



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Standing Committee
on
Alberta's Economic Future

Ministry of Education
Consideration of Main Estimates

Tuesday, April 18, 2017
3:30 p.m.

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Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

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van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (W), Deputy Chair

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Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

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Ministry of Education

Hon. David Eggen, Minister

Curtis Clarke, Deputy Minister

Brad J. Smith, Executive Director, Strategic Financial Services

3:30 p.m.

Tuesday, April 18, 2017

[Mr. Sucha in the chair]

**Ministry of Education
Consideration of Main Estimates**

The Chair: Good afternoon, everyone. I'd like to call the meeting to order and welcome everyone. Before we begin, I'd like to recognize that this meeting is commencing on the traditional land of Treaty 6. Pursuant to Government Motion 17, passed in the Legislative Assembly on March 21, 2017, the committee has under consideration the estimates for the Ministry of Education for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2018.

I'd ask that we go around the table and have all MLAs introduce themselves for the record. Minister, when we get to you, if you could introduce the officials seated at the table with you. My name is Graham Sucha. I'm the MLA for Calgary-Shaw and chair of this committee. We will continue to my right, with the deputy chair.

Mr. van Dijken: Good afternoon. Deputy Chair Glenn van Dijken, MLA for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. Rodney: Good afternoon. Dave Rodney, MLA for Calgary-Lougheed and advocate for Education for the PC caucus.

Mr. Schneider: Dave Schneider, Little Bow.

Mr. Orr: Ron Orr, MLA, Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mrs. Aheer: Leela Sharon Aheer, Chestermere-Rocky View, and I'd like to introduce a special person, Maureen Gough, whom you all know.

Mr. Eggen: I'm Dave Eggen. I'm the minister, and with me is Wendy Boje and Brad Smith and Curtis Clarke.

Connolly: Michael Connolly, MLA for Calgary-Hawkwood.

Mr. Carson: Good afternoon. Jon Carson, MLA for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Ms McPherson: Hello. Karen McPherson, MLA for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Mrs. Schreiner: Good afternoon. Kim Schreiner, MLA for Red Deer-North.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Good afternoon. Maria Fitzpatrick, MLA for Lethbridge-East.

Mr. Piquette: Hello. Colin Piquette, MLA for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

Mr. Dach: Good afternoon. Lorne Dach, Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Coolahan: Craig Coolahan, the MLA for Calgary-Klein.

The Chair: All right. I would also like to recognize for the record that Mr. Rodney is an official substitute for Mr. Drysdale.

Please note that the microphones are operated by *Hansard*, and the committee proceedings are being audio- and video streamed online. Please set all of your cellphones and other devices to silent for the duration of the meeting.

Hon. members, the standing orders set out the process for consideration of the main estimates. Before we proceed with the consideration of main estimates for the Ministry of Education, I'd

like to review briefly the standing orders governing the speaking rotation. As provided for in Standing Order 59.01(6), the rotation is as follows. The minister or a member of Executive Council acting on the minister's behalf may make opening comments not exceeding 10 minutes. For the hour that follows, the members of the Official Opposition and the minister may speak. For the next 20 minutes the members of the third party, if any, and the minister may speak. For the next 20 minutes the members of any other party represented in the Assembly or any independent members and the minister may speak. For the next 20 minutes private members of the government caucus and the minister may speak. For the time remaining, we will follow the same rotation as just outlined to the extent possible; however, speaking times are reduced to five minutes as set out in Standing Order 59.02(1)(c).

Members may speak more than once; however, speaking times for the first rotation are limited to 10 minutes at any one time. A minister and a member may combine their time for a total of 20 minutes. For the final rotation, with speaking times of up to five minutes, once again the minister and a member may combine their speaking times for a maximum total of 10 minutes. Discussion should flow through the chair at all times regardless of whether or not speaking times are being combined. Members are asked to advise the chair at the beginning of their speech if they wish to combine their time with the minister's time. If members have any questions regarding speaking times or rotations, please feel free to send a note or speak directly to either the chair or the committee clerk about the process.

A total of six hours has been scheduled to consider the estimates for the Ministry of Education. With the concurrence of the committee I will call a five-minute break near the midpoint of the meeting; however, the three-hour clock will continue to run. Does anyone oppose having a break? No? As usual, we'll likely take the break after the third-party spot.

Committee members, ministers, and other members who are not committee members may participate. However, only a committee member or an official substitute for a committee member may introduce an amendment during the committee's review of estimates.

Ministry officials may be present and at the direction of the minister may address the committee. Ministry officials seated in the gallery, if called upon by the minister, have access to a microphone in the gallery area. We have pages available to make deliveries should any notes or other materials need to be passed between the gallery and the table. Members' staff may be present and seated along the committee room wall. Space permitting, opposition caucus staff may sit at the table; however, members have priority for seating at the table at all times.

If debate is exhausted prior to the six hours, the ministry estimates are deemed to have been considered for the time allotted in the schedule, and we will adjourn. Otherwise, we will adjourn today at 6:30.

Points of order will be dealt with as they arise, and the six-hour clock will continue to run.

If any material is provided in response to questions raised during the main estimates, it should be tabled by the minister in the Assembly for the benefit of all members.

The vote on the estimates is deferred until consideration of all ministry estimates has concluded and will occur in Committee of Supply tomorrow, April 19, 2017.

If there are any amendments, an amendment to an estimate cannot seek to increase the amount of the estimates being considered, change the destination of a grant, or change the destination or purpose of a subsidy. An amendment may be proposed to reduce an estimate, but the amendment cannot propose

to reduce the estimate by its full amount. The vote on amendments is deferred until Committee of Supply convenes on April 19, 2017. Amendments must be in writing and approved by Parliamentary Counsel prior to the meeting at which they are being moved. Twenty copies of amendments, including the original, must be provided at the meeting for committee members and staff.

I will now invite the Minister of Education to begin with his opening remarks.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Chair. I'm very pleased to discuss the Education 2017 budget here with you, including the main estimates. Along with my helpers here at the table, I have a number of representatives from capital planning and from my ministry office here, too, to help us answer questions, so we're well equipped to get the job done.

Throughout Budget 2017 our government has taken steps to protect and improve education despite the difficult economic circumstances that we're in. We also, of course, are trying to work to make life better for Alberta families through various programs, including the expansion of the school nutrition program and the introduction of Bill 1, An Act to Reduce School Fees, both of which I will come back to here shortly.

First, to the overall figures in this year's budget. Education's consolidated operating expense budget is at \$8.2 billion for the 2017-18 fiscal year, which is an increase of 2.7 per cent from last year. This increase largely comes from our commitment to once again fully fund enrolment, which we project at 1.8 per cent, or about 12,000 new students. In all, 98 per cent of the operating budget flows to school authorities, as it always does, who deliver the education services to Alberta students.

Despite the economic downturn we have continued to see an increasing number of students enrolling with our public boards, charter schools, and private school operators. I believe this is evidence of the trust and the confidence that parents have in the education that we provide here in the province of Alberta. As always, these projections for the next year may shift somewhat, and we have processes in place to address this to ensure that every child in the province is funded.

We also have allocated \$500 million in this budget year to 26 new school and modernization projects, that I recently had the privilege of announcing with the Premier. In total, there will be 10 brand new schools in Calgary, Edmonton, Airdrie, and Lethbridge. We are replacing schools in places like Banff and Grande Prairie. We're also replacing two schools for our francophone communities in Edmonton and in Medicine Hat.

The 10 new school projects will add 6,800 new spaces to our education system. The 16 other projects will result in the modernization and replacement of about 10,000 spaces. In addition, this budget also provides more than \$1.1 billion for ongoing work on 200 new school and modernization projects that were announced by the previous government and then organized and funded through our government. We know that building schools is one of the most important investments that we can make for the future of our province.

Coming back to Bill 1, we can specifically talk about the funding that our government is providing to ease the burden of school fees on Alberta families. These fees were largely unregulated by the previous government, and they continued to grow over the years, now totalling about \$200 million annually. If Bill 1 is passed and proclaimed, our government will flow more than \$54 million to offset instructional supplies and materials fees as well as those charges for busing students to designated schools more than 2.4 kilometres away. All told, the parents of nearly 600,000 students

will benefit from the removal of the ISM fees, and 145,000 students would benefit from the reduction of school busing fees.

3:40

Let me be clear. Our government is flowing funding to offset the removal of these fees to school boards, and there should be no impact to teachers or other education services being provided as a result of Bill 1. I should also note that this legislation is just a start, and we are currently in consultation with our education partners on the regulation to go with Bill 1. Later this year we will launch a broader consultation on fees as we work to develop a second regulation.

Funding for Bill 1 in the 2017-18 fiscal year equals about \$31.5 million; \$15 million of that comes from Alberta Education department's efficiencies, including staff attrition and hiring restraints, a reduction in departmental travel-related costs, a reduction of supply costs, and a review of existing grants and contracts with education partners. These reductions do not affect funding to school boards. Five point six million dollars of the funding comes through a reduction to the credit enrolment unit cap. Currently boards are funded for every high school student that takes 60 credits a year, but on average students in Alberta will be taking about 37 credits. Lastly, \$10.9 million came through the savings found in other ministries reallocated to Education.

My department will continue to review internal processes of conditional grants and other expenses to make further internal reductions in the years ahead. These reductions total \$42 million in 2017-18 and \$16 million in each year after that until 2020.

I also want to touch briefly on the school nutrition pilot program, which has been quite a large success here so far. In 2017 we have allocated \$10 million to the school nutrition program, up from the \$3.5 million in the current school year. This increase will allow us to introduce school nutrition programs in every school board this fall. We know that our initial investment led to 14 school boards offering nutritious meals daily to more than 5,000 students in 33 schools. We know that it is difficult for students to learn when they are not getting the nutrition that they need at the right time, and this program has thus been overwhelmingly positive to communities where it has been introduced. I look forward to seeing the results of our efforts as we expand it to pilots in each of our school boards around the province.

I also do want to quickly mention a few other grants that we are increasing in reaction to anticipated enrolment growth. Funding for the inclusive education grant reaches \$451 million in Budget 2017, an increase of approximately \$13 million from last year. Funding for student transportation will reach \$305 million, which is a \$5 million increase from last year. As well, \$78 million is allocated to Alberta's approach to First Nations education, which is an increase of \$14 million, and this includes \$37 million to support First Nations students on-reserve.

In summary, through Budget 2017 our government has taken steps to improve and protect education in Alberta through funding for enrolment, new schools and modernization projects, and exciting initiatives such as our school fees reduction program and school nutrition program. We are taking immediate steps to make life better for Alberta families in regard to education.

That concludes my comments, so at this time I'd be very pleased to take questions. If you don't mind, if you can try to have a reference to a specific page from the estimates so that we can address your questions in the most appropriate way.

Thanks a lot for this opportunity, and I welcome everybody's input.

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you, Minister.

For the hour that follows, members of the Official Opposition and the minister may speak. Before we begin, just a couple of housekeeping things. Did you want the clock set for 20-minute intervals, just so you know the time?

Mrs. Aheer: Yes, please. Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Okay. Then just a reminder for all members as well to advise the chair at the beginning if they would like to share their time with the minister and that all discussions should flow through the chair at all times regardless of whether or not speaking times are being combined. Would you like to share your time?

Mrs. Aheer: Yes, please. Thank you.

The Chair: Excellent. Please proceed.

Mrs. Aheer: Okay. Thank you. I just wanted to say thank you to all of you for being here. This being my very first time doing estimates as the shadow minister for Education, I'm really, really pleased to be here. In the spirit of André Corriveau, who has written some information for you on early education, early childhood development, I think this is probably one of the most important statements I've read going through this. "Let's ask ourselves: are we doing the best we can to ensure positive futures for our children? It is the most important investment we could make as Albertans."

With that, if you don't mind, we'll just jump right into the strategic plan questions. If we could look at the budget, page 106, the revenue for the education property tax. This is just a bit of your forecasting numbers here. The government has forecast \$2.4 billion to come from education property tax revenues. That's an increase of \$32 million from 2016. The increase is seen even though the mill rates were frozen this year. Obviously, we want to make sure that Albertans' hard-earned dollars are being put to good use and that we end up back in those enviable ranks.

On that same page we also see that the ministry total revenue is over \$3 billion but that expenses are over \$8 billion, leaving a deficit of \$5 billion. That's sort of towards the bottom of that first line there, where it says: ministry total. Where will that \$5 billion come from?

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Well, thank you for that question. Certainly, I think it's very appropriate to look at this because, of course, we're a unique ministry where we have the taxation powers as well, right? The mill rate is set and has not changed. There was some controversy about that. We have the same rate that we've been using for the last few years. If there are any changes that took place in the mill rate in any individual city, it was to do with increase in values of property or devaluations of property and so forth.

In regard to your specific question on these numbers, you know, Education is a spending department. If you add those two figures together, we have the money from the mill rate from the education property taxes that we have, and then the balance of it comes from our budget, that we ask for from general revenues, right? So those are the expenses. We do generate funds mostly – I mean, the main way we generate funds is through the education property taxes, but then the balance comes from our submissions to general revenues.

Then just further to that, again, you know, there is some small part of expenses that school boards from their own revenue do have, that element of their own autonomy, that they do contribute to our books.

Mrs. Aheer: Okay. Does that talk about, then, the deficit, though? It reads as a deficit.

Mr. Eggen: Right. Well, again we look at – the funding comes from our submission to building a budget from general revenues. That's how we look after that element of it. I mean, education is the second-largest budget item in our funding, right? Then between the ASFF, which is the taxation, and then our submission to general revenue, that's how we build our budget for the year.

Mrs. Aheer: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Eggen: You're welcome.

Mrs. Aheer: I'm going to ask just a few questions regarding the carbon tax around this. I wanted to understand, then: what is the impact of the carbon tax going to be on those expenses?

3:50

Mr. Eggen: Thank you for asking. We have been asking our schools to make estimates. We have done estimates as well for the carbon levy across the province. That's part of my budget tour. One of the questions I've been asking is for people to give me a submission. What I've been seeing so far is that the carbon expenditure increase is coming in somewhere between .1 per cent and .3 per cent of budgets for individual school boards. We have been breaking it down into utilities, which is mostly natural gas, and then, of course, transportation, busing.

The submissions that we have had and the estimates that we've done from our department break out to be – we will probably see it at around \$6.8 million for utilities across the province and then about \$1.8 million for all 61 school boards for transportation, so that adds up to \$8.6 million. If we took the global budget for our department and did a percentage of that, it adds up to about a .11 per cent increase to the overall budget for the province.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you.

Mrs. Aheer: My next question is about being able to prepare the school authorities with respect to a comprehensive assessment of the cost of the carbon tax. Is that part of what you're doing with your tour, then? I mean, we're not just talking about schools, of course. As you know, this is about families as well.

