



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 28th Legislature
First Session

Standing Committee
on
Families and Communities

Ministry of Education
Consideration of Main Estimates

Wednesday, March 20, 2013
3:30 p.m.

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First Session**

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Quest, Dave, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (PC), Chair
Forsyth, Heather, Calgary-Fish Creek (W), Deputy Chair

Brown, Dr. Neil, QC, Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill (PC)
Cusanelli, Christine, Calgary-Currie (PC)
DeLong, Alana, Calgary-Bow (PC)
Eggen, David, Edmonton-Calder (ND)*
Fraser, Rick, Calgary-South East (PC)
Fritz, Yvonne, Calgary-Cross (PC)
Goudreau, Hector G., Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley (PC)
Jablonski, Mary Anne, Red Deer-North (PC)
Jansen, Sandra, Calgary-North West (PC)
Jeneroux, Matt, Edmonton-South West (PC)
Leskiw, Genia, Bonnyville-Cold Lake (PC)
McAllister, Bruce, Chestermere-Rocky View (W)**
Notley, Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (ND)
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Young, Steve, Edmonton-Riverview (PC)

* substitution for Rachel Notley

** substitution for Kerry Towle

Also in Attendance

Hehr, Kent, Calgary-Buffalo (AL)
Johnson, Linda, Calgary-Glenmore (PC)

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Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Participant

Ministry of Education
Hon. Jeff Johnson, Minister

3:30 p.m.

Wednesday, March 20, 2013

[Mr. Quest in the chair]

**Ministry of Education
Consideration of Main Estimates**

The Chair: Good afternoon, everybody. I'd like to call the meeting to order. I note that the committee has under consideration the estimates of the Ministry of Education for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2014.

I'd like to remind members that the microphones are operated by *Hansard* and to keep their BlackBerrys away from the microphones.

We'll go around the table and get everybody to introduce themselves. Minister, that includes your staff, please, on the first go-round. We'll start with Mrs. Forsyth.

Mrs. Forsyth: I'm Heather Forsyth, Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Goudreau: Hector Goudreau, Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley.

Mr. Jeneroux: Matt Jeneroux, Edmonton-South West.

Ms DeLong: Alana DeLong, Calgary-Bow.

Mr. Fraser: Rick Fraser, Calgary-South East.

Ms L. Johnson: Linda Johnson, Calgary-Glenmore, on behalf of MLA Leskiw.

Ms Jansen: Sandra Jansen, Calgary-North West

Mr. Eggen: David Eggen, MLA for Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Hehr: Kent Hehr, MLA, Calgary-Buffalo.

Mr. J. Johnson: Jeff Johnson, MLA, Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

I've got with me Dean Lindquist, ADM; Michael Walter, ADM; Brad Smith, executive director. Behind us we've got George Lee, director of budget and fiscal analysis; Laura Cameron, executive director, capital planning; Leanne Niblock, director of communications; and Kim Capstick, press secretary.

Mr. Wilson: Jeff Wilson, Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. McAllister: Bruce McAllister, Chestermere-Rocky View. Mr. Chair, I should mention that today I think I'm actually a substitute on the committee for Kerry Towle.

As well, with me today are two people, the same as yesterday, my legislative assistant, Naomi Christensen; and one of our Wildrose research assistants, Cadence Bergman.

Mr. Pedersen: Blake Pedersen, Medicine Hat.

Mrs. Fritz: Yvonne Fritz, Calgary-Cross.

Dr. Brown: Neil Brown, Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Ms Rempel: Jody Rempel, committee clerk, Legislative Assembly Office.

The Chair: Dave Quest, Strathcona-Sherwood Park, and chair of this committee.

Also, I'd like to welcome Ms Cusanelli. Sorry; we just did the introductions.

We've got Mr. McAllister as sub, and I just want to mention that Mr. Eggen is substituting for Ms Notley, and Mr. Hehr is substituting for Dr. Swann.

For the record I'd like to note that the Standing Committee on Families and Communities completed three hours of debate yesterday on the main estimates for the Ministry of Education. As we enter our fourth hour of debate, I remind everyone that the speaking rotation for these meetings is provided for in Standing Order 59.01(6). We're now at the point in the rotation where any member may be recognized to speak, and speaking times are limited to a maximum of five minutes.

Members have the option of combining their speaking time with the minister for a maximum of 10 minutes. Please remember to advise the chair at the beginning of your speech if you wish to combine your time with the minister, and I'll try and remember to remind you if you don't remind me.

We have six hours in total scheduled to consider the estimates of the Ministry of Education. With the concurrence of the committee I'll call a five-minute break at the midpoint of the meeting.

Committee members, the minister, and other members who are not committee members may participate. Members' staff and ministry officials may be present, and at the direction of the minister officials of the ministry may address the committee.

If debate is exhausted prior to six hours, the ministry's estimates are deemed to have been considered for the time allotted in the schedule, and we will adjourn; otherwise, we will adjourn at 6:30 p.m.

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

Any written material provided in response to questions raised during the main estimates should be tabled in the Assembly for the benefit of all members.

Vote on the estimates is deferred until consideration of all ministry estimates has concluded and will occur in Committee of Supply on April 22, 2013.

With that, picking up where we were yesterday, I would ask, Mr. Jeneroux, if you're ready with your questions. Did you want to go the five and five or back and forth with the minister?

Mr. Jeneroux: Yeah, back and forth if the minister is okay with that.

The Chair: Very good. Please, go ahead.

Mr. Jeneroux: Great. Thanks, guys, for being here. I want to talk about some stuff that was kind of talked about at a high level yesterday in terms of pressures on the capital funding pieces. I don't think we've talked this week, Minister, about the schools in Edmonton-South West, so I'll bring it up again.

Mr. J. Johnson: We haven't.

Mr. Jeneroux: Yeah. So here we go. We're facing extreme pressures in Edmonton-South West in the fact that Johnny Bright school and Esther Starkman – I share that one with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud – those particular schools, are facing extreme pressures on growth. We have schools that were made for 800 that now have over 1,000 kids in them. We want these kids to be comfortable in these schools.

A lot of the families in my constituency move into these areas, and they see on the maps that they've been provided by whomever, developers or community leagues, that there's going to be a new school right across from where they're building their homes. This is still something that new families are seeing quite regularly. Now we're not allowing kids who live right across the street – they can throw a snowball at Johnny Bright school – to attend the school because of these extreme pressures on growth in the area.

I guess I'm basically going for a home run here and saying: when are you going to announce new schools in Edmonton-South West?

Mr. J. Johnson: Well, that's a good question, and I think it's the million-dollar question that your constituents and other Albertans are probably waiting to learn. You know, I'm quite pleased that we've got a Premier who has a very aggressive capital agenda on the school side. We had quite an aggressive commitment through the election. I think that was news to a lot of people's ears. Unfortunately, that was kind of put on hold and a little uncertain when we had to redo the budget when we got the latest projections. You know what? In my role I'm pretty excited that we're now getting the cash flows out of the budget and that we need to plan to deliver the 50/70 that we promised we would.

Certainly, you've got some challenges in your area, and I appreciate going out there with you and speaking to your parent councils. I sympathize with them. One of the issues we're got in the metro areas, in Edmonton in particular, is that we have enough spaces for the kids in the larger metro area, but those schools are just not in the right places. Part of that is managing that infrastructure properly. We've got a large number of schools that are low capacity, and really what happens is that the operation of those schools is subsidized by the schools that are overfull, too.

In your area, in particular, we've seen growth that I think goes beyond the expectations when the schools were planned. The capacity of schools and the size of schools are always set in conjunction with the school board because they do their projections and they do their capital plans, and we double- and triple-check those. We base the size of the school and the capacity of the school on the information we get from school boards and their requests and their capital plans.

Like we talked about yesterday, you can only expand those schools so far with modulars because the core of the school can only accommodate so many kids, the field of the school can only accommodate so many kids, you know, the common areas, the libraries and the washrooms and the gyms. There are only so many kids you can put in a school to give them a good learning experience. So that's one of the problems we've got in your area. The growth exceeded the projection.

The 50 and 70 and the 100 modulars that we've just announced are going to bring some relief to a lot of communities. Right now we're working through the cash flows that we have from the budget so that we can see how we can deliver these schools. One of the things we have to look at there, that we talked about yesterday, is that it's not as simple as just going to the next school on the priority list, potentially. You need to bundle the appropriate schools together across the province to get the best price because some of them are packaged in a procurement model. It's a design/bid or a design/build, the P3s. Some of them are direct grants to school boards, too, and they can do the modernization.

