, is that we work with parents across Ontario to get them involved. They do feel that they don't have a say. Oftentimes they are very intimidated by the current system in terms of getting involved, and that's on the lower levels, within the school, the teaching staff and the principal, but even on a higher level.

They feel oftentimes—and we've seen it; we have cases where they've raised issues, and those issues largely go unheard. And when they raise them to the higher level, the board level, they're limited with the time that they have to speak on a matter to three minutes, and at that point, then, it's even sort of tossed aside.

We do feel that the parent component is vital. And also, just right through from the life that children have in their homes and how that carries over to the classroom, there's got to be a connection there. It can't just be a self-standing entity, the parent looking after the child in the home, and then they go off to school and it's a whole different world. We see that there's a great benefit to having the conversation there or the continuity, from the home to the classroom, in terms of the parents' involvement with their student and the student's education.

**Mr. Matthew Rae:** Thank you. I believe my colleague has a question.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** The Chair recognizes MPP Quinn.

**Mr. Nolan Quinn:** Thank you to all the presenters today. My question is for Bruce.

Just a bit of background on myself: I've owned a restaurant for the last 13 years. I actually started there when I was 14. I was great in math but horribly awkward when it came to serving the customers, so I started as a cleanup kid. I've worked my way up; now I do own the restaurant. But I've noticed a bit of a slip in our math skills when it comes to the staff coming through my store, and because I hire at 14, 15, I get to kind of gauge the education system based on every few years to see the differences.

I'm just curious what your thoughts are on our government's commitment on refocusing Ontario's education system on what really matters: strengthening reading, writing and math skills.

**Mr. Bruce Yu:** Thank you for the question, MPP Quinn. I think it's absolutely fundamental that students are building those key literacy and math skills, because when I think about subjects like science, physics in particular and chemistry are based on those key mathematical skills. I

think regardless of what field students find themselves in, math and literacy are absolutely fundamental skills that students need if they want to be successful in that field. So I'm very appreciative of the government's investments in math education, because again, that does build students for success later in the job market.

**Mr. Nolan Quinn:** Thank you. Again, I think we've all experienced it when going to a retail environment and you try to give some extra change to the cashier and they're not too sure how to make the change from that—that's kind of what I was implying. What has your experience been in navigating the public education system? Have you experienced any challenges? If so, what have they been?

**Mr. Bruce Yu:** It's a great question, and I think maybe I'll—okay, a couple ways I could approach this. But, yes, I've been a student of Ontario's publicly funded education system since JK. I'm in grade 12 right now, so it's been 14 years with the same board, and overall, I think it's been a very positive experience. The teachers and administrators at my school have all been very positive, and I really do appreciate the sense of community they have here in York region.

My only comment would be that it's sometimes challenging for a student voice to get heard by decision-makers. In fact, I think it's hard for even a parent voice to get heard by decision-makers. Yes, absolutely, there are parents who are putting a lot of effort into ensuring that their child's needs are accommodated, and I think it's unfortunate that sometimes parents and students need to be very, very loud if they want to get something done. I think there's a lot of room for improvement for school boards to ensure that student voice and parent voice is actively consulted as part of major decisions.

**Mr. Nolan Quinn:** Thank you, Bruce. And again, I'll ask one more while I'm on a roll here. I am a young parent as well; I have young children at home. And I'm just curious, your parents and guardians—

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** You have one minute.

**Mr. Nolan Quinn:** —are they always informed of what's going on in your school? Are your parents aware of everything that happens at the school?

**Mr. Bruce Yu:** I like to think so, and I guess, on that note, what I would say is, a lot of times, school boards, I think, tend to overwhelm parents with communications. I think back to the pandemic and the early months of the pandemic, and our parents would get email after email after email, and they were very lengthy. I think there's a lot of work that boards can do to make sure their communications are concise, because for my parents, English is not their first language, right? But I think it's important that every parent knows what's going on in their classroom, and that means ensuring that communications sent to parents are written in clear language and as concise as possible, and also ensuring that any sort of board documents, board policies are also available in an accessible format.

**Mr. Nolan Quinn:** Thank you, Bruce.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Thank you. Okay, so now—

**Ms. Patrice Barnes:** Are we out of time?

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** You had 20 seconds.

**Ms. Patrice Barnes:** Oh, okay. Then we'll just skip.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** All right, so let's go over to the official opposition. We'll start with MPP Pasma.

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** Thank you so much to all of our witnesses for being here this afternoon and taking the time to come and share your experience and expertise with us.

I'm going to start with Karen and the folks at ETFO. Karen, you touched briefly on the topic of consultation, and I want to dive into that a little bit more because, of course, teachers and education workers are on the front lines in our schools. You're the ones who are there every single day, seeing what is happening in our classrooms, seeing first-hand what our children are struggling with, what their needs are, what kinds of supports they need and what kinds of supports they're not getting. So I think it would be really critical if we're going to address education in Ontario and the supports that our children need that we include the voices of teachers and education workers. Were you consulted on this bill?

**Ms. Karen Brown:** We were not consulted on this bill at all. This is our only opportunity to address, and as you know, the timeline to respond, I believe, is May 16, so that really doesn't give a lot of opportunity for true dialogue, true input, in regard to some of the concerns that we have. I do want to take this opportunity to say, when you're talking about student success, and there was a speaker that talked about supporting students with mathematics—that's wonderful. Students need smaller class sizes to allow them to do that. We need specialist teachers who can provide that attention to aid them. We all want the same thing: the ability to provide success for our students.

1430

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** Thanks, Karen. And if you were consulted on what kinds of supports our kids need right now—we know that class sizes are increasing, that we've lost teachers and education workers, that the number of unqualified teachers in our classrooms is increasing. Certainly, as a parent, I'm seeing mental health challenges with my own kids, and I know I hear it from a lot of parents and students, and that is contributing to concerns around violence in our schools.

If you had been consulted by the minister, what would you say are the supports, resources and perhaps legislative changes that are actually needed to support our students and make sure every student is able to succeed in Ontario?

**Ms. Karen Brown:** Well, what we've been saying for years is that the government really needs to have, as you said, consultation with us: first of all to sit down and talk about it; to look at the issues of class size, look at supports; look at, well, what we are doing when we talk about hiring for education workers, child and youth care workers. It's great that you've invested some money in the system, but it's not enough money that's being invested into the system to support the needs that are actually there. So it's great we might have been given some funds to hire a few child and youth care workers or a few psychologists, but

what is the wait period of time for those students to be able to see that particular psychologist; to be identified, so that they can get the supports in place, so that they can be in the proper program, to have, then, the teacher or the child and youth care worker working with them?

What we're hearing from parents is there's a delay in diagnosing, getting the proper diagnosis and the proper assessments and supports. So we need that. It's not just to put the money in. You need to put the money in and then you need to have the individuals who are there to support. There continues to be a gap. You can't take out billions of dollars over the years and have a \$2-billion surplus and think that you're actually contributing to the system.

We're seeing a rise in mental health issues. Teachers are not experts in that area. They need professional development and training. That takes time. You just can't pass the legislation and expect that to happen in September. These are some of the things that are concrete that students need, that parents need.

Violence in the schools is on the rise; we heard that in the announcement. We welcome that the government is putting some money in that area, but let's look at the root cause of that: the fact that students aren't being supported. They're acting out. They don't have the ability to have smaller supports to redirect and to help them develop the appropriate skills to engage.

Those are just a few things. When we're talking about Bill 98 and you're talking about the changes that are happening with school boards and with trustees, parents' voices are important. It's important that people who are elected have an opportunity to be engaged in this process. We know what would happen in centralization. It becomes standardization, then becomes privatization. We're very concerned we're seeing that happen right now.

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** Thanks, Karen. What we've seen with the consultation around this bill—more accurately, the lack of consultation. Does that give you any faith that the minister is actually going to consult with parents; with local school board trustees who are, as you say, locally elected and locally accountable; with teachers and education workers on what the needs of children actually are and what the priorities in schools should actually be? Do you have any faith that those consultations are going to happen?

**Ms. Karen Brown:** I don't have any faith that it's going to be meaningful consultation. We've seen it before where we've had these opportunities, and within weeks or within a very short period of time, things are just rammed through. Really, I think it's disappointing to give a perception that they're really going to take this input and make some changes. There's not enough time for these things to actually occur. It's quite obvious the government has already made up their mind and this is just part of a routine that they're doing. It's very disappointing to the people of Ontario. It's very unfortunate for our students who deserve the best and deserve people to take what's happening in the system very seriously.

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** Thank you, Karen. What I'm also seeing and hearing from a lot of teachers and education workers—a lot—is that it's our youngest children that

are struggling the most, certainly in terms of mental health challenges, lack of socialization, difficulty in catching up on learning, but that there are also not supports available in the classroom to support children with special needs, children who have mental health challenges.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** You have one minute.

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** I've had teachers say when they don't have an EA present in the class, learning has to stop. They're just focused on keeping the kids safe.

Can you talk more from the perspective of a teacher? What kinds of supports do we actually need in order to make sure that our children are safe, able to participate in the classroom and able to learn?

**Ms. Karen Brown:** I've mentioned some of them before, but I'll mention them again.

You talked about the early years. We need to establish a good foundation, a good investment for those particular students.

When you talk about mental health issues and supports—that's because, as you said, there aren't the child and youth care workers and the psychologists to be able to support these students. They're still very young in regard to the identification, so it takes a bit of time, but you actually need the individuals. When I was in school, there were guidance counsellors—they don't exist—so if a student was struggling, there was someone there who would be able to connect the parent to community supports—

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Thank you very much for your comments.

We will now go to the government side, and we will start with MPP Barnes.

**Ms. Patrice Barnes:** Thank you to all the presenters. This question is for Karen.

The Minister of Education and the ministry continually meet with the trustee associations and parental associations on a regular basis.

This bill is about accountability. It's about updating curriculum. It's about increasing parent involvement. It's about student success. It's about getting teachers certified faster. It's about a code of conduct for trustees. And it's about assessment for our youngest learners so that we can get interventions early for those learners.

So my question for you is, what is the grave concern around this particular bill, when it's trying to enhance accountability within the Ontario public school boards?

**Ms. Karen Brown:** Thank you for that question. I'll start with the issue around trustees, in the order of my presentation. Trustees have been elected by people within their communities to articulate their concerns and going through that particular process. What we're seeing here is the centralization of control by the minister. Each school board has unique challenges, unique programming; everyone is not the same. Toronto is not the same as Sault Ste. Marie. Basically, what we're seeing is that ability to meet some of those individual needs for the school boards—we're quite concerned about that. I understand transparency, but it seems that everything is just being centralized to the minister, and those who are elected to provide that transparency are being removed from that process and that responsibility has been taken from them.

When I mention in regard to the education system and we're talking about the programming in post-secondary education, a focus just on the "basics"—math and literacy—is really not looking at how students learn best, how we support those students in order to achieve.

Earlier, one of the MPPs talked about—as was said before, you're seeing some challenges with the students counting coins. That's because there needs to be the support for those particular students. When you're looking at a child and you're teaching, you're looking at the whole child. Those are some elements that are important, but those aren't just the key elements, and what we've read here is that those things can change tomorrow. So it gives the subjects that we could be focusing on—and next year it could be math, it could be science, it could be history, as opposed to, what do students actually need to succeed as an overall, and put those supports on all of those things. So it's not just those basics. You need to be able to interact with other people while working at that store, so your interpersonal skills are also very key and important, and your ability to negotiate with other students. There are a variety of factors.

I also mentioned the issue in regard to the college for us. We're experiencing a crisis in education. We understand that there are over 30-something thousand teachers with teaching certificates who are not teaching because the climate of teaching is not welcoming—the respect, the downloading, the non-consultation, the vast changes without the support—

**Ms. Patrice Barnes:** Karen? Sorry, I know you're getting into this, but I just want to get that question. Thank you so much for that response.

I'll just move on to my colleagues.

1440

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** MPP Pang, go ahead.

**Mr. Billy Pang:** This question is for Joe—I'm sorry, it's for Bruce. You are in grade 12, so you are going to graduate very soon. This bill, to a certain extent, won't serve you, but which part of the bill are you saying, "Hmm, it should have been here earlier" so that you could have enjoyed it?

**Mr. Bruce Yu:** That's an excellent question. Thank you, MPP Pang. It's a really good question.

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** He stumped you.

**Mr. Bruce Yu:** Yes, it has stumped me to a certain extent. I guess I'll put it this way: I think the code of conduct reform. Even though I think a lot of students might not view code of conduct reform as directly applicable to their daily lives, I think trustee governance is so, so important.

In my time as a student trustee, I saw how the board spent almost five hours, going from 7 to 12 a.m. in the night, talking about a trustee code of conduct issue. Discussions about those issues are evidently important, but they do detract, I think, from the core business of the board, which is to ensure the director of education is effectively implementing the board's multi-year strategic plan.

So I'm really, really glad to see those reforms to the code of the conduct because I think they're going to empower trustees to focus on what matters. When trustees are focusing on what matters, it's going to help students,

because boards need to be focusing on student achievement and well-being. I think the code of conduct reforms are absolutely going to do that.

**Mr. Billy Pang:** Excellent. As a previous school board trustee of YRDSB, I appreciate how we serve the students in the region. However, also as a parent, I can understand that students spend six and a half hours at school every day, so after school, you have to deal with your parents. In your position, how are you going to help the students younger than you are to engage with their parents so that they can understand more, because we want to have more parent engagement. But the statistics that I have read—basically, the average parent spends seven minutes every day with their children, so seven minutes compared to six and a half hours, right? So yes, I can understand that parents are very busy. Having said that, do you have any ideas on helping the students bring information back to parents so that this bill can in fact help more effectively?

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** We have 46 seconds left.

**Mr. Bruce Yu:** Thank you, MPP Pang. I'll try to answer that. You've also got me stumped again there, but I think I'll tie it back to my previous comments about board communications. A lot of times, students aren't directly talking to parents about issues that are happening in their schools. A lot of those conversations start off from emails from the board, so I think it's really, really important that the board is clearly communicating with parents. Again, when I think back to COVID-19 communication, the emails that we got were incredibly lengthy. They were full of fluff. I understand the board's PR team probably wants to have things look nice, but realistically, it's important that parents know what's going on. I think that starts with the board and I think boards absolutely need to do better in terms of ensuring their communications are clear to parents.

**Mr. Billy Pang:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** MPP Gates.

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** Thank you very much. I'll direct my question to Karen to start off, but I'm going to make a statement. I've been fortunate enough to be married to a teacher and a principal. My daughter is a teacher. My oldest daughter works with special-needs kids, and she's a co-ordinator within the education system, and my youngest daughter worked in public health during COVID, and I can tell you that they're all educated under a publicly funded education system, which is the envy of the world, by the way. I just wanted to say that to Karen and to congratulate all your members.

But what I found interesting—and I don't get a lot of time, so I find this interesting. Karen, I listened to you talk about all the things that could be better within the education system, and you were very clear in the last line of your presentation, where you said that Bill 98 should be withdrawn and they should have consultation with teachers and education workers. I can tell you that every bill where I've been in this committee, we haven't had consultation with unions.

But then I listened to the young man—I think it's Bruce Yu, and he was saying how great this bill is. It just doesn't

make sense, because your teachers go to school every day and we have a student saying, "Oh, no, we've got to do this and do this." So I found that part of it very interesting to me. Maybe you could kind of answer that, and then maybe I'll get Bruce there to answer as well, because it's kind of opposite sides of the field. You come through the publicly funded education system, you're well spoken and you conduct yourself extremely well. I think we're doing a lot of great things in our education system, quite frankly.

**Ms. Karen Brown:** Thank you, Mr. Gates. I agree, and the previous speaker—I believe it was Bruce—said overall his experience has been very positive. I recall that, and I think that is the experience of most students: It is very positive.

The education system is not underperforming; it's underfunded. Our members are doing what they can with what they have in what is Ontario's world-class education system. They could do much better if the supports were there—and ongoing supports, not little spurts of infusion of funds that are not going to be long-term sustainable and that are going to impact very few children.

When you look at taking money out of the system and giving it to tutorial programs, as opposed to providing those direct supports to students—that is one thing that you can do. Why should parents have to take their kids after school, if they're not working, to get tutoring somewhere else, when the government can invest those funds that they sent off to some private institution into the school system to support that particular student? That's how parents are comfortable. That's how parents see success. That's a tangible way of supporting the students, and that's how students feel tangibly supported. So that's one key element of what we need to be doing.

When we talk about the experience of wanting students to do well, our younger students—class size. People send their kids to other systems, not the public system, because they have smaller class sizes. They have that one-to-one attention. If a child is having a difficult day adjusting, there is someone who is able to take them to the side to do that. They're not worrying about having to deal with the student who is having a violent outburst because they haven't been identified, the other student who is going through a family challenge and needs support and is crying in a corner, and then all of a sudden there is another incident and the teacher has to actually evacuate the classroom.

Those are some of the things that our members are dealing with, and they are doing a very good job despite the supports. And so it seems that the—

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** Karen, I'm going to have to cut you off, only because I wanted to have the young man speak, and my colleagues want to ask a question.

**Ms. Karen Brown:** Oh, yes.

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** Please, try to keep it a little short, so you can get another question.

**Mr. Bruce Yu:** Of course. Thank you, MPP Gates, and thank you, Karen, for your remarks as well. I'm obviously not as familiar with the OCT disciplinary process as you are, but broadly speaking, I think there needs to be zero tolerance against any sort of teacher who commits any sort

of crime against a student, because they are the most vulnerable in our society. So I'm very supportive of the changes made to the OCT discipline process.

I would also say that if I were to summarize my support for the bill, it's about accountability. As I mentioned and alluded to in my remarks, it's about accountability for trustees, ensuring that trustees are focusing on what matters to their constituents, and accountability for the director, ensuring that the director of education's performance appraisal is conducted in a standardized manner. It's also about financial accountability, ensuring that every single taxpayer dollar is spent effectively.

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** Thank you. I'll pass it on to MPP Gretzky.

**Mrs. Lisa Gretzky:** We're hearing about accountability for trustees, which is not a bad thing. We're talking about codes of conduct for trustees. What I'm hearing—whether it's with this bill; or whether it was Bill 60 that we just voted on, the health care bill; or the last Working for Workers bill—is that this government is not actually consulting the people who access the services or the people who provide services. In this case, they're not actually consulting trustees. In this case, they're not talking to the education workers, and I can tell you broadly they're not talking to parents.

So I'm wondering: If we're seeing a government that actually isn't being transparent and accountable, do you have concerns that when they are drafting codes of conduct for trustees, they are not going to be consulting students? They're not going to be broadly—broadly; I'm not talking about a hearing for one day or a couple hours in a day here in Toronto, but I'm talking broadly advertising to parents, to students, to education workers, giving them the opportunity to be part of the process in providing codes of conduct for trustees. Do you have concerns, based on the government's past behaviour and their behaviour today, as we're hearing again that many people weren't consulted? Are you concerned that it will be a top-down approach from the government, as opposed to a community-based approach?

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** You have one minute.

**Mrs. Lisa Gretzky:** Either one of you.

**Ms. Karen Brown:** I'll start. It's Karen. Absolutely, we're concerned. Normally you would lead by example. You would engage people in that conversation and they would develop a sense of trust that they would be part of the process going forward. So we have no confidence in that.

**Mr. Joe Perri:** I was going to say I think that the bill does present—just the merit of going back to the basics, and fundamentally he's speaking to all the right things with this bill in terms of going back to the basics and establishing that framework for accountability, for transparency. It obviously hasn't all been fleshed out at this stage, but there is definitely merit in the plan. I think you've got to have a sort of plan set up in a way that can be moved to consulting with the proper authorities on all levels, to get the—

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** I'm going to have to stop you there. Thank you, sir.

I'd like to thank the presenters for their involvement. I would like to—

*Interjection.*

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Go ahead.

**Mrs. Lisa Gretzky:** The independents—

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** There is no independent.

**Mrs. Lisa Gretzky:** We're not splitting the time, like this morning when the independents weren't here for their time?

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** He left.

**Mrs. Lisa Gretzky:** I know he left. That means he's not here to use his time. So I'm just wondering, as we did this morning with the independents not here, if we're splitting their time—both sides.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Again, I'll table: Do you want to split the independents' time? Is it a no?

**Ms. Patrice Barnes:** This morning the conversation was the opportunity to have the minister in the chair and being able to ask him questions—

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Correct.

**Mrs. Lisa Gretzky:** I would like to speak to that.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Go ahead.

**Mrs. Lisa Gretzky:** The language that was moved this morning does not state that that would only apply while the minister was here, or for any specific time frame while the committee was meeting. The language was broad enough that it should allow, I would think, based on the language, that at any point in the hearings—whether that's today or tomorrow, frankly, because there was no date assigned to it as well—if the independents are not here, we should be able to split the time. Again, I'll ask that you look at the language of the motion that passed this morning. It was not specific to just the minister being here. That was part of a conversation but it was not in the language.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** We'll recess for 10 minutes.

*The committee recessed from 1453 to 1503.*

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Since the language that was agreed upon by the committee this morning did not contain any qualifiers or end times, it should apply for the rest of the proceedings unless another change is agreed to. What that means is everyone from both sides will get another four minutes and 30 seconds.

**Ms. Patrice Barnes:** Two and a half?

**The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Lesley Flores):** Two rounds of four minutes and 30 seconds because the independent missed both.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** So the government side can go first. Go ahead, MPP Martin.