Mr. Eggen: Yes. I mean, I've been very up front with my school boards, and we've had very constructive engagements around the carbon levy. You know, part of the reason it's important to have it as a universal levy is that it allows us to look carefully at our fuel expenditures in our schools specifically and then in public institutions generally and to look for ways by which we can provide efficiencies in those places. Each of the school boards that I've spoken to looks forward to not just reinvestment in efficiencies around their energy use – of which those will be forthcoming because, certainly, we know that one of the best ways for us to invest carbon leadership funding is to apply it to the utility and transportation bills that we have to pick up anyway, right? I mean, by making investments in efficiencies in heating systems and transportation, I believe that over time we will see some healthy returns on that.

You know, I believe that our department has done a good job of leading on these efficiencies. For example, we have built in from our own budget, not just from climate leadership money yet, the installation of solar panels on 36 new school projects that we have on the books, and we have further opened submissions for people to put solar panels on existing buildings. It's very interesting because, of course, there's lots of technology that can be associated with this. Yes, you generate electricity, but, for example, there are

apps that can show you in real time how much electricity you're picking up off the roof of said school. So lots of schools are very interested in building a curriculum and educational component to this whole thing.

Yeah. I mean, there was a lot of talk about the carbon levy and its impacts on schools. The .11 per cent is money. Like I say, it's \$8.6 million, but we believe that we can fold back an investment into those same institutions and probably realize savings that would exceed that amount.

Mrs. Aheer: Minister, just to back up for a second, because you were mentioning that, are the carbon tax dollars that you're taking from schools going to be reinvested into those schools, then, to help out with those fees?

Mr. Eggen: Well, indirectly. I mean, Treasury Board and Finance has set up a climate leadership fund, and you make applications through that. The climate change office does that. It's not like a rebate; rather, it's a focused or targeted investment that would flow from the climate leadership fund. You know, they're still considering projects.

But, again, one of the things I've been learning about as I go from school board to school board is how there are many different possibilities that exist for conversion of bus energy systems to panels and, again, sharing some transportation as well and building better systems to pick up kids, having congregated bus pickup sites and stuff like that. There are lots of different ways to save money and innovate.

Mrs. Aheer: Well, I look forward to seeing that.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. You betcha.

Mrs. Aheer: I have a couple of questions, then, just regarding the solar panels. One of the questions I have, first, is about procuring the solar panels. You said that it's 36 schools. Is that correct?

Mr. Eggen: Yes.

Mrs. Aheer: How did you go about procuring those and the bidding for those solar panels? Also, if you could give us some analytics as to how that's working out for the installation and the costs because, obviously, \$6.8 million of fees coming in from schools for carbon taxes is not even going to begin to cover 36 schools' solar panels for installation, procurement, all of that.

Mr. Eggen: That's right. Good point. I think that with the 36 projects we're putting them into, for the new schools we'll build them as part of the new tenders that go out for those schools, I believe. Then for existing ones we will, you know, use the procurement system that we have in place. If it's a bigger school board like Edmonton and Calgary, they do their building. Then if it's a smaller centre, we use Alberta Infrastructure for the system and the process.

Yeah, we have lots of schools. Well, I won't list them off, but I've got a list of the ones here. There's Edmonton, there's Calgary, but there's also Cleardale, Condor, Beaumont, Sherwood Park, Red Deer, Okotoks. Everybody is pretty excited about this.

Mrs. Aheer: Do you have a business plan for that as well?

Mr. Eggen: Absolutely. Yes.

Mrs. Aheer: Yeah? A cost-benefit analysis, all of that?

Mr. Eggen: Well, with the solar panels to a certain extent, I mean, it depends on – like, the systems are still relatively new, right? So

the scale on which we are embarking on this is significant. Yes, we have a plan, but in terms of how much electricity we generate and, you know, how much net benefit . . .

Mrs. Aheer: Or if you can pay back to the grid, yeah, because there was some controversy around that.

Mr. Eggen: There is to some extent, but the new panels are pretty good, right? I mean, they've come down in price a lot. There are lots of questions. These are like pilots, right? There are lots of questions that we have to answer in terms of, you know, running it over the summer and all of those kinds of things.

Mrs. Aheer: And when the sun doesn't shine.

Mr. Eggen: As well as at night, too. That's right.

Mrs. Aheer: I was going to suggest to you that I actually have 40 solar panels on my house, and aside from just the solar panels – now, granted, mine are older, so they're heavy. They're about this tall and about this wide. But I was going to say that the biggest issue, of course, with solar panels and mounting them is the infrastructure that needs to actually be in the building to be able to hold up said solar panels, especially for a large piece of infrastructure like a school. So, on average, for 40 solar panels you're looking at about \$100,000 worth of just concrete and rebar going into any building to make sure that it can hold up that level of infrastructure. So I would really appreciate at some point seeing your cost-benefit analysis and also seeing your business plan going forward.

Mr. Eggen: Absolutely.

Mrs. Aheer: In terms of making sure that it's actually going to pay back and do what it's supposed to do, I think that that would be very important for Albertans to see.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. I concur with your analysis. You know, we see it as an educational opportunity as well, and we believe that we will see not just said financial benefits but that it's kind of like a flag out there for the whole community to see as a source of pride and education for not just the kids but that the moms and dads picking up the kids can see the panels on the roof and see that we're making progress.

Further to that, I think we've put it at up to \$750,000 per school for those projects. It's part of the overall budget. We're seeing a lot of these new contracts come in considerably lower than what we had anticipated, so we can fold the price of the new school projects into the tenders of the overall building.

Mrs. Aheer: Hopefully, those tenders – as we know as we're building, it never comes out to what you think it's going to be, so we want to add at least 20 or 30 per cent on top of that, right? I mean, I'm just talking of my own personal experience with building. It never comes out the way you expect it to.

I do have a question, though, as well. You said that you're speaking with schools about the carbon tax and that you're finding that most of them are able to – of course, you know, I have some other questions about that a little bit later.

4:00

With respect to the end of life, like, the average solar panel, they say, lasts about 25 years. At least, that's what they told us about ours. Have you projected as well for maintenance, replacement, what you're going to do to recycle those kinds of things? Is that part

of your process as well? There's a lot of infrastructure, again, there that's going to need to be replaced.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah, sure. I mean, that's the general way by which the infrastructure analyzes, you know, the maintenance of our buildings in a general sort of sense.

Mrs. Aheer: Sorry; what do you mean by "general"?

Mr. Eggen: Well, just like how you, you know, make a calculation over time of how your schools are going down. The infrastructure maintenance funding that we have built into our budget would be part of how we would maintain and amortize the price and benefits of a said solar panel unit on a school.

Mrs. Aheer: Okay. Well, it'll be interesting to see those numbers.

Mr. Eggen: Yes.

Mrs. Aheer: I just wanted to jump over to – you probably remember this article by Janet French on January 6, where she actually quoted some information about the reason for charging school boards carbon taxes, "to encourage reduction in fuel consumption" and that students want to become environmentally responsible and that this initiative is led by them.

You know, we've been extremely vocal about the actual reductions in GHGs with regard to climate leadership action plans. When you've spoken with school boards and school authorities and, I mean, obviously, students because you're reaching out to students, too, for their input and their critical thinking into these projects, how is it going to work as far as that goes? You said that you wanted to reduce fuel. I think you said that just a bit earlier, that the whole point was that the schools would give submissions and that it's to help them to reduce their footprints. So how are you seeing that working out? Do you have numbers projected or metrics as to what you're looking for in reductions in order to make sure that the solar panel actually adds up to something that is feasible as far as reductions in GHGs go?

Mr. Eggen: Yes, yes. I mean, we are venturing into new ground here in regard to the scale and breadth of what we're doing, so part of it is to work together with school boards to gather that information over time and to evaluate it together as well. So, you know, we are establishing a committee with different school boards to build evaluation over time with them.

Yeah. I mean, I agree that it's important to reduce GHGs, but my focus with this is education, first of all, and saving money, quite frankly. I'm looking for ways by which we can realize savings in our utility bills and in our fuel costs for transportation, and I believe that there are savings to be had and that will result as a benefit of some reduced GHGs. I also know that as we seek to diversify our economy and, you know, pique the interest of young people in diversifying our energy economy, I think this is a great place to start because you can have tactile elements of a school that you can be studying as part of the local curriculum the teachers develop, that's specific to their school, that allows the kids to interact with the new systems, that we might put in place for improved efficiencies in heating and lighting and in transportation.

You know, that's kind of the way I look at it, and I believe that we can seek to quantify all of those things, quantifying the education benefits through the way by which we measure education's success and by watching some bills go down over time – right? – in terms of utility bills and transportation bills and lighting. And then, of course, on a larger level we can have an

accounting for GHG reduction, and we will certainly build that as part of our overall business plan.

Mrs. Aheer: Yeah. Along with that, because you're obviously looking at, you know . . . [A timer sounded] Thank you, Chair.

You're obviously looking at how this can fit into the curriculum.

Mr. Eggen: Yes.

Mrs. Aheer: As far as the curriculum with regard to energy, I suppose if we're talking about that right now, we're talking about resource stewardship as well. Is that inclusive of other types of energy that we already use in this province, resource stewardship, environmental stewardship, all of those bits and pieces in terms of critical thinking so that as students are moving forward with the process? I mean, as you know, things like the technology just turn overnight, right? So I think it's going to be a very important piece to make sure that all energy is part of the education piece so that the decisions that we're making aren't based on what we think works but what actually works in terms of good costs for Albertans, their energy needs, their usages. We do, you know, still live in the Great White North over here, so heat is important. There are a lot of things. I just wanted to mention that to make sure that it's part of the curriculum review.

Mr. Eggen: Yes, very much so. In fact, you know, I was just speaking to the Energy minister today, and as we roll out the next part of our curriculum – we have the results of that first survey that took place in the fall, and in the next couple of months we will do that again, right? – we want to really break out the public meeting and submission aspects of the curriculum development. I just wanted to encourage energy companies to make those submissions to build sort of a broad landscape of energy education in the province of Alberta. We know that the bread and butter and the backbone of our economy is still traditional energy production.

Mrs. Aheer: Oil and gas.

Mr. Eggen: That's not going to change any time soon. You know, that puts food on our table and builds the wonderful lifestyle that we have here in the province. I look at K to 12 education as a way by which we can buttress that, right? When we look at diversifying our energy economy, I think that traditional energy companies realize that the mix is necessary for not just having a stronger, more secure energy industry but also for people to keep pushing forward. Just like your opening quote – I thought it was really good – talking about that the most important thing we can invest in is education, the oil companies know that, too. They know that those are going to be the people that will become the energy companies of the future.

Mrs. Aheer: Yeah. If you can include the energy companies and their funding coming forward as a part of that, then that takes that burden off the taxpayer to pay for something that could be a boondoggle if it doesn't work out appropriately, right?

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. In the next round we want to work with – I've been really pushing this hard – computer technology and business and financial literacy. These are all things that, you know, we can work on with partnerships to build strong curriculum and be creative about it, right? It doesn't all just have to come out of some ivory tower somewhere.

Mrs. Aheer: And the science.

Mr. Eggen: I mean, we can use what we have around us to build creative curriculum development.

Mrs. Aheer: If you don't mind, Minister, I'd like to jump into some questions about stable funding.

Mr. Eggen: Yes.

Mrs. Aheer: I'll be looking at page 33 of the fiscal plan.

Mr. Eggen: Okay. No problem. Just give me a second here. Page 33.

Mrs. Aheer: Yeah. I'll be jumping back a little bit between that and page 99 of the fiscal plan as well. It's basically the same information, but I just want to make sure that I understood this correctly.

Mr. Eggen: Okay. Just give us a sec here. I'll grab the gear.

Mrs. Aheer: Yeah. Sure. Take your time.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. I mean, you can go ahead and start asking, and then we'll figure it out.

Mrs. Aheer: Okay. Thank you so much.

This is with respect, like I was saying, to stable funding, and I just need a bit of clarification. I'm just going to read from this little section here for you, and it's sort of about halfway through on page 33, just after you talk about the equalized assessment.

Education property tax revenue is forecast to increase \$208 million by 2019-20, an average of 4.2% per year between 2017-18 and 2019-20, based on returning to the 32% methodology of calculating the requisition. However, the government will determine the approach for setting the requisition amount as part of each annual budget process, providing flexibility with respect to property tax policy.

Could you please, Minister, explain? There's a lot of information in there about flexibility, a lot of information about changes, and not a lot of information about stability. If you could please give us some information about that, that'd be great.

4:10

Mr. Eggen: Sure. That's great. Thank you for the question. You know, we recognize that, especially during an economic downturn, it's important for us to be careful, and we are. We do have a unique taxation element in Education that other ministries don't have, right? You know, we have assumed responsibility for this since 1994, since the school boards lost. The Education property tax relative to total operational expenses has fallen during that time from way back in '94 from 51 to 32 per cent. It's projected that Education property tax revenue will continue to fund at about 32 per cent of operating costs of K to 12 education. We are . . .

Mrs. Aheer: That's gone up from the 25 per cent in 2015, correct? That's on page 99. That's why I'm asking these questions, because that's where I'm confused, too. I just need some clarity.

Mr. Eggen: Okay. Right. The 32 per cent of the property tax funding Education hasn't changed. I think it's been static – right? – for . . .

Mrs. Aheer: That's what I read, too, but on . . .

Mr. Eggen: And so on page 99 – you'll just have to give me a second to see where you're cross-referencing this.

Mrs. Aheer: Yeah. If you look under Education property tax on page 99, it's that last line there, where it's talking about the government's share of property tax revenues.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. The property tax revenue and the formula: we have no plans on changing that formula. Certainly, in the circumstances that we're in with individuals and businesses paying into it, we want to keep that stable, right?

Now we're just finding the 25 per cent.

Mrs. Aheer: Right at the bottom there.

Mr. Eggen: The Alberta provincial government's "share of property tax revenue collected continues to fall, from 51% . . . to 25%." Okay. I will check that for you . . .

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you so much.

Mr. Eggen: . . . because that is a discrepancy that I can see from one page to the other page, and I will check.

Mrs. Aheer: That's quite a large – yeah.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. You know, that's good. Absolutely.

Mrs. Aheer: Now, I realize you've frozen it, so we're only at \$32 million, but you're going to jump from 1.3 to 4.2 per cent in the next year, and then that increase will stay. So we're looking at \$208 million just in mill rate fees – right? – that will happen in that next year. My question around the stable funding is: if the taxation model is changing, how is that going to provide stable funding? How are the school authorities going to know, too, what's coming forward given that situation? It is confusing.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. Thank you. That's very appropriate. We're just going to sort through it here in a minute.

Mrs. Aheer: Yeah. Please take your time, or if you need to, answer later.

Mr. Eggen: The funding that flows from our ministry to the school boards: we, again, gave them that rock-solid commitment which is the funding for enrolment. Of course, we are a per-student funding model over time, so for the third straight budget I've given that commitment, which has provided a lot of long-term stability, and barring some catastrophic thing that might happen, we will continue to do so.

Mrs. Aheer: You never know. Yeah.

Mr. Eggen: You know, that really kind of settles the education boards' capacity to build long-term budgets down a lot – right? – because we've demonstrated a pattern of funding for enrolment. I know that not every corner of the province is still growing in terms of enrolment, but it does give some measure of stability.

I'm just getting word here. You're saying that the mill rate has been steady, so what's the discrepancy between the 32 per cent and . . .