I don't have a definitive answer for you on when you would see schools in your constituency, but we will have, you know, probably a first round of capital announcements immediately after the budget is passed or around that time frame. At least that's my hope and my expectation. We've got good people working on these cash flows and these packages of procurement and tenders that would theoretically go out.

3:40

Mr. Jeneroux: Great.

Okay. I guess that leads to my second question. We're seeing that a lot of these schools in these new communities are packed. I don't think you have to be a rocket scientist to figure out that these

kids are going to get older and then are going to go to the next level of schools. In Edmonton-South West there are no high schools. I guess I'm hoping to get an answer from you on where we're looking to go and minimize the current pressures right now: announced new schools, modulars on some schools. But in terms of the grand fix to this, these kids get older, they go to the next grades up. I guess in terms of being proactive, how is your ministry, then, working with the school boards in order to have this kind of long-term vision of these communities as opposed to just: here's a school for the current growth? Are we looking long term in this? Are you comfortable that we're looking long term?

Mr. J. Johnson: I am. Absolutely. I mean, one of the problems we've had as a province is that you can look long term and you can do the projections and you can plan, but you also have to get the funding for it. You have to be able to afford to do it. Obviously, the capital takes dollars, and we've got to decide how to finance that. That's been one of our challenges in the past when we had to rein in some of the capital and the infrastructure spending.

There was a time not so long ago when the province's enrolment was decreasing, and the province thought we were going to have decreasing enrolment for a while. Things obviously turned around and quite dramatically.

We have really good people that do all the capital planning within Education, and those people work very closely with school boards as they put their capital plans together. Those people roll up to Dean here. The school boards do a lot of good work. The larger ones, especially, have quite a lot of capacity for that planning. But the projections on enrolment come from everything from, you know, workforce statistics to birth rates to all those StatsCan and health statistics that we pull together to project enrolment increases or decreases in particular areas. That's why we have a feeling of where this is going to go over the next decade.

When I said yesterday that we think we'll likely have about, you know, 100,000 more kids in the system over the next decade, roughly equivalent to the size of the whole city of Calgary board of education, that's quite an increase on a system that's got 600,000 kids today. That's what's driving our capital plans, that's what's driving local school boards' capital plans, and that's what's driving our budget.

One of the reasons that we feel that we have to build these schools even though we don't have the cash in the bank to do it – well, we do if you want to liquidate the heritage trust fund or some of the other savings vehicles that we've got. We certainly have the cash, but if you're making 8 per cent on savings and you can borrow at 2 and a half per cent, why would you liquidate your savings to do that? It just doesn't make any sense. So the province is going to look at financing these buildings and amortizing them over time just like everybody does with their home and their business, and we'll get more out the door that way.

Mr. Jeneroux: Okay. That brings me to . . .

The Chair: Thirty seconds.

Mr. Jeneroux: Okay. P3s: we can't even put, basically, tacks on the wall in a lot of schools. Just kind of some comments on future models of schools when building these P3s.

Mr. J. Johnson: We're now in our third round of building P3s, and I think that with every round we've learned from the contracts, and we've been able to improve them every time.

We can carry this on another time.

Mr. Jeneroux: Great.

The Chair: Thanks, Minister.

We'll go to Mr. McAllister, followed by Mr. Eggen.

Mr. McAllister: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Greetings again, Mr. Minister. How's the family?

Mr. J. Johnson: I hear they're doing good.

Mr. McAllister: You know what's funny? I think we can all relate.

I appreciated the discussion yesterday – I really did – and what I thought were some tough, fair questions from everybody here, and I think we got some legitimate answers.

I wanted to ask you about something in the House. I didn't today because I don't think it's always the place to bring a topic to your attention. Sometimes that 30/30 time frame is just not enough to get after it. While it's not a line item in the budget, it has everything to do with the budget and everything to do with our kids, and that's where we are contractually right now. Word is today, as you know, that the Calgary board doesn't like the deal, and the Edmonton board has said that it doesn't like the deal. Others are coming forward and saying the same thing.

You know, I don't want to speak for the boards, and I'm not trying to drive a wedge in negotiations. I'm asking you legitimately to find out where you're at with it because you know that the ASBA feels like they were left out of the process. I don't think that should be the reason for, you know, not recommending it. I don't speak for them, but they're saying that. They're being quoted like that in the media. They feel they didn't have time to take it back to their boards to look at. I guess that's just a broad one at first for anybody who might be listening to get your thoughts on where these are at. I know they're difficult times. Are we getting there?

Mr. J. Johnson: It's a great question. In my mind, yeah, we are getting there. We're very close, and it's exciting because we have worked on this for two and a half years. We haven't been at this point before, where we actually had the ATA endorsing a tentative deal.

You're right. There are some boards who have said that they won't accept it, and there are boards that haven't really said, but they've told the ASBA that they think they should not endorse it. We've also got several boards that have come out now and ratified it and want to accept it.

This isn't a surprise. One of the challenges that we have – and I've said it many times – is that the bargaining structure is, in my mind, broken. The ASBA as an organization has a very difficult job, to try to represent 62 boards at a bargaining table when they actually don't have a mandate to bargain, and they don't have the legal authority to bargain. They have 62 boards that will have differing opinions and have a diversity of communities, so they don't necessarily get unanimous support from those 62 boards when they're at the bargaining table. That's one of the reasons this thing has taken two and a half years.

Mr. McAllister: Yeah. Right. As I said, I do recognize how difficult it must be. What would you recommend, you know, is done differently on that front? What would you change if you could?

Mr. J. Johnson: I would change the bargaining structure. I would have some form of structure in Alberta to make sure all three key stakeholders have a seat at the table: the province, who funds it and can give assurance of policy; the local school boards, who

need to be able to negotiate some of those local items; and the ATA, of course.

Mr. McAllister: It's tough to fix that regardless of where you sit. I recognize that.

Mr. J. Johnson: I can't fix it this week. That's right.

Mr. McAllister: No, you sure can't. I felt it was pertinent to bring up because I think it's what everybody is talking about, and to ask you that question in the House doesn't afford you the time to answer fairly and, frankly, doesn't afford us the time to ask.

Mr. J. Johnson: I think you've made a very good point, the concern about the process and feeling like you're left out of the process. In my mind, it's not the right deal to scuttle, a deal with 40,000 teachers province-wide. I don't think that's going to happen.

Mr. McAllister: Okay. Yesterday one of the things I asked you about was curriculum development because I think a lot of people would like more details on what that means, what takes place in curriculum development. I think it was Laura . . .

Mr. J. Johnson: Ellen, but she's not here today.

Mr. McAllister: Ellen told us that it was \$55 million a year that is spent on curriculum development. Does that include the curriculum redesign project that is under way, or is that in addition to the \$55 million that you spent?

Mr. J. Johnson: No. That would be the total cost of what we spend annually on the curriculum. That's my understanding of it. You're right. There are some ongoing things happening with the curriculum, but there is a substantive effort to redesign the curriculum in a number of ways.

Mr. McAllister: It just seems like an awful lot of money annually. If you spend \$55 million this year, we need to spend \$55 million next year, and we spent \$55 million the year before. Do you agree with that? Do you see that people look at it that way?

3:50

Mr. J. Johnson: I think most people that are informed on what that area of the department does in the education system see it as a really good investment and one of the reasons that we have one of the strongest education systems in the world, in the English-speaking world for sure. You know, Alberta is the vice-chair of CMEC, the Council of Ministers of Education of Canada, and I was at APEC meetings and CMEC meetings. One of the coveted things of Alberta's education system is its curriculum. It has such a strong reputation for having good curriculum, and many of the experts – you brought up Finland yesterday; Pasi Sahlberg, one of the Finnish gurus, was in town speaking not too long ago – will talk about the Alberta curriculum, so it's not something that we should take lightly. It's one of the foundational pieces that make our system so strong.

Mr. McAllister: You're accurate when you say: those that are familiar with it. I may not be as familiar as, obviously, the members of your department are, but I think, you know, most Albertans are probably in that category, too, not as informed as to what takes place in curriculum development. I just know that \$55 million developing curriculum seems like an awful lot of money.

I don't know what a teacher's annual salary is. I guess people throw out different figures, somewhere between \$70,000 and

\$100,000. You know, that would go a long way to hiring more teachers. I am legitimately trying to find areas to get money into the class, and I know you are too. So maybe enlighten us a little bit on what takes place with the curriculum development and that \$55 million.

Mr. J. Johnson: Well, there are a number of things that happen. One of the things we're doing right now is adjusting the curriculum to tie in with Inspiring Ed and the direction that we're wanting to go to shift our system from being so packed with content and based on time and how many minutes a kid spends at a desk and memorizing that content to a system where kids can progress through the education system based on their competencies and their masteries of the skills.