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** I wanted to ask a question of Joe. One of the things in the bill being discussed today is the first extensive update to Ontario's education system in over 20 years. The curriculum hasn't been reviewed for many years in some cases. The minister was saying this morning it has been since 2005 or 2007 or 2009; meanwhile the world

is changing a lot. I wondered if you have any thoughts on curriculum updating. This bill, I think, provides for regular curriculum updating going forward.

**Mr. Joe Perri:** As far as updating the curriculum, I don't have a lot to say on that matter at this point in time—definitely more on the legislation around creating consistency across the province with the accountability, the transparency across all of the boards, and in terms of creating the contact points for the parents and creating that consistency, as I said, across the province. There's a big need in that regard, and that's what we're more focused on—but not on that item, specifically.

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** Can I ask that to Bruce, as well, as a person who has been in the school system for the last little while and as trustee?

**Mr. Bruce Yu:** Thank you for the question, MPP Martin.

I think the curriculum review part is something that our organization fully supports. I've watched a lot of student trustee campaigns, and those student trustee candidates talk to students and their board and they always talk about curriculum. I'm always disappointed to tell them that it's not the board that sets the curriculum; it's the ministry and the province that sets the curriculum. So I think from that, we can infer that there is absolutely a lot of appetite for the ministry to be regularly updating the curriculum, because things change, technology adapts, the workforce adapts. I think it's absolutely fundamental that the minister is empowered to order the revision and review of curricula on a regular basis.

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** I think MPP Wai had a question.

**Mrs. Daisy Wai:** I'd like to ask this question to Bruce. We have heard from many students, and we have learned that the schools need to have relevant curriculum that will help prepare students for their jobs in the future. What do you think about that, and what do you see this bill has in this regard?

**Mr. Bruce Yu:** Thank you for the question, MPP Wai.

I'm very supportive of the bill empowering the minister to make regulations about the review and revision of curricula because it allows the minister to be responsive to any community concerns or to student concerns and ensures the minister is able to adapt the curriculum or at least kick-start the process of changing the curriculum to ensure that students are learning the relevant things in their classrooms.

**Mrs. Daisy Wai:** What do you see in this bill that we have proposed—how that will prepare them for the future? What are your thoughts on it?

**Mr. Bruce Yu:** I just think it's specifically the mechanism—the fact that the minister is able to do that is important, because putting it into regulation gives the minister a lot more flexibility to make those changes as the need arises.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** I recognize MPP Martin.

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** I just had another question for Joe.

I think you mentioned something about this. Parents in your group have concerns sometimes, and you mentioned

that sometimes parents don't feel like their concerns are being addressed. How do you feel that this bill will help with making sure parents' concerns are listened to and addressed?

**Mr. Joe Perri:** We think the bill presents a way to create the mechanisms and the consistency to have those conversations with the parents and that involvement with the parents on every level, right from the classroom with the teacher, right through the principal and higher up. That's the main positive aspect of it—that the channels are there. Getting into the specific tools would be: creating the town hall meetings consistent across every board, the parent handbooks, the portal check-in points on the websites and that kind of thing. It's creating the continuity and the consistency across the board, across the province to do that. We think that's what the bill does in a very good way.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** I'll have to cut you off there.

I'll turn it over to the official opposition. You have four minutes and 30 seconds. Go ahead.

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** Joe, I have a question for you.

We don't have one education system in Ontario; we have four education systems—French, English, publicly funded, and Catholic—but this is a bill that makes no reference to that fact except when it comes to the Integrity Commissioner section. That's the only place where there's any mention of the rights of different school boards and different communities. But we know that especially for French education, control by francophones is incredibly important. For denominational education, it's very important that there be recognition of the rights of denominational members in managing that education system.

Are you not concerned, when this bill allows the minister to set any kind of priority he wants for the system, order any kind of sale of property to the system with no reflection of the rights of denomination members, that this is actually an erosion of denominational rights in Ontario?

**Mr. Joe Perri:** No, we didn't see that. Again, I'm going to go back to the fundamental framework: Going back to the basics, with the plan of the minister, and taking the politics out of the classroom seems to be a focus, and sort of the greater good, if you will.

**1510**

As far as the allocation of funds for the buildings and things of that nature, I didn't see anything here; we didn't read anything in the bill that demonstrated that there was any kind of a threat or risk in terms of that aspect, as far as real estate and the allocation of the real estate. So there was no concern.

In terms of the individual groups that you mentioned, I would imagine that when the framework is further fleshed out, the according groups would be consulted and all of that would be taken into consideration and into account when creating those action items. I don't see why that wouldn't happen in terms of the bill as it stands right now.

The rest would be speculation. It would be just saying, "We think this might happen; we think that might happen," but it hasn't actually happened yet.

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** Well, one would hope, but we also saw this bill tabled without consultation of major partners in the education system, so I think it's far from clear that there are any guarantees here that consultation will happen, including consultation with Catholic partners in education.

Bruce, a question for you: The education system has some significant challenges right now. In the time you've been in secondary school, we've seen a significant drop in funding per secondary student. It's \$1,200 less per student now than it was five years ago, once you've adjusted for inflation. We just learned, when the Grants for Student Needs came out a few weeks ago, that there are now four fewer teachers per secondary school in Ontario than there were five years ago. We're seeing significant challenges with regard to mental health, and half of schools have no mental health resources at all. Less than one in 10 has regularly scheduled access to a mental health professional.

We're hearing stories about violence increasing across the province, both due to the mental health challenges, but also students with special needs and students with other needs in the classroom not having those needs supported. Do you have any concern at all—it's great to talk about transparency and accountability, but if we're going to talk about setting priorities and expecting school boards to deliver on it, we're actually setting up school boards to fail—

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** One minute.

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:**—unless we're actually addressing all of these resource challenges and the lack of supports for students.

**Mr. Bruce Yu:** Thank you for the question. The way I view it is I think boards need to be responsible with the expenditure of funds. For example, YRDSB has a \$1.5-billion budget, and sadly you see in the news somewhat frequently, or even on Twitter, reports of the board spending things on very high-cost consultants. I think that ultimately detracts from what's important.

As I kind of alluded to in my remarks earlier, every single dollar a board spends needs to be on student achievement and well-being. I think there's a lot of work that boards can do to ensure that they're spending the money where it needs to be. I think boards definitely need to be consulting more with parents when it comes to the budget process, because again, the board does have a \$1.5-billion budget, and they do have some flexibility. I know most of the money does go to teachers' salaries, but the board does have discretionary funds, and I think the board needs to be consulting actively with students and parents to ensure that the funds that they have discretion over is going to the right places and that it's being maximized in terms of value that it's getting.

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** If there's any time left, I'll turn it over to MPP Gates—

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Thank you very much.

I'd like to thank all the presenters for their involvement. If you would like to submit any written materials to the committee in addition to your presentation today, the deadline for written submissions is 7 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time on Tuesday, May 9, 2023. Thank you for your involvement.

ONTARIO ENGLISH CATHOLIC  
TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION

SCHOOL BUS ONTARIO

MR. MIKE RAMSAY

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Now we'll go to the 3 o'clock scheduled presenters: the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association, School Bus Ontario and Mike Ramsay. Welcome. As a reminder, each of you will have seven minutes for your presentation, followed by questions from committee members. I will provide reminders of time remaining during the presentation and questions.

Please state your name for Hansard, and then you may begin. Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association, you can start, wherever you are.

**Ms. Barbara Dobrowolski:** Thank you. My name is Barbara Dobrowolski, and I'm the president of the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association. I'm here representing 45,000 professionals who teach kindergarten to grade 12 in publicly funded Catholic schools across Ontario.

The past several years have been incredibly challenging for Catholic teachers and the students and families that we serve. The biggest challenge facing us is certainly not addressed or even considered in Bill 98, the so-called Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act. I say "so-called" because there's nothing in this bill that will result in better schools or better student outcomes, and if you hear frustration in my voice today, it is because as a teacher, I am frustrated, just as families, students and educators all across the province are frustrated. The question we have repeatedly asked is this: Why can't the government bring itself to do the one thing that would make the biggest impact for Ontario students and properly invest in Ontario's publicly funded education system?

This legislation and the government's other rushed, last-minute changes to curriculum and programs, when stripped of the spin, fall well short of what students need and deserve and are seemingly more concerned with entrenching government authority over school boards and their real estate assets and giving the Minister of Education new, unchecked powers rather than serving Ontario students.

Curriculum and other program reviews can be positive and should be made, working with educators to make improvements that will serve our students, but that's not what we're seeing. This is more covertly crafted policy, announced directly to the media without consultation or collaboration and without the necessary funding to ensure success. This government thinks it knows what's best for students, but there's nothing in its five years of governance that would suggest that's true.

In our publicly funded Catholic education system, we champion a values-based approach to education. Every day, Catholic teachers incorporate important lessons for life, like empathy, resilience and respect, into every subject we teach. We're incredibly proud that graduates of our schools consistently go on to become contributing and engaged members of society in Ontario and beyond. Yet

the idea of supporting lifelong learning seems to be antithetical to this government's philosophy. We're concerned that this bill infringes on our denominational rights to determine what the priorities are for our students. This, and other recent changes, are yet more examples of this government's fixation on turning schools into factories whose sole purpose is to churn out workers.

Going back to the basics will rob the students we teach of the holistic approach to education that publicly funded Catholic schools in Ontario deliver to such acclaim. The world is complex and ever-changing. Catholic and graduate expectation—such as having the skills to become life-long learners, responsible citizens and reflective, creative and holistic thinkers—prepare students for current-day realities. We urge the government to also champion these values.

Ontario's 45,000 Catholic teachers continue to call on the government to:

- improve the learning environment for students with significant sustained investments in publicly funded education;
- invest in lowering class size averages in elementary and secondary schools to provide more one-on-one student-teacher interaction, which research shows improves student academic success;
- provide the immediate and real funding necessary to truly realize extra math and literacy supports for students;
- provide real and sustained investments to expand mental health resources and services;
- prioritize supporting students with special education needs and stop underfunding school boards, which are now considering cuts to critical programs, and reinstate the funding for children with autism, especially those who require intensive, needs-based interventions;
- cease the expansion of online learning which fails the overwhelming majority of students;
- cease any efforts to privatize publicly funded education which only benefits companies seeking to profit;
- commit to engaging in meaningful collaboration with front-line educators and their representatives regarding the growing epidemic of violence in our schools;
- respect teachers' professional judgment and stop trying to micromanage classrooms;
- stop cherry-picking evidence, ignoring the complexities of student learning and ramming through curriculum and other program changes without the proper time and resources in place to ensure a smooth transition to maximize success.

This is a pattern that keeps repeating. Catholic teachers strongly support the recommendations in the Ontario Human Rights Commission's Right to Read report, but this government only feigns support, selecting what suits its ideological objectives and leaving the rest, including the necessary funding, on the cutting room floor.

#### 1520

Another example: The critical K to 12 Education Standards Development Committee report, which provides recommendations on creating an education standard under the AODA by 2025 to support students with different and

specific disabilities, has been completely ignored by this government for more than a year as it doesn't align with its priorities because it would cost money to implement.

The government must start consulting and collaborating with educators and listen to and respect our experience and expertise. Catholic teachers, as always, stand ready to do just that—

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** You have one minute.

**Ms. Barbara Dobrowolski:** —to help ensure that our publicly funded education system remains world-class and that every student gets the learning environment they need and deserve. Our message to this government is this: Do what our students desperately need you to do and properly invest in Ontario's publicly funded education system.

Thank you, and I'm happy to take questions.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Thank you. Let's go to School Bus Ontario.

**Ms. Nancy Daigneault:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair and members of the committee, for having me here today. My name is Nancy Daigneault. I'm the executive director of School Bus Ontario. We represent over 100 school bus companies in the province: small, medium and large-sized operators. We safely transport over 833,000 students to and from school every single day in every single riding in Ontario.

School buses are the safest way to get students to and from school. In fact, statistics from the National Collision Database show children who travel to school by school bus are 70 times safer than those travelling to school by car and 45 times safer than those walking or even cycling to school. This is because of the stringent rules in place for school bus drivers, who possess the highest class of licence. They must also have to pass multiple school bus driver improvement courses, defensive driving courses, along with many other certifications, including CPR, EpiPen training, racial sensitivity training and many others.

We are here to talk about Bill 98, and we're very pleased to see the minister's office and the ministry have listened to many of our concerns and addressed many of our issues in the bill. The enhanced accountability and transparency in the bill along with the funding formula framework are a welcome step forward for the student transportation sector.

Funding student transportation is very complex due to the intricate nature of school busing in Ontario. What works in Toronto does not necessarily work in northern Ontario or even central Ontario. Longer rural routes in some regions and differing local economic conditions and school board rules make funding very complex. In addition to this, the funding allocated from the Ministry of Education has to go through multiple hands before it gets passed along to the operators and then, of course, the front-line workers like school bus drivers, mechanics and others on the front lines.

The ministry will transfer the amount earmarked for student transportation to the boards of education, and then the boards pass that money along to the transportation consortia. The consortia are the transportation planners who enter into the contracts with their local school bus companies. To complicate the process further, the ministry will set out the overarching rules on how the money should

be spent, and at times, there are very different interpretations of those rules, and therefore their application will be different from school board to school board and consortia to consortia. Additionally, local contracts that are in place with operators very often take precedence in terms of how operators get paid, which may not align with how the ministry instructs local boards or consortia to direct the funds.

SBO has had trouble following how the money gets spent in different regions in the province, which is why we've been asking for the minister to be given the ability to envelope funding for student transportation. All student transportation money needs to be set into a single envelope that can't be touched for other needs. This bill will allow this to happen. It will make the funding process more transparent and accountable, not only to School Bus Ontario but to taxpayers as well.

Ensuring that every penny gets to where it is intended to go is very important. The school bus drivers, mechanics, dispatchers, monitors and others on the front line of student transportation deserve to be paid adequately and in a transparent manner. The accompanying funding formula unveiled in this bill is another welcome development. SBO is pleased with the following aspects of the proposed new formula:

First, we're pleased with the annual reviews that will be conducted. That's something that's long overdue and something that we've been asking for, for a very long time.

Additional money has also been set aside to allow for the paid training of school bus drivers. This will hopefully help us attract new drivers to the business, because, as you all know, we do have a chronic school bus driver shortage in Ontario.

Additional paid days, statutory holiday pay and additional consideration for a benchmark hourly wage for drivers is also very welcome.

SBO is pleased with the proposed new formula but does caution that the application of the funding and the regulations must be very clear to ensure that the money is distributed in a transparent manner. Again, this is why we are asking that the funds be enveloped.

SBO will continue to work collaboratively with the minister's office and the ministry on the regulations on this bill moving forward.

To conclude, SBO welcomes the many changes that are set forth in this legislation, and we look forward to the regulations accompanying the funding formula to ensure additional transparency in the student transportation sector.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** We'll have Mike Ramsay next, please. You can start now, sir.

**Mr. Mike Ramsay:** Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and members of the committee—and a brief hi to my friend and former colleague on the public school board in Waterloo, Catherine Fife.

I am Mike Ramsay, one of the elected members from the Waterloo Region District School Board, representing specifically the electors of Kitchener on that board. This is my sixth consecutive term as member of the board, and I have previously served as chair of the board and as a director on the Ontario Public School Boards' Association.

I've come to speak to you about the trustee code of conduct provisions in Bill 98. I appear before you with the authority of experience in how the code of conduct proceedings work in practice, having been the subject of a series of politically motivated code of conduct investigations. In the most recent proceeding, which took place last year, the board voted 6 to 3 that I had breached the code of conduct. There was no public debate by the board on their decision. I was not allowed to speak at the public board meeting in my own defence. They censured me, suspended me from the board meetings and suspended me from committee meetings for three months. When I exercised my right to reconsideration, the board confirmed its original decision, again with zero public debate, again denying me any chance to publicly speak to the meeting in my own defence, with the members voting exactly as they did the first time.

Every word of the integrity commissioner's report remains a secret to this day. The board has not published any transparent reasons for my censure or the sanctions they imposed. Again, the board has tenaciously resisted all attempts to allow the public to learn the facts, and it was only through my application for judicial review that the complaint was made publicly available.

For lack of a better word, this secrecy stinks, and Bill 98 wisely takes decisions about code of conduct violations and sanctions out of the hands of trustees. Trustees are elected politicians, like city and town councillors. We're sometimes political rivals, especially in school districts with pooled elections instead of single-ward elections, such as the Waterloo Region District School Board. To make us judges of each other's behaviour when we have obvious vested interests in the outcome is simply ridiculous.

The problem with Bill 98 is that it puts the decision-making in the hands of the integrity commissioner who performs the investigation. As a former police officer, I can tell you that we don't have police officers judging the validity of the traffic tickets that they issue. We don't have municipal integrity commissioners approving the results of their own investigations. The fix that Bill 98 is trying to make is likely to make the problem worse. So I do think the bill needs to be amended to provide for an independent provincial tribunal that decides trustee misconduct accusations fairly, impartially and with transparent reasons. That tribunal would create a body of case law that would guide trustees in how their code of conduct applies and would assure the public and the people of this province that when they elect their trustees, they will not be deprived of their right to full and fair representation except through a fair and public process in which the accused trustee has the right to tell their side of the story in public.

**1530**

I have a few more words about integrity commissioners and how they view the role of trustees and, indeed, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

In January of this year, at the Durham District School Board, integrity commissioner Benjamin Drory wrote in his report into the conduct of trustee Linda Stone: "Trustees are simply far more limited than politicians in their

‘freedom’ to speak. To the extent that a trustee’s speech might harm members of the local community—recognizing that measuring such can be inherently difficult—it may be contrary to the code of conduct.” I could not disagree more. Trustees are in fact elected politicians, no less than you are, and our mandates are, with all due respect, in a sense stronger than even those of provincial and federal legislators, since we are elected solely under our own names and not based on a party affiliation. Like you, we are accountable for our performance to the people who elect us every four years, and if the people find us wanting, they will escort us into alternative careers with little ceremony. To do our jobs and represent the people, we must have the right to speak our minds about the issues, both in and outside of board meetings. We also do not leave our charter rights to free expression at the door of trustee meeting rooms. The people of Ontario are not well served by trustees being micro-policed by ever-watchful integrity commissioners ready to pounce on the slightest thing that is remotely controversial.

I think we all want a strong and effective public education system that gives every student the first-class academic program that prepares them for adult life. We all want to forever eradicate racism and all bigotry, but we disagree about the ways and means. We disagree about the concepts and vocabulary, and except in rare cases, these disagreements are honest, sincere differences of opinion and are a healthy part of a vigorous democracy. When these genuine differences of opinion get twisted into concocted accusations of misconduct and those accusations are unbelievably upheld by faulty reasoning of integrity commissioners—

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** You have one minute, sir.

**Mr. Mike Ramsay:** —who in certain cases have been shown to be less than impartial, the public loses confidence in the system, and a culture of self-censorship and fear permeates every school board in the province.

Bill 98 needs to be amended to guarantee public access to the full record of the facts relating to a complaint of trustee misconduct, except as genuinely necessary to protect legitimate privacy interests, and not to shield partisan board embarrassment when it engages in dirty tricks. I hope that when Bill 98 passes and the regulations for board conduct are written, these considerations will be in mind.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak to you today.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** We’ll now go to the government side for seven minutes and 30 seconds. I recognize MPP Jordan.

**Mr. John Jordan:** My question is for Nancy Daigneault of the school bus operators’ association. It has been a while since I’ve been in transportation, so this relationship between the school bus operators, the board and now the consortium—the consortium part is new. I’m wondering if you can describe that relationship a bit, and is there anything in this bill that will help with that relationship and improve access to and the availability, quality and safety of transportation for our students?

**Ms. Nancy Daigneault:** Well, we’re very pleased with the bill, because it is going to increase, first of all, accountability and transparency, but there’s also additional funding

that has been announced for school transportation in Ontario, which will be very, very helpful to us and will help us get the buses on the road.

The longest-standing issue that we’ve had is a chronic school bus driver shortage. This bill, first of all, not only increases accountability, but it also sets a benchmark rate for school bus drivers’ wages, which is very, very helpful. With the accompanying extra money that has been earmarked for school bus transportation, we’re very hopeful that that can help us attract and retain more school bus drivers to the sector.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Go ahead.

**Mr. Matthew Rae:** Thank you to all the presenters for your presentations today.

My question is for Nancy and SBO. You alluded to it a bit in your remarks earlier, but in 2023-24 there is a new funding formula for the GSN. I know many people probably aren’t excited about this, but coming from a rural riding—and when I was PA to Minister Lecce, I did work for yourself and Rob as well on this and many others. We held extensive consultations on the proposal for the new funding formula with school boards—our northern boards as well, especially—and our French boards to ensure that we get this right moving forward.

So to ensure success in the new funding model, as you mentioned, the ministry is introducing new accountability and reporting requirements related to school bus driver compensation, availability of spare drivers, public transit use, potentially, as well, for those municipalities that have public transit, obviously.

Do you agree that it’s necessary there is enhanced accountability and transparency around these measures we’re proposing to put in place?

**Ms. Nancy Daigneault:** Absolutely. We’re very thankful for them, because the issue that we’ve had for a very, very long time is the money gets earmarked from the Ministry of Education for whatever it might be—let’s say, \$100 million for whatever—and then it gets transferred to the school boards. From the school boards, it will go to the local consortia, the transportation planners, and from there, it gets transferred to the operators. It gets really convoluted, because sometimes the local contracts that the operators have with the transportation consortia don’t necessarily align with some of the instructions that might come from the Ministry of Education. So this will allow us just to follow the money a little bit more easily than it has been. It is convoluted—and necessarily convoluted, because what works in northern Ontario won’t work here in Toronto, as I had mentioned. But at the same time, because it’s necessarily complicated, it is difficult to follow the money. So this will certainly help us out with that.