Mrs. Aheer: And the 25 per cent.

Mr. Eggen: Okay. The property values changing over time, too: that's what it is. That's what the difference is.

Mrs. Aheer: The property values changing: is that, then, being put onto the municipalities? Obviously, that's not coming from government changes; that's property tax changes. Then is that being

loaded down onto the municipalities, and are they being given a heads-up that they're going to be responsible for collecting that cash from people that, as you know, are already suffering right now? Even if it's not coming directly from the provincial government, it's going to get downloaded onto municipalities, therefore onto individual families. And on top of everything else, that 4.2 per cent jump, \$208 million, is going to be huge for families.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. Well, the mill rate has not changed during that time.

Mrs. Aheer: But it will next year, right?

Mr. Eggen: We're going to keep it the same. We're not going to change it.

Mrs. Aheer: It's not going from 1.3 to 4.2 per cent?

Mr. Eggen: No. I mean, there are no plans to change that, especially, like you say, during an economically unstable time. Any changes that individual municipalities might have seen as a result of their education portion of the property tax were due to the value of said properties as they were coming up on the books for that year. You know, I mean, obviously, the mill rate: the trend since 1994 is that it's been going down considerably, so I don't see any reason why that would not continue because, again, people need to know and municipalities need to know and individual homeowners with these things need to know, too. The mill rate is reviewed every year, but I can see an overall trend for the last 25 years, which is for it to be falling.

Mrs. Aheer: Okay. Can I ask you, then: what is the tax revenue piece that is forecast to increase \$208 million? What is that 4.2 per cent, then? Like, how do we get from 1.3 per cent to 4.2 per cent? Like, what is that differentiation? I'm sorry. That's on page 33.

Mr. Eggen: That's back on page 33. That's what I thought. Okay.

Mrs. Aheer: It's right above the section about other tax revenue, underneath education property tax. Even if you want to write me back about that later, I'm not really sure . . .

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. That probably wouldn't be a bad idea.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you.

Mr. Eggen: Can you just say that one more time, so we can get a clear shot at it?

Mrs. Aheer: Sure. For example, like, it says under here that you're forecasting \$2.4 billion in 2017-18, an increase of \$32 million – right? – or 1.3 per cent. Then about halfway down – we're talking after the equalized assessment – education property tax revenue is forecast to increase \$208 million, an average of 4.2 per cent per year. Now, is that another discrepancy with property taxes again?

Mr. Eggen: I would suspect so. But you know what? You know, what we need to do is to cross-reference that with Municipal Affairs . . .

Mrs. Aheer: If you wouldn't mind. Thank you so much.

Mr. Eggen: . . . because then that will give us the clear picture, right? We did see some individual anomalies in certain places around the province. I suspect that it's an assessment thing, but I also, you know, would like to just reconfirm my suspicion with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs.

Mrs. Aheer: I would appreciate it. It's just another set of eyeballs on it, right?

Mr. Eggen: Absolutely. Thanks. That's a good question.

Mrs. Aheer: This is just a question around what's been going on in Calgary with respect to the fact that the province took less education tax than what the city budgeted. You were probably hearing over the weekend about the \$27 million – right? – that was returned to the city, that was collected by the city. The council has rescinded a motion that saw the city automatically absorb that money out of province. My question is more about – it's a bit confusing because the funds were collected as an education tax, but it's being reimbursed as tax room. I mean, that can be used on anything. I think the \$54 million a couple years ago was actually used for the green line, potentially. Can you explain or describe: is there any way that the government can make sure that those tax dollars actually go into education? Do you have any say? What is the oversight on that?

Mr. Eggen: The oversight for us in regard to spending on education is not great. I mean, once they build their tax structure – right? – then if there's a lowering of that, for example, as you suggested, in Calgary . . .

Mrs. Aheer: Is it, like, outside the purview of the provincial government?

Mr. Eggen: Yeah.

. . . then it's a Municipal Affairs issue, setting up that formula.

Mrs. Aheer: Okay. I just thought I should ask.

Mr. Eggen: No. That's good. You know what? I will ask them that, too, because now that you've asked, I think that's a very astute question, and I'm curious now, too.

Mrs. Aheer: Okay. Thank you so much.

Let's go – now, did I do this already? Hold on one second here. Yes, I did that. Okay. We're going to go to future ready if you don't mind.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. Sounds good.

Mrs. Aheer: The future ready initiative is extremely wide in scope. Is it in the budget under a particular budget line? I couldn't figure out where that was.

Mr. Eggen: Well, it does exist in regard to our initiatives around dual credit funding – right? – because, I mean, future ready is a way by which we can focus curriculum and focus our partnerships with postsecondary institutions, our initiatives like bridge to teacher as well, right?

4:20

Mrs. Aheer: So on page 100, I guess, in the budget?

Mr. Eggen: These are all places in which future ready resides. For us as we build, I would suggest that curriculum is a very important place for it moving forward, right?

Mrs. Aheer: Yeah. Where is the dual credit in the budget line items, then? I don't see that either. Is it funded?

Mr. Eggen: Dual credit: this year I think it's \$2.7 million. Am I right?

Mrs. Aheer: Because 21.9 went to Advanced Education . . .

Mr. Eggen: Oh, the line. Okay. It's line item 2.7. We're going to find it for you on page 100. It's part of education system support. It resides deep inside that.

Mrs. Aheer: And there's been a cut of almost \$2 million to that education system support, right?

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. But it's a pretty broad area. I mean, what we've been trying to do – it's delicate in this economic circumstance to try to look for ways by which we can provide efficiencies. That line item: the reduction was in department efficiencies, you know, in terms of staff attrition and so forth. We have continued on with the dual credit program.

Mrs. Aheer: You have. Okay.

Mr. Eggen: It's quite valuable. What I'm trying to do, actually, you know, to put it on record here, is to try to get Advanced Education to pay for more of it because, quite frankly, we put kids in high schools into a college – let's say, Olds College – and they benefit from that, too. If I can bring those two elements of budget together a little more closely, I think we can really start to bust out our dual credit capacity even more.

Mrs. Aheer: Dual credit has shown such significant metrics in how positively it works. I mean, there are so many ways that children will learn differently with this aspect that they might not normally be able to do in the classroom, so I think that this is a fabulous investment in the future.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. I mean, I've seen it on an anecdotal level because, you know, there are some kids and families that just wouldn't even think of going to a postsecondary institution. They wouldn't darken the door, you know. So if you can get some of those kids in high school picking off credit in Fairview College, let's say, or Vermilion . . .

Mrs. Aheer: Or Olds.

Mr. Eggen: . . . or Olds or wherever or Red Deer – Red Deer College is a big one – then it makes it easier for them just to kind of walk in and start to, you know, fill out that program.

Mrs. Aheer: How much was put into dual credit, then? Are you able to break that down a little bit to let us know?

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. Absolutely. We've got \$11 million over three years that was put in there – that was 2016 – and then this year we're continuing on with it.

Mrs. Aheer: Okay. I was just going to say, Minister, that I have some other specific questions about dual credit if you don't mind.

Mr. Eggen: No. That's fine. We can follow you.

Mrs. Aheer: Some of them, I think, I may have already asked, so please forgive me if I'm redundant. I'm just out of order here a little bit.

The other thing I was going to suggest, too, is that there are a lot of people, I think, in advanced education and schools that are maybe not aware that this is being funded again or they're not understanding that this is available. At least that's the impression. I've had so many meetings with people asking me: "What about dual credit? What about dual credit?" I don't know if it's just a lack of information or knowledge or outreach. I'm not sure if there's some way that that information can be put out there more – I'm not sure what the best way is – or if there's a line item for

communication as far as that goes. I have to say that I've been asked at least probably 10 times in the last couple of weeks about dual credit.

Mr. Eggen: Is that right, eh? That's good information to know.

Mrs. Aheer: Yeah. If I could make any recommendation, it would be that there are a lot of schools that are very, very interested. Especially given the economic downturn right now, having our, you know, grade 10 to 12 students be able to step into a business that – I mean, it's so good.

The other piece of that, too, Minister, is to be able to reach out to the stakeholders that are involved and have them also fund and help out with that because they're actually getting the students – right? – that will benefit from that. Creating those partnerships and helping that would take a burden off the taxpayer as well.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. You know, that was how it was structured from the beginning . . .

Mrs. Aheer: It was up until 2011.

Mr. Eggen: . . . and then the three-year dual credit plan sort of coincided with quite a significant economic downturn – right? – not just this last one but even before . . .

Mrs. Aheer: Two thousand and eight.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah, that's right: 2008.

. . . so a lot of the partners that were kind of enthusiastic about it, you know, didn't feel like they had that in their budget. [A timer sounded]

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Chair.

Mr. Eggen: You know, I mean, I'm definitely interested in expanding the program. We're going to have to be creative, and we need all the help we can – we are evaluating this program now to try to figure out a way to . . .

Mrs. Aheer: That was my next question.

Mr. Eggen: Yes, we are.

Mrs. Aheer: Okay.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. We're in the midst of doing it now, and I think we will have something, you know, positive to announce on that.

Mrs. Aheer: Okay. And to engage more high schools, hopefully.

Mr. Eggen: And engage more. Like you say, we're not getting . . .

Mrs. Aheer: That was my next question.

Mr. Eggen: Maybe it's not penetrating as far as it should into these places, right?

Mrs. Aheer: Okay. Yeah. Because, I mean, being a part of that economy, that global economy, that competitiveness is essential – right? – to being able to have a high quality of life and being healthy and strong and being able to self-promote, right? These are a lot of things that our youth are – it's an absolute necessity right now.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. It creates confidence. You know, I think that's what you're hitting on.

Mrs. Aheer: You cannot measure confidence.

Mr. Eggen: That's what I notice, too. Like, the Red Deer program, the school within a college program that they have at Red Deer College: you know, I met with the kids there. Most of the ones I talked to had dropped out of high school or got kicked out of high school. Then there they were in Red Deer College. They're back on their feet and getting training in mechanics to get a job.

Mrs. Aheer: Okay. May I ask just a few more questions on this?

Mr. Eggen: You can ask me as many as you want. You betcha.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you so much. [interjection] What I was wondering – we've got a joker over here on this side.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah.

Mrs. Aheer: Within your funding model, have you also got a vision of sort of what you want? You've sort of explained a little bit about how you see dual credit moving along. You also mentioned some of the changes that have happened. You and I have talked a little bit about that. Do you have an overall idea of how you want this vision to work? Like, what is your, you know, go-forward? How do you want to see this come out?

Mr. Eggen: Well, my hope is to expand it considerably, right? I'm looking to have it up and functioning with all of our colleges and that expanded . . .

Mrs. Aheer: Yeah. The website doesn't reflect it.

Mr. Eggen: It doesn't say . . .

Mrs. Aheer: It hasn't been updated since 2013.

Mr. Eggen: No, I mean, because we're sort of – like, honestly, in the next few weeks we will have this thing coming out, right? You know, we do want to make it bigger, right?

Mrs. Aheer: Okay.

Mr. Eggen: Northland school division is a good example of how, you know, you can work with this because, I mean, you have a very low enrolment rate, you have lots of kids that are not graduating, and then you have lots of northern colleges that are interested in creating some creative ways to reach those communities. Again, you know, for the sake of dollars invested in, I think you get many dollars coming out if you have a kid that graduates and maybe signs up for Lakeland College afterwards or Keyano College . . .

Mrs. Aheer: They have work experience – right? – like, those ones.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah.

. . . or Fairview, right? You know, there have been some pilots for having microcampuses even right adjacent to Northland schools. These are kind of some of the things that we're working on right now.

Mrs. Aheer: What about the green certificate? Are you familiar with that?

Mr. Eggen: Yes, I am.

Mrs. Aheer: Is that going to play into this as well?

Mr. Eggen: Yes. You are very clever to make that association. You know, we are definitely interested in building – the green certificate will carry on. You know, we know it's very helpful. I was just down

in Wetaskiwin a few days ago, and one of the trustees asked me about that. He said how successful it was in conjunction with 4-H.

Mrs. Aheer: I think that Lacombe – there are a couple of places where it's been very . . .

Mr. Eggen: Yeah.

So we are not just continuing with it, but we have something that – I think people would really like for us to demonstrate our long-term commitment to the green certificate program for agriculture.

Mrs. Aheer: Will that fall into funding that you already have, or is this going to be outside of the funding that's already allocated?

Mr. Eggen: It's within the funding that we have available, but, you know, it will, like I say, demonstrate our long-term commitment to it. You'll see very soon.

Mrs. Aheer: I think I'm going to jump into curriculum rewrite a little bit here.

Mr. Eggen: Sure.

Mrs. Aheer: As you know – and I've been very vocal about this – this is an unprecedented undertaking.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah.

Mrs. Aheer: You know, you're very boldly revising the entire kindergarten to grade 12 curricula in five areas, which include new programs of study, assessments, and learning, teaching resources as well as processes for developing the components of a curriculum. This is going to obviously require massive amounts of professional development for teachers to learn and use all of these new things. In the past, as you know, these things take a long, long time, especially the professional development pieces of it, aside from evergreening and other pieces like that that we've seen in the past, so my questions are going to kind of revolve around how this is going to be implemented. One of the major questions, of course, is the dollar figures. Where is that in the budget?

4:30

Mr. Eggen: Well, I mean, I first will tell you that it's in the existing budget. We figure that it's around \$64 million.

Mrs. Aheer: Right. Yeah, I've heard that number tossed around.

Mr. Eggen: Again, it resides in the very large place, at 2.7 on page 100.

Mrs. Aheer: On the billion side?

Mr. Eggen: No, no, no. Line 2.7 on page 100.

Mrs. Aheer: Oh. Yeah, line 2.7 is the broader piece. It seems like a lot of things are collated into line 2.7.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. Well, that's a good place to ask about. Ask more about line 2.7.

Mrs. Aheer: Well, I was going to say that if there's some point in the future, when we do our next budget, if we can have that broken out just a little bit if that's possible – I don't know if that's a feasible thing.

Mr. Eggen: Sure. Let me give it to you. I mean, the cost over the next six years is about \$64 million. The staffing is at about \$39 million. The engagement, with the curriculum working groups and

the public meetings and all that kind of stuff we're doing, is about \$20 million. Then the management application is \$5 million as well, which is the digital platform on which the whole thing will reside.

You described it very well. This is a big undertaking. I wouldn't even think of doing it without the engagement of all teachers and all school boards and the general public and industry and the whole deal, right? You know, we're not trying to turn things upside down for the sake of change. We will weigh each element of our existing curriculum for its value and utility over time, too, right? But at least casting some constructively critical eyes on each of those subject areas in all grades is very important because, of course, it's where all of this money is being invested. If you look at our whole budget of \$8.1 billion, it's all going through this to make the curriculum come to life. I think it's high time we did do some revision on it, and so far so good. I've really enjoyed the engagement and the debate that's already happened. I believe that we've raised the interest of the public in education in general. Just by doing this, again, people are talking about it.

Mrs. Aheer: Parents are very interested.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. Exactly. And, you know, we're not afraid of that, right?

Mrs. Aheer: No. You shouldn't be.