I can tell you that my three kids have different capacities to learn things and are better in some areas than they are in others. Our system isn't designed to recognize that kind of uniqueness, that differentiated learning ability. It's particularly important once we get into high school. We can get into dual crediting and getting kids interested in potential career paths and blur the lines between high school and postsecondary and industry.

What's happening now is that the curriculum department is evolving so that we're bringing forward curriculum that's based more on cross-curricular competencies and those competencies that we want kids to have as opposed to just siloed subject items that kids have to memorize. That takes some time, and that takes some money, so that's one of the big focuses. As we get there, we're going to have a less packed curriculum, and we're going to have less requirement for a large curriculum department. We're going to have more flexibility on the ground for teachers so they can be creative and innovative.

That's the good news. That's where we're heading. I agree with you. I hope in the years to come, that department will be smaller.

Mr. McAllister: Great. Just a final point on it, then. Would you at least indulge me in that the point I hear from principals and others in the system is: if we spend \$55 million this year on curriculum, why do we need \$55 million next year on curriculum?

Mr. J. Johnson: Because the world doesn't stand still. Just look at social studies, for example.

Mr. McAllister: Are we starting from scratch every year?

Mr. J. Johnson: Social studies, technology. I mean, the maps look different today than they did two years ago. There are so many pieces of curriculum that are different. We're told that when a kid goes into university now, half of what he learns in his first year is obsolete by the time he's in his fourth year.

Mr. McAllister: Do you remember anything from university?

Mr. J. Johnson: Well, schoolwise?

The ability to be nimble and keep up and to keep Alberta at the front and at the fore: a big investment has to be in curriculum because curriculum is not only what we're teaching the kids and how we're teaching them; it's also part of the assurance mechanism in Alberta – right? – to make sure we're not colouring too far outside the box in classrooms. We've had that in the past in this province. I don't want to bring up any names, but everyone can probably think of what I'm speaking of, right?

Mr. McAllister: Yeah. Again, I try and propose questions to you that I think the public is asking, so thank you.

Mr. J. Johnson: You bet.

The Chair: Thank you. Okay.

We'll go to Mr. Eggen, followed by Mr. Fraser, followed by Mr. Wilson.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Minister, and everyone who is here again. I just have a couple more questions that I wanted to ask. The first one is in regard to extra school fees. I was wondering if the department has completed an analysis of school fees starting in 2012, I guess. Did you get itemized lists of what school fees are being charged in each school district? Is the government prepared to act on the findings in any way like synchronizing fees that are allowable and unallowable? Will these changes be implemented as soon as possible, by the fall, let's say? If you've got any comments on that, that would be great.

Mr. J. Johnson: Yeah. The previous minister, Minister Lukaszuk, was looking into school fees and did get an inventory of what they were across the province. We hadn't done that previously, so we don't actually have information on that from previous years, but we do have last year's.

I think that along with a number of other things are going to inform the work that the folks will do on the regulations on the new Education Act. That consultation is going to start right away. That's going to be led by one of our MLAs, Maureen Kubinec, who is a former president of the ASBA. We want to hear from Albertans on all the regulations that we need to build around the Education Act. One of the main pieces that I think I'm most interested in is the regulations around school fees. The Education Act obviously allows school boards to set fees, and we want to put in regulation what kind of fences or expectations would be around that to be clear. Parents need to be involved in that discussion, right?

Mr. Eggen: Absolutely. Well, I'm sure you can appreciate my concern around this fall coming up because of the uncertainty around, you know, funding and so forth, right? We just don't want to see a flood of extra school fees as a stopgap measure to pay for things that need to be done in the schools. I know as a high school teacher for years that nothing annoyed me – it broke my heart as well – more than having students, you know, whose families you knew didn't have the money. We would make provisions for that, but it was embarrassing, and it was confusing. It's some part of our public education system that we need to rationalize ASAP, right? Thank you for that.

My second question is in regard to these strategic education marketing initiatives. I know that you talked about it a little bit the last time we were together, the initiatives that were being undertaken in Brazil and in Vietnam, Colombia, Mexico, and China. I just want to know about some of the costing of those missions and what the future plans are for those. What ultimately is our net benefit for doing this in regard to, you know, our public education system? What performance measures and indicators are we using to assess these strategic education marketing initiatives?

Mr. J. Johnson: Well, there are a few things going on there if I'm reading the question properly. We have a bit of a focus on some of the international exchanges and some of the international presence that Alberta wants to have. Part of it is kids coming here and working with other countries on that.

There's another part, which is having Alberta-accredited schools and trying to develop a network of Alberta-accredited schools across the globe. We have a number of those. I've visited some, actually, in China, Hong Kong, and Macau. These are really valuable for Alberta because there are Canadians and North Americans or English-speaking folks that are working all over the

world, and they want a good education. One of the things that they're clamouring for is that Alberta diploma if they can get it.

It was interesting to be in the one school in Hong Kong. They were registering kids that are three years old. The reason parents want to put their kids in school when they're three years old – I think they had 400 applications for about 50 spots – is because if they're in at age three, then they're in the school, and they'll be able to get into kindergarten. If they got the kindergarten spot, then they'll get into the K to 12 system. If they get that, then they get the Alberta diploma.

The Alberta diploma is so valuable and well recognized that these parents want their kids to have a Canadian diploma, particularly an Alberta diploma. Then many of them end up wanting to come to school in Alberta.

The networking that I did even when I was in Hong Kong with some of the businesspeople and the leaders down there that had gone to school in Alberta and that know about Alberta – these things help us later on in life with our market access, with investment into the country, with our kids, you know, being global citizens and being aware of the global economy. Those exchanges are important.

4:00

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. With some reservation I'm enthusiastic about the possibilities. I just have a couple of reservations, that you need to watch for, first of all, that usually – and I've taught overseas before, too. You know, different curricula are marketed in this way around the world, and it's almost entirely private schools that are using that. Of course, you're only as good as your reputation, and sometimes you can lose control of that Alberta curriculum brand or that British Oxford brand or whatever it is. People will flog it as maybe something that it really isn't. I mean, the integrity of our public curriculum is very important, and I'm just warning you that it's the private schools who will be selling it, right?

My other reservation about it is, again: to what degree are we selling positions for overseas students to study here in our Alberta public system? I mean, I think it's an interesting program. I've had lots of international students in my classrooms over the years. But to what degree do we sell those spaces? I know we make money off of it, but in times of shortage of spaces, you know, how do we calibrate how much is enough and having enough space for Alberta residents?

Mr. J. Johnson: Those are all really good questions. You know, on the first one maintaining our brand is really important and probably one of the reasons that Alberta doesn't have as many accredited foreign schools as some of the other jurisdictions, and one of the reasons is because we've got some really tight rules around that. We monitor them very closely. We go and see them every year. They deliver PATs and diplomas just like we do, but there are very tight integrity controls on that. And they pay for all those things, so if one of our staff goes to visit the school in Macau, they pay for that. The Alberta taxpayer is not paying for that.

The other question, about the exchanges and the money and taking up spaces here, is another good one and, I think, probably would concern Albertans more in a situation like southwest Edmonton. When we don't have the space, is there a foreign student in there taking up the space of an Alberta kid? I recognize that concern. But these kids coming are paying their own way, so we're not subsidizing them in any form. You know, I hope that for the most part they're not taking up spaces that are pushing an Alberta kid out of that school, and I don't believe they are.

What they are bringing with them in some cases – and Macau is a good example – is actually an exchange program. When I was in Macau, we launched the exchange program, where their kids come to Alberta for the first semester, study and stay with our kids, and our kids go back there and study and stay with them for the second semester. So those kinds of programs are really valuable, right?

Mr. Eggen: Good. Thank you so much.

I guess my last set of questions – I'm not sure what time we've got going on there. One minute? Okay. Well, I'll change my question, then. You know, I'm less inclined to head down this path, but I mean, we're looking for ways to save money, and we're short in this budget for public education. I know that the PAT exams for grade 3 are going to cost us – I don't know how much. Is it a million three to run it or a million, let's say, rounded off?

Mr. J. Johnson: That's a good guess. Yeah.

Mr. Eggen: So we've got a million bucks right there – right? – that we can hire some teachers with if we eliminate the grade 3 PATs straightaway.

Mr. J. Johnson: This is interesting. You know, we've got the NDP wanting to cut the budget and the Wildrose wanting us to put stuff back in.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. I don't do this very often. This is a special moment in time here. It's the day after solstice or something like that.

But we could, you know.