**Mr. Matthew Rae:** Great. Thank you, Nancy. I was wondering if you could explain a little bit what the benefit is of the benchmark for the hourly rate of bus drivers and how that can help address—and, obviously, the whole business of our government and your organization to recruit and retain more bus drivers. What is the benefit of that?

**Ms. Nancy Daigneault:** Well, it would definitely help us recruit and retain more drivers. The difficulty is in the

application of all the funding and also because of the local contracting issues. Because the operators have contracts with the transportation consortia, some of them can't be opened up. So we're hopeful that that benchmark will certainly help us get to a point where we can pay the school bus drivers more adequately than they are right now. The average across Ontario is about \$19.50 an hour, at which it's very difficult to attract and retain drivers. Also, it's not just pay; it's also because it's a part-time split-shift job. We do tend to attract retirees to the position, and it's great for them. They enjoy getting out in the morning and getting to know the students they have every day. So we're hopeful that this benchmark will help us move the needle a little bit more further forward.

**Mr. Matthew Rae:** Great. Thank you.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** MPP Barnes, please.

**Ms. Patrice Barnes:** Thank you to all the presenters who have presented. Mr. Ramsay, this question is for you. I wondered if you would just expand a little bit more. This bill has talked about, really, a uniform code of conduct for trustees who are across the province. If you could share a little bit about your thoughts about that process and recommendations you may have around that.

**Mr. Mike Ramsay:** Thank you for the question. I think it's excellent, moving in the right direction in terms of it being taken away from boards. Overall, it's been my experience over the last number of years, and the experience of other trustees, that boards are becoming distracted with regard to what one could term as decisions that are made by staff that are really of a political nature and then boards are left to get distracted in defending or responding to those, such as the mockery of our LGBTQ friends and neighbours up in Halton District School Board, where the board was left dealing with a decision that was made by staff. Then there's no focus on student learning and achievement.

So to your point, with regard to it being uniform, I fully endorse that. Where the issue is, as I mentioned, is with respect to the fact that there wouldn't be a body of case law and the lack of it being a tribunal. And some parts of the legislation refer to how the minister may establish a roster of integrity commissioners, for example. I think that should be changed to "shall," because I think over the next few years, as the government side, you're making decisions that you're going to be living with for the next few years in terms of how this rolls out.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** One minute left.

**Ms. Patrice Barnes:** Well, I'll ask you to finish up. You have a minute left.

**Mr. Mike Ramsay:** Yes. I'm just suggesting that I really do think it's a step in the right direction. I just think, though, that there has to be some kind of process where if a trustee is brought up on a code of conduct, it's thoroughly independent of boards. Boards can't be determining what's going to be happening to your competitor in the next election, for example.

1540

**Ms. Patrice Barnes:** Thank you.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** You have 24 seconds.

**Ms. Patrice Barnes:** Twenty-four seconds?

Let's see. Your thoughts around the director of education appraisal and setting direction?

**Mr. Mike Ramsay:** Well, again, it's a step in the right direction, because it's all about student learning and achievement, and I think there have to be some ways for the directors of education to be held accountable for the outcomes that are specific and measurable—

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Thank you for your comments, sir.

We'll now go to the official opposition. MPP Pasma.

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** Thank you very much to all the witnesses for taking the time to be here with us this afternoon. Barb, I'm going to start with you. Teachers and education workers are really experts on what's happening in our schools. You're on the front lines every single day, seeing what's happening in the classroom, seeing where our children are at, the kinds of supports and resources that our children have access to and the kinds of supports and resources that they need. Were you consulted on this legislation at all?

**Ms. Barbara Dobrowolski:** No, we were not consulted at all on this legislation.

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** And if you had been consulted on this legislation, what would you say are actually the needs that our children face right now in order to be able to succeed in school? What kinds of supports and resources do our children actually need?

**Ms. Barbara Dobrowolski:** Well, for starters, I would say that we need smaller class sizes. Students need more personal interventions, and the only way to do that is to have smaller class sizes, so we have more time for one-to-one support with our students.

Students need more access to mental health supports. We need more professionals and paraprofessionals in our schools, including social workers and psychologists and mental health workers. We need more EAs, as well.

We need, as well, to really work collaboratively to address the issue of the rising violence in our schools. Rising violence is an issue not only from a teacher's perspective but for students as well. Students deserve to feel safe in schools, and we all have to work collaboratively to put proactive measures in place to address the sources of violence in our schools.

Additionally, I would say that there are still pandemic learning gaps that some students are grappling with, and we need to have targeted supports for students who are struggling as a result of the pandemic. There was never really a comprehensive plan put in place to do that. This idea of money for tutoring after school is ineffective and unequal. Not all parents are going to have the capacity or the access to tutors to get that kind of support, and in any case, the amount of money that is provided is inadequate to actually realize something significant in terms of catching up.

So there are a lot of supports that students need. We also need more funding for special education. It has been underfunded severely for years. It needs to be addressed.

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** I'm glad you've touched on that topic of special education. I had a very informative but emotional meeting with teachers from OECTA Ottawa a

few weeks ago who were telling me about the increase in demand that they're seeing for resource teachers, for special education supports within the system, the lack of supports available to these students and the kind of decisions that teachers have to make as a result, including trying to triage who needs help the most, what small amount of help they can apportion out to students to try to make sure that everybody gets a little bit of help.

Can you talk about how not having those supports available impacts the ability of kids who need special education supports to learn but also the impact that that has on all the students in a class, especially when we have a crowded classroom with lots of kids with an IEP in the class who aren't getting the supports they need? What impact does that have on the ability of all the children in the classroom to learn?

**Ms. Barbara Dobrowolski:** Having students in our classrooms who are inadequately supported means that not only is it very frustrating for those students, some of whom then will act out because they're not getting the support they need, but when that happens, it can be extremely disruptive to the class itself. It's not unheard of and it's not, unfortunately, that infrequent that teachers are forced to evacuate a classroom when a student is acting out and possibly throwing things or harming others. So it's a huge disruption to an entire classroom, and it's really, really sad, because all these students need is the support from an EA, more one-to-one supports to actually meet their needs, and this wouldn't be happening.

From what I understand, there are a lot of school boards that are actually considering collapsing classrooms that are dedicated to students with special needs and going full integration, which would work if you had adequate support for those students within the classroom. If not, they just find themselves in a very frustrating place where their needs are not being met and they're not succeeding to the extent that they should be. So parents, I think, are very concerned as well about what that means for their students with special needs.

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** Absolutely. I've been hearing that concern from a lot of parents. One of the stories I heard from the teachers with OECTA Ottawa is that they're being sent to school with Kevlar on, because that's become the solution to violence in schools instead of actually specialized training and providing these children with the supports they need.

I'm also hearing a lot from parents about children whose mental health is in crisis and the lack of resources in schools. I know I've experienced that with my own children. Can you talk about what you're seeing from the perspective of educators in terms of children's mental health and what resources we should be providing them with?

**Ms. Barbara Dobrowolski:** Well, certainly there have been increases in mental health issues for students. It particularly became more acute after the pandemic. We need proactive and comprehensive—

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Fifty-two seconds.

**Ms. Barbara Dobrowolski:**—mental health assessments of students in our schools so we can provide them with

social workers, psychologists. They need child and youth workers, and we need school mental health workers.

I think too many students are on wait-lists, sometimes for upwards of two or three years even, for the kind of support that they need. So, really, it needs to be school-based resources and services that they have adequate access to. I think all educators and staff also need professional development to recognize issues and be able to refer students to the supports that they need.

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** Thank you.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Thank you for your comments.

Now we'll go back to the government for four minutes and 30 seconds.

*Interjection.*

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Oh, no, I'm sorry—for seven minutes and 30 seconds.

I recognize MPP Martin.

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** Thank you to all the presenters. I did want to ask a question of Nancy Daigneault of the school bus operators. You talked about the importance of accountability and transparency with the funding and how it seems sometimes that the funding doesn't get to the school bus operations. I know that we've made recent investments into school bus funding, which is partly included in this legislation—not the funding itself, but the changes.

I'm particularly concerned about the same issue from the point of view of special education, where we have historic levels of funding this year in special education. In 2023-24, special education funding will reach a historic \$3.4 billion, nearly \$541 million more than what was funded for special education under the former Liberal government. Yet I have parents come into my office and say, "I haven't seen that in my school. I'm not getting the funding." And worse yet, I have teachers come to my office and say the first people that they lay off are the special education teachers when they need the funding for something else. So can you talk to us a little bit about why accountability and transparency is important, specifically with respect to school buses?

**1550**

**Ms. Nancy Daigneault:** The transparency and accountability—it's just the nature of the beast, I think, because it's such a complex system, because there are so many different layers of school bus transportation. As I said, the Ministry of Education to the school boards, from the school boards to the transportation consortia, and from the consortia to the school bus operators: That's what makes it complex.

We've always wanted to have enveloping for the funding for student transportation, because if there is, let's say, \$100 million earmarked for student transportation—it's much more than that, we know that—it doesn't end up getting to the school bus operators; we wonder why. Part of the difficulty is because of the local contracts in place—we do know that—because sometimes they supersede some of the instructions that come from the ministry to the school boards and the consortia. But the one thing we've never understood is, let's say, if the Ministry of Education sets a GSN for 2%, some school bus operators will report

back to us that they only received 1% or 0.5%—which never made sense to us. We don't understand how that can be, given that the GSN has been set at 2%. Very rarely, on occasion, sometimes, we'll get a school bus operator saying, "Yes, well, we got a little bit more than the GSN." That's extremely rare, but it does happen, and we don't understand how that is.

So if a GSN is 2% and they earmark a certain amount of money for that GSN in that particular year, why isn't it getting to the front lines? We don't know. We can't follow the money enough because there are so many different hands that the money has to go through before it ends up with the operators and then the school bus drivers, mechanics and others.

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** Thank you very much for that response. That's certainly my concern, just knowing exactly where the funding has been allocated and perhaps why it's been moved from where we thought it was allocated.

I know the government has also increased mental health funding by something like 420% since the last government. It might be 460%; I can't quite remember, but it's a lot. And still, people are saying, "Well, I don't see that in my school," so I think that's what's really important, for us to have better information so we can make sure we have better services for all the students.

My colleague MPP Pang has a question, I think.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Go ahead.

**Mr. Billy Pang:** Mr. Chair, through you, this question is for the Catholic teachers' union: When I was a school board trustee, I always checked the Fraser rankings. Most of the parents focus on the higher rankings, but I spent quite some time to look at those—they're called "lower rankings." That includes a lot of Catholic schools. For instance, I just double-checked one of the lowest scores, which is called St. Francis Xavier high school. The graduation rate in 2019 was 57.7%. Previously, it was 75%, so I can see a huge drop, and there are some other Catholic schools that keep staying behind. So when the union keeps asking for funding instead of results—this bill is about better schools and better results.

Why is the organization not focusing on better results but asking for more funding instead?

**Ms. Barbara Dobrowolski:** Thank you for the question. As I said in my statement I read at the beginning, I don't see very much in this bill, actually, that addresses trying to improve results for students. There's very little within it that actually does anything to address better results. I understand the importance of reading, writing and math to all students and why those are fundamental things that every student should graduate with general knowledge of and to their well-being in terms of longer-term outcomes. I also have a great respect for the trades, and I think that having a path to graduation, acquiring skills with the trades is a really good thing.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** One minute.

**Ms. Barbara Dobrowolski:** There should be different pathways to graduation.

Obviously, when students are struggling in any particular school, there may be many reasons for it. Some of our schools have greater needs than others, and it can depend

on where that school is situated and the demographics of that school. In those schools, we need additional supports to ensure that the students succeed.

One of the things that was lacking in the rollout of destreaming was additional support for students to make sure that they successfully graduate from those courses. What I'm being told is that students are struggling in the destreamed courses because of the failure to roll it out in an adequate way by the government. So rather than—

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Thank you for your comments. I'll have to cut you off there.

We'll go to the official opposition for seven minutes and 30 seconds. I will recognize MPP Pasma.

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** Barb, I just want to pick up where we left off in discussing the challenges that schools are facing right now. I'm concerned that if we don't actually address the crowded classrooms, the lack of teachers and education workers available for classes, the lack of special education supports, the mental health challenges, the rising tide of violence in schools—if we're not actually addressing the funding shortfall in classes, but we are imposing priorities on school boards—that we are setting up school boards to fail. Is that your concern, as well?

**Ms. Barbara Dobrowolski:** Absolutely. I'll tell you that there's an undercurrent of concern that schools are being set up to fail through underfunding, through death by a thousand cuts, and in much the same way that our health care system has been underfunded. We create a crisis by underfunding. We worry that the real agenda here is to drive parents and students to private schooling. That is what we see being done, essentially, to our publicly funded school system that is currently very highly regarded internationally. We are seen as a model of success, and if these cuts continue, that is not going to continue for us, so we'll see lowering graduation rates and so on.

Teachers do everything they can to help students succeed; they really try, but if year after year we're seeing bigger class sizes, if we're seeing fewer supports for students, there's bound to be an effect.

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** Thank you, Barb. I do want to say thank you to our teachers and education workers, who have put in incredible work, supporting our kids throughout the past few years and before, in incredibly challenging circumstances, without the respect that you deserve for all that work. So thank you, and please know that parents do see you and appreciate you.

Nancy, I have a question for you. Do you know that this bill doesn't actually say the words "school bus" or "transportation" anywhere in the bill?

**Ms. Nancy Daigneault:** It does say "accountability" and "transparency" throughout the bill, and that is something that we are very much in favour of. As I was telling the committee members earlier, sometimes it doesn't make sense if the GSN is set at 2% and then we hear back from our members that they're getting 0%, and we can't follow the money, because it is necessarily complex. I keep saying that—what works in North Bay doesn't work in Toronto. So, obviously, local rules have to prevail, but the accountability and transparency is very important.

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** We certainly hear you on that need to be able to follow the funding. And nothing has stopped the Minister of Education from creating a special envelope of funding until now; in fact, he has announced it without this bill even being passed. It's something that should have been done a long time ago.

What I'm hearing from school boards, parents, teachers across the province is adequate funding for school transportation is definitely a significant challenge. Hopefully having a separate envelope actually allows us to track that, because we know that school boards are paying much more on transportation than what they're actually receiving from the ministry. That's contributing to the challenge of not being able to have enough school buses on the road, and certainly that's contributing to one of the biggest challenges which I hear all the time: the lack of drivers, which is due to the fact that the wage is absolutely not a living wage. We're not going to be able to recruit people to work these difficult and challenging jobs unless we're actually paying them a fair wage for the work that they do.

1600

**Ms. Nancy Daigneault:** Actually, the problem is that the school bus driver issue began many, many years ago, when junior kindergarten was eliminated and it became full-day. The school bus driver shortage started then, because the middle-day route for school bus drivers was eliminated. Students used to finish school at 12 noon when you're in JK and SK. That route was eliminated, and that's when this shortage began, because all of a sudden it became a part-time, split-shift job and seasonal on top of that. So that's when it began, and it's just gotten worse and worse and worse throughout the years.

Obviously, the wages don't help. We've always said that we need to see more funding for student transportation. We were pleased to see a little bit more funding that the minister announced recently. We're still waiting on the details and the regulations that are going to accompany this to make sure that with the new funding formula that was announced, the money gets flowed appropriately and very quickly.

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** Thanks. I'm going to turn it over to MPP Gretzky.

**Mrs. Lisa Gretzky:** Mine was really a comment; it's not a question. It's just based on what I heard from some of the folks on the Conservative side. I know MPP Martin had talked about how school boards pull funding from other areas to cover shortfalls in spec ed funding. I couldn't agree with you more. So fund it better. Actually fund the needs of the students in the system so that school boards aren't having to pull that funding from other areas.

MPP Pang had talked about how he closely watches the Fraser rankings, which doesn't surprise me, because the Fraser Institute is a Conservative think tank that puts out the results of EQAO. But I just want everybody to be clear that when it comes to EQAO, when it comes to testing and we're—

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** Chair—

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Just one—

**Mrs. Lisa Gretzky:** Okay. Hopefully, my time will be saved.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** No, your time is—

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** I'm sorry, Chair, to interrupt. On a point of order: The member phrased what I said incorrectly, I believe. I think she should stick to her own point and not rephrase what I said. What I actually said was that special education funding is untraceable, in the same way that the school bus operators were saying school bus funding is untraceable and can get moved. That was my point, and I think it was misrepresented.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Comment?

**Mrs. Lisa Gretzky:** I'll just say that I also realize that the member didn't argue the fact that spec ed is underfunded and they need to fund it better.

But I'll move on to the point I was trying to make. When we're talking about the Fraser rankings, that is a snapshot in time, a very specific snapshot in time, in the life of a student. It does not take into account their education support needs. It does not reflect any outside pressures that a student is facing, whether that is a death in the family, whether the student is having a mental health crisis themselves, parents are splitting up, numerous things—no food in the house because parents can't afford to buy groceries under this government.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** One minute.

**Mrs. Lisa Gretzky:** There are numerous things that affect a student's ability when it comes to EQAO, and if this government really wanted to focus on student success, they would get rid of EQAO and look at the results of students on a day-to-day basis throughout the year, rather than making teachers and students stress and focus on one specific test in a snapshot of time that, frankly, takes a lot of resources for our front-line education workers and teachers, and it puts a lot of stress on students and a lot of stress on their families. If you really want to support student learning and put a focus back on student learning, then you need to find something else to see what student achievement really is, not that snapshot in time when they write the EQAO. I cannot stress that enough. And as a parent, I think I didn't get those results till the following year. It didn't help me at all to—

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Thank you. That's the end of that, please.

Now we'll go back over to the government side, where you have four minutes and 30 seconds. MPP Martin.

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** I wanted to go back to Nancy Daigneault and to ask you if you've heard any feedback about this bill from the members of your organization and what that feedback was like.

**Ms. Nancy Daigneault:** The feedback we've gotten so far has been positive, that the ministry and the minister's office have been listening to us in changing the funding formula, and we've been heavily consulted on this bill and on the funding formula itself. In fact, we've been working very closely with the ministry for several years now on changes to the funding formula. We've put forth numerous presentations and all sorts of different data to the government to help them make the changes to the funding formula.

Our members are very welcoming to changes to the funding formula because, as I said, some of the positive

things that are in there will certainly help us out tremendously. Specifically, some of the things that will help us are the annual reviews. That's something we've been asking for, for a long time, and throughout the consultations on this, we certainly put forth the need for that. Government has listened, so we're very pleased with that.

The government has also listened with statutory holidays and additional paid days for school bus drivers. That will help us as well. So we are very, very thankful for that, and our members are thankful for the consultation.

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** Thank you.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** MPP Barnes, please.

**Ms. Patrice Barnes:** This question is for Mike.

When we talk about students in poverty, we talk about marginalized students and we talk about things like a 57% graduation rate at a school—whereas we recognize that there might be outside forces that might influence student learning. We also recognize that not being able to graduate with a high school diploma distinctly affects those students very badly, especially those racialized and marginalized kids who live in poverty. So the acceptance of 57%, when there are so many other things that could be causing these kids not to succeed, really bothers me. So I just want put that on a point.

Mr. Ramsay, I just want to ask you, when we talk about student achievement and about the boards, having been a trustee, do you want to talk a little bit about that in regard to how you think this bill would affect student achievement or some of the things that you think that boards have moved away from for student achievement?

**Mr. Mike Ramsay:** Thank you very much for the question. I think much of it goes back to the board's improvement plans, and I think that, to the extent that the bill is taking a look at student achievement and so forth, the board improvement plan—they should be making it so that it clearly identifies specific, measurable, achievable and time-limited key performance indicators.

That brings us back to when you look at the EQAO scores. If you measure something, it's going to get done. I'll give you something from our district. We have one school—and I'll contrast it, because it's not all bad news—where of the student population, 22% is performing at the provincial level on the EQAO testing—only 22% above number three; reading, 39%; writing, 22%. Then we have another school where it's 80% math, 80% reading, 76% writing. I think we've got to find ways to duplicate those kinds of successes into the schools that are underperforming.

What do we do as trustees being distracted by infighting? We're focusing on—and we spent five committee meetings discussing what the name of a school was going to be instead of talking about student learning and achievement. We have an array of superintendents, qualified educators, really excellent educators, but we have them talking about something that's not going to jump off the wall and prevent students from learning. That needs to stop, and that's a distraction from frivolous codes of conduct. It would provide trustees more time and to be more accountable for

outcomes. So to the extent that it talks about board improvement plans, I think that's one of the things that we could certainly look at in committee.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Thank you very much. We'll go back to the official opposition.

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** I appreciate that. Thank you. I'm going to—

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Go ahead.

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** It's okay? MPP Gates—it's okay to speak? Perfect.

Good afternoon, everybody. A question to Nancy: Were you consulted?

**Ms. Nancy Daigneault:** Yes. As I had said earlier, we were consulted heavily on this.

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** I think your words were you were “consulted heavily”?

**Ms. Nancy Daigneault:** Yes.

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** Nancy, were you consulted—

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** You mean Barb.

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** Barb, were you consulted? I can't hear you.

**Ms. Barbara Dobrowolski:** No, we were not consulted at all.

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** And how many members do you have?

**Ms. Barbara Dobrowolski:** We have 45,000.

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** How many?