Mr. Eggen: You know, sometimes it can be a little bit controversial.

Mrs. Aheer: The more you can involve the parents and teachers and students, the better off you're going to be.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. They sure are.

So there you go. It resides in line 2.7 on page 100, and we estimate the overall costs so far at about \$64 million.

Mrs. Aheer: Okay. I was going to ask you about agencies and participants as well. You have a lot of agencies and participants – right? – that are coming in to help develop the curriculum.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah.

Mrs. Aheer: Is that included in that \$64 million?

Mr. Eggen: Yeah, it is.

Mrs. Aheer: Do you know how much approximately? Is that the \$20 million for engaging?

Mr. Eggen: That's the \$20 million for engagement. That's right, yeah, \$19.116 million altogether.

Mrs. Aheer: Okay.

Mr. Eggen: I mean, it might grow because we're seeing quite a lot of enthusiastic interest, right? For example, last time we put out about a hundred and some public opportunities. I have instructed my department to advertise and then bust those out quite a bit more, so we could go as high as, you know, 170, even 200 public engagements with the next round here in the spring.

Mrs. Aheer: The more the better.

Mr. Eggen: I've been trying to invite, you know, junior achievement people. People have been coming across over the last few months and saying, "Hey, we want to get involved in curriculum," and I say, "Yeah; I want you, too."

Mrs. Aheer: I have to ask you: are you on time and on budget as of right now?

Mr. Eggen: We are on time so far and, yeah, I think, on budget, too.

Mrs. Aheer: In the past, I mean, we've had millions of dollars that have been spent on curriculum prototyping projects, and, you know, the stakeholders are concerned that many, many years of their work, those past seven years, will be lost due to the rewrite. Are you using work that was done in the curriculum prototyping to inform these reviews?

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Absolutely.

Mrs. Aheer: Okay. All right.

Then as far as textbooks and resources and those kinds of things, how much have you budgeted for that with respect to the curriculum? I imagine that would be way outside of the \$64 million.

Mr. Eggen: Yes, that's outside of that. That's right.

Mrs. Aheer: You're looking at, like, K to 12, a complete resource redevelopment, a complete PD redo.

Mr. Eggen: Yes.

Mrs. Aheer: Do you have any ideas, like, any projections on textbooks or anything like that?

Mr. Eggen: Well, the first round of engagement for curriculum is K to 4 – right? – which would be the end of 2018, I believe.

Mrs. Aheer: You'll be done that in 2018?

Mr. Eggen: I mean, that's the first place where we will start to look for the materials, as you suggested, and the professional development in the budget as well.

Mrs. Aheer: Do you have any projections on those numbers?

Mr. Eggen: You know, except for the curriculum development management application, which is a digital platform . . .

Mrs. Aheer: Which is \$5 million.

Mr. Eggen: . . . we have not budgeted for the other things yet.

Mrs. Aheer: Okay.

Mr. Eggen: I mean, when I've studied other jurisdictions around the country, this is where you have to be really careful, too, because you can produce a great curriculum, but if the teachers and the parents and the school boards are not engaged, then it will fail, right?

Mrs. Aheer: And we've seen that, right?

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. We saw that in some elements in Ontario, in Quebec, and in some parts of the B.C. curriculum rollout. I'm trying to learn from others' misfortune, and, you know, we will make sure that we won't have another Ontario or Quebec thing happen here.

Mrs. Aheer: As far as your professional development goes, then, I would imagine – I mean, at that point in time, 2018, we're going to see, obviously, other increases in student populations, teacher populations.

Mr. Eggen: I would expect so.

Mrs. Aheer: Is your professional development going to go into secondary? I know this isn't our portfolio, but is it going to start in Advanced Education as well as you're rolling this out? In 2018 you're saying that you're going to have K to 4 done.

Mr. Eggen: That's right.

Mrs. Aheer: Is that going to also then be incorporated into Advanced Education for teachers coming into the system in order to be able to bring that stuff forward?

Mr. Eggen: Yes, it will. I mean, we've been meeting with each of the teacher training colleges around the province, you know, and they are fully engaged in the curriculum development, right? They're at the tables. We want to make modifications over time to teacher education, both at a PD level . . .

Mrs. Aheer: Especially the PD level, yeah.

Mr. Eggen: . . . and for student teachers, too, to meet the demands of the new curriculum. Like, even now I've stuck my toe in it a little bit in trying to make improvements on teaching mathematics to lower grade levels.

Mrs. Aheer: I have a whole section on that.

Mr. Eggen: Part of an announcement I made four months ago or so was to have professional development training for elementary school teachers to improve their skills in being able to teach math in their classrooms. I mean, I think that's an important investment, you know.

Mrs. Aheer: Well, that's a good segue to my next question.

Mr. Eggen: Plus, we're building new teacher standards right now, too, right? We have the TQS, teaching quality standards, that are just sort of imminently coming out here in the next very short time. You know, we can do a lot to have all of those things joining together – curriculum development, teacher training, professional development, and the teaching quality standards – all kind of helping to buttress this new curriculum.

Mrs. Aheer: Teaching quality standards: can you go into that a little bit?

Mr. Eggen: Sure. Yeah. The teaching quality standards was work that was done between the Alberta Teachers' Association, the schools superintendents' association, our ministry, the universities as well, and the Alberta School Boards Association. Everybody sort of came together to build a standard for teachers and a standard for administrators and even a standard for superintendents as well. So it's a big, far-ranging document, that we're just on the cusp of finishing and ratifying, I should say. Everybody is excited about it. You know, I was, quite frankly, a little bit surprised when I first saw this as minister, but the enthusiasm which each of those levels, teacher, administrator, and superintendent, having these standards which they can apply to the profession – I think it's refreshing to see that kind of co-operation, and I think it reflects well on our system.

Mrs. Aheer: I mean, there's been a lot of work done on that over the years. Did you find that you just brought, like, a lot of the work in and then . . .

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. I must say, you know, that a lot of it was done by those groups independently, so it was there. It was just there for

us to grab. It talks about professional development, too, so it kind of will help us to feed into building new curriculum. And then it'll help us to, I think, improve student outcomes in education just by having professional standards and professional development that will support those standards.

4:40

Mrs. Aheer: And testing.

Mr. Eggen: Like, for First Nations, for example – right? – the whole FNMI structure that we're trying to put into our education system can be really well supported by a teaching quality standard so that teachers have an understanding of residential schools, have an understanding of the history of our province, have an understanding of treaties. So it's exciting. It really is.

Mrs. Aheer: I'm going to ask some questions about math, actually.

Mr. Eggen: Okay.

Mrs. Aheer: This is just in regard to the business plan, outcome 1, where you talk about all students being successful and performance outcomes and student learning in specific subject areas and acceptable standards of excellence.

Mr. Eggen: What page is that on in the business plan?

Mrs. Aheer: We're talking about page 50. We're looking at key strategy 1.3.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. I see it there.

Mrs. Aheer: Okay. I just have a couple of questions about this. I think we only have about five minutes left. What resources are being developed to support student learning in math? You'd mentioned something about talking to young teachers that are coming in, but do you have a budget line item, like, something dedicated specifically? We all know how important this is. The province has spoken loudly about this importance.

Mr. Eggen: Yes. For sure. We've set quite a high goal for improving mathematics outcomes in the province of Alberta for K to 12. We see some reason to be optimistic, but we also see some stubborn sort of flatlining, you know, in some of the standardized tests that we do, especially in grade 6 and grade 9 to some extent. So I put into place a four-pronged sort of plan – right? – in regard to having bursaries for teachers to be able to cover tuition costs for postsecondary courses. Then I also put in some changes to, for example, the grade 12 math diploma exams, 30-1 and 30-2, to have a written component to those exams, and to have no-calculator portions of the grade 9 provincial achievement exams. These are some of the things that we've put in, too.

You know, I think that as we build curriculum, we need to make sure, because we saw it in living, 3-D technicolour how people who submitted to the survey want math outcomes to be improved, too . . .

Mrs. Aheer: Yeah. Top of mind, for sure.

Mr. Eggen: . . . of sort of those practicals, shifting some of our focus in terms of numeracy and having kids internalizing math strategies – right? – and just a certain sense of rigour that I think a lot of kids could benefit from.

So is it a line item? That's the question of the day. It would reside, Brad, in line 2.7? At 2.7? There it is. That's a great, vast line item.

Mrs. Aheer: Then I just wanted to talk a little bit about the numbers because your acceptable standard increases are pretty teeny tiny. Like, we're going from 69.9 to 70.3.

Mr. Eggen: And that's in grade . . .

Mrs. Aheer: I think we're talking about grades 6 to 9 on the provincial achievement tests in mathematics.

Mr. Eggen: In the business plan again?

Mrs. Aheer: Yeah. We're still on page 50, at the bottom, in that little grey area under Performance Measures. I was just curious if you could tell us a little bit about those numbers, what that means. Obviously, like everybody else in this province, we want to make sure that our kids get math, that it's meaningful to them, that there's a reason, that they feel engaged, that the teachers also are feeling engaged and are having ways of getting the kids to be interested. If you could give us a little bit of an understanding as to how you came up with, you know, a .4 per cent change as being an acceptable standard. Is that based on previous numbers or patterns?

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. It's based on a pattern. I mean, we have tens of thousands of kids writing these things, right? You know, I think that our target for, let's say, the PATs, up to 70 per cent, 71 per cent . . .

The Chair: I apologize to interrupt. The first hour has concluded.

We'll now move on to the PC caucus. Mr. Rodney, would you like to share your time with the minister?

Mr. Rodney: I would be happy to share the time with the minister.

The Chair: Please proceed.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, sir. The hon. member from the Wildrose might be happy to know that I'm very happy to pick up exactly where she left off. No, we did not talk about this beforehand. Referring to page 50, in my notes, of the business plan, outcome 1, the fact that Alberta's students are successful – now, Minister, you've got a background in education, as do I, and so do many of the people around the table, both as educators and also as an administrator. I really appreciate the chance to work in many schools at many levels.

I'll tell you that what I saw was that the strength of Alberta education often was the choice that's available here. I can remember many, many years ago where even *Maclean's* magazine, whatever you think of it, said, again, close to a decade ago, that the reason that the Alberta education system was so successful and far and away the most successful in Canada was because of the choice of, you know, public and separate and charter and private and home and other. I know that we just celebrated Easter, but in a certain publication – it's the Association of Independent Schools and Colleges in Alberta – in the Christmas publication there was a letter from you, and it states, "We have – and will continue – to support choice in education as well, whether students are learning in a bricks-and-mortar school or at home under the watchful eyes of their parents," and it goes on. That's great news.

Referring to page 50, Mr. Chair, that Alberta's students are successful . . .

Mr. Eggen: Page 50 of the business plan, yeah?

Mr. Rodney: Yeah. Let's face it. Integral to that is the fact that parents need to be part of this. They choose the right learning environment for their child's specific needs. Right in your opening remarks you referred to Bill 1. You know it. People have accused

you of pushing kids towards the public system with that bill and perhaps not to separate, charter, private, home, or other. What's your response to that?

Mr. Eggen: Well, you know, Bill 1's title really explains the circumstance, which is – it's An Act to Reduce School Fees, right? I mean, school fees: it's a pretty bumpy landscape out there. We have more than \$200 million worth of school fees being charged out, maybe even more – right? – in the province, so in a difficult economic circumstance I really knew that we needed to do something about reducing school fees and starting to rationalize and to review them in a systematic way. So we built a long-term budget to start redoing school fees next year, and I just thought that we really need more time to do the second component of Bill 1, which is to start to clean up and rationalize school fees as well.

Mr. Rodney: I know you know the criticism. People would say: "Hey, it's great that you're helping public school kids, but how about all the kids in the other systems?" Isn't it discriminatory against those in charter, private, home, or other systems?

Mr. Eggen: Well, I mean, it's An Act to Reduce School Fees, right? I was looking for a way by which I could cover off with limited funds, because it was very difficult to get the 50-some million dollars together to reduce fees, the most people, so that's the choice that I made.

You know, I think that it helps us to open the door on discussions about how we can further reduce school fees in the future. I'm fully supportive of trying to do that and including everybody at the table to further reduce school fees and do it in a rational way. This is a point in time in history, a point in time that I'll always remember because it's a pretty good bill, right? As part of Bill 1 we will communicate and interact with our school partners to further reduce school fees over time.

Mr. Rodney: Now, when you say that it's a pretty good bill – of course, it's going to have unanimous support, I expect, in the House – Minister, you're not blind to the fact that many people say that you're really taking money out of one pocket and putting it in the other except that you're keeping a whole bunch in the meantime. In other words, it's simply a shell game. I've heard from all sorts of parents that they're actually going to be paying for these fees for the rest of their lives through their taxes, so there's really no saving of money. They're being bribed with their own money. What is your response to that? That's pretty harsh criticism.

4:50

Mr. Eggen: Well, I think it comes from your mouth more than anybody else, right?

Mr. Rodney: Really? Minister, I beg to disagree, and I'm quite offended by that comment. I get comments like that every day.

The Chair: I'll warn all the members around decorum, including the Minister, in relation to this. Can you get back to the question at hand, please.

Mr. Rodney: Yeah. What do you respond to parents who say, "Well, listen, it's really nice that you've got \$54 million to reduce student fees, but the fact of the matter is that taxes are going through the roof, and that's how we're paying for it for the rest of our lives, and you're bribing us with our own money"? How do you respond to folks who would level that claim?

Mr. Eggen: Well, I mean, certainly, this is not a shell game because we are paying for the reduction in school fees through very careful reductions and savings in my department, that we worked very hard on, and in other places, too. I mean, it is a way to focus where, I think, things are the most important, right?

During an economic downturn I think it's very important for us to look for ways by which to provide some relief to families. In the two previous Septembers that I have been the Minister of Education, I saw that during that month there were all kinds of school fees happening. Usually it became quite a difficult time for a lot of families, especially if you had more than one kid in school. I thought: well, what we need to do is to try to reduce school fees here in the province of Alberta. You know, we worked very hard to do so, and I think that we touched on something that was very meaningful and will prove to be quite popular in the fall. I know that you make difficult decisions as a government, and I think one of them is to make sure that you are trying to ease the burden and make life more affordable.

Mr. Rodney: Minister, don't get me wrong. It is popular amongst a certain section of society, and some people are thinking, "Hey, this is a good break for me." Other people have the opinion that I was telling.

Minister, I know that you're also not deaf to certain school boards. I know that you've heard a number of school boards saying: hey, you never consulted me about this, and I have a lot of questions, and I'm not totally convinced of this.

Also, when it comes to schools, I've had people come up to me and say, "Hey, lookit, we're restricted by this bill in terms of what extra fees we can charge," and they're saying, "Look, maybe it's unintended consequences." I don't know about you; I've always detested the term because that usually means someone hasn't done enough planning. Anyway, they're saying that often it limits program choice because the community may want the school to offer a specific program, but without the ability to charge fees, the school simply can't afford it.

So the question really is this, through the Chair, Minister: how is the minister ensuring that, you know, there's work going on with school boards to address these concerns and ensure that schools are able to offer the best quality and broadest range of programs to meet the needs of that community they happen to be located within?