Mr. J. Johnson: We could.

Mr. Eggen: I mean, we're cutting AISI on April 1.

Mr. J. Johnson: You're right. And we will. The grade 3 PATs will change, but there will be some other form of standardized assessment come in in its place. So it won't be as easy, I don't think, as saying: get rid of the test and we'll save a million bucks or a million three. Parents believe and I think Albertans believe that some form of measurement and standardized assessment is important. They need to look different, but they still need to be there.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks a lot.

The Chair: All right. Well, thank you.

Mr. Fraser: Minister, it's good to see you again. I always appreciate the time that you give me and my concerns in Calgary-South East around the shortage of schools and everything else. I just want to say ditto to all of the questions that the Member for Edmonton-South West asked because there are very similar pressures there.

You know, I think we all know that Alberta is a fantastic place to live and work and play. That's not just what we know here in Alberta, but people know it right across this country and around the world, so they come here to make a home and to raise their families and so on. Our economy is good, and there are lots of good things. But, clearly, when they come to start a family and develop a career and go to university and come out of that and again go into a career, they're having children, so there are extreme growth pressures. You said during your speech that school boards are getting more funding for enrolment growth, so if

you could just give me a little bit more information on what that means.

Mr. J. Johnson: Yeah. You bet. One of the unique things about the Education budget is that it's really driven by enrolment. It's not just a budget that you can flatline and assume there aren't pressures on top of that. If we theoretically were to freeze the Education budget – we did close to that this year; we increased it by .6 per cent on the operations. Even if you freeze the Education budget – and you're funding school boards on a per capita basis primarily – if there are more kids in the system next year, then you have choices to either fund those kids and cut something else, increase the budget, or you have to decrease the base amount for each kid. The latter wasn't something that we wanted to do.

Like I said, we have about 20 grant envelopes, funding envelopes, for school boards. Those are just there to try to disseminate the money fairly and equitably, right? But the main envelope is the base instruction grant. That's the largest envelope and the one with the most flexibility, so that one and the grants, that are for the small class size initiative and inclusion, are ones that are funded to a great degree on a per capita basis. We wanted to make sure that we didn't cut the base instruction grant, the amount that each kid gets, the amount that goes towards each student. We wanted to make sure we didn't cut that, and we also wanted to make sure that every new kid coming into the system was going to get that much next year. There are going to be 2 per cent more kids, roughly. I think 1.9 per cent is our projection for next year.

One of the challenges we had last year was that we had a projection of 1.5 per cent, and we ended up with an enrolment increase of 2.3 per cent. We had to find money from within our department to cover off those grant increases in year, and we had to go back to Treasury Board for a supplementary, I think, \$12 million. It was \$29 million that we needed to cover off. We found some of it by cutting some things internally, and then we had to go back to Treasury Board. That was one of the supplementary estimates that we had here recently.

The enrolment pressures are good news for Alberta in a sense because we have babies being born, and people are moving into the province because it's a great place to be. But not everybody brings a school with them, and they may not be settling or living in the areas where we have capacity in an existing school like in rural Alberta. Those are communities like you have in southeast Calgary or like Matt has in southwest Edmonton. The enrolment pressures on the system mean that if a school board gets the same amount of money next year but they have more kids, they've got some tough choices to make.

It meant the same thing for us internally, so that's why we had to look at the things that were not direct instruction in the classroom and going to teachers that were giving direct instruction in the classroom. Those are the things we had to peel back on. We had to cut some things to make sure that we could have the money to fund every new kid coming in because our budget wasn't going up.

I hope that answers your question.

Mr. Fraser: To add to this, how do you determine what the expected enrolment will be? You know, I think we all heard recently that the CBE has come up with a new format for how they determine where schools will be built, and certainly when you think about it, I think additions were a part of that in terms of upgrades. How do you determine what the expected enrolment will be, and how does that tie into the CBE's plans? Those are a lot of the questions that I hear in Calgary-South East.

4:10

Mr. J. Johnson: The enrolment projections are based – you know, I touched on this a little bit earlier. A lot of information goes into that. There's a student population and teacher forecasting model that we have, and it's based on a standard demographic forecasting method used by academics and forecasters around the world. It ties into all kinds of statistics from birth rates to health information to stats that a school board would have, all types of things. It's pretty accurate. The school authorities are provided with that information and that model to help them with their forecasting. Of course, when you get down to a specific area of a community or a corner of a city, it might be more of an art than a science. You can never exactly forecast what the boom, or the growth, will be in a particular corner of a city even though you might have a pretty good sense of a region of Alberta or of the province as a whole.

Mr. Fraser: Just clarify it for me. Does that funding include provisions for new teachers?

Mr. J. Johnson: Well, we don't fund teachers; we fund students. The idea is that we fund learning. We send dollars to accommodate every student in the system, and those dollars go to the school board. The school board has a lot of latitude in terms of how they deliver the learning experiences for that child. Every child is different, and some need help, whether it's speech and language pathologists or teacher aides or occupational therapists or mental health pieces. That's one of the reasons school boards and principals and teachers on the ground need that latitude. We don't as a province say, "As a school or a school board you get X amount of teachers," because every school is different, and they have a different makeup. What we do is that we try to fund those students. You could argue that with every new student coming into the system, the dollars for the teacher, the dollars for the aides, the dollars for the superintendent, the dollars for the buildings come with that student, right?

Mr. Fraser: We know that this budget is probably one of the toughest budgets we've had to deliver in probably 20 years, and we're kind of asking everybody to dig deep. Can you give me some background on the areas within the department that are being reduced, you know, to offset some of the enrolment funding?

Mr. J. Johnson: I can. Yeah. I can't remember to what level of detail I covered this in the opening comments, but there are a couple that are being eliminated immediately, as of April 1. One is the AISI program, the Alberta initiative for school improvement. That was \$46 million. We talked about that a little bit yesterday. It's been a great program. It's around innovation, but again it's not necessarily funding teachers in the classroom delivering instruction. Even though it's doing some really valuable things, it's one of the things that we had to sacrifice.

The other thing that's eliminated as of April 1 is the fuel contingency program. It's a \$22 million program that topped up funding for transportation once diesel gets over a certain rate, so once it's 60 cents a litre. This was an envelope of funding that was only in the budget for last year. It wasn't scheduled to go past April 1. So we didn't actually cut it; we just weren't able to put it back in.

We've decreased the funding to school boards by the equivalent of 10 per cent of their allowable administration costs just as a number we're trying to find and a message we're trying to send everyone that the ministry is going to reduce administration – and

we need everyone to try to reduce administration – to get more dollars towards the classroom.

We reduced slightly the infrastructure maintenance renewal budget. It was at \$96 million. We reduced that to \$77 million. It will go back up to \$100 million next year and \$100 million the year after. Those are the dollars that pay for kind of the major refits where, you know, you've got to replace a boiler or do work on a roof and those types of things. School boards will argue that that's not enough money, and they're absolutely right. It's one of the things that in the future we'll need to increase, and we were trying to this year before we were hit with the situation we were hit with.

We reduced slightly the funding for each kid that is coming in as an English as a second language learner. We give top-up funding for ESL students because there are more resources and supports that they need. In the past we have delivered that funding over a span of seven years, so we've funded that kid extra money for seven years. We cut that back to five. I can go on another time.

The Chair: All right. Thank you, Minister.

I've got Mr. Wilson, followed by Ms Cusanelli, followed by Mr. Hehr.

Mr. Wilson: Great. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I will go back and forth as well, please.

Thank you, Minister. I wanted to direct you to line item 3.2 in your budget. I'm wondering if you can help me understand. You spend roughly \$27 million this year on debt servicing. Can you let me know just how many schools that's covering? Is that sort of a result of P3s?

Mr. J. Johnson: From my understanding, yeah, that would be the P3 schools, the debt servicing. We're in a third round of P3s. We're in what was called ASAP 3. We're in the process of building or delivering 35 schools right now. I think 22 of those are P3s. The other 13 are modernizations or new builds. It's the ASAP 1 and the ASAP 2 schools that were delivered previous to this school year, and it's just the cost to manage the debt, the financing on those schools.

Mr. Wilson: Sure.

What is the term on those P3s?

Mr. J. Johnson: Those are 30 years. The way the P3s work is that there's a lump sum that's paid up front to pay off part of the capital. The balance of the capital is financed over the 30 years, so the cost of that capital, of course the cost of funds, some interest rate. On top of that, there is the cost to maintain the building for 30 years. One of the really valuable things about the P3s, other than that we're getting schools built faster and cheaper, is that we don't have to provide IMR money for those schools, so we're not getting the deferred maintenance on it, right? You get a fully warrantied building in 30 years, and it's theoretically in good shape.