**Ms. Barbara Dobrowolski:** We have 45,000.

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** So you have 45,000 members, and you weren't consulted as their representative?

**Ms. Barbara Dobrowolski:** That's correct.

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** Yet the school bus operators were. Do you find that a little strange, a little different?

**Ms. Barbara Dobrowolski:** Absolutely, I find that very strange and disconcerting. You would think that the front-line educators might have some insight into what is going on in our schools and our classrooms and might have some insight on how to actually achieve better student outcomes. It is very troubling and disconcerting that we were not even asked our opinion.

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** Well, just so you know, because you weren't here earlier today, the teachers' unions weren't consulted. When we had Working for Workers, they weren't consulted. When we had Bill 60, they weren't consulted; Bill 124, they weren't consulted. Yet the school bus drivers' association was consulted. I find that just terrible—when you're from the government.

You said something, Barb, that I found really hit me, really stuck with me. It was incredible. I just wrote it down immediately. I'd like if you could explain your comment, if that's fair and reasonable: “Schools are a factory to turn out workers.” Can you explain that comment?

**Ms. Barbara Dobrowolski:** Well, that seems to be the philosophy that is driving the changes. In Bill 98, it talks about reviewing curriculum on a regular basis and one of the experts that they plan to consult in making changes are labour experts. You would think that they would really like to hear from education experts as well and hear about what we think are updates that are needed to our curriculum.

It seems like they are forcing kind of a labour-ready career training, instead of education, on students, not looking at them as whole beings.

I think that education is about creating a love of learning; it's about creating curiosity, about critical thinking. It's not about training students for a specific job. That is an element of it, but we want to graduate whole, healthy people who have a lifetime of fulfillment, and training them for a single job isn't going to do that. So we have to be very, very careful about what it is that we're trying to achieve when we give students an education.

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** Again, I'm going to go back to Barb, because I'm actually not surprised, but I think it's disgraceful and certainly just disrespectful to your organization that you weren't consulted. In Bill 98, is there—there's a couple of things, and I'll let you answer. Is there anything in here that talks about the staffing crisis, mental health, violence in our schools, our wait times for our students when it comes to mental health? Is there anything you can see in the bill that addresses what I can say are critical needs for the school boards or for the schools?

**Ms. Barbara Dobrowolski:** I would say there's nothing at all in Bill 98 that addresses this. The only very tangential thing that is alluded to is setting priorities for school boards, but as MPP Martin said, there's so much variety from school to school within a school board that one school should really focus on certain priorities—

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Thank you. That will be it for this section.

I'd like to thank all presenters for their participation. If you would like to submit any written materials to the committee in addition to your presentation today, the deadline for written submissions is 7 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time on Tuesday, May 9, 2023.

Is it the opinion of the group to take a five-minute break? Okay. Let's take a five-minute break and come back at 4:19.

*The committee recessed from 1614 to 1623.*

ONTARIO AUTISM COALITION  
MS. KATHY MCDONALD  
ASSOCIATION DES ENSEIGNANTES  
ET DES ENSEIGNANTS FRANCO-  
ONTARIENS

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** We're going to resume again. I'm going to call on the next group of presenters to please come forward: the Ontario Autism Coalition, Kathy McDonald and AEFO. Welcome. As a reminder, each of you will have seven minutes for your presentations, followed by questions from the committee members. I will provide one-minute reminders of time remaining during the presentation and questions. Please state your name for Hansard, and then you may begin.

The first group we will call will be the Ontario Autism Coalition. Welcome.

**Ms. Kate Dudley-Logue:** Thank you. Good afternoon. My name is Kate Dudley-Logue, and I am the vice-president

of community outreach with the Ontario Autism Coalition. As well as my volunteer duties with the OAC, I am the mom to two amazing autistic children.

The OAC is a non-partisan, not-for-profit volunteer-led police advocacy organization. We have a membership of almost 20,000 from across the province who are very engaged and share with us regularly the challenges they experience with the Ontario education system.

We would have hoped that when planning for better outcomes for Ontario students, we would also be planning for better outcomes for students with disabilities as well. But unfortunately, that is not reflected in Bill 98, and we will be asking for some amendments that would help in addressing the diverse needs of students with autism and other disabilities in Ontario schools.

The situation in schools right now for a vast majority of autistic students is, quite frankly, abysmal. Supports are stretched so thin that for many kids, the main goal is just getting through the day. Many autistic students are not meaningfully accessing the curriculum and often just being at school safely is a problem. School boards will often cite underfunding and staffing challenges as being the reason for shortfalls in support for kids with special education needs, but there are other reasons as well.

First, the prevalence of autism diagnoses has been steadily increasing for years, as well as what seems to be a catch-up of diagnoses happening post-pandemic. This all leads to an increase in kids entering our school system with higher support needs.

The delays in the implementation of the Ontario Autism Program have also played a very significant role in what we are seeing in the schools right now. The OAP has only just recently started bringing kids off the wait-list after a five-year freeze. During this time, tens of thousands of children have not had access to consistent clinical therapy that would have helped them develop the skills to participate in school, follow routines, communicate and develop important self-help skills such as toileting, self-regulation, hygiene and feeding. Without the development of these important skills, autistic students are entering our schools requiring a great deal more support than ever before, and unfortunately, that support is just not there.

Starting in April, legacy kids who had been lucky enough to maintain their therapy levels from the old Liberal OAP have begun transitioning to the new OAP. They will see drastic drops in their therapy hours, which will mean they're in school much more than ever before. Some of them will even be starting school for the first time ever. The kids remaining in the legacy program are primarily kids with the highest level of needs, and this transition to schools has not been addressed, nor planned for.

So at a time when the needs of autistic kids in schools are at their highest and you would assume that supports would be increasing, it seems the opposite is happening. Many school boards across the province are cutting special classes and some are even moving towards dropping full programs completely, claiming they are moving towards a more inclusive model of education that strives to integrate all kids with disabilities into mainstream classes.

While we believe that a vast majority of autistic students can absolutely thrive in a mainstream classroom when properly supported, more often than not this support is not there, and for a smaller population of autistic children with the highest level of support needs as well as often sensory or behavioural challenges, smaller congregated classrooms are, in fact, the only way that they are able to get through a day successfully, safely and to be actually accessing curriculum.

Our education system needs supportive mainstream classes where kids are supported not only for behavioural challenges but also with proper educational supports in place. Right now, it is typical that only kids who pose safety concerns are given consistent extra support in classrooms. Better outcomes for our kids means supporting their educational goals as well.

We are asking for province-wide minimum standards that reflect the diverse needs of autistic students. This would include mandating and properly funding school boards to maintain and, where necessary, add special education classrooms consistently across the province for kids who are unable to successfully and safely access education in a mainstream class and to ensure that proper support is given to autistic students who need it in mainstream classes, both to address their behavioural and self-help needs, as well as their educational goals.

We also recommend that the government implement the recommendations made in the final report of the K-12 Education Standards Development Committee. There are many recommendations in this report that would vastly improve the accommodations for all children with disabilities in our schools. Failure to implement these things will lead to more and more exclusions, which leads to our next ask.

Exclusions are rampant in Ontario schools right now, and because of schools not having access to adequate supports, autistic kids are experiencing these exclusions more than ever before. Exclusions happen when a school is not able to safely support a student with disabilities and asks or forces the child to not attend school, sometimes completely or sometimes for part of the day or during certain activities. This is obviously not okay as children with disabilities have a legal and human right to an education the same as everybody else.

Formal exclusions, often referred to as hard exclusions, occur when schools officially exclude students for short, long or sometimes indefinite periods of time. But most often, what are referred to as soft exclusions are happening consistently in all regions.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** One minute.

**Ms. Kate Dudley-Logue:** This can be seen as phone calls in the morning, letting a family know that they have no EA available to support the child and the child will need to stay home for the day, or a call home during the school day saying that the student is having a rough time and exhibiting behavioural challenges and will need to be picked up.

Believe it or not, there are many families who receive these calls multiple times a week or more. Not only does

this break in routine and consistency usually make things worse for the student, it is very challenging and stressful for the families to navigate. Exclusions are the dirty little secret of the Ontario education system, and that needs to change.

Our last ask is that a provincial monitoring system be created to properly track data on how often both hard and soft exclusions are happening in Ontario and mandate that the school boards indeed use it. Properly tracking exclusions will provide important information about where support for students with disabilities is lacking.

**1630**

We hope that you will consider our recommendations and, as stated earlier, much improvement needs to happen—

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Thank you for your presentation. Your seven minutes are up.

We'll now go to Kathy McDonald.

**Ms. Kathy McDonald:** Thank you for this opportunity to appear before you today. I would first like to clearly state that I'm speaking on my own behalf. I'm not representing any school board, any committee or any association. I'm coming here today as a traumatized victim of the integrity commissioner investigation and code of conduct complaint process. Please note that my examples are drawn from experiences of many of my colleagues across the province. They are not related to any specific IC or board.

I firmly believe that the current process needs to be totally dismantled and rebuilt, creating a process centred in procedural fairness. I strongly support the standardized process under the directive of the Ministry of Education. From my experience, many ICs wear two hats and are not impartial. In many cases at boards across this province, ICs are often weaponized and used to intimidate trustees that don't toe the line. ICs are often in cahoots with directors of education, chairs and some trustees. Trustees that are deemed to have opposing political views, challenge the status quo or are seen to champion equity, diversity and inclusion are often targets of the integrity commissioner.

The current system employed by many boards usually lacks a restorative element and appears to have one purpose: to intimidate and silence dissenting or minority voices. I truly believe a standardized code of conduct administered by the Ministry of Education could eliminate many of the barriers that exist in this current system. By making the code of conduct complaint process confidential—and to discuss and disclose this matter with family or colleagues or anyone is to violate section X of the complaint protocol—this allows trustees to work in tandem with the integrity commissioner and code trustees for frivolous infractions, like being jealous of an individual or having an email with an aggressive tone. Who knew that someone expressing an opinion to fellow colleagues like “We may have acted in an irresponsible way” can set off an IC investigation costing taxpayers thousands of dollars—money that could be better spent in classrooms.

There are several cases where ICs have gone to various trustees asking them to put in a complaint, and taxpayers are left holding the bag to the tune of \$30,000 to \$80,000

every three months at some boards, and sometimes \$100,000 on a case for a targeted trustee. Boards having limitless funds is a widely held belief, and the meagre resources of a trustee is no match for the integrity commissioner. There are colleagues that have spent over \$6,000 of their own meagre salary to defend baseless claims which were eventually abandoned. I would hope that if the process is centralized, the roster would include ICs that understand human rights and the importance of EDI, not an IC that doesn't see colour or doesn't believe in racism. It's important than an IC understands the difference between a pun and a harmful, triggering, racist comment. The IC should be able to make connections that recognize how identities are impacted by insensitivities and violation of human rights. It is imperative that an IC understands the spirit of the law, not the letter of the law, and has sound judgment, wisdom, transparency, fairness and, above all, integrity.

I would also like to add that adding the director of education in alleged breaches that concern the chair is very concerning, as invariably they have a friendship in addition to a working relationship, and sometimes may have a non-platonic relationship. I think this is a problematic suggestion on many fronts. It blurs the lines of governance and operation between trustees and our only employee. ICs should have to declare that they have no relationship with trustees being investigated, and declare any conflict of interest, real or perceived.

I like the inclusion of a time limit, as ICs have been known to drag on investigations upwards of over a year. It can be very disconcerting and stressful to a trustee to have vexatious and baseless complaints hanging over one's head for a year, only to be thrown out. I would suggest consideration be given to the creation of a division under the supervision of the Ombudsman. Ideally, a truly independent party should review all the documentation and evidence from the boards across this province of trustees' collusion and bureaucratic abuse collected by trustees victimized by the current process, to help guide the development and implementation of a procedurally fair code of conduct investigation process.

Once again, thank you. I truly appreciate the minister's efforts in ensuring transparency and fairness and his commitment to righting a wrong in the integrity commissioner's code of conduct reporting and investigation process.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Thank you. We'll now go to the AEFO, which will be in French.

**M<sup>me</sup> Anne Vinet-Roy:** Oui, exactement. Je vais parler français.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Go ahead, please.

**M<sup>me</sup> Anne Vinet-Roy:** Bonjour. Mon nom est Anne Vinet-Roy et je suis la présidente de l'Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens, l'AEFO. Nous sommes un syndicat francophone qui représente près de 12 000 membres, des travailleuses et des travailleurs du domaine de l'éducation de partout en Ontario. Je suis accompagnée d'Anne Lavoie, la directrice générale et secrétaire-trésorière.

Monsieur le Président, distingués membres du comité, merci de nous recevoir aujourd'hui. Avant de commencer, il est important pour nous de souligner le travail essentiel et remarquable de nos membres qui oeuvrent dans les écoles franco-ontariennes. Ce sont des professionnels passionnés et réellement engagés envers chaque élève, et c'est en grande partie grâce à elles et eux que nos écoles sont de milieux accueillants et inclusifs où il fait bon vivre et grandir en français.

L'amélioration des écoles et du rendement des élèves ne peut se faire sans tenir compte des particularités du système d'éducation en langue française, des particularités qui ne sont pas suffisamment prises en compte, selon nous, dans le projet de loi 98. Nous sommes confiantes aujourd'hui que vous saurez nous écouter et prendre des actions concrètes pour vous assurer de respecter vos obligations constitutionnelles envers l'éducation dans la langue de la minorité et d'offrir aux élèves francophones les mêmes opportunités que celles et ceux qui fréquentent les écoles de langue anglaise.

Nous attirons votre attention, pour débiter, au préambule du projet de loi. Trois éléments du préambule :

—mettre en place des enseignantes et enseignants hautement qualifiés dans les salles de classe;

—le concept des écoles modernes; et

—donner une plus grande place aux parents.

Tout d'abord, les enseignantes et les enseignants qui oeuvrent dans nos écoles sont déjà hautement qualifiés. Il est important de reconnaître dans le projet de loi qu'elles et qu'ils préparent déjà les élèves à réussir dans la vie tout comme sur le marché du travail. On dit souvent que ça prend tout un village pour élever un enfant, et ce village comprend certainement les parents. Mais pour assurer des collaborations optimales pour le bien-être des élèves, il faut délimiter les rôles et prévoir des encadrements. Enfin, le succès des écoles modernes ne peut se faire sans la consultation et la participation des travailleuses et des travailleurs de l'éducation.

Dans la section du projet de loi qui s'appelle « priorités provinciales en éducation en matière de rendement des élèves », nous demandons que soit précisés la consultation de toutes les parties prenantes et l'engagement à soutenir le travail, et les recommandations qui en découleront. Car, selon nous, une collaboration et une consultation significatives doivent reposer sur la confiance et le respect. Il ne suffit pas de consulter; il faut aussi écouter et permettre de contribuer. Un projet de loi comme celui-ci est une occasion de collaborer véritablement avec le personnel enseignant qui travaille aux premières lignes avec les élèves et d'utiliser leurs expertises et leurs expériences pour améliorer nos écoles et le rendement de nos élèves.

À la section « curriculum » du projet de loi, nous vous demandons de vous assurer d'ajouter l'établissement d'un processus collaboratif de révision du curriculum, des premières phases jusqu'au lancement final. Il ne suffit pas que le ministère adhère à de la rétroaction qui s'harmonise avec ses orientations, mais il doit aussi se montrer ouvert à des suggestions pour remettre en question et bonifier ses approches. Et surtout, n'oublions pas qu'il est primordial

que les curriculums continuent à être développés en français par et pour les francophones.

En ce qui a trait maintenant aux sections du projet de loi sur les apprentissages, nous recommandons la prudence quant à l'élaboration d'une formation équivalente et sur la problématique de l'accès à suffisamment d'occasions de formation en français pour les élèves francophones.

Nous avons aussi des inquiétudes en ce qui concerne la section sur l'éducation spécialisée. Sans injecter d'importantes ressources et du financement supplémentaire, notamment pour le dépistage plus précoce, les parents devront continuer à se tourner vers des services privés et devoir payer des frais afin d'obtenir les évaluations nécessaires pour leurs enfants. Les ressources professionnelles en français déjà insuffisantes ou absentes dans certaines régions de la province seront encore plus limitées pour la pénurie si aucune mesure spécifique n'est prise. Les élèves francophones ayant des besoins particuliers font face à des iniquités en comparaison avec les élèves de la majorité.

Nous sommes donc loin, ici, d'avoir une approche qui répond aux objectifs de la Stratégie ontarienne d'équité et d'éducation inclusive visant à éliminer les obstacles systémiques afin de favoriser la réussite et le bien-être de tous les élèves.

1640

Nous demandons que le projet de loi précise que la santé mentale des élèves n'est pas que l'affaire des écoles; c'est tout un continuum de services dans la communauté qui doit collaborer pour appuyer le bien-être des jeunes. Si vous souhaitez faire des écoles des centres communautaires et de santé, assurez-vous alors que les ressources professionnelles soient suffisantes, accessibles, bien financées et en français partout en province.

L'appui aux élèves en santé mentale ne peut pas reposer que sur les dos des enseignantes et des enseignants dans les écoles. Autrement, on ne fait qu'ajouter à la lourdeur de leurs tâches déjà énormes sans tenir compte de leur santé mentale. Allez-vous inclure dans le projet de loi des politiques et directives sur la santé mentale du personnel éducatif? Je ne vous apprend rien, je pense, en vous disant que prendre soin de soi est essentiel pour pouvoir s'occuper des autres.

D'ailleurs, pour améliorer nos écoles et le rendement des élèves, ça prend des enseignantes et des enseignants qui peuvent se consacrer entièrement à la pédagogie et à l'enseignement du curriculum. Nous sommes inquiets de la surcharge de travail que pourraient représenter certaines exigences du projet de loi, notamment la préparation de divers rapports ou l'application de directives de communication pour les enseignantes et les enseignants qui sont les premiers communicateurs avec les parents.

Si le gouvernement a reconnu la gestion scolaire par et pour les francophones il y a 25 ans, il doit aussi reconnaître que ce n'est pas une bonne idée de forcer des écoles de systèmes linguistiques différents à cohabiter. La politique d'aménagement linguistique stipule qu'il est essentiel à l'école de créer un espace francophone pour que l'élève puisse s'épanouir dans son développement langagier et identitaire. Dans un tel contexte, le français parlé devient

alors la langue de communication privilégiée par toutes les personnes qui fréquentent cette école.

En terminant, nous ne pouvons passer sous silence l'absence de mesures dans ce projet de loi pour contrer la pénurie du personnel en éducation qui frappe durement notre système d'éducation en langue française.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** One minute.

**M<sup>me</sup> Anne Vinet-Roy:** Nous ne retrouvons aucune mention sur les recommandations du groupe de travail sur la pénurie des enseignantes et des enseignants francophones, notamment sur l'importance d'arrimer les programmes de formation à l'enseignement aux besoins du marché du travail, de favoriser l'insertion professionnelle et la rétention du nouveau personnel enseignant, de valoriser la profession enseignante ainsi que de promouvoir les opportunités d'emploi en éducation de langue française.

Il ne fait aucun doute qu'un système d'éducation de qualité passe par une main-d'oeuvre qualifiée. Nous vous remercions de votre écoute et nous espérons que nos considérations mériteront votre attention et des actions concrètes. Merci.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Merci. We'll start with the official opposition for round one. You have seven minutes and 30 seconds. I recognize MPP Pasma.

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** Thank you to all our witnesses.

Merci beaucoup à tous nos témoins cet après-midi. C'est difficile pour moi de choisir où je vais commencer.

It's really hard for me to know where to start because I have questions I want to ask all three of you but, Kate, let me start with you. Is there anything else you wanted to add from your presentation? I know you ended up being cut off there at the end.

**Ms. Kate Dudley-Logue:** Actually it was my very last sentence, just concluding—

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** Okay. That timing worked out well then.

You talked about exclusions, which is something I hear about a lot from parents of children with disabilities and parents of children with special needs. Of course, our children can't learn if they can't actually be at school. I'm wondering if you can share some examples with the committee of what these exclusions look like in practice for children in Ontario.

**Ms. Kate Dudley-Logue:** Yes. As I mentioned in my presentation, they can look very different. It can be calls home where you just have to come pick up your child early, or they could be organized, where actual paperwork is involved and a child is away from school for sometimes an indefinite period of time until safety plans are made and that kind of thing. It can be very, very challenging.

We have a family we've been working with at the OAC called the Legault family. Actually, I think Joel Harden has spoken about him here in the Legislature before. The child's name is Elliot, and it's been about a year now. He finished off the last three months of last year fully excluded. Through much advocacy and work with the CHEO hospital in Ottawa—this is from Ottawa—they negotiated for Elliot to go back to school in the fall but for only two hours a day, and that has continued for most of this year.

This has a tremendous effect on the child and the family, if you can imagine. The mom has not been able to work, so there's financial loss there. The stress that is involved with the advocacy of having to constantly be on the phone with school board officials, trying to work this out, is just tremendous, when all that is needed is extra supports to be put in place so that the kids can be there safely. So, yes, it's those kinds of situations.

But we have another mom in the Durham area who just found out in March that her child has been excluded from recess since October, if you can imagine. When every other child is allowed to go outside and play and get fresh air, this child has been inside for recess for six whole months. Since March, when the mom finally found out that this was happening, the mom has been going to the school three times a day to walk her child around the block—because the mom is not allowed to be in the schoolyard, apparently—just to give her son some fresh air. It's these kinds of things. This child is determined to be too unsafe to be around other kids and impulsive in a schoolyard, yet they're not giving the child an EA to help support him. The unfairness is awful, because the kid feels that. When the kid can't go outside and be with the other children, they feel that.