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. That's a good question, right?

Mr. Rodney: Thank you.

Mr. Eggen: The other ones are okay. That one is even a little bit better.

Mr. Rodney: Looking forward to a good answer.

Mr. Eggen: I mean, it's important to recognize that schools do charge fees to offer a whole universe of different programming, right? You might have, you know, a performance athletic school that has kids travelling around to different parts of Canada. You don't want to stop or reduce any of the opportunity for schools to do that, too.

Again, we looked long and hard for places where there was some common feature of school fees that we could reduce. I know, again, being very honest, that some school boards worked really hard to reduce their school fees before we even engaged in this enterprise, so I realize that the equity across the province is not going to be the same for a lot, right? But as we work to rationalize school fees and still have choice available to school boards as to what they charge for that core – I don't like calling it basic because it sounds like

basic cable. You know, you don't get all the channels that you want. But it's those core courses – right? – that people need to graduate and to get a good education that we want to reduce school fees on in a basic way.

You know, I mean, we consulted with the school boards really very fulsomely, with the Alberta School Boards Association and with the superintendents and so forth. I mean, I know that it does cause them some reflection as well, but I also believe that it will help them ultimately because their reason for existing in the first place is to provide good-quality education for kids and to make sure that the access is available to everybody. By reducing school fees, we will cover off each of those basic mandates.

Mr. Rodney: Well, you mentioned school boards, and I'll have questions about them later.

But I'll finish off this section right here with a couple of these questions. I'm wondering, Mr. Chair, what the minister is doing, with his department, of course, to support new charter schools along with charter schools that wish to expand their existing facilities. Here's why. So many times – I'm sure you've seen it – a new charter school comes into existence because there's a need, there's a desire, and they make everything better for the people in their community, and often these ideas are so good that they're actually adopted by public school boards. I'm not even going to talk about a monopoly of schooling or anything like that, but I guess I hope that no one in Alberta is afraid of – I wouldn't call it competition. It's just, you know, that we don't live in a cookie-cutter world. So, Minister, what are you doing to help out with new charter schools or charter schools who are hoping to expand their existing facilities or programs?

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. I mean, well, obviously, at the core we increased funding for enrolment for all forms of schooling in the province of Alberta, for public schools, which includes the Catholic schools, and for charter schools and for private schools and for home-schooling based funding as well. That was, you know, a pretty solid telegraphing that we're carrying on with the diversity and the choice, like you say, that we do have, which is a strength in our school systems.

I have, during my two years as the Minister of Education, extended charters for some schools as well that have come across my desk. We still have the mechanism in place for people to make new charter applications for schools – I've had a couple of those, right? – and I apply within my ministry the regulation around the starting of new charter schools, which is that it provides some innovation that is maybe not around in the existing system, and then they do work for us to try to expand innovation throughout the whole system.

I don't think I've done anything that would suggest otherwise, that these charters, like – I don't know. I'm thinking that Westmount is one, that I extended their charter, and they provided very fulsome and interesting innovation and feedback that helps us to improve education generally.

Mr. Rodney: Sure. And, Minister, I guess, through the chair, all these questions have been related to page 50 of the business plan, outcome 1, Alberta students are successful. I know you're probably tired of the question, wherever it comes from . . .

Mr. Eggen: No, no.

Mr. Rodney: . . . but would you say that what you just said would be another public statement – and I don't want to put words in your mouth; I'd rather hear it from you – that those folks, you know, parents who choose to send their child and the child who wants to

go to either charter or private or home or other, shouldn't be shaking in their boots, that funding isn't just for public or separate, that you're actually going to not only make sure that these groups survive but they thrive, and they're not going to be shut down in any way.

Mr. Eggen: No, not at all. Charters are, I know, in a pretty healthy financial position in general. You know, I guess – this just in, a bulletin: I approved three charters for 15-year extension terms. That was nice, right? The funding for enrolment was a big deal because, again, it was during financial difficulties, and I was even surprised that I was backed up by my caucus and cabinet and Premier three times now to make sure that we get full funding for all forms of education, for increasing enrolment. You have to go with your strengths. I mean, yeah, I like to see innovation and creative thinking in all forms of our education systems, and I demand that from Calgary public as well as the charters and everybody in between.

5:00

Mr. Rodney: I'm sure it applies to all stakeholders, whether it's students or teachers or administrators or otherwise. That's why I'd like to move on to page 54 of the business plan if we could, Minister.

Mr. Eggen: Which page? Sorry.

Mr. Rodney: Outcome 4, that Alberta has excellent teachers and school authority leaders. For those folks beyond these walls who might happen to be tuning in today, I want to preface these comments because there's a little bit of hardball here, Minister, not towards you in particular, but it's a tough issue that I'm going to be addressing here. I think we all know – and this isn't just lip service. I've worked with some of these people, some of the best educators in Canada. They've been recognized nationally and beyond. They have great intentions coming to work every day. They have been involved with incredible professional development, not just getting their degree or degrees but as they continue on through their teaching years. But let's face it. There are thousands and thousands of Albertans who are employed as educators, and some struggle for one reason or another or another.

So this is with the best interest of the child in mind. Can you tell us about the retraining process for any teachers who have been identified as needing improvement? Has there been any amelioration of that situation? Because let's face it. It's one thing to receive your evaluation that says: needs improvement, this, that, or the other. What's actually happening so that we can help these educators help our kids more, quicker, better?

Mr. Eggen: We always have to make sure that we're not just hoping that people engage in professional development, but we compel them to do so. I believe that the new teacher quality standard and the principal and superintendent quality standard are going to really start to formalize that in our schools and across our postsecondary institutions, too. I mean, it's setting standards and expectations for professional development in a more formalized sort of way. We're going to be able to quantify that if that's what you're kind of suggesting.

Mr. Rodney: Minister, I'm encouraging you and supporting you in that. As you know, with the terminology I don't refer to myself as shadow minister or critic. I'm an advocate. I think we're doing the same thing together. We want what's best for, actually, the teachers themselves as well as the students. So along those lines, could you give us the number of teachers within the public and Catholic

school systems who have had the unfortunate circumstance of having their contract terminated within the last year because of a problem with teaching – perhaps their ability to teach was deemed inadequate – and the number of teachers whose contracts were terminated for professional misconduct?

Mr. Eggen: I'll be glad to get that for you. I don't have it handy on me.

Mr. Rodney: You don't have it handy? Okay. We'll move on to the next one. I look forward to that response.

Now, our new president of the ATA is hoping the organization will have the ability to grant and revoke certification for teachers. That would obviously consolidate greater control within the ATA. Can you tell Albertans: have you been approached on this issue, and what do you think of their request? Will you be supporting it?

Mr. Eggen: No, I haven't, you know, save for that one article that I saw in the paper, probably just like the one you read. I've had no formal engagement with the ATA on this matter. I mean, we always work closely with them on some of these things, but it's important for the province to have some position on certification and so forth, too, right? We've had no thoughts about this, that we would consider doing that. I'm not sure what the ATA has in mind, but they have not approached me in this regard, nor am I considering anything in that regard.

Mr. Rodney: Okay. No problem.

Again, Chair, this set of questions – I kind of grouped them – has to do with outcome 4. The next question then, Minister. In conjunction with our respective teaching programs at postsecondary institutions across Alberta, what's the ministry doing to attract and retain younger teachers within the rural school boards? Because – let's face it – we probably both know many young graduates who struggle on a substitute list for years before getting a permanent placement in Edmonton or Calgary or other urban places when there are generally opportunities available in rural areas. Maybe I'll ask this further question in the same vein: is attraction and retention of teachers meeting your expectations?

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. I see it as a teacher myself, right? One of the big concerns that I have – and it's totally anecdotal – is that you have very excellent young teachers in the system now. I mean, the standard has gone up for sure. Those same teachers are considering, you know, after five years not sticking around. I think that just points to a huge problem.

The Chair: My apologies for interrupting.

Mr. Rodney: That was my next question about five, 10, and 20 years. We'll get back to that later.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. Sure. We can loop it around.

Thank you, for your . . .

Mr. Rodney: Unless maybe someone wants to offer some time.

The Chair: First, Mr. Rodney, would you mind tabling in the House tomorrow the document that you referred to as well?

Mr. Rodney: Which one are you referring to?

The Chair: The one you referred to at the introduction.

Mr. Rodney: Oh, absolutely. Yeah.

The Chair: Excellent.

Mr. Rodney: Yeah. I've got it right here.

The Chair: Perfect.

We'll proceed to our five-minute break and resume at 11 after.

[The committee adjourned from 5:05 p.m. to 5:11 p.m.]

The Chair: All right. Hon. members, I'd like to call this meeting back to order.

We're now going to move to the government members' questions. Mr. Coolahan, would you like to share your time with the minister?

Mr. Coolahan: I would like to share my time with the minister if that pleases the minister.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. You betcha.

The Chair: All right. Please proceed.

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Chair. Minister, key strategy 5.6, about reduction of school fees: what are the plans moving forward on this? I know we've heard a bit about it, but maybe you could elaborate on this for me, please.

Mr. Eggen: Sure. You know that we have Bill 1. We've had a lot of good support for it, and I thank people. Constructive criticism is good, too, right? I mean, this was a hard file to take on, quite frankly, because people were charging all kinds of different fees all over the place, and it was really starting to add up for some families. It's the beginning of a way to rationalize school fees here in the province of Alberta. It's going to take some time, and there will be some bumpy spots. I know that when I go to some specific school boards, they say: look, we tried so hard to reduce our school fees over the last five years, and some of these other guys didn't do it, and now we're all being thrown together. Well, yeah. I know that doesn't necessarily feel great, but it's the beginning of a way to start to rationalize things over time.

For the parents and the kids in a specific school board the comparison from school board A to school board B doesn't figure into when they're writing the cheque. They're just, you know, writing that cheque to read: school fees. So if we can bring that down, then I believe that over time we are doing the right thing.

You know, we're eliminating fees for instructional supplies and materials. Even that definition is not that easy to achieve – right? – because people have different definitions of that. We are targeting, for example, the elimination of fees charged to an entire student body or grade cohort, so it may be that all of the grade 11s have a certain fee. Those are good ones to aim at.

The transportation fee one. Again, you know, it's not a perfect thing. I mean, what I was aiming at was that let's say, for example – you're from Calgary, right?

Mr. Coolahan: Yes.

Mr. Eggen: You have a situation where a family might live in a new area where their new school went up, but there are so many kids in the area that they do a lottery for who gets to go to which school. You could lose the lottery to go to the school right in front of you, right across the street. Instead you'd have to take a bus 20 minutes away, and you would have to pay \$400 to ride that bus. I thought this was a great place to start to reduce school fees, to eliminate it for kids being bused to their designated school.

I mean, I'm not afraid to touch on the controversial bits here, you know. What about the person who wants to go to the French immersion school or the Italian school across town? How come

they're not getting their bus fees eliminated? Well, you know, I had to just draw a spot, right? So I aimed for that one because I saw 145,000 people in that definition of reducing bus fees. That's pretty good. Does it cover everybody's bus fees? No. It's An Act to Reduce School Fees. That's kind of the definition that I did aim at. Over time we might seek to further reduce school fees.

Sorry. We're sharing time, so why am I talking so much?

Mr. Coolahan: That's okay. I know there's a lot to answer there. I am acutely aware of those issues you're talking about in Calgary as well.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah.

Mr. Coolahan: You know, I think a lot of us who ran to become elected officials did so because we want a say in what happens in our lives. I think that's what parents and school boards want in this. How can parents and school boards be involved in this discussion?

Mr. Eggen: Well, we are setting up a way by which we can talk to people about this, right? We know that we want to have it reflect what specific needs are on the ground. Like, we can make analyses. I've got people that are really good at doing statistical analyses. If we can get information from individuals, that can really help us as well.

In advance of the 2018-19 school year we will explore options for regulating other school fees should that be what we need to do and if we have, you know, the money to do so as well, right? We could include maybe – for example, another big one is lunch hour supervision. That could be a big problem for people, and there's, again, a whole landscape of different ways by which school boards have approached lunchroom supervision. Maybe we can talk about that and so forth.

We will have an engagement process by which we will further talk to school boards about how this is going for them and make adjustments so that we don't – MLA Rodney mentioned about not losing choices that people might want to make. They might want to take some extra programming or have a trip to Toronto or something like that, right? We also want to make sure that parents are engaged, too, because they're the ones who are writing the cheques.

You know, sometimes when I've been doing this Bill 1, An Act to Reduce School Fees, I got constructive criticism and sometimes quite aggressive constructive criticism from school boards and so forth. Then I remind myself that we're doing this for the parents and for the kids, right? I mean, I know it's annoying to have to change the system that you've been using for a number of years, but if you are going to actually realize reductions and savings for people and for families, then we're going to have to make those adjustments. It's been inconvenient for us, too, to try to figure out how to do it. We've all aged a little bit as a result, but it's worth it because we'll put \$54 million back into families' pockets here in September. It's a good mission to aim for.

Mr. Coolahan: Agreed. Thank you.

I'm going to just quote from page 53 of the business plan here. It states:

An inclusive education system is established when the system anticipates and values diversity, understands learners' strengths and needs, and reduces barriers to promote a culture of well-being through effective and meaningful collaboration with partners.

Given how important GSAs are for the safety and academic success of traditionally marginalized students, what supports have you put in place to ensure a safe and caring school for all children?

Mr. Eggen: Well, thanks. I appreciate that question. You know, again, you can sometimes watch this unfolding in the news, right? I believe that we have made some progress in regard to doing this. You'll see that globally we do have a \$451 million budget for inclusive education in this school year coming up, and that's an increase of about 3 per cent. We do have an inclusive education advisory committee as well, which helps us with these things.

Now, in regard to building a good environment to support the gay-straight alliances in schools across the province, which is part of a provincial law – right? – we have been working very closely with school boards to build policy and to build guidelines that not just conform to the law but conform to the spirit of supporting vulnerable kids in these circumstances. You know, sometimes I talk about this so much in my office and in the news and things like that that I forget about it on the ground. Last week I went to a GSA at a high school, Eastglen, and it just reminded me once again of how fragile – the kids need support, and they go to the GSA as a safe place to be. Again it reminded about how it's important to retain the integrity of that safe place in the school, and it reminded me as well that it's an alliance thing, too. It's a gay-straight alliance, so there are kids that go there to support their friends and to support maybe family members or whatever, to be there together and show their solidarity for the cause of equality and social justice for students in the LGBTQ community. And then there are teachers there, too, right?

5:20

I mean, we've come a long way. We've made progress here in the province, but it's all really quite fragile on a local school level right now and then still moving out. But when you think about what we've been through in the last two years, we've made tremendous progress, right? I've learned a lot, and I'm an older person that has difficulty learning new things. I can only imagine, you know, how we've moved people along toward understanding and caring for marginalized members of our society in our schools and creating a safe and caring environment for all of them. So I'm cautiously optimistic. Certainly, we are building supports within our budgets for inclusive education generally and GSA support specifically.

Mr. Coolahan: Great. I've learned a lot on this file, too.