Mr. Wilson: Sure. Great.

Knowing that you've got the ambitious plan of 50/70 and you've suggested that many of those will also follow this model, can you extrapolate from what you are currently spending to what you think you might be spending on debt servicing by the time those 50 and 70 schools are completed?

Mr. J. Johnson: You know, I can't. That's a really interesting question but one we won't be able to answer until we decide how many or which of these schools are P3s. It's probably a better

question for the Finance minister. They will be the ones deciding where the funding comes from to fund all the 50/70 because it's capital. We could theoretically be borrowing all that money either through a P3 or some other alternative finance program or direct financing. There are 28 P3 schools within that; I just got passed that note.

Yeah, until we package out and tender these 50/70 and understand if it is five P3s or 15 P3s or 25, we wouldn't be able to answer that.

Mr. Wilson: Understood. Thank you.

Moving on to your business plan, to some of the performance measures, I was just wondering if you could help me understand some of the numbers. We'll start with performance measure 2(d). It says: "Overall satisfaction of parents, teachers and the public that students demonstrate attitudes, skills, knowledge and behaviours to be successful when they finish school." Your target is only 78 per cent there, and I'm wondering if you could, again, just help me understand. It seems like that's a pretty low target. If you could comment on that.

Mr. J. Johnson: Well, we'd love to have a hundred per cent satisfaction, but I don't think that you'd probably ever get a hundred per cent satisfaction.

Mr. Wilson: But your target is only 78, so if what you are truly hoping for is a hundred per cent, should your target not, then, be a hundred per cent?

Mr. J. Johnson: Well, we try to set realistic targets. If I got 78 per cent in school when I went to school, I'd be pretty happy with that. Obviously, we'd love to have higher numbers, but I think the satisfaction rate amongst parents and people that are stakeholders in the education system in Alberta is pretty high. You know, we've got stats on a page to show it because we formally go out and survey and try and do that in a formal structure every year.

4:20

Really, what you'll know, being an MLA, is that even anecdotally what you hear from people on the ground and what you hear from people internationally and from other jurisdictions is that we've got an incredible system. Overall, parents are really satisfied. Overall, kids are doing tremendously well. This number of 78 or 76 per cent: obviously we want to keep making gains on it. I think it's realistic to say that we want to try and improve that number – we want to try and improve every year – but to set a target of a hundred per cent isn't realistic in one year. If it's at 76.2, I think it's really realistic to say, you know, that next year one of our goals is to make sure that's bumped up by a couple of per cent so that we're gaining every year, and we can show that we're moving the yardsticks.

Mr. Wilson: Sure.

All right. Moving, then, to performance measure 3(b), I'm sure your answer will be similar. "Overall satisfaction of parents, teachers and school board members that education leadership effectively supports and facilitates teaching and learning": 73.3 per cent, a 74 per cent target, so again you have a goal of having 1 in 4 parents, teachers, or school board members feeling dissatisfied with leadership.

Mr. J. Johnson: Yeah. You know, this one, personally, concerns me a little bit. Again, relatively speaking, it's a high number. I mean, 74 per cent isn't anything to scoff at, and everyone will tell you we've got great leadership in our education system, but one of

the areas that I think we need to pay closer attention to and invest more in and nurture better and have high expectations of is the leadership in the schools. We have a former principal of a school here in the room with us, so she would probably be able to speak about this at great length. In my mind, the real lynchpin to success of our education system is those principals in the schools. They are the interface between the board, the superintendents, the community, the parents, the students in the classroom, and the teachers in the classroom. They've got a very difficult job, so if there's anything we can do that would be very impactful on the system, it would be on the leadership side.

Mr. Wilson: Sure, and I understand that. I guess that maybe my question is more in line with: are you setting these targets slightly above what your last actual survey is, or are you actually setting ambitious targets that are going to drive change?

Mr. J. Johnson: I think both. I think we want to be ambitious, and we want our performance to rise every year. That's a tall order for Alberta because we've got great performance.

Mr. Wilson: Sure.

Moving on to vacant schools, I know that there's a vacant school not far from my riding. I believe it's called Eugene Coste. What is the plan for vacant schools? What control does your ministry have over the use of them, or is that strictly the purview of the board that oversees it or did oversee it?

Mr. J. Johnson: You know, that really is the purview of the board that has that school. We get involved once a school board has declared a building surplus to help them decide what to do with it. We like to see that inventory redeployed to other educational opportunities if possible, to charter schools probably, first and foremost, or to other school divisions. Certainly, that's happening, but I think that's something that is going to need some work and that we'll have to look at here in the near future.

Mr. Wilson: Do you have, like, a bar, that if it sits vacant for one year, two years, then you step in?

Mr. J. Johnson: I don't know that we have measures on, you know, how many weeks or days or months it can sit empty. Certainly, there are some guidelines for schools on how they declare a building surplus. One of the benefits of having the department that we do and some of the people that are behind me is that they have a really good handle on all the capital with every school board. If we've got school boards with pressures that need modulars or need buildings, they know whether they're I wouldn't say telling the truth but how accurate the requests we're getting are. They also know when we've got buildings that are under capacity and should be pressuring boards or encouraging them to look at other partnerships or allowing other groups to use them. They do a lot of that work on the ground, so we don't typically get to a point where we've got vacant schools sitting around for years.

Mr. Wilson: Okay. Fair enough.

I want to reflect on some of the comments you've made about sort of your three-priority, I guess, measuring litmus test for capital funding, the third one being: how innovative is the board being in finding partnerships and whatnot? I also want to reflect on Motion 503, by the Member for Calgary-South East, passed unanimously in the House, that commented on finding

collaboration with municipalities, school boards, and other stakeholders which would function as schools during the day but have the ability to offset operational expenses by partnering

with compatible public and private enterprises such as but not limited to libraries, daycares, and recreational facilities.

Again, how much influence can you have to start making this a priority for new builds?

Mr. J. Johnson: You know, I think we can have quite a bit, and I think we're going to do it in two ways. Well, I guess I would say in three ways. One is that, like I said yesterday, internally we're looking at this differently. Our ministry is actually working with other ministries as we get these requests. I can elaborate, hopefully, later.

The Chair: Great. Thank you, Minister.

We'll go to Ms Cusanelli, followed by Mr. Hehr, followed by Ms Jansen.

Ms Cusanelli: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I want to thank you, Minister, and your colleagues who are here today to be able to answer our questions.

In my first question I guess I'd like to put a little bit of a focus on our FNMI students, our First Nations, Métis, and Inuit. For me, when I think about students and schools, I've often felt that when we're serving our most vulnerable, in serving the least, we're serving the most because I think that sometimes our students need that extra support system made available to them.

Clearly, that is reflected in the results that we would have here under your performance measures on page 18, where we can see that our standard of acceptable and excellence in terms of the language arts for our FNMI students shows that 62.4 per cent and 5.7 per cent are achieving, respectively, acceptable and excellence standards. When you compare that, of course, to the 80 per cent of acceptable standards and 17.9 per cent for all students, it would show that we have a pretty big problem there that we need to be addressing.

For me, when I look at that, I also think about the pressure points that those students will be causing across other ministries – Health, Justice, Human Services, et cetera – because, again, you can kind of draw a correlation between the performance results in 2(a) and then, of course, the high school completion rate that is shown in 2(f), where it's showing that 46.9 per cent of FNMI students are graduating within five years of grade 10. What I can draw from this, essentially, is that our FNMI students specifically are not experiencing success in school. What I would draw as a conclusion is essentially that they're not achieving, that they're not able to demonstrate that they've learned the curricular outcomes and then are dropping out in high school. That would be my best guess.

I'm just wondering: what are we going to be doing in terms of implementing this long-term strategic plan? Can you talk a little bit more about the MOU with First Nations that you have? What kind of funding is going to be made available to ensure that we actually are able to make an impact on these measures to achieve the targets?

Mr. J. Johnson: Really good questions and an important topic. We have close to 1,200 FNMI students in the system right now, and the top-up FNMI grant we give to school boards amounts to about \$43 million. Of course, there are aboriginal students outside of our system as well, in the reserve schools. Those aren't part of our purview. We don't manage those. We don't deliver the education there; the reserve, the band, does. Kids go back and forth, so it's important to have a stronger working relationship and a long-term strategy with the First Nations in Alberta. That's one of the things that we've been working on over the last little while here and what precipitated the MOU.*

*See page 119, right column, paragraph 6

Alberta has an MOU signed with the three grand chiefs in Alberta and the federal government. There are a number of things at that table that they're looking at in terms of developing long-term strategies on various items. We've set up eight subtables with the First Nations, and one is an indigenous knowledge and wisdom centre, that will be run by the First Nations, that will be a great resource centre and I think can bring a lot of value. It speaks to one of their main concerns and one of their biggest criteria, to make the learning relevant for their kids and to make sure that their heritage and their culture and their language are part of their education or that they have that opportunity. The other seven subtables deal with transition, education restructuring, data sharing between the various ministries and the First Nations and the feds, children in care/not in school, teachers, community engagement, and special ed.