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** That is breathtakingly unfair. And right now, we are not tracking these exclusions at all.

**Ms. Kate Dudley-Logue:** Yes. This is the biggest problem, and this is why I refer to it as the dirty little secret. I've met with MPP Barnes here—you've been lovely, thank you—but we've been trying to get data on where exclusions lie. If you talk to a school board official, they will tell you that they're tracking them, but they can't get you the report. Then, if you press them enough, they will eventually admit that they can't really track the soft exclusions. If a family is being called at 11 o'clock in the morning to come pick up their kid, that kid is marked as being there that day; meanwhile, they've missed more than half of the day.

How do we see the lack of supports that are happening if we're not tracking it? I feel it's really important that a mechanism gets put in place for all schools to have to track all forms of exclusion.

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** They may say they can't track it, but if you have to pick up the phone and call a parent, you can certainly fill out a piece of paper or a form after you do that.

**Ms. Kate Dudley-Logue:** I don't, honestly, understand it, because back in my days in school, when a child left the school early, you had to physically sign them out. There has to be some tracking mechanism there. Adding that the child is leaving because of an exclusion would be one extra step. It doesn't seem like this is an impossible ask, to me.

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** You touched on another issue briefly. We are seeing a disturbing number of cases where the funding pressure on school boards and the fact that funds are not keeping up with the needs of children for special education and that funding is not keeping up with inflation overall is resulting in school boards looking for

places where they can make cuts. Congregate or special classes is an easy place to make a cut because it's cheaper to have a child in a mainstream class. Whether or not they actually get an EA or the supports they need there is another matter. That has a serious impact on the ability of some of our children to learn.

I'm wondering if you can share some examples you might have seen or heard about the impact of the elimination of these classes on kids or how kids in these classes are benefiting from those.

**Ms. Kate Dudley-Logue:** As I mentioned, many autistic children can do quite well in mainstream classes. However, those with the highest need often have many sensory challenges. Being in a busy, loud classroom is next to impossible and is only going to lead to challenging behaviours. For these kinds of children, being in a smaller classroom that is contained, with more supports readily available to them, is a lifeline for them. It provides these children the ability to be with like-minded peers, to sometimes develop friendships for the very first time, and to actually access a curriculum.

Parents report that when their children moved to smaller congregated classrooms, for the first time ever they are not being excluded, they're actually learning, and they're just happier in general because they're suffering from less anxiety and stress to get through their day.

These classes have to remain. It's incredibly heartbreaking to see that school boards are cancelling them.

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** You mentioned that not all autistic kids have the same needs and that's why we need to make sure that the supports are there for kids based on their needs.

I know you personally have two very different experiences within your own family. Do you want to comment on that?

**Ms. Kate Dudley-Logue:** Yes. I have two children. My daughter is in a mainstream classroom and doing quite well. She could arguably have a little bit more support to help her academically, but she's doing quite well, and it is the placement that works for her. My son has many challenging needs—

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Thank you. I have to cut you off there.

1650

Now we will go to the government side, and we will start with MPP Quinn.

**Mr. Nolan Quinn:** Thank you to all the presenters. My questions are for Kathy. There are about 700 trustees, who make critical decisions on Ontario school boards, who bring valuable perspectives and local considerations into how school boards are governed. Can you provide some insight into how the role of a trustee is?

**Ms. Kathy McDonald:** How the role of a trustee is?

**Mr. Nolan Quinn:** Yes, the trustee role—just insight.

**Ms. Kathy McDonald:** Absolutely. Basically, I would divide our roles into three categories: We have to hire a director. We also need to balance the budget—it's four, actually—as well as focus on student achievement, and

also parent advocacy. That's basically how I'd break down the four roles of a trustee.

**Mr. Nolan Quinn:** There are obviously a lot of priorities as a trustee. Would you agree with our training that we want to provide for trustees moving forward, just knowing that you have the budget and you have a lot of different leadership roles?

**Ms. Kathy McDonald:** Yes, absolutely. I think it's imperative because, in my experience, a lot of people who run for trustee—I think a lot of people don't really understand the role of a trustee. They're coming, thinking, and they have run on platforms and realize that, no, you have absolutely no jurisdiction in, for example, masking. Right? I think that it's important that trustees get the proper training as to governance roles, because it's a very nuanced role. It doesn't operate like most boards do.

As well, I know the Ontario Public School Boards' Association has modules. They're excellent modules, but right now it's up to the discretion of a trustee if they want to look at those modules. I've always told OPSBA I think it should be mandated, because there's such rich learning from those modules. I think any form of training—and it should be centralized so that all trustees are getting the same message so there's no confusion as to what we can and cannot do.

**Mr. Nolan Quinn:** Thank you—so standardizing the trustee process, the training, the onboarding side. Okay.

I have another question as a parent. Every day, parents receive information from their children's school. As a parent, I regularly receive permission slips. I have to preface that: I don't; my wife does. I'm always in Toronto. But we do receive a lot of slips at home: updates on class activities, requests to take part in fundraising, report cards, artwork. The lists are as endless as their backpacks are full—some days very heavy backpacks, but they're learning lots.

Yet one information piece that I feel is missing is how the child's school is performing. I know that our proposed legislation includes setting provincial educational priorities for boards. Do you agree that requiring school boards to provide progress reports on provincial education priorities for student achievement to parents is fair?

**Ms. Kathy McDonald:** I do, and I think it increases the onus on school boards to be transparent with the public. I think it's important to make sure that we bring the public into public education so that the members of the public can understand what's happening in their schools. It's really important that they know. When you look at different results—let's say the EQAO scores, for instance—we can have conversations around what's happening in that particular school. So I think it's important information that can be garnered from such information going home to parents.

**Mr. Nolan Quinn:** Thank you, Kathy. I think my colleague has some other questions.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Go ahead, please.

**M<sup>me</sup> Natalia Kusendova-Bashta:** Mes questions sont adressées à M<sup>me</sup> Lavoie et M<sup>me</sup> Vinet-Roy de l'Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens.

Je voudrais remercier l'AEFO et tous vos membres pour le travail que vous faites. Notre gouvernement reconnaît que l'enseignement dans une situation linguistique minoritaire est vraiment quelque chose qui demande de l'attention. Je sais que vous avez parlé de la pénurie des enseignants, et nous reconnaissons que la demande d'enseignants qualifiés en français dépasse l'offre actuelle. C'est pourquoi nous oeuvrons pour ajouter 350 enseignants en langue française supplémentaires par an pour répondre à cette demande dans le système d'éducation francophone.

Je viens de visiter l'UOF aujourd'hui pour un forum. Vraiment, quand on parle de l'UOF, c'est un bijou sur notre couronne. L'UOF a introduit un nouveau programme de baccalauréat en éducation pour vraiment outiller les étudiants pour une carrière en enseignement en Ontario en contexte minoritaire. Comme vous le savez, l'UOF est par et pour les francophones, alors nous sommes très fiers de ce nouveau programme de baccalauréat. Aussi, quand j'ai visité Windsor, j'ai eu l'opportunité de visiter le petit campus là-bas qui offre aussi un baccalauréat de l'enseignement par l'Université d'Ottawa.

Alors, oui, on fait des progrès, mais on sait qu'on a toujours cette pénurie d'enseignants. C'est pourquoi l'Ontario a lancé la Stratégie ontarienne de recrutement et de rétention du personnel enseignant de langue française en juin 2021. Le ministre a établi le comité de mise en oeuvre de cette stratégie, et on travaille là-dessus.

Alors, je voudrais vous demander la question : votre organisme, l'AEFO, est-il favorable à la certification d'un plus grand nombre d'enseignants, et à un rythme plus rapide?

**M<sup>me</sup> Anne Vinet-Roy:** Merci pour la question. Oui, absolument, parce qu'on a besoin de personnes le plus rapidement possible pour être capables d'assurer la pérennité et la vitalité de nos écoles francophones et, par ricochet, de nos communautés francophones. La question de que ce soit plus rapide, plus efficace—oui, absolument. On sait que la certification passe également par l'Ordre des enseignantes et des enseignants de l'Ontario, alors ça aussi. Il faut voir les processus de ce côté-là. Mais aussi, vous mentionnez des universités en particulier—

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** One minute.

**M<sup>me</sup> Anne Vinet-Roy:** —mais il y a d'autres universités aussi. C'est important d'avoir cette offre-là de programmation au niveau des facultés d'éducation, des programmes de formation en enseignement un peu partout en Ontario, parce que ce n'est pas tout le monde qui peut aller à Toronto ou à Windsor. Et l'université, l'UOF—malgré que, oui, c'est une excellente institution qui est plus récente—n'accueille qu'un certain nombre de gens à ce moment-ci. Il faut s'assurer que le programme soit accessible à plusieurs endroits en province pour faire en sorte qu'il y ait le plus de gens possible qui choisissent cette profession et qui aient accès à la formation.

**M<sup>me</sup> Natalia Kusendova-Bashta:** Merci. How much time, Chair?

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Twenty seconds.

**M<sup>me</sup> Natalia Kusendova-Bashta:** OK. Alors, aussi, comme vous le savez, ce projet de loi parle des parents, et vraiment des parents comme partenaires en éducation. J'ai eu l'opportunité de participer au congrès annuel de Parents partenaires en éducation. C'est un organisme formidable. L'engagement et la croissance et l'abondance dans la communauté parentale est vraiment essentielle pour—d'accord, je vais reprendre dans la prochaine section.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Thank you. Now we'll go back to the official opposition. Go ahead.

**M<sup>me</sup> Chandra Pasma:** Merci, Anne et Anne, d'être venues cet après-midi. C'est toujours un plaisir de vous voir.

Nous savons que les enseignants et les enseignantes sont dans nos salles de classe tous les jours. Vous voyez ce qui se passe avec nos enfants, les besoins que nos enfants ont en ce moment, les soutiens dont on a et les soutiens dont on a besoin.

Est-ce que vous avez été consultée sur ce projet de loi?

**M<sup>me</sup> Anne Vinet-Roy:** Malheureusement, non. Le projet de loi est survenu—on a appris à propos du projet de loi en même temps que tout le monde, en même temps que les médias. Donc, c'est ce qui est problématique, parce que, encore une fois, on n'est pas venu vers le personnel qui oeuvre au quotidien, tous les jours dans la salle de classe, dans les écoles auprès des élèves—peu importe la profession, dans le sens qu'il y a plein de professions qui oeuvrent en appui à l'éducation des enfants dans nos communautés scolaires. Et non, nous n'avons pas été consultés.

C'est ce qui fait en sorte que c'est difficile de comprendre, parce qu'il y a des choses que le gouvernement dit qu'il va faire, mais on n'est pas certain comment parce que, bon, il y a déjà une pénurie du personnel. Alors, comment aller en recruter plus s'il y en manque déjà? Et si le ministre nous avait demandé, on lui aurait dit qu'on a du personnel enseignant et des travailleurs et travailleuses en éducation hautement qualifiés présentement et que c'est important de s'occuper de et d'appuyer et d'écouter les gens qu'on a actuellement dans le milieu, nonobstant le fait qu'il faut aller en chercher d'autres, c'est certain.

**M<sup>me</sup> Chandra Pasma:** Oui, et ça démontre un grand manque de respect de ne pas consulter les enseignants et les enseignantes, mais surtout pour les enseignants et les enseignantes francophones parce que les Franco-Ontariens ont un droit constitutionnel de gérer leur propre système d'éducation. Et maintenant, nous avons un projet de loi qui ne mentionne même pas la distinction entre le système d'éducation francophone et le système d'éducation anglophone.

Le problème que le ministre a dit ce matin qu'il veut adresser avec ce projet de loi, c'est un problème de résultats d'examen, mais on ne voit pas ce problème dans le système d'éducation francophone. Vous avez des résultats excellents dans le système d'éducation francophone.

1700

Mais ce qu'on voit, c'est que vous avez un problème particulier : la pénurie des enseignants et enseignantes, qui a été créée en grande partie par des changements que le

gouvernement a apportés à la formation des enseignants et avec les changements aux facultés d'éducation—le changement dans la formule de financement pour les facultés d'éducation. Ils ont fait ça pour adresser un problème dans le système anglophone qui n'existait pas dans le système francophone et ils ont créé un grand problème pour les francophones.

Est-ce que vous avez peur maintenant de ce qui va se passer avec ce projet de loi et les priorités que le ministre veut mettre en place, que ça va créer encore une fois beaucoup de problèmes pour le système d'éducation francophone?

**M<sup>me</sup> Anne Vinet-Roy:** Oui, absolument, parce que le résultat du groupe de travail par rapport aux recommandations en lien direct avec la pénurie font en sorte que—ce rapport-là fait en sorte que le gouvernement a en main toutes les réponses dont il a besoin pour les adresser concrètement.

Des petits morceaux ici et là qu'il semble avoir adressés—je dis bien « semble » avoir adressés—depuis que cette stratégie a été officiellement lancée ou qu'est devenu public le résultat de ce rapport de ce groupe de travail, et bien, ça semble être des choses qui s'appliquent à ou qui sont bonnes pour les anglophones aussi, ce qui n'est pas mauvais en soi, mais ce groupe de travail a été spécifiquement mandaté pour faire le travail pour le système d'éducation en langue française. On a des partenaires, des conseils scolaires qui ont participé à ça. Le gouvernement a participé à ça aussi, et il était d'accord avec tout ce qu'il y a dans ce rapport. Pourtant, il n'y a à peu près rien de concret qui agit.

Et vous avez raison, Madame Pasma, la question de la faculté d'éducation qui ne répondait pas du tout à nos besoins à ce moment-là—vraiment, maintenant, la faculté d'éducation est d'une durée de deux ans, mais c'est une durée plutôt étirée. Ce n'est pas vraiment parce qu'il y a une meilleure qualité; ça ne fait pas nécessairement en sorte que le personnel enseignant est mieux préparé ou mieux qualifié. C'est essentiellement le même programme qui a été étiré sur deux ans.

**M<sup>me</sup> Chandra Pasma:** Nous avons maintenant cette pénurie d'enseignants et enseignantes qui s'empire chaque année, parce que chaque année il y a un écart de 500 enseignants mais nous ne produisons pas assez d'enseignants pour remplir cet écart. Ce n'est pas dans le projet de loi, mais le gouvernement a fait des promesses d'adresser la littératie et la numératie, qu'il y aura un nouveau curriculum en place pour septembre. On verra, mais c'est la promesse.

Qu'est-ce que vous pensez va se passer dans le système d'éducation francophone parce qu'il n'y a pas d'enseignants additionnels pour ajouter au système francophone?

**M<sup>me</sup> Anne Vinet-Roy:** Bien, de un, les éléments sur lesquels le ministre veut insister au niveau du retour à la base, ils ont toujours été importants. Cette base dans le système scolaire a toujours fait partie du curriculum. Ça a toujours été important.

Et puis maintenant, si on veut l'ajuster—encore, le personnel sur le terrain n'a pas été consulté. Souvent, la nouveauté arrive sans les ressources, sans la préparation adéquate au préalable. Alors le personnel enseignant fait ce qu'il peut avec ce qu'il a, comme d'habitude, puis à un moment donné, il y a des limites à ce qu'on peut faire humainement quand un changement n'est pas bien préparé, et on va parfois critiquer le personnel enseignant. Mais vraiment, le personnel enseignant et les travailleurs et travailleuses de l'éducation font ce qu'ils peuvent avec ce qu'ils ont, et il y a des limites quand les ressources ne sont pas là, quand la préparation n'est pas là avant que les choses soient mises en place.

**M<sup>me</sup> Chandra Pasma:** Si vous avez été consultée par le ministre sur les besoins de nos enfants pour réussir maintenant, vous auriez parlé surtout, je suis sûre, de la pénurie d'enseignants et enseignantes. Mais de quoi d'autre est-ce vous auriez parlé, si vous avez été consultée?

**M<sup>me</sup> Anne Vinet-Roy:** Bien, une des choses qui est très importante : avec les besoins changeants qui ont découlé de la pandémie, ça a aggravé les écarts, effectivement, entre les élèves. Mais les élèves ont toujours appris différemment. Même sans la pandémie, il n'y a jamais eu un contexte où les élèves apprenaient tous en même temps ou de la même façon.

Et pour être capable de bien répondre aux besoins changeants des élèves, ce qui est le but, et de faire en sorte qu'ils réussissent à plusieurs égards—pas seulement avec les résultats des tests provinciaux, mais de façon générale—eh bien, on a besoin d'avoir des tailles de salles de classe un petit peu plus petites où on peut accorder l'attention et la relation humaine nécessaire auprès des élèves, parce que—j'ai entendu un peu ce que ma collègue Barbara Dobrowolski a dit tantôt—c'est vraiment important que l'école soit un milieu de vie humaine où il y a des relations humaines. Oui, on veut que les élèves réussissent, mais qu'ils réussissent à plusieurs égards, et ne pas juste réussir parce qu'ils ont tenu un pourcentage ou un résultat quelconque qui satisfait une exigence provinciale. Le côté humain du travail qui se fait dans les écoles est très important, et malheureusement, le ministre l'oublie souvent.

**M<sup>me</sup> Chandra Pasma:** Et si nous ne donnons pas des ressources aux conseils scolaires pour adresser la pénurie, la santé mentale, la taille des classes, est-ce qu'ils peuvent réussir à mettre en oeuvre les priorités du ministre, quelles que soient les priorités?

**M<sup>me</sup> Anne Vinet-Roy:** Ce sera très difficile parce que les ressources vont être limitées. Les gens vont faire du mieux qu'ils peuvent, mais ça ne répondra jamais aux besoins—

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** I have to cut you off there.

Now I'll go back to the government side. Go ahead.

**M<sup>me</sup> Natalia Kusendova-Bashta:** Merci. On va continuer en français. C'est toujours une belle opportunité de parler la belle langue de Molière.

Je dois ne pas être d'accord avec M<sup>me</sup> Chandra Pasma, car on ne veut pas créer un système d'éducation juste pour

les francophones, car les francophones sont les Ontariens. Les Franco-Ontariens font partie de notre province. C'est pourquoi on a un ministre de l'Éducation et on a un projet de loi pour toutes les écoles francophones et anglophones dans notre province. Mais on a aussi le ministère des Affaires francophones, et c'est vraiment notre travail de donner des conseils au ministre de l'Éducation et de travailler en étroite collaboration avec le ministère de l'Éducation et les autres ministères. C'est ça la fonction du ministère des Affaires francophones, et on est vraiment fier de travailler en collaboration avec d'autres ministères partenaires.

Mais ce que je voudrais demander à l'AEFO c'est du rôle des parents. Car vraiment notre gouvernement—et ce que le ministre Lecce veut faire, c'est vraiment rendre le respect aux parents et donner une voix à nos parents. C'est pourquoi, dans ce projet de loi, on veut accroître la participation des parents en les informant du rendement des élèves et en veillant à ce qu'ils aient facilement accès aux renseignements dont ils ont besoin pour participer de manière significative à l'éducation et à la réussite de leurs enfants.

Oui, je veux vraiment féliciter tous les conseils scolaires francophones, car on voit que les taux de scolarité, les taux en mathématiques sont vraiment élevés. Alors, merci vraiment pour ce travail que vous faites, car vous le faites très bien.

Votre organisation, est-elle favorable à ce que les conseils scolaires s'engagent davantage auprès des parents?

**M<sup>me</sup> Anne Vinet-Roy:** On a toujours été de l'avis que le rôle des parents est super important dans la réussite des élèves, dans ce qui se passe à l'école, évidemment. Et il y a déjà des mesures en place dans chacune des écoles où on communique régulièrement par différents moyens des résultats, des attentes, des préoccupations auprès des parents. Alors, une préoccupation est que ça semble dire qu'il n'y en a pas et qu'il faut qu'il y en ait, mais ce n'est pas tout à fait exact parce qu'il y en a beaucoup de choses qui se font en collaboration avec les parents, avec toutes sortes de projets, d'activités dans les écoles—pas nécessairement des rencontres formelles, mais des participations.

Nos communautés francophones sont vraiment—il y a beaucoup de partenariats dans nos communautés pour assurer la vitalité de nos écoles. Une école francophone ne peut pas fonctionner en soi toute seule. Elle se doit d'avoir des partenaires, et les parents sont certainement de ces partenaires-là aussi. Mais il faut faire attention de ne pas donner l'impression que ça ne se passe pas déjà. Il y a déjà beaucoup de belles choses qui se passent dans nos écoles qui sont faites avec la collaboration des parents. S'il y a certaines façons d'ajuster, on n'est pas nécessairement contre ça, mais il faut s'assurer que les partenariats appuient ce qui se fait dans l'école pour que les enfants réussissent mieux, comme je l'ai dit tout à l'heure, à différents égards.

Et pour la question tantôt du commentaire par rapport au système d'éducation de langue française, c'est important d'avoir un système d'éducation de langue française qui peut offrir la meilleure qualité possible de façon

équitable par rapport à ce qui s'offre dans les écoles anglophones. Donc, la question d'équité et non d'égalité est importante ici, parce qu'on ne demande pas nécessairement des traitements de faveur; on ne fait que demander ce à quoi nos élèves francophones de l'Ontario ont droit.