If I could just ask a supplementary question to that. When you started investigating this and moving forward with the GSAs and schools did, was Alberta behind other jurisdictions on this?

Mr. Eggen: It was a bit of a patchwork, for sure. I mean, you can learn from other provinces. Like, B.C. seemed to be a little bit further down the road and so forth. In other ways we were kind of getting up to speed with and surpassing even some other provinces, too. I think I'm proud of the progress that we've made. I know that it's sort of like good things are sometimes born sort of phoenixlike from the fires of, you know, difficulties, right? But I'm starting to see people's minds turning and changing over time. I'm at heart an educator, and I believe that we don't just educate K to 12 Albertans in this ministry; we help to educate everybody. I think that in this endeavour, building curriculum and building understanding about safe and caring schools for LGBTQ kids, we are in the business of educating everybody.

Mr. Coolahan: Great. Thank you for that.

I'm just going to move to the curriculum review right now if that's all right.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah.

Mr. Coolahan: You've announced over the next six years putting greater emphasis on literacy and numeracy, as detailed in the strategic section on page 49 of the business plan. How does the curriculum put greater emphasis on literacy and numeracy?

Mr. Eggen: Well, we're still building the curriculum. I mean, I'm not going to sit around and wait for six years for the curriculum to be updated, right? We're doing work all along the way. Like, I had ordered to track the mathematics curriculum for scope and sequence of concepts from K to 12 with the existing curriculum so that we could look at where you go from basic numeracy and adding and subtracting and then times tables and quadratic equations and algebra, you know, and looking for each of those concepts building through the 13 levels of education that we provide. We're already doing that, you know.

That being said, the emphasis on literacy and numeracy in the new curriculum will be very strong and very deeply rooted. We saw the survey results from the fall come out just last week. It was crystal clear that people wanted to focus on these two things, and quite frankly I concur with that. I mean, I'm not – well, I'm the minister, I guess. I defer to the expertise of people to build good curriculum, but I know what some of those outcomes have to be, right? And in a 21st-century world where you have content galore – like, Brad has his personal device here, and he's looking at hockey scores, whatever.

Mr. Smith: No, no.

Mr. Eggen: For us to be able to process that information in a systematic way, using strong numeracy and literacy and communication skills: that's the ticket for our next generation of children, for them to be well equipped for the rest of their lives. I mean, who knows where the economy will go over the next 30, 40 years? It'll still be a strong energy economy, for sure, in Alberta, but the kids will have all kinds of new expectations. I think that just focusing on these basic concepts and infusing them in all of the subject areas is really important, too, right? It's not just like math class, and then you get out, and you're not doing math anymore. You build it strongly into each of the subject areas. That's the ticket.

You know, we are always studying other jurisdictions around the world to make sure that we're staying up to the expectation that we do reside in now. I mean, in Alberta, whatever you think of PISA scores and all that kind of stuff, we do very well in certain areas, and we are constantly looking and borrowing best practices from other jurisdictions to ensure that it stays strong.

Mr. Coolahan: Excellent. Just supplemental to that, what was the participation rate on that review? I can't remember what the numbers were.

Mr. Eggen: Oh, the curriculum review that we had this last round? There were 32,000 people who participated overall, and we had 25,000 people complete part B, which was quite comprehensive, so I was pretty happy about that. You know, we're building the new one now. We'll put it out here in the next while. It will be sometimes a little more specific, but people don't have to do the whole thing. They can just focus on what area they might be interested in, and then away they go, right? In every part of both surveys we invite commentary as well. We're not just steering people to some outcome, like somebody in the newspaper tried to suggest today. It's not true at all. I mean, we're gathering information in a systematic way, and it's coming out great.

Sometimes you get unintended consequences; for example, that I as a teacher of English literature and Shakespeare for the last 20 years would somehow have my name attached to the elimination of

Shakespeare in the Alberta curriculum. I found that really ruined my Saturday. It was because people could make comments straight out, right? They could fill in whatever they wanted, so if 50 people said that they wanted to get rid of Shakespeare, then somehow that turned out to be a headline in the newspaper, which caused me some anxiety.

Mr. Coolahan: Minister, as an English major, too, that really hurt my feelings as well.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah, I'm pretty sure it hurt my feelings, too.

No, we're not taking Shakespeare out of the curriculum. It's not going to happen.

Mr. Coolahan: Well, thank you for that.

Those are very high numbers. I think they're even higher than the daylight saving time input.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah, probably. I mean, I was compelling. At every single place, at all the teachers' conventions I said: fill this thing out. We're not just doing this as a public relations exercise. We really need to know where to go, right? For anything you do in governance you have to have public support. Otherwise, it's like driving on four flat tires. With curriculum we have to have public support every step of the way.

Mr. Coolahan: Great. I agree.

I'm just going to stick to the curriculum review topic for a second here. How will it help implement government commitments to the United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission?

Mr. Eggen: Yeah, that's a good question, for sure. We are building some very strong elements into the curriculum and into our commitments to the TRC. I've signed an agreement with the truth and reconciliation institute in Winnipeg, Manitoba, to ensure that we have professional development training for all education workers over the next three years here in the province of Alberta so that everyone has training and sensitivity training around the findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the report. We are reaching out to all education workers – right? – including administration and support staff and teachers and so forth. I mean, that's a big deal. I think that we will see some benefits from that.

You know, we are building curriculum as well – right? – and working closely with our First Nations, Métis, and Inuit partners to develop meaningful curriculum for Alberta schools. This is curriculum for everybody. It's not First Nations curriculum for people in Lubicon Lake. It's First Nations curriculum for everybody to consume and learn the collective history that we share as a province and a nation.

5:30

Yeah. We're doing a lot of work on it. I can say, again being frank, that it's not easy to do because we're dealing from a position where historically there's been a lot of distrust and a lot of very difficult circumstances – right? – that took place with First Nations people and education. I mean, that's the convergent point right there; it's, like, residential schools. You know, First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students and families have, quite justified, some cynical feelings about education based on that history of residential schools, so there's a lot of work to be done. But I also know as a teacher that you can get the greatest gains and improvement from aiming at where you have the room . . .

The Chair: I apologize for interrupting. The time allotted for the government caucus is concluded.

As a clarification on Mr. Rodney's earlier comment, there is no citation for a point of humour.

Mr. Rodney: Are we allowed to have a sense of humour? I hope so.

The Chair: We'll now move back to the Wildrose caucus. Would you like to share your time with the minister?

Mrs. Aheer: Yes, please, if that's all right with the minister. Thank you, Chair.

I'm going to take us back, Minister, back to math. There's obviously been a ton of controversy over the best way to teach math. We need to know the direction that the expert math group is taking with respect to the pedagogy, especially because it sounds like the whole thing is going to see some major changes here. I think that I asked this question previously, but I'll jump in again with the same question just to get us back on track. I was asking questions about the resources that were being developed to support student learning in math. I think that's kind of where we left off. You were just answering me at that point. I don't know if you remember.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. I got it. You know, I'm not waiting for the curriculum to be developed for six years before we do make revisions. For example, when we just got our last international test scores, I chose that as a moment to announce some of the revisions that we did straight away. I won't necessarily go into those again, but there was the no calculator part of the PATs – right? – the written portion of math 30-1, 30-2, and then the bursary program for math teachers to go back to school or for student teachers to learn from the universities about the specific pedagogy of teaching mathematics.

As we move forward with building the curriculum – you know, I did have a math focus group, and they came to very similar conclusions that other people did, too. They were mostly postsecondary math teachers from colleges and universities, and they said that a lot of the kids weren't strong in their basic math skills to function at a postsecondary level in terms of their algebra especially and so forth. That's part of the reason why I did the scope on the existing math curriculum.

Mrs. Aheer: Yeah. You mentioned that.

Mr. Eggen: We did a scope and sequence from K to 12 to say where each of the concepts should be learned. It gives the parents a good sense as well. You know, if you're in grade 3, the kids should learn the times tables or whatever. Now they can be sort of measuring where they are. Because they'll say, "Well, your kid is two grades behind in English" – right? – but do they have a mechanism by which they can do that for math? That's kind of where I was thinking.

Mrs. Aheer: That was why you did the scope?

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. That's part of the reason I did it, for sure.

Mrs. Aheer: Is that part of line 2.7?

Mr. Eggen: No. No. Where did we put that one? Wendy will tell us in a moment.

Mrs. Aheer: Okay.

Mr. Eggen: Now we are building the curriculum working tables, have been building scope and sequence for the new curriculum. You know, we will have that available for people here coming up in the next couple of months as well.

Mrs. Aheer: Okay. You had also mentioned about bursaries for teachers to go back and get some extra help, I'm assuming, with math and teaching math. What line item is that? Is that 2.7 as well? Could you break that one down for me?

Mr. Eggen: I will get that to you shortly.

Mrs. Aheer: I think you'd actually done it in a press release briefly, but I'd like a little bit more information.

Mr. Eggen: That's right. I think it was a million dollars for that bursary.

Mrs. Aheer: I think it was based on the number of teachers, actually, if I remember correctly.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. That's right. Two thousand dollars per person.

Mrs. Aheer: How many teachers does that allow for within the million dollars? Is the million dollars that \$2,000 per teacher? Is that approximately the math?

Mr. Eggen: That's right.

Mrs. Aheer: Okay. I just wanted to bring in one of the people that really impacted me through this process and even previous to my being elected, Dr. Nhung Tran-Davies. I mean, we all know what a brilliant woman she is and what she's contributed as far as bringing information forward from stakeholders and from parents. I was just curious. Is she participating in that professional working group, with adjusting math outcomes? She'd be an excellent choice.

Mr. Eggen: I can check to see. I mean, I think that she might have been making a presentation in the next round of presentations.

Mrs. Aheer: I'd love to know about that.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. I mean, let me say right now that her advocacy around mathematics really hit a chord that helped to move things along, like, before I became the minister, right?

Mrs. Aheer: It sure did. Yes.

Mr. Eggen: I mean, I could see it. It was an organic thing, you know, and it was real. I remember when my kids were little as well, and we thought: we'd better do some extra math here. It seemed to be the thing that was steady because they were reasonably smart kids, and they weren't doing as well in math. It was sort of an anecdotal feeling in the province here for quite a few years. She helped to consolidate that, and the direct action that we are now taking is part of that, quite frankly. We know that we have a lot of expertise in the province that we can tap into, and we will be building public meetings for presentations that will take place.

We have indeed offered to meet with her, so there you go.

Mrs. Aheer: Oh, good.

Mr. Eggen: And I did meet with her when I first became the minister.

Mrs. Aheer: Right. Yeah. I knew that.

Mr. Eggen: You know, we will have these public presentation opportunities available, too. It's not like the curriculum working tables are some kind of magic place, right?

Mrs. Aheer: Really?

Mr. Eggen: No. It's not. Their work will become very obvious, and we will be cycling it out all the time because we need to see how legitimate it is, too – right? – and we need to see how functional it is.

Mrs. Aheer: And concerns over standard algorithms, right? That was really her key input over that information.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. For sure. I don't discount anyone. I mean, I was an advocate – I am still, right? – for a person who works hard to improve the circumstances in our society generally and for a specific important skill for children. I think that's something to be recognized.

Mrs. Aheer: Anecdotally, I can also say that I did the times tables with my kids at home with the table. Even in my brain I can still remember being in grade 3 with my teacher and going over times tables and doing the dots on the pages.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. Me, too.

Mrs. Aheer: My oldest son, who's been accepted conditionally to two universities, can't get in without his math marks, so he's working like a crazy person right now to try and get his math. This is an opera program – this is music – and he's required to have at least close to an 80. They'll probably take him with under that, but from a personal perspective, you know, I can't begin to explain how important it is that these kids are getting these skills. It is required of them to get into these schools. He's on hold right now without this math mark, and he is just putting everything he's got into it. But it's going to be up to – I don't know – the math elves.

Mr. Eggen: Well, you bring up an interesting point. I mean, we want to improve our students' math skills, to see those reflected in test outcomes or whatever, but I believe as well that as a society we need to redouble the value that those skills have as being a member of our society, right? It's not like, "Oh, I've got to do my math," and it's like taking cod-liver oil or something. It's a valuable, integral part of being a well-educated person in our society.

5:40

Mrs. Aheer: I agree. I think there's an entire change of mental space that has to go around that.

The whole reason I brought that up is that I think that Dr. Nhung Tran-Davies really actually brought that movement to the forefront, like you were saying, so if we can jump on that and really, really encourage especially our young teachers that are coming into the system, to make sure they feel comfortable to do that, too. That's a really big deal, that they feel not only the competencies but really confident.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. You're right. I mean, again, I don't have empirical evidence to back this up, but I've got a feeling that for a lot of especially elementary teachers, you know, math is not their major and their forte. You teach all the kids all day in all of the subjects – right? – so if maybe math is not your strongest suit, then maybe you don't do that as much. And it's not out of bad intentions.

Mrs. Aheer: Exactly. But, again, if it's part of advanced ed and that's the expectation, then you're going to elevate those teachers

right from the get-go, in my opinion, right? You spoke about it, early childhood and the supports. You were talking about elementary school math and getting them engaged at that time. Within the curriculum rewrite or even now – you said you're not just going to wait for the redesign – are you offering help with the main goal of using mathematics confidently to problem solve at that age, in younger, you know, in the developmental stages of math? There are many teachers that will use life skills and daily things, gardening, whatever it is, to bring in measurements and math and make it meaningful. How are you bringing that in right now, and are there line items in the budget that . . . [A timer sounded] Oh, my goodness gracious. That is crazy fast.

Mr. Eggen: We can go right back to that spot again.

Mrs. Aheer: Okay. Back to math.

The Chair: We will be moving to the PC caucus for 10 minutes. Would you like to continue sharing your time with the minister?

Mr. Rodney: Yes.

The Chair: Please proceed.

Mr. Rodney: Minister, where we left off earlier was the question regarding postsecondary education. Specifically, you were about to answer this: what's your ministry doing in conjunction with our respective teaching programs at PSEs across Alberta to attract and retain younger teachers within rural school boards?

I have kind of a supplementary, and I bet you can answer this all at the same time. Is attraction and retention of teachers meeting ministry expectations? Does your ministry collect statistics on the number of teachers who are actually teaching somewhere in Alberta five, 10, and 20 years down the line after graduating? Also, does your ministry collect statistics on the number of individuals who graduate with a teaching degree but actually never end up teaching because they end up somewhere else?

Mr. Eggen: Well, to your first point, we do have some bursary programs that I'm looking to buttress – it's not in this budget – northern school boards and rural school boards as well. Young teachers need to get that experience and to utilize their degree within the first couple of years, I believe. I mean, as a teacher I took that as a way, the theory of how I ran my career, and I went to the rural place to get a job, right?

Now, we know that in order to attract people to go and stay in a rural area, you need to have the facilities in place and supports in place, too. Again, I'll use Northland because we have Bill 6 up on the Order Paper now. I believe that a key to the success of the Northland school division will be the retention and training of teachers, especially First Nations teachers that might come from those communities.