4:30

From what I gather, those eight subtables have got some work that is just about ready to come up to the ministers now to have a look at. That is basically a long-term strategic plan on each of those areas, and those areas were set aside, of course, working with the First Nation community.

I would say, you know, that these numbers are concerning. As one of the things that we're doing as a province as we move forward with Inspiring Ed and try to make learning even more relevant for kids and help kids move through the system at their own pace, at any pace, any place, any time type of thing, technology is going to play a key role in our remote and rural locations, which is a lot of our FNMI community. A lot of the community engagement, which is a big part of Inspiring Ed and wraparound services for kids, is going to play a big role, but it's also making sure that we're doing things like the dual crediting and that we're tying real-life learning and career opportunities into the education system. So we're motivating and keeping kids interested, and they show up for school.

Some of the academies we have like the hockey academies – you know, I was just with our whip, Steve Young, at the Gibbons hockey academy here. We were on the ice, skating with kids, and those kids don't get to skate on the ice till their homework is done. If their homework is not done, they sit in the penalty box and actually do their homework until they get on the ice. Those kinds of programs are being run in some aboriginal communities and with some of the FNMI kids, and it has a big impact. Those kids want to come to school because they're part of that program. They want to be part of that music program or that hockey program or that baseball program, and that's what's getting them to school.

We've got programs up north. The YAP program, youth apprenticeship program, is a fantastic program. Kids in middle school, where we're losing a lot of these kids, which is why they don't finish high school, are having the opportunity as part of the school day to leave the school and go out and do some job experience, work experience, working on small engines, working on fixing bikes. Calling Lake has a great program that was going on, and United Cycle was a big sponsor. Those kids can tear apart a bike and put a bike together now. They're better bike techs than you see at United Cycle, and these are middle school kids. They're going to school just so they can go work on that bike – right? – but we're getting them to school, and they're staying in school with these learning experiences that are going to translate into career opportunities. They don't necessarily need to be prepared for university. Not every kid is going to go to university. Many argue that our system is designed to prepare kids for university when only 17 per cent of our kids go to university.

I think Alberta is doing a better job, especially with all the career opportunities that we have in the trades, embracing that and embracing that trades and some of the more traditional occupations that aren't necessarily delivered or taught at our universities are really viable, well-paying, satisfying, and worthwhile careers. We need to make sure our kids know that and that they're getting exposed to that. It's going to change participation rates.

Ms Cusanelli: Thank you, Minister.

The indigenous knowledge and wisdom centre: what age groups is that going to be targeting?

Mr. J. Johnson: I don't think it's targeting any age group. It's supports, more than anything, for educators, for teachers, for people that are working with the kids, and for building that teacher capacity. I can't speak exactly for the folks that are working on it – I'll know more in time – but my understanding is that this is a centre that the First Nations want to have ownership of. They want to run it. This is about making sure that their culture and their language are infused into education and that that opportunity is there and that teachers can tap into that to make sure kids have that opportunity and there is that, you know, pride, right?

Ms Cusanelli: I'm just thinking about enrolment. Certainly, you know, when you're looking at your own enrolment as an administrator of a school, a big part of it is to be able to identify your vulnerable students, so FNMI students are identified through the coding process. While I understand that the complexity issue in the classroom is more related to the funding, I just think about our FNMI students. Quite often they are such a small section of any school population, provided you're not at a school that is drawing directly from a neighbouring reserve, et cetera. Given that students are so displaced, how is funding going to be able to help those individual students where there might be two or three students at a random school here and then five over in this school? How are we going to ensure – if you think about 1,200 students, that's not a lot of students. Did you say 1,200? Is 1,200 the right number?

Mr. J. Johnson: Oh, I'm sorry. It's about \$1,200 per student, but there are about 37,000 FNMI students.*

Ms Cusanelli: Okay.

The Chair: All right. Thank you, Minister.

Okay. A bit of a change here: we'll go Mr. Hehr, followed by Mr. McAllister, followed by Ms Jansen.

Mr. Hehr: Well, thank you. Just following up on some of the comments made by the previous speaker, I think that's a good point you brought up, that only 17 per cent of our kids go to university and that we should reflect some of that in our education system. I've also been reading over the last couple of years articles out of the United States and even here in Canada that are saying: are university degrees as valuable as they once were? There seems to be some question as to whether that is the way to success going forward, so I like the fact that it appears that our postsecondary minister is thinking about some of that thought. As well, it appears that you are now. As an opposition MLA I reserve my right to change my opinion on that, you know. Nevertheless, I'm learning, as well as you.

It seems like we're going to need people in the trades and the like, and we're going to try and direct more people into the trades, which probably I agree with doing as a use of limited dollars, but

*See page 118, right column, last paragraph

at the same time it's my understanding that we've virtually given up on shop classes, building new shop classes into the high school systems and having that experience in our educational system. It seems to be counterintuitive to me, when you're trying to get kids interested in the trades, to not have shop classes and the like at the actual school. Can you speak to this?

Mr. J. Johnson: You bet. Yeah, you raised a few good points there. I think that certainly we want to not necessarily just direct people to the trades but give them opportunities to explore a whole bunch of different things. We don't want to discourage them from going into the trades. You mentioned about: are university degrees as valuable as they once were? That's a fair question. I think they are, and I think one of the big values of getting a postsecondary education may not be the ticket you end up with at the end of the day or the sticker on your wall. It's the experience, right? What we learned through Inspiring Ed is that one of the capacities . . .

Mr. Hehr: You're taking my Liberal talking point there, by the way, when you say stuff like that.

Mr. J. Johnson: Am I? We're sitting too close to each other.

Mr. Hehr: There you go.

Mr. J. Johnson: We want kids to have that culture of lifelong learning. Education is not a destination. I don't go and get my grade 12 diploma and I'm done and then go get my university degree and I'm done. That's traditionally how I used to think of it, anyway, growing up, that you've got to battle through high school to get your diploma. "All right. I've got it now. I'm finished." Well, then you go to university, and you do your four years and: okay; now I'm finished. Well, you're never finished learning, and you shouldn't be. Kids need to know that nowadays. Whether you use your degree – I have a psych degree from Camrose Lutheran College. I guess I use that in politics. I've never been a psychologist, but it sure came in handy to help teach me how to work hard and learn.

As we get to the trades piece and the CTS piece that you talked about, I think we are building CTS labs – we certainly are – but we're looking for more legitimate, I would say, and more comprehensive partnerships in the community to deliver some of those programs. There are schools in Edmonton that don't have a CTS lab, but those kids are coming to St. Joe's, which has a huge, massive, fantastic trades facility as part of the high school.

The complex in Olds that I mentioned yesterday: we don't need to build a CTS lab in a high school if it's on a college campus and they already have all those facilities, right?

4:40

Mr. Hehr: Then is this having the effect of saying that schools in Calgary and schools in Edmonton – you know, it was pretty easy to get a kid at Sir Winston Churchill interested in shop if that was what interested him because he could sign up for the shop class. Are those being promoted throughout the high school system? From what your initial comments were, do you believe this is fulfilling that need in the same way that the old shop class did?

Mr. J. Johnson: You bet. I think it's better because those opportunities are there, and I think they're more relevant.

Mr. Hehr: Okay. Very cool.

Moving on, can you give me a brief rundown, just keeping it brief, brief, brief, on what the Edmonton public and separate envelopes and the Calgary public and separate envelopes are, just a quick breakdown on sort of what your global funding is? Then

I'll get to my narrow question on that. What's the increase this year to those school boards?

Mr. J. Johnson: The increase: okay; the total number I don't have off the top of my head. We'll have it here in a second for you.

Mr. Hehr: Yeah. Don't break down all of it.

Mr. J. Johnson: Well, I've got it right here. I'll give you the right one. Calgary Catholic is flat, so no decrease. Calgary public was a decrease of .9 per cent, Edmonton Catholic was a decrease of .3 per cent, and Edmonton public a decrease of .6.