**M<sup>me</sup> Natalia Kusendova-Bashta:** Oui, merci, alors c'est pourquoi on a aussi réalisé une stratégie de progrès. Par exemple, on a signé une entente, un projet pilote, avec le Consulat général de France pour avoir plus de mobilité et plus d'immigrants d'un pays comme la France. Est-ce que vous pensez que ce projet pilote—est-ce qu'on peut engager d'autres pays, comme des pays africains francophones, pour faire venir des enseignants français d'autres pays?

**M<sup>me</sup> Anne Vinet-Roy:** Je suis tout à fait d'accord avec cette possibilité-là. Notre francophonie ontarienne est de plus en plus diversifiée. Donc, de faire appel à d'autres pays n'est absolument pas mauvais, sauf que c'est limité, ce qu'on peut faire venir comme personnel. On a parlé tantôt d'au-delà de 500 postes ou 500 places, 500 membres du personnel enseignant qui ne sont pas présents dans les écoles dont on a besoin chaque année, et qu'il va continuer de s'aggraver, ce nombre-là. Alors oui, cela peut faire partie de la solution, mais il faut y en avoir d'autres, et il y a plein de bonnes recommandations dans le rapport du groupe de travail sur la pénurie.

1710

**M<sup>me</sup> Natalia Kusendova-Bashta:** Merci beaucoup. I leave the rest of my time to my colleagues.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** I recognize MPP Barnes.

**Ms. Patrice Barnes:** This question is for you, Kate. I just had a question for you and then I'll have a question for Kathy.

You and I have met a couple of times, and we've had some really good conversations. This bill really talks about the accountability and transparency piece. I just wanted you to speak to that, because we've had some good conversations about that piece with parents, with special education, dealing with the school board system. I just wanted to ask you to expand on your thoughts around that piece in the bill.

**Ms. Kate Dudley-Logue:** Sure. Transparency: That has been an issue that we've been taking on, for sure, mainly to do with the Ontario Autism Program because we've felt that it's been over four years, close to five years, where we've sort of been in the dark.

But if we're looking at exclusions, which is a big part of the briefing notes that I provided to you and what our ask is—and again, I don't mean to keep repeating this, but I refer to it as the dirty little secret. If nobody is taking data on how often these exclusions are happening, then I guess it's not a problem, right? We can deny that they're happening. As many parents are complaining about it, if nobody is taking a look at the overall problem and how often it's happening, then we don't really have to deal with it. That's something that we're really trying to push towards stopping.

We need to see how rampant this issue is, how many kids are being excluded—daily, weekly—throughout the school year. It can't be a report at the end of the year. It needs to be an ongoing report so that we can take a look: What ages is this happening? What grades is it affecting? Is it happening more in high schools? Is it happening at the elementary level? That will help you determine how best—how better—these children could be supported.

**Ms. Patrice Barnes:** Thank you very much.

I'll just be really quick: Kathy, we have a section in the bill around director appraisal, being able to look at that and put that together. What are your thoughts around that in regard to having an overall director appraisal process that is standardized across boards?

**Ms. Kathy McDonald:** Actually, I'm happy to see that in terms of—again, different boards have such different processes. There are some boards, for example, where a director just simply comes in and says, "I have done XYZ," and he tells you he has done his job, and that's considered an appraisal. There are some boards that have a 360 detailed appraisal that very many different faculty, staff and community participate in. So again, I think it needs to be—

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Thank you very much for that answer.

Given that we're behind schedule, would the committee like to move to the next group of presenters instead of using the independent members' time this round?

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** No.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** No?

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** I have questions still.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** On this side?

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** We would do that.

*Interjections.*

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Let's have a vote: Put your hand up if you want it; put your hand down if you don't—

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** I move that we dispense with the time for the independent members in this round so that we can catch up on the time and move to the next presenters, who were scheduled for 5 p.m.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Okay. Thank you. Is there any debate?

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** Let me get this straight—

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Go ahead.

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** We've agreed. The motion we did this morning was very clear, the language was very clear, that we would do this. And now you're bringing forward another motion. I understand that your concern is that people are here a little late, but it's such an important bill. Quite frankly, education is probably something we're going to talk about at 6:30 and how much time we're going to allot to education. I would think that to be consistent for the day and tomorrow, we should go by the motion that we've all had many opportunities to speak on today.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Okay. Any further debate?

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** I'd like to call for a vote on the motion—the motion that I moved.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Okay. Let's have a vote. All in favour? All against—

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** Before you do that, can I see it in writing, her motion, please? Put it up like you did this morning?

*Interjections.*

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** I withdraw my motion so we can just get on with the time. I was just trying to expedite things, but seeing as how the opposition does not want to do that, let's carry on, because we're just wasting time.

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** I'm always trying to be fair and reasonable.

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** Oh, that was it. I must have missed that part.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Go ahead.

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** Thank you, Chair, and sorry to the witnesses about the procedural games.

Kathy, I have a question for you. You mentioned the need for integrity commissioners on the roster to have experience in training and racism, and particularly how racism impacts different communities differently, and I'm wondering if you can expand on that point, please.

**Ms. Kathy McDonald:** Yes, because with the current process, you have a variety of individuals that can put their name forward and apply to be an IC. There are even boards where they've only had one candidate interview, which, again, is problematic in itself, and it's almost by default that person has been taken. I think that there are many examples where trustees have brought forward or tried to bring forward valid concerns with regard to comments by trustees. We have had some highlighted in the media. There are trustees who have made basically derogatory and racist comments, and it took nine months and a lot of community advocacy to get them to resign and step down. I think even just looking at how that process unfolded and the woeful lack of trustees who were at that table to act and sanction their colleagues—because I think in no reality should a trustee be calling a parent the N-word. There have been derogatory jokes made towards a particular group of individuals, and again, the trustees have chosen to turn a blind eye to the impact of the harm.

I think it's important for the Integrity Commissioner to understand the lived experience. As a parent of four Black children, two of which are males—my first two kids are males—they have been told they should be criminals, that “Your kind doesn't go to university.” A teacher didn't want my first son in a math club because he's a Black boy, and luckily, the principal intervened, and a different teacher. He was allowed in. He got perfect in the Gauss math exam. The teacher didn't tell him about this amazing achievement; 40,000 people worldwide wrote this exam. Only 125 people made it to the perfect honour roll list, and the teacher didn't even tell him about it because she didn't think he would care.

These are the experiences of Black children and many Black families. This is 2023, it's still happening, and you have people who discount these experiences and don't understand how triggering it is for somebody to call your child a criminal when you know you have your precious

children you sent out to get an education that they are legally entitled to. I think the integrity commissioners need to have a deep understanding of the trauma that they inflict on Black children and Black families when they uphold such outrageous behaviour by trustees.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** One minute.

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** I'm incredibly sorry that that happened to you. It should not happen to anyone in our system.

Right now, the legislation has no requirements for the Integrity Commissioner. Would you say that is something that should be added into the bill as a requirement for integrity commissioners in Ontario?

**Ms. Kathy McDonald:** Yes, definitely. I'd like to see that.

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** Thank you. I'll turn the remaining time over to MPP Gates.

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** All 35 seconds? I'll see if I can—

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Thirty-nine.

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** Thirty-nine? I was close. There you go.

This will just go quickly to Kate. Was your organization consulted on this bill?

**Ms. Kate Dudley-Logue:** No, not at all.

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** Not at all?

**Ms. Kate Dudley-Logue:** Not at all.

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** And you know that none of the other unions or people that represent education workers—they weren't consulted, as well.

Do you think that's fair and reasonable, to not consult your organization?

1720

**Ms. Kate Dudley-Logue:** Not at all.

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** Okay. How much time left?

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Twelve seconds.

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** And to you on racism, unfortunately it runs rampant in the province of Ontario. We have to do better as a society. And the last thing I'll say in my three seconds is, “Love is love.”

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Thank you very much. That ends the questions for the official opposition.

We'll go to the government. MPP Martin.

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** I think what's really important is that we consult with parents, who have a lot of views about what's happening in our education system and rarely get an opportunity to be consulted on things. We certainly have lots of opportunities to consult with lots of others, but parents don't get heard very much, and this legislation is dealing with a lot of things that are, I think, really important to recognize—where changes need to be made in our education system and to make some changes to have more accountability and transparency. That's why I think it's a really great piece of legislation.

I am sorry, Kathy, to hear about what happened to your sons. That's truly horrible to think that something like that can happen in the education system in Ontario today, so we're certainly going to make sure that things like that do not go on in the future.

I wanted to ask you about transparency and accountability. We all, as elected officials, understand the importance of that kind of transparency with constituents and with parents, with students, with teachers, with everybody in the system. So do you believe that this bill will enhance transparency both in the use of funds and in general board governance?

**Ms. Kathy McDonald:** I do. I think it will significantly enhance transparency, and I think it's important for the public too, because traditionally a lot of people didn't even understand the role of trustees. Unless you're a very involved parent—when I say “involved,” meaning you show up at the school or council; that's how you got information. But I think it's very important to pass and disseminate information out to the community.

There are people, for example, who don't have children physically in the school but have an interest in what's happening in the community, because, after all, even if you have no children, when you get older you're going to need young people to take care of you, so you have a vested interest to ensure that our education system is working.

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** Thank you for that, Kathy.

As a parent of a child who is on the autism spectrum, I'm certainly concerned to make sure that children with special needs get the attention and resources that they need to succeed as much as possible. I think we all want what's best for our children, and we all want them to have an opportunity to achieve whatever they're capable of achieving. Whether it's a Black boy in a school or a child with special needs, any child should have an opportunity to succeed.

One of the things that I was most excited about with this legislation is the fact that it will allow us to know what the special education funding is being used for by requiring transparency and accountability with respect to how those funds are used. Right now, as I said I think in an earlier question, I've been told by teachers that the special needs teachers are the first teachers that are laid off or told not to come in because school boards have other priorities.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** One minute.

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** The government has increased funding and has now 3,000 new EAs across the province, and parents say, “Where is that happening at my school? I'm not seeing that.”

I personally would like to know where the money is going, and I just wanted to ask you, Kate, if you could say what that means to you.

**Ms. Kate Dudley-Logue:** Well, I'm certainly no expert in that area, but whatever funding is going to the schools is clearly not enough. Because there's no mandated amount of programming that has to be made for kids in any given school board, that's where school boards tend to cut when they're underfunded. I can't speak for the school boards in terms of how they're allocating that funding. I just know that our kids need better supports and more programs.

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** Thank you. My point would be, if we don't know how they're spending it, we can't know if it's enough or not, and we need to know that.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Thank you. I'm going to have to cut you off there.

I'd like to thank the presenters for their involvement. If you would like to submit any written materials to the committee in addition to your presentations today, the deadline for written submissions is 7 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time on Tuesday May 9, 2023.

## ONTARIO HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

### ONTARIO CATHOLIC SCHOOL TRUSTEES' ASSOCIATION

MR. MICHAEL BARRETT

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** I would now like to call on the next group of presenters to please come forward: Ontario Human Rights Commission, Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association and Michael Barrett.

We'll start with the Ontario Human Rights Commission. As a reminder, you're going to have seven minutes for your presentation, followed by questions from the committee members, and I will provide reminders of the time during the presentation and questions.

Please go ahead. And state your name also.

**Ms. Patricia DeGuire:** Good evening, everyone. Standing committee members, thanks for including the Ontario Human Rights Commission—

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Can you speak closer to the mike, please?

**Ms. Patricia DeGuire:** Thank you. This initiative is critical because it is pivotal to the lives of our children, the future of our province and the future of our country. I appreciate the opportunity to express the commission's support for the proposed Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act. The proposed act seeks to prioritize student achievement in reading, writing and math, and directly responded to the recommendations outlined in the Ontario Human Rights Commission Right to Read inquiry report.

The commission applauds the Ministry of Education for the latest positive steps towards creating a foundation for the government, school boards, faculties and other education partners to meet their human rights obligations in ensuring that everyone has the instruction and support needed to learn to read. If you cannot read, you cannot do math.

In February 2022, the Ontario Human Rights Commission released its Right to Read report calling for critical changes to Ontario's approach to early learning. The inquiry considered systemic issues which contribute to human rights concerns, including the need for standards—I heard that a lot—consistency, monitoring, improved data collection, and better communication and transparency with parents and students, a recurring theme throughout the submissions.

The Ontario Human Rights Commission is pleased to see that Bill 98, if passed, would lay the groundwork for setting and monitoring provincial standards and priorities for fundamental areas of student achievement like reading. Setting provincial standards will help establish better and

clearer parameters so that students across the province can succeed. These provisions, coupled with recent investments to boost literacy, directly respond to the recommendations of the commission's inquiry report.

The commission supports the proposed improvements to transparency, communication and reporting through publicly posted board improvement plans, updated to parents twice a year. In addition, the bill, if passed, would set the groundwork for alignment with the commission's recommendation on teachers' education by ensuring that teacher education programs are aligned with the Ontario curriculum, especially with respect to math and literacy. However, there is nothing explicit about data collection in this bill.

I hasten to extend gratitude to the Minister of Education for adding two of the three recommendations of systemic areas identified in the Right to Read report.

Data collection is necessary to ensure all groups benefit equally from service, and in the education sector, data collection and analysis would allow school boards and the province to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of special education services and supports, and to take steps to measure student achievement and outcomes, particularly for students from code-protected and disadvantaged groups.

Currently, the lack of consistent data collection and analysis reporting is a major accessibility barrier in Ontario's education system. The commission urges Ontario to implement all the recommendations in the Right to Read report related to data collection to monitor individual student outcomes, identify and close equity gaps, and improve student achievement and outcomes for better decision-taking. Bill 98, if passed, has the potential to ensure that all students have equal access to an evidence-based approach to learn to read.

1730

The Right to Read report identifies several barriers to children which hinder their ability to learn to read. Anti-Black racism in education was a major one. The commission, in collaboration with erudite stalwarts from the education sector, recently had a round table to explore how to address the issues that are now in a critical state.

Educators have been instrumental in helping students across the education system, despite many challenges flowing from the intersection of two pandemics: COVID-19 and racism and the ongoing crisis of anti-Black racism. Their efforts have gone unnoticed, and we must continue to support them in this important work.

Educators see and want to respond to the academic and mental health challenges facing students when they fail to learn to read, and they need consistency and support to do so. However, the lack of clear, consistent guidance is an additional burden on educators as they are often left to determine the best approaches on their own.

Honourable members of the committee, I ask in musing mood, can we afford this to happen to all children? That is why the commission continues to work with stakeholders and duty-holders—

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** One-minute mark.

**Ms. Patricia DeGuire:** —in education spaces to support leading practices in accommodation.

I am going to conclude by saying, in the round tables, one of the most robust conversations we had, one young 13-year-old remarked, and I paraphrase, “Things have to be taught from a positive perspective. Other ideas need to be put in the minds of students. This helps to improve our dream. It took me a very long time to realize that I could learn something else other than slavery and gangster”—very sad for an education system.

In conclusion, I say that the right to read requires the government to be consistent and to be stable. This means mandatory standards related to curriculum and instruction, early screening in reading, intervention—

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** I'm going to have to cut you off there. I apologize.

Now we'll move on to the Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association. Please state your name.

**Mr. Patrick Daly:** Good evening, Mr. Chair and members of the committee. My name is Patrick Daly, and I am honoured to be the president of the Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association. I am joined virtually by our executive director, Nick Milanetti.

I want to thank you for providing us with the opportunity to share our views on Bill 98. We will as well be providing a more detailed written submission for your consideration.

The OCSTA was founded in 1930. We represent the 237 locally elected Catholic trustees in the province who serve on 29 English-language Catholic school boards. Collectively, these school boards educate approximately 560,000 students, from JK to grade 12.

I would like to begin by thanking Minister Lecce and staff in his office and the Ministry of Education for meeting with us and listening to our perspectives on the legislation. I want to as well acknowledge the significant contribution that publicly funded Catholic schools make to the fabric of our society and recognize the outstanding service and faithful leadership of Ontario's 237 Catholic trustees. But most especially, I want to express deep gratitude to the teachers, school and system leaders and support staff in Catholic school systems throughout Ontario for their dedicated service.

We have and continue to consider Bill 98 through the lens of four guiding principles. Those are the extent to which the legislation strengthens and promotes the denominational and constitutional rights of Catholic school boards; excellence in student faith formation, academic and co-curricular achievement and well-being; local flexibility and autonomy; and the distinct role of locally elected Catholic trustees.

We welcome within the legislation the acknowledgement of the denominational rights of Catholic boards, including provisions requiring consultations in areas such as integrity commissioners and shared use of facilities.

We applaud the focus on building a strong foundation for student learning as well as the amendment 29.6 that would require boards to establish policies respecting student mental health. We as well welcome changes to Ontario College of Teachers disciplinary processes.

Catholic school boards have throughout their history recognized parents as the primary educators of their children.

I say that to indicate very clearly that we strongly support the legislation's stated priority on strengthening parental engagement and improving communication with parents. We believe this will build on the good work happening in our member boards.

Over the past 25 years or so, a number of factors have increased centralization and diminished local school board autonomy and flexibility. This is of particular importance for Catholic school trustees, as sufficient autonomy and flexibility are essential so as to realize our Christ-centred mission.

While time will not permit us to elaborate on each area, we will provide you with specific recommendations so as to ensure the outcome of the legislation is not to further diminish local autonomy.

With regard to section 24, governance reforms for trustees, we would request consultation with OCSTA and Catholic boards when developing regulations related to the codes of conduct affecting Catholic trustees; secondly, that the Ministry of Education requires the duties of trustees, as outlined in section 218.1 of the Education Act, in trustee codes of conduct; and finally, under (c), regulations that we prescribe professional development training for newly elected trustees.

With regard to the role of integrity commissioners, we would strongly recommend that the Ministry of Education provide our association or Catholic school boards with sufficient funding to support the hiring of integrity commissioners when required; that the use of an integrity commissioner remains optional for school boards; that if it's determined that a provincial list be developed of integrity officers for Catholic boards, such lists be approved by the Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association; and finally, that the Ministry of Education continue to support professional development for trustees regarding best practices in school board governance, including human rights and equity training.

With regard to section 3.4.1, training policies and guidelines for trustees and senior board staff, we would recommend that the section be narrowed so that the requirement for training policies represents for school board trustees only; that we get further clarity with regard to those areas of training that will be mandatory; and finally, that Catholic school boards and OCSTA receive sufficient funding to permit us to infuse distinctly Catholic content in all professional development and training material.

With regard to the powers of the minister in terms of property disposition, we would strongly request that the requirement with regard to disposition fully respect the rights of Catholic school boards to locate, manage and dispose of board property.

With regard to joint use of schools, we know that that will be one of the areas where there will be consultation on, but for the record, we wanted to state that we would recommend—

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** One minute.

**Mr. Patrick Daly:**—that the regulation be developed so as to ensure funding allocations for each board within a proposed joint-use arrangement are consistent; and secondly,

that the contract should have mediation agreements and dissolution terms in the contract.

Finally, in terms of timing, Mr. Chair, I would just say, in summary, that there are certain aspects of the bill we strongly support and there are other areas that we would recommend be included. Those areas requiring further consultation include surplus properties, trustee codes of conduct, the minister's regulation-making powers over a board's business activities and school board-controlled entities, and directors of education performance appraisals.

In closing again, Mr. Chair and members of the committee, thank you for your consideration. I would be pleased to respond to any questions.

1740

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Thank you. Now we'll go to Mr. Michael Barrett, please.

**Mr. Michael Barrett:** Thank you very much, Chair Riddell, members of the committee. I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to address the changes as proposed in Bill 98.

Prior to commencing my comments, I'd like to add some contextual background as to what I am doing here. I served as a trustee for the Durham District School Board for almost two decades, 12 of those years in a leadership role. I'm also past president of the Ontario Public School Boards' Association and served as a member of the executive for over a decade. In the other part of my life, I just recently retired as president and CEO of Gay Lea Foods, the largest dairy co-operative in Ontario, but I have been labelled as a governance geek. I have had the opportunity to teach and train organizations on good governance and have advised associations both domestically and internationally. I'm a strong believer that good governance improves a board's effectiveness, and effectiveness leads to strong understanding of accountability and connectivity to those we serve and an ability to plan and achieve our collective goals. Good governance is a foundation of democracy, protecting the rights of every voice and to ensure effective decision-making.

I am in full support of the need to amend the various acts relating to education. Over the past decade, I have witnessed a deterioration of good governance, focus and intent of the education system across the province that have failed both our students and our respective communities.

Allow me to be clear: I am not in favour of the elimination of the role of trustees. However, I am in full support of mending the governance model. While there are some elements of the proposal I support, I also have some suggestions for change in areas where I feel the proposals don't go far enough.

Allow me to start by speaking to those areas that I fully endorse. I am in full support of the proposed change to the regulations with regard to a code of conduct, section 218. Despite the best intentions of the code of conduct, the implementation of specific board policies and the use of the code has resulted in a weaponization of the code, wherein it is used by both boards and directors as a methodology of stifling and silencing differing opinions. I

recognize there are trustees behaving badly across the province who require guidelines and process. However, I have also witnessed and been part of the use of a board code policy in a malicious, punishing and politicized manner that goes well beyond its original intent. The code, unfortunately, is also utilized by directors who have overstepped their boundaries by encouraging codes to be filed against problematic trustees who do not agree with their position or leadership. I am an equal opportunistic critic. It is time to centralize and boundarize the process to make it equitable, neutral and process-driven.

An area of concern I would suggest in the proposal is the director being involved in the process whatsoever. To have the director involved in complaints against the chair or vice-chair is reinforcing the director's involvement in an area where an overstep is dangerous.

The other element I would comment upon is to ensure that the potential sanctions do not supersede those which are levied against other elected officials.