I was up in High Prairie a few months ago, and the few First Nations teachers that had been from Sucker Creek, you know, or one of the three places around there and then came back to teach were like gold. Literally, people were in a bidding war, like with Connor McDavid, to get them to teach at their school, right? They were modelling positive behaviours for the kids, and they spoke Cree. They went back to their community, and like holy smokes. So the degree to which we can value that in our budgets I think is really important.

We have made a commitment to the Northland school division to the reinstatement of democracy in that board but also to increasing funding to that school board by 20 per cent, right? Hopefully, that will help to put some lifeblood in there. You know, when you get a

good example of a good example, perhaps Northland will provide us with a template for other boards in rural areas that can help us to increase graduation rates and attendance rates, too. Those are the measurements I use. I use graduation rates and attendance rates and say: okay; is that it? That's where I go from there.

Do I have statistics on graduates and so forth? I will look to see if we do have those.

Mr. Rodney: This is going back a while, and we could have some smart-aleck comments from the other side. I wouldn't blame you. It's been a long time since I was in a classroom teaching. I can tell you, honestly, that when I first moved to Alberta, right after the Olympics in '88, it was a big concern then, and I know it's a big concern now. It's an ongoing thing, so obviously we collect these targets for a reason, and we've got to do something about it because, I mean – anyway, that's a whole other conversation. I look forward to it.

Mr. Eggen: The reality is that in some rural school boards their populations are going down, right? The population in Alberta is going up for kids, but some other ones are going down. So we need to be creative to build facilities and places to live for the teachers and so forth to meet the needs for now and then 20 years down the road.

You know, I made a point of, let's say, not in the north but building the new school in Irma, Alberta, which I think maybe has 600 people living there, maybe a little bit less. But it's a right size of a building of a school, so they'll have a brand new school. Maybe it's a little bit smaller, but then it can be a community hall, too, and a community centre because these schools, of course, are not just a place from 9 to 3 in the afternoon. They can be used for all kinds of stuff. By creating that kind of interest, I hope that maybe we can help with teacher retention, too, right? So the focus is on rightsizing schools and building some of the facilities and then even teacherages in the north so that there's a reasonably nice place for the teachers to stay.

Mr. Rodney: Thanks for that, Minister.

Now, also on page 54 of the business plan – I promised I'd come back to this – the reference to Alberta's education system being well governed and managed. Perhaps you've heard these concerns, as have I, about reduction in credit enrolment units, or CEUs, having a negative impact on smaller school boards. Then there are programs such as RAP and the green certificate that could be negatively impacted because these programs are funded by the small overages obtained by CEUs. Mr. Chair, given that key strategy 4.4 refers to introducing career and technology foundations programs, the question is: how are you ensuring the health of programs like RAP and green certificate in the face of CEU reductions, and will the reduction in the ability of schools to get certain fees impact the feasibility of programs like these? I guess that's the bottom line.

Mr. Eggen: That's a very good analysis. I do recognize that the CEU grant reduction does have an impact on some boards. Of course, the scenarios that you described are, yeah, often rural boards, so the green certification program and so forth might be jeopardized. First of all, let me say that globally, across the province, we've now hit a point where there are more schools in the high school redesign program than there are in the traditional credit programming. We've hit that sort of Rubicon, so the majority are not even running that system and wouldn't be affected.

You know, again, it wasn't easy because I really didn't want to cut grants when I was trying to look to save money so that I could do this school fee thing. With the CEUs the average number of

credits is, like, 37 units, I think. I thought that the reduction that we made wouldn't impact too many people who were still using that system. For those who are – the green certificate is a good example. I recognize the value of that, and I certainly will have an announcement very soon in regard to helping with that here. I don't want to scoop myself, right?

Mr. Rodney: No. That's okay. I look forward to an invitation to be there.

Mr. Eggen: We just completed a review on that, and we know that it will be valued by actions. Judge me by my actions.

RAP, another program that you mentioned – right? – is also being assessed right now. I believe in its value. You know, one of my kids did use that program. I believe that people can help us to assess the value of that, and that would be helpful.

So, yeah, I recognize that there are some boards that did feel a reduction as a result of the CEU funding decrease, but I'm hoping to mitigate that by speaking to them individually and trying to buttress some of their programming collectively.

5:50

Mr. Rodney: Well, speaking of boards and numbers, performance measure 5.5 states that you'll "monitor school boards with reserves over five per cent of their operating expenses." Can you bring Albertans up to date in terms of which school boards are on your radar in terms of exceeding this number? Minister, we both know this varies wildly, with some boards having little to no reserves and others having an extraordinary amount of money being tucked away.

Mr. Eggen: Yes. I do recognize that, and we have to just remind ourselves where that reserve fund comes from in the first place. You know, we've been funding schools on a per-student funding mechanism for quite a few years now – right? – and that's where they're getting it from, somehow. We give them so much per kid, and then somehow the reserves, you know – I think it's not unreasonable to have some reserve in place for whatever contingency . . .

Mr. Rodney: Sure. But can you identify certain places that are on your radar?

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. Exactly. You know, I don't want to prejudice the overall circumstance because, of course, if we say anything that would suggest a run on reserves, they can spend them all. So I have no plan for anything at the moment, right?

Mr. Rodney: Okay. Then let's switch gears, because I know what you're saying. As long as Albertans are aware of this and that something needs to be done . . .

Mr. Eggen: Well, they do. People are very aware that those reserves are there, and I want people to use it.

The Chair: Hon. members, I apologize to interrupt. Time allotted has expired for the PC caucus.

We'll now move back to the ND one. Member Connolly, would you like to share your time with the minister?

Connolly: Yes, please.

The Chair: All right. Please proceed.

Connolly: All right. Well, thank you very much, Minister. Just to start, I'd like to talk about outcome 1 in the business plan . . .

Mr. Eggen: Okay. Hang on.

Connolly: Perfect.

. . . starting with key strategy 1.1, where it talks a bit about continuing to implement a guiding framework to develop future curriculum, and then it names many subjects as well as understandings of First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and francophone perspectives and experiences. I actually found this quite interesting. I know that for myself I was in French immersion, so I was lucky to have a lot of my teachers being francophone or from Quebec or Ontario or New Brunswick. I was able to get a lot more of those francophone perspectives compared to a lot of my colleagues in the English programs. I found that invaluable in reality because we don't just learn about how the English interacted with First Nations here in Alberta and all across the country but also how the francophones really started in Quebec and moved across and were, really, the first people here and were the first people in Alberta and many parts of the nation other than the FNMI people.

I know that in, I think, the grade 11 or 12 curriculum in their textbook the subject is nationalism. I think it's in chapter 1 that the francophone textbook is different than the English textbook.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. I'm sure it is.

Connolly: I know we talked about manifest destiny when we talked about nationalism; however, in the English program it wasn't even in the textbook. It was a very small blurb, but it was quite interesting because, from what I understand, being in French immersion, half of your teachers also designed the curriculum because there were so few francophone teachers. He said that he actually put that in there even though it wasn't in the English textbook, because the English textbook was designed before the francophone textbook. I believe that was the way it was before, but now we're changing it up and having it developed at the exact same time.

Mr. Eggen: Yes.

Connolly: My real question is: how does the new curriculum really support francophone education to make sure that we get that different perspective as well as French language arts, whether that be in francophone schools or French immersion schools, as is detailed in outcome 1?

Mr. Eggen: Okay. Well, thank you. Certainly, we're pretty proud of how we're approaching curriculum in terms of francophone education. For the first time the curriculum will be developed simultaneously in both French and English and supported on that same digital platform that we talked about before.

I mean, I think it's about time – right? – that this did happen. We know, first of all, that our francophone population is growing by leaps and bounds here in the province of Alberta. There are now, self-reporting, more than 235,000 francophone speakers here in the province of Alberta and growing quite quickly, where I think we're, like, the third- or fourth-biggest population of that language in Canada.

We also know that the value of a bilingual education or a francophone education is demonstrable, right? You know that if kids go to a francophone school, it's not as though they're compromising their Anglo skills. I mean, I've had them track to see that francophone students exceed the performance in English 30 as well. So, obviously, it's probably working out. I don't know exactly why that might be, but it's not as though you're compromising your child's education by having that francophone option there.

It's, you know, about high time. I mean, French is not just another language. It's the official language of our country, right? So it was

about time that we recognized it as such, and we believe that we will see lots of positive outcomes from strengthening, really, a bilingual education program because I think that almost all of our francophone students will be excelling or having high competence in both official languages.

Yeah. We'll have it there. It's in the new curriculum. We're developing these two languages simultaneously, and I believe that we'll have lots of unexpected positive consequences from doing that.

Connolly: Excellent. Thanks. I know just from my work in the francophone community as well with francophones from across Canada that we're one of the only if not the only province with a growing francophone population with so much immigration from Quebec and New Brunswick as well as Ontario and . . .

Mr. Eggen: Africa.

Connolly: . . . African nations. We have quite a lot of immigration. So, actually, back on key strategy 1.1, I'm really interested as to how key strategy 1.1 is informing the work you are doing to develop the new curriculum.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. I mean, 1.1 sort of describes the purpose of the curriculum and includes the common principles and standards that guide the development. You know, curriculum generally defines what the students are expected to know. Saying "what" and "how" is a very sometimes nebulous thing – right? – because both the process and the content can interact with each other. That is definitely true. Key strategy 1.1 also talks about common features across the different traditional subject areas, which is good.

The guiding framework was developed over many years with lots of different people. It helps to bring in research from other countries as well, so it helps us to, I guess, build curriculum prototypes with that in mind, crosscurricular competencies they call them – right? – and so forth. But, you know, at the end of the day it's important not to be mired in jargon sometimes but to loop back to the basic principles that guide a strong education: numeracy, literacy, citizenship, and being able to express those things in all of the traditional subject areas.

Connolly: Great. Thanks so much.

Of course, we're all here to represent the people of the province. Knowing how important that is, what has been the public's feedback on the curriculum guiding framework and the curriculum process in general so far? Like, I've done a curriculum consultation in my own constituency.

Mr. Eggen: Yes, you did. Yeah. Those kids.

Connolly: I was able to have several people, several students and teachers as well as parents come out. Those who don't even have children came out as well to show that they are interested in the curriculum rewrite and that they really want to see us move forward as a province and have things like the art curriculum, which hasn't been reviewed since, I believe, 1988.

6:00

Mr. Eggen: Thirty years, so do the math. You're a no-calculator generation, right? You can just do the math.

Connolly: Exactly. Again, like I said, my key was social studies. That was the best one. Not that I was terrible at math; it was just never my strong suit. In science I was much happier.

Anyway, at my curriculum consultation I had lots of people come out from the community and tell me how interested they were,

whether that be in the wellness curriculum or the social studies curriculum, to make sure that we have more FNMI in the curriculum. Can you just talk a little bit through some of the results of the survey you published in the fall?

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. We did it in the fall. We just published it last week. We saw, I think, some interesting trends. I kind of talked about it already here, so I won't repeat myself. You know, one of the things that I saw which made me feel confident that we're heading in the right direction is that people were looking for vigour and strength in those basic skills of communication – literacy, numeracy, and so forth – and that connection to postsecondary opportunities, the future ready concept that we've come up with.

I think we saw, again, that people have a strong sense of equity and inclusivity. You know, that's part of who we are as Albertans, to make sure no one gets left behind. Really, a strong public education system in the broadest sense is how you build society in the strongest way. You reach to people regardless of their socioeconomic circumstance or their geographic location or their gender, and you give them a really, really strong education. We know, looking across the planet, that those are the nations that persevere and thrive regardless of what circumstances might be happening, those ones that apply that sense of equity and inclusivity to their education. So that's good.

I mean, you know, surveys are what they are, right?

The Chair: I apologize for interrupting as well. The time allotted for the ND caucus has expired.

We'll now revert to the Wildrose caucus. Continue sharing your time with the minister as well?

Mrs. Aheer: Yes, please. Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Good. Please proceed.

Mrs. Aheer: Okey-dokey. You were finishing off speaking about the main goal of using mathematics confidently to solve problems amongst our munchkins in the early grades.

Mr. Eggen: Yes. That's right. I'm sorry. Give me a sec here.

Mrs. Aheer: Take your time.

Mr. Eggen: Again, you know, we have different levels of assessment. Of course, it's changing over time, but that's not to say that if we change the curriculum, we're going to throw the old one out just for the sake of the new, right? We can learn from the new and learn where we can strengthen some of those skills.

The actions in math initiative that we have is looking to reinforce number facts and operations through provincial assessment. Part of that was put into the grade 3 student learning assessments, SLAs, in the fall of 2015. That was just when I became the minister. There you go. Number operations without use of calculators is something that I'm interested in pursuing. Again, you know, we are trying some of these things, and then we will make a close assessment and see where we're at.

Now, in terms of building early childhood math education, I'm not an expert, right? I mean, I won't pretend that I am. I see a lot of schools doing interesting things like in Spruce Grove. I was at a Catholic school there the other day that looked really strong in it. I know that you can't start some of these concepts too early, right? When you're dealing with the very youngest kids in kindergarten or even prekindergarten, there are certain developmental targets that they hit at three and four years old where you can really

maximize a concept, you know, a simple concept, but they internalize it like no other.

I remember my kids going to Montessori preschool, you know, and they would just drive it in. They learned this math like crazy just by using manipulatives and so forth. So I'm very interested in seeing rigour and money and attention applied to the very earliest childhood education. Even though we don't have early kindergarten or what you call prekindergarten, we are still applying some of our curriculum development here now to build up the basic concepts that we have so that we can maybe use some of that in this \$25-a-day pilot that we have so that it's not just a place for \$25 daycare or whatever but will actually have curriculum built into it, too.

Mrs. Aheer: Right. I was going to say that one of the most important things is that they're learning this when they're young – right? – when they're open to the thought processes.

With the curriculum redesign, I mean, I would hope that you're wanting to reincorporate the mastery of number facts, rote practice, recall, all of those really important things that I think – I mean, children love those kinds of games, you know, recall and guessing games and stuff.

Mr. Eggen: Yes, they do.

Mrs. Aheer: Those numbers speak to children, right? And there's the connectivity of numbers to the environment, too. Is that maybe part of where you're going to be heading with your curriculum redesign as far as early childhood development in math?

Mr. Eggen: Yes.

Mrs. Aheer: That's, I suppose, a bit old school, but there is some real validity in that.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. I mean, after you hit a certain age, maybe, then you hear about old math, new math, and all that kind of stuff, right? You know, I remember that happening when I was in school, too. They'd talk about: "How come these kids are learning this new math? What's going on?" We need to make sure that we are using what's most appropriate, what's the best math. Really, that is what it is.

Mrs. Aheer: Well, that was the question, yeah.

Mr. Eggen: You know, we know that we can equip – because we have to use basic number skills throughout our lives. So to have some of those deeply internalized in there, it's like learning basic music concepts as a musician, right? It just has to be there at the tip of your fingers. We certainly are focusing on number facts and operations. It's an interest of mine, and to the degree to which I can influence that as minister, I will do so.