Mr. Hehr: Here's my challenge. You look at the Calgary board of ed. We now have – I think the numbers are that 25 per cent of our students in Calgary public are ELL students, okay? I don't have a number like that for Edmonton, but it has gone from 3,000 students in 2003 with English as a second language to 15,000 with English as a second language skills. Now you've cut from seven years to five years the support in ELL as well as the global number for that funding. I look at those two boards, being the magnets for our immigrant kids, as needing a recognition of that being within their school systems.

I'm concerned that we may be in a situation where we're attracting now workers from all over the globe who are coming here to raise their families. We may be setting ourselves up for failure, not now but 20 years from now, if we're not doing enough there to increase their competency in the second language. If they don't get that, they're not going very far.

If you could comment on that. I probably haven't narrowed it down, but you get the drift of where I'm going.

Mr. J. Johnson: Yeah. I get the gist of it. You know, it's an important piece of the program. The one thing you mentioned was that we cut ELL as well as cutting the global number. The cut to ELL was within that global number, right?

Like I say, we've got about 20 different envelopes, and some of them we adjusted so that we could keep the other ones whole and so that we could keep every new kid coming into the system funded. Those envelopes go into a pot to the school board, and they still have the latitude to do what they think is best. If it's more important for one community to take money out of, say, the basic instruction grant and put it into ELL, they have the ability to do that.

Mr. Hehr: Is it a recognition – or is this just, being from Calgary, maybe my inherent bias, that I don't sit in your shoes? – that delivering programming to this type of population is seemingly going to be a more challenging area than in other jurisdictions, being a more homogeneous population?

Mr. J. Johnson: Yeah. It's an interesting point, but Calgary doesn't kind of hold the franchise on that, fortunately. I mean, it's great to have new Albertans and new Canadians. But if you look at Brooks, Brooks probably has, you know, a higher percentage than your constituency, for example. It's out there.

Mr. Hehr: There are certain hot spots, then, where this is. Does your ministry feel it's got a good handle on directing funds to these challenged neighbourhoods?

Mr. J. Johnson: Well, I think that's why we want to tie the money to these ELL learners. Fort McMurray has lots of them, too, right? If you tie an envelope of funding to an issue like that, you're going to be able to get some equity and get some funding

to those areas as opposed to just coming out with a program to say, “Oh, jeez, Calgary needs help” or “Fort Mac needs help.”

Mr. Hehr: Just one thing. I know we’ve gone to all the school boards now placing their information on the website to evaluate their different spending, different programs, and the like. I asked questions about this back in March, when we hadn’t yet had our private schools up on the websites to evaluate their spending. You know, public dollars are going to those institutions. The minister at that time indicated he would. Is your department going to do that, or is that sort of going to change with a new minister, that this won’t be happening? That’s just on that private school accountability that we’ve talked about in question period.

Mr. J. Johnson: That’s an interesting comment because, obviously, they are private organizations, but they are getting public funding in delivering a public service.

Mr. Hehr: Think about it.

Mr. J. Johnson: Yeah. I’ll think about it.

The Chair: Okay. We’ll go to Mr. McAllister and then Ms Jansen. Then we’re going to take a short break.

Mr. McAllister: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I’d like to ask you about diplomas, Minister – I know we talked about provincial achievement exams – and grade 12 specifically. How much does it cost a student to rewrite a diploma?

Mr. J. Johnson: Twenty dollars to rewrite.

Mr. McAllister: Do you know how much Alberta students spend in a year, what the government would take in on rewrites?

Mr. J. Johnson: We’ll get that number for you. Sure. I don’t have that off the top of my head.

Mr. McAllister: You know, I’m going to put you right on the spot. Is that a line item in the budget? Have you seen it?

Mr. J. Johnson: No. Revenue from rewrites for diplomas wouldn’t be a line item in the budget. It would probably be wrapped into fees and licences and those types of revenue.

Mr. McAllister: So what page? Sorry.

Mr. J. Johnson: Page 54. Oh, there you go. It’s \$1,530,000.

Mr. McAllister: So 1 and a half million dollars roughly?

Mr. J. Johnson: Right.

Mr. McAllister: Okay. Good. Thank you. I’m glad we found that. I’ve read so much. Literally, Minister, I could not remember if I had read that or if I had created that.

It struck me when I saw that that if grade 12 students are spending 1 and a half million dollars at – what was it? – \$20, I mean, we’re talking tens of thousands of people rewriting exams. Doesn’t that seem excessive?

Mr. J. Johnson: I think, you know, the goal of the diplomas is to make sure the kids have that skill level, that competency level that they need. I don’t know if you can put a number on that. You don’t want to discourage kids from rewriting diplomas. If they need to rewrite to ensure that they’ve got that competency, you want to have that ability for them to do it.

Mr. McAllister: Well, that might open a couple of other subject areas.

I just want to make sure that we have our numbers straight. So 1 and a half million divided by \$20 is 76,500 students – well, probably not because, you know, maybe some are writing more than one. It would strike me as an awfully big number of students rewriting exams.

Mr. J. Johnson: So you’re saying that we should charge less?

I’ll just give you a little bit more information on this. I mean, \$20 was an approximation. It’s \$26.25 per exam, \$50 per exam for foreign students. The \$1.53 million also includes revenue from the sale of diploma examinations outside of Alberta. Of course, there are rewrites, too, for the second or subsequent time. There is a little bit more there than just a \$20 fee for every kid that rewrites.

Mr. McAllister: Okay. In any event, we’re probably well over 50,000 students rewriting exams. You know, I think if the public knew that students spend 1 and a half million dollars rewriting exams, they would be alarmed by that. I know I was when I saw it. You’ve got no trouble with that?

4:50

Mr. J. Johnson: I have no trouble providing kids the opportunity to rewrite a diploma exam. As a matter of fact, I think we should do more of that, not less of it. There is a cost that comes along with that, and I’m sure that you wouldn’t want us necessarily to just increase the budget to provide that more often. If my kid needs to rewrite the exam two or three times, why shouldn’t he pay 20 bucks for it?

Mr. McAllister: Yeah, and I wouldn’t recommend that you make up your budget shortfalls on charging students to rewrite exams, Minister.

Mr. J. Johnson: Well, again, a good chunk of this is foreign students, so \$1 million of this is coming from the sale of diploma exams and foreign students writes.

Mr. McAllister: I would like to task your staff here. I know that it probably would be unreasonable for me to ask you to get it today, but I would like to know how many students are rewriting exams.

Mr. J. Johnson: Yeah. We can certainly look that up and get an estimate on that.

Mr. McAllister: It’s a worthwhile conversation to have with Albertans.

Do you think that it has anything to do with – and this is a discussion I know you’ve had travelling the province and I’ve had travelling the province, and I’m not advocating for either side of it – the 50 per cent value of the diploma?

Mr. J. Johnson: No, I don’t believe so.

Mr. McAllister: Just to be more frank, are you comfortable with the 50 per cent value?

Mr. J. Johnson: I think that’s an ongoing debate that’s never going to end. It doesn’t matter if it’s 45 or 30 or 80 or 70. You know, whether the 50 is right for now or whether we keep the 50 tomorrow, Alberta might adjust those things, but the debate on what the weighting should be will never end.

Mr. McAllister: Right on. I agree. You know, from one board I hear: knock it down. From another I hear: keep it the same. But it’s worth having the discussion. Since we have some time and

we're not in question period and we can go back and forth a little bit, I'm curious, Minister of Education, what you think of that. Do you have a specific preference? Would you like to see it go down?

Mr. J. Johnson: I think the weighting that it has right now has served us well. It's served students well. It's kept the integrity of the exam and the diploma extremely high outside of our jurisdiction and with our universities. It also gives fairness to gender. I'm not opposed to a discussion on looking at it. If there's research on reasons that it should be changed, yeah, sure, let's have that discussion, but I don't have an agenda to change it.

Mr. McAllister: No time frame going forward? Your government is not looking at reducing that rate from 50 per cent?

Mr. J. Johnson: No. We're not currently looking at it, but we have no opposition to having a discussion about it.

Mr. McAllister: Okay. One of the things that we talked about yesterday I'd like to follow up on. The Premier promised during the election campaign, as you well know – and I said that I looked through this document to find it – a tax credit for teachers at \$500 per teacher. I think you and your party had figured it out to be about \$2 million. I said that, you know, I couldn't find it. Was it \$2 million a year? I couldn't find it in your Education budget estimates. I think you said that I might find it in the Finance budget estimate. Well, it's not there either. So are you reneging, effectively, on the Premier's election promise?

Mr. J. Johnson: As I said yesterday, that's a discussion you need to have with the Finance minister. He's the minister that needs to answer that question. I don't set . . .