Secondly, I'm in full support of the need to collaborate with municipalities, section 170. However, as one who has been on the other side of the table, there need to be clear guidelines towards a partnership and not a reinforcement of the belief that municipalities govern public education. Too often, school boards are criticized for a failure to work collaboratively with municipalities. However, I would suggest that municipalities on an equal number of occasions have been difficult and cumbersome.

There is a significant need for mandatory training for all trustees, a need for policies and guidelines and funding respecting student mental health, and stronger, purposeful multi-year plans and processes, as outlined in section 169.

There are several areas of the proposed act which do not go far enough. First of all, directors of education play a very significant role within the governance model of public education, and as the sole employee of the board of trustees, there needs to be a better understanding by directors of their role and how to work effectively with their employer, the trustees. Education is a partnership between significant contributing parties, and the partnership between board and directors is a crucial one. Some directors today overstep their boundaries; utilize legal counsel to curtail the governance process and involvement of trustees and interpret the Education Act and stifle public debate by moving things into in camera guidelines and utilizing operational-versus-oversight arguments to limit questions, trustee involvement and public debate. Effective governance is not just setting guidelines for trustees.

Secondly, there needs to be a common contractual relationship and template for directors of education that clearly lays out a performance appraisal process, the use of feedback from all related parties and connectivity back to the multi-year plans in a measurable manner that will demonstrate to the larger community of effective governance.

And lastly, there also needs to be a significant overhaul of the role of the board of trustees with regard to the auditing process. Though changes were made to this process, the budgeting process, the oversight process, the ability to ask

for and receive information are areas where the process is cumbersome and does not allow boards and trustees to effectively manage the hundreds of millions of dollars that are placed within the auspices of the board of trustees.

In closing—because I don't want to be cut off—I support the need for amendments to ensure the good governance of our school boards. Good governance is foundational to government, corporations, corporate well-being, ensuring public input, ensuring diversity of opinion and effective decision-making.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** You had one minute and 21 seconds left.

Now we will turn to the government side.

**Ms. Patrice Barnes:** Questions?

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Go ahead.

**Ms. Patrice Barnes:** Thank you all for being here. My first question will be to Patricia, and that is around, really, the right to read. We've known that there is a disproportionate amount of racialized and marginalized students who are impacted by the education system and not being able to be prepared to be out on the other side.

So my question to you is—we've seen data; we heard Kathy's story here. What do you think is the importance of this act that aligns with what needs to change around the right to read?

**Ms. Patricia DeGuire:** Thank you very much for the question, and I should mention that I'm here today, virtually, with a member of staff from the Ontario Human Rights Commission. I'm going to take a stab at this question, simply because it also relates to anti-Black racism in the education system and how it relates.

Number one, I want to say that the Right to Read really focuses on making changes for a student's ability to learn to read, and it talks about an evidence-based approach that is sadly lacking. Without that evidence-based approach, many children have fallen through the cracks and will continue to fall through the cracks.

A significant part of that are the impacts of that exclusion on Black children. The Right to Read mentions that children with disabilities, children from low socio-economic standards and vulnerable children mentioned by the code often fall prey to a system that does not have enough accountability, is not transparent and does not have consistency of the methodologies that it teaches to teach the children.

For example, the report talks about phonology, and it mentions that because it is evidence-based and scientifically proven that that methodology would assist children, including Black children—who are, again, often excluded—to learn to read in earlier time. As I mentioned, if you cannot read, you can't do math. And if you cannot read, you're nobody in our society.

**Ms. Patrice Barnes:** Thank you very much.

I just have a quick question for Mr. Barrett. You have a lot of experience here in regard to school boards, and you've served in different leadership roles. We've talked about transparency, we've talked about accountability, and we've talked about student achievement. How do you

see that having a shift in school boards around really focusing on student achievement and success?

**Mr. Michael Barrett:** Well, what I've seen happen is that the reality is the trustees are there for a reason and do ask good questions. When the governance model doesn't work, questions are limited. When trustees are not given data—which, again, has been referenced—then trustees don't have the ability to hold staff accountable. Again, I'm not anti-staff; what I'm talking about is a partnership. But if you don't have the information in order to be able to make wise decisions, we're going to have trustees be able to get lost in the mire of public education.

I talked with regard to the funding piece. It is very, very difficult to truly understand where the dollars are being spent. And when you're asked questions with regard to detail, the detail is mired in a very broad budget. As a president and CEO, I would have been turfed in order to be able to hide information from my board. I'm not saying it's deliberate, but I am saying that the information is not being given, and I'm not just talking finance.

1750

I listened to the parent earlier about the expulsion pieces, the exclusions—that information is not being shared, and when asked for it, it's being said that's operational. So if you develop the ability to ensure there's transparency, we will connect back to who. We are there to serve—which is the public, it's parents, it's taxpayers and it's the source of funds. To me, being able to go forward on being able to ensure there's transparency only strengthens the governance model. Good governance equals results.

**Ms. Patrice Barnes:** Thank you. Daisy?

**Mrs. Daisy Wai:** Thank you. Actually I want to ask almost the same question as Patrice there. I'm happy to see the contribution you're making to the community for so many years and all your experience put into service of the community. You already just now expressed how a trustee can perform and work really well for us. So maybe I should ask the question differently then.

Does this bill support the things that—you did mention earlier what you like about this bill. Can you elaborate a little bit more and say how this is supporting the trustees that you want to have the performance on?

**Mr. Michael Barrett:** I would say certainly I have a bias with regard to the value of trustees, so I'm not going to be—I believe that trustees have made significant contributions, being able to push government policy and to be able to have certain things happen in school boards and across the province as they come. Trustees' associations are critically important. However, I do believe there has been a shift in the governance model and, to me, this bill is starting to reorient where that governance model lies.

The reality is that the director is an employee of the board. I know the director has a different dotted-line responsibility to the Ministry of Education too, through regulation, but I believe this bill will allow us, as trustees, to get that information that is critical in order to be able to ensure that what we do is have good governance, and I'll talk specifically about the appraisal process.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** One minute.

**Mr. Michael Barrett:** There are as many contracts in this province as there are directors. Therefore, being able to ensure that we have an appraisal process that allows input and links back to real measurements is critically important, and I believe this bill will allow us to begin to start to do that.

**Mrs. Daisy Wai:** That's good. I think this is what the minister is really working towards. Thank you.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** MPP Martin.

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** If we have a few seconds, I just want to say how delightful it is to have someone qualify themselves as a governance geek. It doesn't happen very often, and so I'm delighted to have a governance geek here that we can ask questions of, and we'll get you in the next round.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Okay. Let's go to the official opposition. Go ahead.

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** Thank you to all of our witnesses for being here.

Pat, I'm going to start with you. I think you got cut off on your time, and I'm wondering if there's anything you want to add to your remarks right now.

**Mr. Patrick Daly:** Thank you, through you, Mr. Chair, to MPP Pasma. I think I got it in the end when I summarized those areas that we would request be included in mandatory consultation. I had more to say to elaborate, but clearly our main focus is to ensure there's good dialogue and conversation with regard to the areas I outlined. We really believe that, through that consultation, we and other associations can work with the government to get it right.

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** On the subject of consultation, were you consulted at all for this bill, and if so, what did the process look like?

**Mr. Patrick Daly:** Yes, we were. We had a few meetings with representatives of the minister's office and ministry staff generally—you know, sort of high level with regard to what the legislation might include.

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** I also saw a high-level PowerPoint the day that the legislation was tabled and you could not tell from the high-level language about what the government wanted to accomplish, what the actual changes in the bill were going to be. I'm wondering, when you say "high level," did you know that it was going to involve this degree of centralization of power of the minister, rather than the power that is currently delegated to school boards?

**Mr. Patrick Daly:** What I would say is that we received sufficient information with regard to what the legislation may look like to provide our thoughts and make some recommendations. I would say it that way.

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** We've heard from many witnesses this afternoon, including all of the unions representing teachers and education workers in all four school systems, that they weren't consulted. The parents of children with severe disabilities and the Ontario Autism Coalition weren't consulted. Do you have any concerns when so much of what is in the bill—you want to see consultation on it before it's actually implemented in the regulations. Do you have any concerns that consultation

won't happen meaningfully, that it will actually address the specific concerns of Catholics and governing Catholic education in Ontario?

**Mr. Patrick Daly:** What I would say is, obviously we have the expectation that through a good and effective consultation process, we and others will be heard. I have confidence that that will happen. We are strongly recommending that the list be expanded because there are some other areas that information is required. But I am confident that the consultation process will be real.

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** Okay. One of the things that we've also heard from multiple stakeholders this afternoon is that school boards are not being given funds that cover the actual costs of education, particularly with regard to special education. Many school boards are paying tens of millions of dollars more than they're actually receiving from the government.

Transportation is another area where school boards haven't been receiving funds that cover the actual costs. This is a bill that has no funding attached to it. It's being tabled at the same time as Grants for Student Needs that don't keep pace with inflation. We've heard a lot of aspirational language from the minister about addressing the needs of students. There is language in here about mental health programming—no funding for it. There are going to be costs associated with Integrity Commissioner reviews, other costs in terms of co-operation with municipalities. My concern is that if there are not resources attached to all of these things, then the minister setting priorities, the minister setting requirements for school boards is actually setting up school boards to fail. Do you have that concern?

**Mr. Patrick Daly:** Clearly, one of our roles is to advocate for adequate and sufficient funding for Catholic school boards to educate students within their system. The areas that you mentioned—clearly, special education in particular is highly, highly complex, challenging. The needs of students, as you know, have changed and increased dramatically over the last number of years. For sure, special education is a particular area of challenge with regard to funding. Transportation: We were very pleased that a new transportation funding model was just released and announced that we think is fair for all school boards in the province.

So, for sure we will continue to advocate for more funding, but as you saw in the GSNs, additional funds were provided.

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** They were significantly less than the rate of inflation, though.

The last time I had the pleasure of seeing Nick, we were in a conversation with local school directors and superintendents who were talking about the challenge in finding qualified teachers and workers right now, the number of classrooms that have someone who is not qualified. I have real concerns when we're talking about supporting our kids that we have far too many classrooms that don't actually have a qualified teacher, far too many kids who don't have an EA who is actually qualified to support them. Are we actually going to be able to help our kids succeed

at the basics if we're not actually able to put qualified teachers and education workers in the classroom with them?

**Mr. Patrick Daly:** For sure. Like many sectors of society, there aren't sufficient—and not only teachers, educational assistants in some boards, including my own, custodial staff. So, absolutely, that needs to be a priority for the government, the Ministry of Education and school boards in terms of recruiting, training qualified teachers, especially, but all levels of staff. Even prior to the pandemic, for a whole variety of reasons, staff shortages have been a real big concern for school boards.

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** And—sorry; I have to find the question back. It's been a very long day. Oh, it was with regard to schools. The minister has said that we have to have clauses in this legislation that allow the minister to compel a school board to sell school board land to any person at any price in order to transfer land between coterminous school boards. But it's my understanding that that's already a requirement when you sell a school, that it has to be offered first to a coterminous board. Is that correct?

1800

**Mr. Patrick Daly:** Yes, a coterminous board and a number of other public agencies—the municipality, universities. There's seven or eight—a list of agencies—that we have to offer it up to, either to one of those or on the open market at fair market value. So that requirement is there, yes.

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** In situations where it would be the Catholic board—

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Twenty-one seconds.

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** —that needs land, does this in any way make it easier for you to acquire land?

**Mr. Patrick Daly:** It's difficult to say in terms of the number of properties that perhaps would be required to be up for sale. I see in some parts of the province a need to—I would rather say encourage a school board—

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Thank you for your response.

We'll now move to the government side. MPP Rae.

**Mr. Matthew Rae:** Thank you to all the presenters for presenting. I know it's late, so I appreciate you being here and coming in.

As well, my question is to Patrick. Just building off the questions you were just receiving from the opposition member, does the Catholic trustees' association support the enhanced measures to build schools faster through some of the changes we're proposing in Bill 98?

**Mr. Patrick Daly:** Yes. Through you, Mr. Chair, to the MPP: We absolutely support measures to lessen the amount of time it takes from when a school board receives funding to opening a school. There are all kinds of reasons for the delay currently, some within school boards for sure, some within the Ministry of Education and a number within municipalities. Sometimes it can take six months, eight months, a year just to get a building permit and a site plan approval. There are all kinds of factors that have contributed to delays. For sure, we support measures that will reduce that time.

**Mr. Matthew Rae:** Thank you, Patrick. As the PA to municipal affairs and housing, I know we're working on that with Minister Lecce as well to ensure, on the zoning side, we get those things moving forward.

My next question would be to Michael. I just want to preface that my parents were dairy farmers, and they did ship milk for Gay Lea, so everyone is aware of that.

But back to the bill at hand, I was just wanting your thoughts on our proposals to increase transparency and accountability through Bill 98. Do you believe this would lead to better outcomes for informing parents and for students as well in their performance in schools?

**Mr. Michael Barrett:** Yes, I do. I think that, as I'd mentioned earlier, the tendency now is to curtail the amount of information. Discussions are taking place in camera when they should really be in public. Therefore, that information that gets shared also then puts the feet to the flame in order to be able to make sure—like, when you're talking about violence rates, about the expulsion rates, about the literacy data and things of that nature, that information should be public. Right now, it's hidden. I'm not saying hidden everywhere, but having that data allows those that are charged with the responsibility of governing being able to ask the right questions.

**Mr. Matthew Rae:** I believe my colleague from Ajax has some questions, Chair.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Go ahead.

**Ms. Patrice Barnes:** My question is for Michael Barrett. The opposition has talked about—the question that was asked earlier was really what I wanted to put back to you. We're tabling Bill 98, and the opposition has talked a lot about funding in regard to municipalities, integrity commissioners, all of these pieces—mental health, which is not really central to the bill.

Can you speak to Bill 98 as to your overview of the bill as you see it and the impact it would have on education and a little bit around that funding piece where I think it's sort of outside of the scope of the bill?

**Mr. Michael Barrett:** Just to make sure that I clarify the question, you're asking my opinions with regard to the funding piece of Bill 98? Is that what you mean? Sorry.

**Ms. Patrice Barnes:** I'm asking you your opinion on Bill 98 and the impact it would have on education.

**Mr. Michael Barrett:** Okay. Well, I certainly think that Bill 98 is heading absolutely in the right direction. I recognize that there have been some comments with regard to centralization of authority and responsibility, but I also think that what is being proposed in this bill is actually going to open the transparency and allow trustees and the governance model to be able to do their role more effectively.

When you're talking about the funding, I recognize that there's a significant need for funding, because I can easily talk with the legend Mr. Daly here on the need for funding, but also I cringe if I think how much money and time and dollars have been spent to be able to isolate—and I see trustees across this province. I can't get that number. I couldn't get it from my school board, and I would dare think that, when we are talking about dollars, the amount

of money that's being spent today that does not actually add a single result in reading into the classroom is a tragedy.

Therefore, I recognize there's always need for more dollars, and I could talk about specific areas, but I also think I'd like to understand where the dollars are being spent today. My board demanded it of me when I was president and CEO. I demanded it, and did not necessarily get the information that I needed to make effective decisions.

**Ms. Patrice Barnes:** Thank you.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Go ahead, MPP Martin.

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** Thank you to all the presenters again. Just on that point, that is the point that I've been trying to make on this bill, how important it is to actually know where the money is being used and how much is—because we do not know anything at this point. It goes into a black box. You may know more on the trustees, but it's very difficult to follow. We had the school bus operators saying this earlier. I think that is a critical point because we can't even know to make the better decisions, and the trustees can't know to make better decisions, so I appreciated that emphasis.

I would like to ask a question of Patricia DeGuire. I wanted to ask you, we're implementing the commission's recommendations with respect to reading screening for senior kindergarten to grade 2 students. I know you've done a lot of work in this area, so I want you to just comment on how important it is to do that kind of reading screening and why it's essential for kids at that age.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** One minute.

**Ms. Patricia DeGuire:** I'm going to call on my colleague who's on the screen, who actually was involved in this inquiry, because I think, succinctly—go ahead, Nika, please.

**Ms. Nika Farahani:** Thank you. Yes, so the screening is ultimately important because we don't know which students need help unless we actually do screening. Screening is a quick, 10- to 15-minute measure, and the end goal of that is to provide the reading interventions that are necessary for students who are struggling. It's important to do it in kindergarten to grade 2 because that's when you want kids to ultimately learn those early word-reading skills.

This bill, in establishing that standard and allowing the minister to set those provincial priorities, lets us standardize something that you don't need to leave to the discretion of 72 school boards to do things completely different. We know through the science of reading what the best way is to teach reading, to screen for reading difficulties—

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Thank you for your response.

We'll go over to the opposition. Go ahead.

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** Patricia and Nika, I have a question for you as well. We heard in the panel earlier—I'm not sure if you had the opportunity to hear that testimony—about children with disabilities and special needs being excluded from schools and classrooms because the supports are not available for them to actually be allowed to participate. I know some families in Ontario have actually filed human rights complaints about the lack of support for

their children with disabilities, and those complaints were essentially dismissed because the finding was that the school board did not have the resources necessary in order to be able to provide those supports, and school boards can only do what they have the resources to do.

I'm wondering if you have any concerns about the right to education of children with disabilities in Ontario not being respected because of lack of funding for adequate supports in the classroom.

**Ms. Patricia DeGuire:** I'm going to respond to that and then I'll turn it over to Nika.

1810

The Supreme Court of Canada said in 1984 in a case called *Singh* that you cannot use resources as a way to abrogate your responsibility in public service. And in 2012, the Supreme Court of Canada said that children with disabilities have a right to education.

Nika?

**Ms. Nika Farahani:** We know that every student has the right to meaningful access to education. For some students, getting supported in a classroom is the preferable thing, but some are going to need more advanced interventions that might require taking a student out of the classroom. So when it comes to not delivering on human rights obligations, the defence of funding for such a large-scale enterprise as education will be hard. Of course, as the commission, our mandate is to support that every student has that right to a meaningful education.

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** I would love to hear the 20-minute version of that sometime, Patricia, so maybe we can connect afterwards.

Michael, I have a question about something that you flagged earlier, which was the need to make changes to the audit process. You said specifically that it's still difficult for trustees to ask for and receive information and to understand the budget and effectively manage the budget. I'm wondering if you can expand on your concerns on that topic.

**Mr. Michael Barrett:** Certainly, it's done differently across the boards. I'm still a magnet for trustees across the province, having been involved for almost two decades, and there are certain elements that are going on today in the sense of—when you're talking about a budget that's \$300 million, or in Durham it's a billion and in Toronto it's multi-billion dollars, there needs to be some significant public input; there needs to be a process by which the budget is brought forward. For example, some boards are restricted—trustees are restricted to two questions. That's absolutely ludicrous for anybody to be able to exercise their governance authority.

But then, being able to, once the money is spent—and I sat on the audit committee; I was chair of my board's audit committee. I had my own audit committee at work that needed to be able to get very significant data to understand where dollars are being spent. The discussion that is now taking place today is, "Well, that's operational." No, it is oversight, to be able to understand where those dollars are being spent. How much did it cost to move those offices? How much did it cost for a Chromebook program? How much did it cost to be able to put artwork up? How much

property do we have sitting, and what's the value? Those elements are critically important—that are not necessarily shared with the audit committee and then broadly with the board that has to make decisions.

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** Thank you. I'm going to turn the rest of my time over to MPP Gates.

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** I appreciate that. Thank you. It's a little more than 50 seconds or whatever it was last time, so I'm happy.

I've never heard of a governance geek; I have heard of SeatGeek, and that's where I get my Blue Jays tickets. So I was kind of figuring out how that worked together.

We know that trustees are elected by their community. They do the same thing we do when we run our elections: They go out, knock on doors, and people put their trust in them. I just want to make sure that we understand very clearly that they're elected.

The schools on property that are schools that, for whatever reason, have been closed down or whatever is a big issue in my riding of Niagara Falls, Fort Erie, Niagara-on-the-Lake. What happened is, they closed the schools down and, as we've seen in Niagara—and I know everywhere is growing, but Niagara is really, really growing. Niagara-on-the-Lake is growing; Port Colborne, Welland, Fort Erie. And now what happens is, because the school boards were underfunded and they wanted fair market value, so they were not encouraged to buy it back—so what happened is, they put it on the market, they sell the school. It's short-sighted, because six or seven years later, guess what? We needed a school, and now it has been sold to a developer. That's happening all over the province of Ontario, but it's certainly happening in my area.

So I'd like to just get some comments on what we can do to make sure that we hang on to the land that we have. I think the Conservatives, almost every day, say they're bringing in 47 billion into Ontario, but where are we going to put them and send them to school if we sell all the land? That's the question I'd like you to answer.

**Mr. Patrick Daly:** Through you, Mr. Chair: Thank you, MPP Gates. I just want to really applaud you for talking about trustees as elected. My view, for sure, on behalf of OCSTA, is that we should be held to the same standard, the same expectations of all other levels of government. We are, for sure, in our case, a constitutionally protected level of government, so I really appreciate you saying that.

In terms of property and planning, I agree with you that it is a challenge, for sure, for school boards. As you know, demographics have shifted, and through our planning departments, we receive both short- and long-term projections in terms of enrolment. That's why in our recommendation, we have strongly, strongly suggested that the managing and locating of sites remain with the local board.

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** I appreciate that, and I just want to let you know that I have three daughters that came through the Catholic school board. I'm a big supporter of Catholic education and faith-based schools. I don't know how many fundraising events I've gone to, to make sure that the schools that they have have the resources that they need. So I certainly do support Catholic education, and hopefully that Catholic education is here for a long, long time.