Mrs. Aheer: I was going to say, too, that I've been speaking to a lot of high school teachers lately – it just happens to be the way that it's been – and one of the problems that they're seeing at that level, when the kids are getting into grade 10, is that they're coming in with a description versus an actual number of how they're doing. You know, a lot of schools are using descriptors like, "They're a 2, and they're emerging" or things like that. It is very, very hard at a grade 10 level to come into math with that description, which doesn't actually give factual information about who that child is, how they learn, all of the important aspects of where they're coming from. As you know, high schools are feeder schools. There are kids coming from all over the place with lots and lots of different versions of how they're describing a child's learning, right?

I'm finding that this has been a really consistent concern. I would suggest that I hear from a lot of teachers, especially math, in high school that they're not going to just pass the kids for the sake of passing the kids. These kids are coming in with 80s and 90s and then are ending up with 60s and 50s in high school math. Some of them are doing okay, but I would say that generally across the board we're seeing those numbers.

Just as an add-on to what I was saying, I think that fundamentally it would be really, really nice to see that come in and that the supports are there for teachers, whether that's through putting them back into school to help them with those things or making sure that those are outcomes. Again, it's about elevating the teachers – right? – because everybody is going to go up to the highest level. You don't want to be going down to the lowest common denominator, right? You want to elevate and make sure that everybody is rising to the occasion. So just a thought.

I do have another question just on page 50 of the education business plan, 1.2, under your key strategies for outcome 1. This is just more of a budget line question. I'm assuming that these diploma examinations are about kids that are not able to get into schools being able to write them online. Is that in 2.7 as well?

Mr. Eggen: Sorry. Could you just clarify that?

Mrs. Aheer: So 1.2 is the development and implementation of online examinations. I actually read this wrong initially. I thought it was about practising, but my understanding is that it's actually to develop that. Is that part of the \$5 million that's going into IT in order to build the program, or is that separate? Or is this a different dollar figure that's going to go into making sure that kids can do an exam online?

Mr. Eggen: Yes, I believe so. But, also, we will be starting to develop an online library to help to support that.

Mrs. Aheer: Oh. So this is supports as well?

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. I mean, I used to teach diploma exams, you know, so old diploma exams were very valuable as a tool to get ready. I would expect that it would allow us to get through PASI – right? – the diploma exams on demand. Yeah, it would serve both of those functions.

6:10

Mrs. Aheer: Oh. It would?

Mr. Eggen: Where does it reside? Which line does it come under?

Mrs. Aheer: What line item? Line 2.7? I'm just curious on the cost or what you're projecting that to cost. Is there going to also be online help as well as support? Is this for home-schooling? What's your sort of vision with this? What's going to go forward?

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. I mean, I envision it as a way by which, you know, all schools can use more digital platforms, right? We see the evolution of diplomas, for example, on a digital platform and a corresponding increase in achievement. And in any of the writing courses like social studies and English students that have been using digital means, writing on computers, have been doing better over time. It just gives us more flexibility, right? The capital cost of PASI, it sounds like here, just off the top of my head, is \$1.6 million total for this year.

Mrs. Aheer: It's \$1.6 million. Okay. Just for this year?

Mr. Eggen: Yeah, just for this year. So that's where it's at.

Mrs. Aheer: All right.

Mr. Eggen: But that does not mean just that number is being expended on diplomas. I mean, PASI is a pretty large platform.

Mrs. Aheer: But towards the online perspective?

Mr. Eggen: Yeah, of building more online. I mean, the whole new curriculum will be digital and in two languages.

You know, I think there are lots of interesting opportunities. I mean, I was just looking at some of our people who choose to use the Alberta curriculum overseas, and I think that we could market that to other jurisdictions. We also have the Northwest Territories and Nunavut using our curriculum, and they have seats at our curriculum working groups to help us build curriculum.

Mrs. Aheer: Member Connolly was actually speaking about that, about French immersion and French. What is the cost to do things in both languages?

The Chair: I apologize for interrupting, Member, but the allotted time has concluded.

We will now proceed to Mr. Rodney in the PC caucus. Will you be sharing your time as well?

Mr. Rodney: Yes, please.

The Chair: Please proceed.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Minister, if we can just pick up where we were on page 54 of the business plan, Alberta's education system being well governed and well managed. I left off with this two-part question. Last year during estimates I know you noted that you definitely encouraged school boards to find efficiencies. So I'm wondering what you can tell Albertans in terms of what types of efficiencies you actually expect school boards to be able to find and tell us which school boards indeed have had a lot of success in this particular area, because it's nice to shine a light on them.

Mr. Eggen: For sure. Thank you for that question. As I mentioned in my opening comments, we flow through about 97 per cent of our budgets to the school boards, you know, but I'm still responsible for that whole thing, right? So as we demand more from those difficult-to-get public dollars, we are looking for school boards to make some choices, too.

I mean, you mentioned the reserves, right? I think that I always encourage the school boards to be careful with reserves. People are looking at them all the time. We're in the midst of collective bargaining right now, for example, which has been going very well. You know, the teachers look at some of these reserves and some of these school boards, and they go: hey, you guys are not broke at all; just look at all that money you have. So you have to be just really careful always.

We have been encouraging school boards to develop efficiencies around procurement, for example, purchasing together with other school boards and sort of encouraging that through our department, to try to do that. You know, we've been trying to encourage joint-use sort of work with other ministries or with municipalities and so forth. I can tell you that tipping the balance for the Irma school, again, was that the community raised \$1.6 million or something like that to make it not just a school but a community centre, too. Then you say: well, then you're getting that extra value added on. You know, the degree to which school boards can reach out and even work with municipalities or even other levels of government to

build something together: I really think that that creates efficiency as well.

You know, we're working for collaboration to reduce expenditures on utility costs and so forth and other operations, administration as well. We have put an administrative cap in place to encourage school boards to take a close look at their expenditures on admin. We have the energy consortia as well, which helps to buy utilities collectively, and we encourage school boards to do that, too. I mean, yeah, rate my school board. Which ones are really tight and lean, and which ones are not so much? Everybody is unique, right?

But we will always work closely to make sure that school boards are getting the support they need from us. For example, this new collective bargaining model that we built here is quite revolutionary for this province. We're negotiating. The funders are at the table, and we will meet the terms of that agreement from that table completely, right? That really helps school boards a lot, I think.

You know, we had a lot of – I don't know what the term is – like, whipsawing or something like that, where some boards will negotiate a big thing. It was confusing. I think that there are efficiencies that could be had from that.

Mr. Rodney: Minister, don't take me wrong. I'm not looking for efficiencies in terms of slash and burn. That's never been my style.

Mr. Eggen: No, no, no. I understand.

Mr. Rodney: It's not what I've ever been about personally or professionally or politically.

But I want to switch gears if I can.

I mean, just to finish that point off, you have efficiencies, so you can afford to do other things that you really want to do, but that requires parking egos at the door. I saw it with not really students but staff and principals, school boards, and now there are community associations working together rather than against each other.

But speaking of that – and all you have to do is turn on the radio to hear about this. I'm not going to name the people involved. That's not the most important thing. It's a higher level thing I'm getting to but a specific I'm going to refer to. I'm talking about the Edmonton Catholic school situation. Some of the members have had some very serious issues, as you know, and that's impeded the work of the board. Has that stabilized in your eyes? And I guess the higher level question: what are you doing to prevent this sort of thing happening either there or in other situations across the province? Because no one wins from a situation like that.

Mr. Eggen: No. That's a really good question. Of course, you know, we are just starting the cycle into the next municipal elections, too – right? – so we want to make sure that we have some sort of expectations in place so that people who are thinking about running for school board trustee and so forth will say: okay; this is where we want to be. We are trying to encourage more sort of training of new trustees through programming, through the Alberta School Boards Association, and some universities as well so that they get some administrative boot camp – I don't know – whatever you want to call it, to start them off on the right foot.

You know, you never know when trouble might come your way, right? With 61 school boards there will always be a couple of challenges here and there at any given time. Now, obviously, the circumstance in Edmonton Catholic just garnered a lot more attention because it's one of the big four. You know, they had some more serious problems. I mean, you saw it all again unfold in the newspaper, right? I put a helper in there for a while, and then he

left. Again, we just really want to work hard on improving governance in that particular board.

My deputy minister here has been meeting with them weekly . . .

Dr. Clarke: Bimonthly.

Mr. Eggen: . . . bimonthly, yeah, to try to see where things are at. You know, they just have to get one more budget in, and then they'll have an election.

6:20

Mr. Rodney: Sure. And, again, this is just one example.

But a different example from the same board: some members of that board had expressed concern that the school board was paying a significant portion of the cost associated with one of the members doing a master's in public health. Is there a provincial policy under your government now on what school boards can and cannot spend professional development money on? If so, what are you doing to ensure the policy is applied consistently across the province? If not, why is there no policy to aid school boards in this process? Because that's what it's about. We're trying to assist them.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. I mean, for sure. I've been thinking about this a lot – right? – because, you know, when these problems do come up, they come up in the court of public opinion. Boards make decisions . . .

Mr. Rodney: The question really was about professional development and if there's a policy provincially on what they can or cannot spend. Is it applied, or is it not there?

Mr. Eggen: No. It is an individual board thing, right? You know, I can tell you that I've certainly been thinking about it, though, because, of course, when these things come to light, sometimes it's the source of conflict, and then that conflict spills over into other things that I need those boards to govern properly over.

Mr. Rodney: So is there a go-forward process in terms of: it will be mandated provincially according to certain specifications? What's the plan?

Mr. Eggen: I don't have any plan for it now, but, I mean, you know, hon. member, you've touched on something that I certainly have been reflecting on. Perhaps the governance training thing can be part of how that sets guidelines for people. Like I say, when you do get elected, don't all go to Disneyland straight away and whatever. That could be a way by which we can guide some of these things. Is there a provincial regulation in regard to professional development opportunity and payments for trustees? No, there is not at this time.

Mr. Rodney: Okay. A quick question. I don't think we'll have time for the answer. We can come back to it, though. Last year you stated that 98 per cent of the money within Education is sent to school boards. How much of the money that is allocated to school boards is returned to government in the form of carbon tax payments, and can you comment on the total amount of money that's collected from the carbon tax which will actually be redistributed back to the school boards? I don't have a secret agenda in terms of why they aren't exempted in the first place, but a lot of people are asking questions just like that.

Mr. Eggen: No, no, no. That's fine. Yeah. I mean, I've been talking to the boards, and they've been giving me some pretty good statistics, pretty accurate. I can start to see, you know, carbon levy potential prediction of expenditures and population of the school

boards. I can almost guess. Anyway, \$8.6 million is where we estimate it to be.

The Chair: I'll apologize for interrupting.

The final seven minutes will be to the ND caucus. Member Connolly, continue sharing your time?

Connolly: Yes, please.

Let's go back to outcome 1 if that's all right with you, Minister.

Mr. Eggen: Sure.

Connolly: I see that under outcome 1 and in sections 1(a) and 1(b) we anticipate the students' scores on the grades 6 and 9 provincial achievement tests as well as the diplomas. Well, they don't have diplomas for grades 6 and 9, do they now?

Mr. Eggen: PATs.

Connolly: Yeah. That's only in grade 12. They get their diploma. You don't really get that much of a diploma.

Anyway, to improve in the years ahead, what steps are you taking to ensure that our students are better able to grasp the fundamentals of literacy and numeracy before they write these exams?

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. I mean, you know, almost all of everything we do, we do it for those outcomes, for sure – right? – to paraphrase the song. For example, we are using the grade 3 assessment tool as a way to sort of check in where kids are at in the grade 3 level, and I'm still thinking about how we might be able to modify that over time to give teachers and parents a diagnostic tool to see where the kids are at at the tender age of seven. Then we are trying to focus on literacy and numeracy on those SLAs in general, and I'm hoping that they might evolve into a more useful tool for teachers to use. I guess they will be the basis, Member, of our curriculum. I see them, unless someone can convince me otherwise, as the pivot point by which we judge everything that we build in curriculum. How is it strengthening numeracy and literacy skills?

I mean, we've set pretty aggressive goals for improvement on grades 6 and 9 achievement, and maybe it doesn't look as much when you see it on paper, but we're aiming, again, for everybody as well. We have a very large new-Canadian population here in the province of Alberta, and we have a significant First Nations population, too. So, you know, yeah, everybody gets the same standard, and everybody will have to hit that same standard, too. It will not be cheap to do so, but I always believe in aiming for the place where you have the room for the most improvement – in other words, where your numbers are the lowest – and investing and putting your time and effort in there. Again, we have a pretty strong First Nations strategy that could help us, and again we need to try to work on helping and supporting new Canadians with their literacy and numeracy, too.

I would expect that the population of Alberta will continue to grow. We have the youngest population in Canada, and our economy is looking strong compared to other jurisdictions across the country, too. So, you know, while comparatively it doesn't feel like that, people will look and still see us as a place for opportunity, and I'm grateful for that. I believe that one of the biggest attractions we have is really one of the strongest and best supported education systems in the country as well. I see it, and I see it in the standards and the professionalism that we have available, the support that we're building across society for our education system, building the new curriculum.

There are a lot of eyes that are on us. Like, I notice, you know, when I go to the national – because there is no national ministry of

education. The table we sit at like this, with the 10 provinces and the territories: that's it, right? And people really look up to where we're going as a school system, so I think that's encouraging as well.

Outcome 1 will judge, and we will assess based on the exams that we do have in place. I think exams will evolve and assessment will evolve in tandem with curriculum. The two must evolve together. I need to have assessment tools so that I can measure where we're at – that's pretty basic – but I'm certainly willing to be creative so that we are always circling back to the basic notion of numeracy and literacy.

Connolly: Great. Thanks.

Kind of to continue along in a similar vein to what MLA Aheer was on, about key strategy 1.2, as we all know, testing for students can be incredibly stressful and really, depending on the student, could make the entire difference in their future. I know that when I was in high school, diploma exams were 50 per cent of the mark. They're now down to 30 per cent, which is fantastic. I know that when I was in high school and even just after high school, I was always trying to advocate to lower the percentage, and I know that many of my teachers believed that having it at 50 per cent wasn't always the best way of having it because, as everyone knows, standardized testing does not really work for every student, and it can be very different as to how someone puts out their knowledge of that certain subject. But as of right now it's kind of the best way

of judging it that we have. Really, my question about this is: how are you making diploma exams more responsive to students' needs, as detailed in key strategy 1.2?

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. I mean, I used to teach diploma exams, too, and I know, you know, the time thing really causes some kids some stress, right? So I'm thinking about maybe being more flexible on that and not having to make it such a big deal. It's an exam that's not supposed to be measuring your timing necessarily but for knowledge, right? We put a lot of effort into our diploma exams because there are pretty high stakes there. I think that we will see evolution over time. They're important, and it was important to put our exam value at 30 per cent because that was sort of the national standard for universities around the country, so . . .

The Chair: I apologize for the interruption, but I must advise the committee that the time allotted for items of business today has concluded.

I would like to remind committee members that we are scheduled to meet tomorrow, April 19, from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. in this room to continue our consideration of the estimates for the Ministry of Education.

Thank you, everyone. The meeting stands adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 6:30 p.m.]