**Mr. Patrick Daly:** Thank you for that very much.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** All right. So let's move back to the government side. Go ahead, MPP Martin.

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** Thanks very much. Nika was cut off, I think, in answering the last question I was asking, which was about the screening. Did you want to just finish off the points that you were making? I think I asked why it's so essential, screening at that age.

**Ms. Nika Farahani:** Right, yes. I mean, this is just in line with we need data. If you don't have data about how a student is progressing—and it's not a rigorous exercise, the screening. It's really just to give you indicators of the student who needs that help. It also protects against bias, right? We're all biased as human beings. It's not that we're targeting anybody, but if you have that objective data, then you can actually help the kids who need that extra support. So it's an important safeguard from a human rights perspective, but also just a teaching perspective, just for teachers to know who they should focus more on and who needs that extra support.

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** Thank you.

**Ms. Patrice Barnes:** I just have a quick question for Michael again. I'm just following up on MPP Gates's question around surplus properties and the challenges that boards are facing, and why the minister has really put in this bill the opportunity to really know what's going on with surplus properties in boards.

**Mr. Michael Barrett:** Well, certainly, having sat, obviously, on the board for as long as I did, growth is different in each school board. Durham is a growing board and has been growing for the last decade, but it's only growing in certain regions. I had six kids, but when my kids grew up and out of the school system, there were no more kids to replace that. The reality is, although there are older houses and people move into them, they don't have six children. They have one or 1.4—something like that. So we have, in certain areas, school lots that are sitting empty, schools that are at 44% capacity. It just doesn't make any sense from an educational standpoint. Again, I'm not talking about busing every single kid. We have to look at what makes sense. But there are surplus properties.

I would tell you that there's a little bit of a problem in the system today in the sense that you have surplus properties, you sell them for market value—and we do have a process to work through; they get offered to a coterminous board's municipality. We sell those schools, but those dollars are restricted on what you can actually use them for. They can only be used to purchase more land. The reality is, land keeps going up in price, so we sell the land that you originally bought for us, and then we put the money into this fund and then we ask you for more money because the property values have gone up significantly. So I mean, it's kind of a Catch-22.

But there are school properties that absolutely should be sold, and there's no reason why a school board should be holding onto properties. But again—and I take your point—you have to do it within the demographics of what that school board looks like and what's going to occur. But

there are a lot of dollars sitting in property that are not helping literacy when it's just being held in reserve.

**Ms. Patrice Barnes:** Thank you. Do I have time?

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** One minute.

**Ms. Patrice Barnes:** Since you already have the floor, I'll just get you to wrap up about Bill 98 and your thoughts about the board, and how you think this will impact student achievement.

**Mr. Michael Barrett:** Well, I think that the thing—I'll go back to the point that was made earlier. Indeed, we are politicians. You don't get to be a trustee unless you get elected, so the reality is that that's the elements. Even at Gay Lea Foods, I often said, "I end up with a board that gets elected. I don't have any control over who gets elected." However, there are good methodologies and governance models that allow you to make sure that you can effectively run that school board. There's a role for the ministry, there's a role for the public, there's a role for teachers, and there's a role for bargaining units in order to make sure that there's good governance. But why are we there? I'm going to go right back to yourself, because I've heard you speak so many times and I just love when you speak—the reality is we have to make sure that our kids know how to read, because reading allows you to do math, it allows you to be something in society.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Thank you very much for your comment. We'll just finish off with the opposition.

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** I appreciate some of your comments around the schools and how the land is sold off. The reality is, the problem that we made in Niagara—and I don't know if it goes right across the province—is they build the schools to the population of the time, and then, the next thing you know, you have all these other—what are they called there? They put them up on little—what are they called?

**Interjection:** Portables.

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** Portables. They have portables, eight, nine, 10 portables, which makes absolutely no sense, and that's what I'm saying. In our area, everybody is coming to Niagara. I don't know if there's anybody representing Brampton or Mississauga; they're all coming. They're having their own communities down in Niagara, for a lot of good reasons, but they're coming with four and five children. People like myself, they're having one or two; they're coming with four, five and maybe even as many you, six, so that's going to put some strain on the school.

I'm going to ask a couple of trustee questions real quick, all right? Are you okay with that? Are the trustees you represent concerned about the new powers given to the minister by this bill?

**Mr. Patrick Daly:** You're asking me?

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** Yes, please. The other guy has talked enough.

**Mr. Patrick Daly:** Yes, for sure in the areas that I raised, we really would be requesting and recommending in-depth consultation into those areas. I would say a mix of wanting more information and concern, but as well applauding the areas that I referenced at the beginning.

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** You speak a lot—your responses aren't as long as the gentleman beside you for sure, so I get to do another question.

Can you speak to the importance of the role of trustees and the need for autonomy from the province?

**Mr. Patrick Daly:** Yes, absolutely. My father was a trustee for 20-odd years, and when he passed away suddenly, I ran for the position and have been for 38 years now. I feel very strongly in terms of the importance of Catholic trustees, but as well our friends in the other system. I have always looked at the role as fourfold, as stewards in the whole range of areas: funding; policy-making; multi-year strategic plans; advocacy for ratepayers, parents, for servant leaders; and as well the political side of our role. I absolutely believe they're crucially important. I don't disagree with my friend Mr. Barrett in some areas in terms of requiring more information, data, all of that. But I think the role is more important today than ever.

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** To Mr. Barrett and yourself, this is why we need more consultations, why we need more discussions on bills rather than kind of doing what we're doing here and rushing them through—have consultations with people that it affects. Obviously, you've got quite a bit of talent, quite a bit of knowledge. You've done this for a long time, like yourself. But, for me, when I took a look at what we got on it today—it's great that the government decided to have consultation with some groups, but you can't do this without having consultation with the educators, to talk to them about bills. How is it going to affect your school? How is it going to affect—do we need more EAs to make sure that we're taking care of families who have kids with autism? All those things should be discussed. Unfortunately, that didn't happen. It's certainly not what I saw today, and that's disappointing.

Your comments are very good; your comments are good; your comments are good. It's great to hear that stuff. We just should make sure we do it a little better so that everybody gets an opportunity to get their point out, and then pick what's best for our schools—

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** One minute.

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** I'm good. Thanks for coming. I know everybody is excited to do estimates, so I'll just be quiet.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** This concludes our public hearing on Bill 98 for today. Thank you again to all the presenters. Just to remind you, if you want to submit any written materials to the committee in addition to your presentations today, the deadline for written submissions is 7 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time on Tuesday, May 9, 2023. Thank you for your involvement.

The committee will now recess until 6:30 this evening when we will return for the selection of estimates.

*The committee recessed from 1824 to 1840.*

## SELECTION OF ESTIMATES

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Good evening, everyone. The Standing Committee on Social Policy will now

come to order. On our agenda this evening is the selection of estimates for consideration.

On April 20, 2023, the Lieutenant Governor transmitted to the Legislative Assembly the estimates of certain sums required for the services of the province for the year ending March 31, 2024. Pursuant to standing order 62(b), these estimates, upon tabling, are deemed to be referred to the standing committees to which representative ministries and offices were assigned, pursuant to standing order 113(b).

All committee members should have received an electronic copy of the 2023-24 estimates in the corresponding ministry and office briefing books from the Clerk.

The estimates for the following ministry offices have been referred to the Standing Committee on Social Policy for selection and consideration:

- Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services;
- Ministry of Colleges and Universities;
- Ministry of Education;
- Ministry of Health;
- Ministry of Long-Term Care; and
- Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility.

The objective of today's meeting is to select estimates of certain ministries or offices for review by the committee. Standing order 63 sets out the process by which the committee makes its selections. Each of the recognized parties on the committee shall select the estimates of up to one ministry or office in each turn. The official opposition selects first, followed by the government. If members of one party decline to make a selection, the selection then passes to the next party in the rotation. The process concludes when either there are no further ministries or offices available to select or both recognized parties decline to make any, or any further, selections.

Pursuant to standing order 63(c), these selections are to be reviewed in the order that they were chosen; however, this order may be altered by unanimous agreement of the subcommittee on committee business, or by order of the House.

Pursuant to standing order 63(d), the time for the consideration of estimates of each ministry or office shall be determined by the respective committee.

The estimates of those ministries or offices not selected for consideration will be deemed to have been passed by the committee. As Chair, I will report those unselected estimates back to the House, and they will be deemed to be adopted and concurred in by the House.

If supplementary estimates are tabled for any of the selected ministries or offices, those supplementary estimates will be considered by the committee during the same time which the committee decides to allocate for consideration of the main estimates for those corresponding ministries or offices.

In accordance with standing order 66(a), the committee must present a report to the House with respect to the estimates it selected and considered by the third Thursday of November of this year: November 16, 2023. If the committee fails to report by the third Thursday in November,

the estimates and supplementary estimates before the committee will be deemed to be passed by the committee and deemed to be reported to and received by the House.

When making your selections, I would also like to add that if members could please look at the list of ministries and offices in the estimates book, or as displayed on the screen in front of you, and give the correct names of the ministries or offices when they are selected for consideration.

Do members have any questions before we begin?

I'll start with the official opposition for the first selection. Go ahead—your mark is Ms. Gretzky.

**M<sup>me</sup> France G elinas:** I always wanted to be called Gretzky, and now—

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** If you were related, you would be rich today.

**M<sup>me</sup> France G elinas:** I'm not. I'm not related or rich; sorry.

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** She's related and she's not rich, just saying.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Well, there you go. MPP G elinas.

**M<sup>me</sup> France G elinas:** It's Ministry of Health, my first choice.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Ministry of Health.

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** Ministry of Education.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Thank you for your selections.

Go ahead.

**M<sup>me</sup> France G elinas:** Children, community and social services.

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** Ministry of Long-Term Care.

**M<sup>me</sup> France G elinas:** Colleges and universities.

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility.

**M<sup>me</sup> France G elinas:** Intergovernmental affairs.

*Interjections.*

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** It wasn't on the list.

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** It's not one of our ministries.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** We have Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services; Ministry of Colleges and Universities; Ministry of Education; Ministry of Health; Ministry of Long-Term Care; and Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility.

**M<sup>me</sup> France G elinas:** That's all, then.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Thank you for your selections. Is there any other business which members would like to raise? Yes?

**M<sup>me</sup> France G elinas:** Yes, I would like that the consideration of estimates for the Ministry of Health be 15 hours in total; and

That, until the time allocated for consideration of estimates of the selected ministry has expired, the committee shall meet from 9 a.m. to 10:15 a.m. and from 1 p.m. to 6 p.m. during weeks that the House is sitting, and from 9 a.m. until 12 p.m. and 1 p.m. until 5 p.m. on Mondays and Tuesdays during weeks the House is not scheduled to meet.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Is there any debate or discussion on this motion?

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** I have an alternate proposal, but I don't need to debate this.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Would you like to say your alternate proposal?

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** No, not yet.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** No? Okay. Is there any other further debate?

**M<sup>me</sup> France G elinas:** Estimates are big responsibilities for MPPs. We get to look at the finance for a specific ministry, and unless we schedule this work, I can tell you that it's not going to get done. So the motion in front of you is to make sure that we get this important work done in a timely manner. You will be surprised how fast committee time gets eaten up once we start to do estimates.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Is there any further debate? Would the members like to vote?

**M<sup>me</sup> France G elinas:** Recorded vote.

### Ayes

Gates, G elinas.

### Nays

Barnes, Jordan, Martin, Pierre, Quinn, Rae, Wai.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** The motion is accordingly lost.

Are there any other motions or business for discussion? Yes?

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** I move that, pursuant to standing order 63(d), the following time be allotted to the consideration of estimates of the ministries selected by the committee:

—the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services for three hours;

—the Ministry of Colleges and Universities for three hours;

—the Ministry of Education for three hours;

—the Ministry of Health for three hours;

—the Ministry of Long-Term Care for two hours;

—the Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility for one hour; and

That the ministers responsible for those respective ministries be invited to appear before the committee; and

That for each ministry, the minister be allotted 20 minutes to make an opening statement followed by question and answer in rotations of 20 minutes for the official opposition members of the committee, 10 minutes for the independent member of the committee, and 20 minutes for the government members of the committee for the remainder of the allotted time; and,

### 1850

That the Minister for Seniors and Accessibility be allotted 10 minutes to make an opening statement followed by question and answer in rotations of 20 minutes for the official opposition members of the committee, 10 minutes for the independent member of the committee, and 20 minutes for the government members of the committee for the remainder of the allotted time; and

That the committee meet for the purpose of considering the estimates of the selected ministries at the following times:

—on Monday, June 5, 2023, from 9 a.m. until 10:15 a.m. and 1 p.m. until 6 p.m.; and

—on Tuesday, June 6, 2023, from 9 a.m. until 10:15 a.m. and 3 p.m. until 6 p.m.; and

—on Monday, September 11, 2023, from 9 a.m. until 10:15 a.m. and 1 p.m. until 6 p.m.; and

That if any invited minister is unavailable to appear before the committee, the parliamentary assistant or parliamentary assistants may appear before the committee in their place.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Is there any debate or discussion on this motion?

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** I'd like a copy of the motion.

**The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Lesley Flores):** It's on the screen.

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** That doesn't help me a lot. I can't see much of it.

Go ahead. I'll let you go.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** With the three dates that you have given us, will the three, three, three, two, three, one be done?

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** I'm sorry?

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** Did you do the math to see if—you have given us June 5, June 6, September 11, and we have—

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Please address the Chair.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** Oh. Chair—have you done the math to see if the dates that were shared with us add up to the number of hours that was recommended?

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** Yes.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** So it all fits in? Okay.

Topic number two, then, is that three hours for the Ministry of Health does not even allow you to turn all of the pages of the estimate books of the Ministry of Health. This is how thick this thing is. I have asked for 15. They came back with three. Could we settle on five for the Ministry of Health, which is the biggest ministry of them all, which would be an extra two hours—so a friendly amendment, just for that ministry?

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Further debate?

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** I'd like to move an amendment.

**The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Lesley Flores):** What was the amendment? I'm going to edit it live on the screen.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** If you go up, at the very top, when the fourth ministry is health, and rather than three hours, it would be five—just the three becomes a five.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Is there any debate on the motion, as amended?

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** So that I'm clear: We can still talk about the individuals—like long-term care and seniors and accessibility? Or do we have to put the motions all at one time?

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** We're just going to take a five-minute recess.

*The committee recessed from 1853 to 1901.*

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** All right. We're back again. Go ahead, MPP Gélinas.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** Okay. To make things a little bit faster because my colleague has a migraine, I will move that we amend the third, the fourth and the fifth. So, the third bullet point, Ministry of Education, goes from three to five hours; Ministry of Health goes from three to five hours; and Ministry of Long-Term Care goes from two to five hours. And I can put all of those in one amendment to the motion.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Any debate?

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** I just want to speak to the need to expand the amount of time for the Ministry of Education. The Ministry of Education of course covers two very large portfolios: education and child care. And we saw this past year what happens when you don't provide sufficient time. It doesn't give the time that child care deserves to have scrutiny. We also know that this is the second-biggest spending portfolio for the government. I think it deserves adequate time and scrutiny, especially when we have just spent an entire day discussing the need for greater transparency and accountability from school boards. I'm sure that the government will also want to be transparent and accountable about their own expenditure decisions when it comes to education.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Any further debate? MPP Gates.

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** I'd like to talk on the long-term care. I was on this committee last year, when we went through this same exercise, and it was terrible back then, obviously, because I agree with my colleague: We're looking at privatizing our health care system with Bill 60 that just got passed today, lots of issues around health care, and again they're asking three hours for health care. It's absolutely amazing to me when they say they're open, they're transparent, they want to communicate with everybody, and they do three hours.

The education—I'm sure that our education critic talked about education and how important that is, but I'm going to talk about long-term care again, because this is what happened last year.

You guys all know it. Maybe not all of you, but I think there are a couple of MPPs who were here last year. They put two hours down for long-term care, and because it takes a few minutes to open up your binder and get everything done, there wasn't enough time left for long-term care last year.

Well, you know, we're up to 5,600 people who died in long-term care. And it would give the minister at least a chance to come and talk about what the government is doing: maybe some of the positive things that they're doing, maybe some of the things that they're doing to make sure that our moms, our dads, our aunts and uncles, our grandparents, brothers and sisters aren't dying in these facilities. He could come and talk about that.

You know, I saw him. He was in Niagara just the other day.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** I think that's out of the scope though.

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** It is not out of the scope. That is not out of the scope. I'm sorry, I'm going to disagree with you.

People are dying in long-term care. What estimates is for is so we can talk to him about it, and make sure that the resources that are going into long-term care—it's being taken care of and making sure that people stop dying. I don't think it's out of the scope. If you want to rule me out of order, I guess you can, but at the end of the day people are dying in long-term care today. Today, they're still dying from COVID.

And I don't know the minister; I've probably had five conversations with him since I got elected, but I would think that he would be proud—including the MPP across from me. They'd be proud on exactly what they've been doing to make sure that this stops.

Now, I've already said I disagree with long-term care that's for-profit. It should be about care, not profit. You know; maybe you don't know—and I'm looking right at you so I don't get in trouble for not going through the Chair. But I'm telling you straight out: 78%—higher than my math mark when I was in high school, by the way—

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** That explains a lot.

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** Pardon? Do you want to say that again? Or do you just want to be yourself?

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Let's just continue, please.

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** So 78% of those that were in long-term-care for-profit homes died. That's the percentage of them; 78% are the 5,600 that died in for-profit care.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** So what are you proposing?

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** I'm proposing—it's already on the sheet; I believe I said five hours. This is the second time I've been in this committee. I believe Minister Calandra should come here in front of this committee and defend his record on what's going on and tell us—I'm giving him an opportunity to come here and tell us all the good things they're doing, because there may be good things that they're doing that I'm not aware of. But the one thing I do know: Today, people are dying in long-term-care facilities still and most of them are dying in for-profit long-term care. That could be our moms, our dads—I know, because they've talked to me; colleagues from their side have talked to me and said, "I lost my mom," "I lost my dad."

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Actually, my mother died February 20. It was not from COVID, but from old age.

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** Well, old age is one thing, but—

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Is there any further debate?

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** The only thing I'm going to say is that your role as Chair should be non-partisan.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** I am.

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** Because that wasn't a non-partisan statement.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** That was a personal statement.

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** The reality I'm talking about is our moms and our dads that have died from COVID. That's what I'm talking about.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Excuse me, MPP Gates. You brought up something personal, so that's why I responded to it. Let's just take that part right out and just keep on what we're trying to do here.

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** What you're trying to do is make sure that we don't get the opportunity to talk about health care, to talk about education, in a fair and reasonable amount of time.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** That's what I'm trying to come up with right now: something fair and equitable for everybody.

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** Well, if you're telling me two hours for long-term care is fair, then I think you're wrong.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Is there any further debate?

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** Can we have a vote now, Chair?

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Yes, let's have a vote.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** Recorded vote.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** We're going to have a recorded vote right now on this amendment that we're looking at right now.

#### Ayes

Gates, Gélinas.

#### Nays

Barnes, Jordan, Martin, Pierre, Quinn, Rae, Wai.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** The amendment is lost. Is there any further debate?

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** Can we call for a vote on the motion?

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** We can. So let's go—

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** Further debate? I didn't wave hard enough.

I have had the privilege to take part in estimates for the Ministry of Health for 15 years in a row, and I can tell you that even with 15 hours the members on all sides of the House still had questions. The ministry is just so, so large and touches so, so many areas of our lives—our families' lives, our constituents' lives—that, I guarantee you, with three hours, we're not going to be able to do decent work for the people of Ontario who elected us to do that work.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** Any further debate? Are the members ready to vote?

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** Recorded vote.

#### Ayes

Barnes, Jordan, Martin, Pierre, Quinn, Rae, Wai.

#### Nays

Gates, Gélinas.

**The Chair (Mr. Brian Riddell):** The motion is carried. Thank you, everyone, for attending today's meeting. This concludes our business for today. The committee is

now adjourned until 9 a.m. on Tuesday, May 9, when we will resume public hearings on Bill 98.

*The committee adjourned at 1910.*

## **STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL POLICY**

### **Chair / Président**

Mr. Brian Riddell (Cambridge PC)

### **Vice-Chair / Vice-Présidente**

M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas (Nickel Belt ND)

Ms. Patrice Barnes (Ajax PC)

Mr. Wayne Gates (Niagara Falls ND)

M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas (Nickel Belt ND)

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky (Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest ND)

Mr. John Jordan (Lanark–Frontenac–Kingston PC)

Mrs. Robin Martin (Eglinton–Lawrence PC)

Ms. Natalie Pierre (Burlington PC)

Mr. Nolan Quinn (Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry PC)

Mr. Matthew Rae (Perth–Wellington PC)

Mr. Brian Riddell (Cambridge PC)

Mr. Adil Shamji (Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est L)

Mrs. Daisy Wai (Richmond Hill PC)

### **Substitutions / Membres remplaçants**

Mr. Billy Pang (Markham–Unionville PC)

Ms. Chandra Pasma (Ottawa West–Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest–Nepean ND)

### **Also taking part / Autres participants et participantes**

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta (Mississauga Centre / Mississauga-Centre PC)

### **Clerk / Greffière**

Ms. Lesley Flores

### **Staff / Personnel**

Ms. Sandra Lopes, research officer,  
Research Services

Ms. Ellen Wankiewicz, research officer,  
Research Services