Mr. McAllister: Well, if a teacher asks you, Minister, as the Minister of Education, "You know, we were promised a tax credit after the election," what do you say to them?

Mr. J. Johnson: I say that the Minister of Finance is looking into that. I don't set the tax policy for the province. As the Minister of Education I don't set the taxes. I know we've got several campaign promises, obviously, and we'll deliver on those. I'm not sure. I couldn't say off the top of my head what timelines were tied to that promise. Obviously, we're focusing in my ministry on the things that we're responsible for delivering, which is the 50/70, which is full-day K, which was the Education Act, which was the \$107 million: all those things. Some of them we've already gotten across the finish line, and some of them we're focusing on getting across the finish line soon. I can't speak for another minister on the campaign promises that would be in his file.

Mr. McAllister: Right. Although it is education related. Maybe I'll, you know, respectfully let it go, Minister, but I did want to raise the point that the Premier did promise during the election campaign a \$500 tax credit to every teacher in Alberta to be delivered after the election. It's not in your budget, it's not in the Finance budget, so clearly it's not there. I'm hearing about it from teachers, and I'm not even sure where you stand on it personally. Do you think they should get it?

Mr. J. Johnson: Well, it was a commitment we made, so I'm certain that we will be delivering it. I just can't speak for the Finance minister as to what date or in what form it'll be delivered.

Mr. McAllister: Okay. Yesterday, Minister, you said that communities who exhaust all partnerships and come up with

creative solutions are more likely to receive funding for a new or renovated school than those who are not looking into partnerships. You know, we love to hear that we're encouraging communities to be creative, and the more schools that we build, the better. Can you refresh my memory on sort of how you determine when a community has dotted the i's and crossed the t's, your preference on that, and maybe give an example or two?

Mr. J. Johnson: I think this picks up on one of your colleague's questions. Like I said, there are a number of ways we're doing this. I guess I'd preface it by really emphasizing that that is the third lens we're looking at, capital projects. The first and most important one is health and safety, and the second one is enrolment pressures. Then the third one is, of course, that partnership piece. We're doing that internally by looking at the different ministries and projects that are on the go.

The Chair: All right. Thank you, Minister.

Mr. McAllister: Are you kidding me? Man, that flew by.

The Chair: We'll go with Ms Jansen and then go to a break.

Ms Jansen: All right. Thank you, Chair, and thank you to the minister and his colleagues for answering these questions so patiently today. I want to start out just quickly putting this on the record. Obviously, I'm going to ask it every time I see you. You know that. Clearly, we need that middle school in Calgary-North West, and I'm going to say it until the end of time if I have to. Obviously, we're one of those schools that was oversubscribed from the minute the doors opened. We were at 107 per cent on the day the doors of our elementary school opened. Clearly, we have that need. You know, I just want to make sure that's on the record so that you know again and again.

I do want to talk to you about inclusive education and ESL and some of those incidents. I know the stat, the fact that we have some 65,000 students in Alberta who have special education needs and that each of these kids has an individualized program plan. I'm pretty familiar with that because I have a coded child myself and she's in a program. Also, I've been getting some calls from people. I'm wondering if you can take me really quickly through the changes that have happened. Now, we know that each of those kids comes with an amount of money, so when they have an IPP, there is an amount of money attached to that. Can you sort of give me a sense of what that looked like before and what those changes are now? I'm told that no longer is that money going for each individual child, but that money is now going in a lump sum to a school. Maybe I have that wrong, but maybe you can clarify that for me.

Mr. J. Johnson: Yeah. You know, there was a time years ago, I guess you could say, when funding for special-needs kids was tied to the coding of a kid. They'd have to be evaluated, and they were given a code, and then the funding followed the code. Of course, many students got special supports, whether it was a teacher's aide or whatever because of those codes.

What I believe happened – and the guys may correct me – was that we spent a lot of time and money validating those evaluations and making sure that paperwork was right and auditing that. You spend as much on administration, almost, as you do on handing out money to support the kids. So Alberta moved away from the coding of special-needs kids, in terms of the funding piece of it, to a profile for a school division. If you had roughly X number of kids last year, you'd get X amount of money in terms of a bucket of dollars for special needs and for those resources.

What happened over time was that that bucket would get bigger every year for a school division because we increase grants every year even though it wasn't actually tied to a demographic necessarily within their school or a coding. So we didn't actually have a specific number of kids. Some of these school divisions that actually got more money every year were decreasing in enrolment as a school division. It became evident that this could be characterized as a bit of a problem.

The folks before my time went in and had a look at it and reviewed how we did inclusion and the funding for special needs. This all came out of the work that Mr. Hancock did. Naresh Bhardwaj chaired the whole review of special needs and inclusion, which is the setting the direction report. They came up with a different model working with the stakeholders. Many think it's not perfect. We're working on it. We're tweaking it. The inclusion money, or that bucket of money, now is tied to a per capita head count, but it's also tied to the demographics of your community. They're looking at a whole bunch of different metrics from things that might contribute: you know, single parents, the health stats that we have, the FNMI community. There are a whole bunch of pieces that they've put into a bucket that can help us define the demographics of a community. The dollars are defined by that, and they go in a bucket to the school board.

5:00

So now the school board has a bucket of money. We've tried to be as fair as we can in terms of how we distribute that and tied it to the demographics of a community as opposed to each particular kid. They have complete flexibility and latitude in terms of how they deliver that in the schools. You're going to have different kids, different makeups of classes, and different teachers with different capacity. Some kids may need a teacher's aide. Some might need an occupational therapist. Some might need a speech-language pathologist. The school, the principal, the teacher have the latitude in terms of what they bring in. It's not necessarily a dollar tied to one child that should go towards a teacher's aide, which might be seen as the more traditional model.

Part of what we need to do to make sure that people are informed on what needs a child has is to share information on that child. One of those things that they use is the IPP, the individualized program plan, which is designed by the student's learning team. It's an electronic document or a document, and that team is comprised of the classroom and subject teacher and the school administrator and the parent and others that are relevant. It's basically a document or data used to inform the work that everyone does with that child, and that's how the funding flows now as opposed to being tied to a coded child.

Ms Jansen: Yeah. Now, I'm going to pull on my own situation. You know, I ended up with my daughter in a charter school situation because we were in a situation where she wasn't really thriving in her public school. When we started looking around and were trying to figure out what it was that wasn't clicking for her, we went to the Science School and applied there, which is a charter school, and they told us that she was testing at a high school level in grade 3.

Then the public system tells me, you know, that you have to have an IQ test done before you can take advantage of the GATE program, if you want to be involved in the gifted and talented education program. When I asked how I did that, they said that you have to be put on a list. It was a year and a half waiting list to get the IQ test done. That was a little frustrating. For me, I went out and paid the 1,200 bucks to get it done, but I think that there are a lot of parents who certainly didn't have the resources to be

able to do it. Then when I finally had it done, they told me that the GATE program was full.

I ended up steering her into a charter school system, and I have to thank you from the bottom of my heart for your support of the charter schools because, seriously, really, if it wasn't for the charter school situation, I don't know what we would have done. I mean, she is thriving, and that at the end of the day speaks to me of the marvellous education system we have in this province because the choice that's available to us, to me, is fantastic. I just want to put that on record.

At the same time, I'm concerned about what the GATE program represents. Resourcewise is there a pot of money that is put towards that? How exactly does that funding work?

Mr. J. Johnson: Well, you mentioned the charters and that kind of choice and that ability for the system to have diversity and flexibility and to challenge every kid. It doesn't matter what level they're at or what their skill level or the capacity is. To challenge every child and provide for every child the support that they need, which is going to be unique, is really important. That's why charter schools and private schools are an important part of our system. We need to continue to invest in those, I believe. That's also why programs like the one you're talking about, a gifted program, are really important.

When funding rolls through to school boards, you know, the expectation is that they will be delivering to the best of their ability those resources that every child needs and challenging every child. We need to, I think, as a government make sure we give them as much flexibility as possible so that the professionals on the ground, the principals and the teachers and the administrators, can make those choices locally because every classroom and every kid is different. I can't speak to the program in particular that your daughter was tied to, but just in general that's the approach.

Ms Jansen: When you look at, you know, what people are saying – I know that my daughter is an A student now. She looks forward to going to school every day. As a parent, to me that's a fantastic thing. It makes me happy to know she is really happy now.

I have heard from a few parents who have called me, my constituents, who said that when your child has special needs – you know, we're not talking about code 80 kids, like gifted and talented. We're talking about kids who maybe need a teacher's aide in the classroom. One parent told me that the principal said: well, we're not getting money for your individual child anymore, so we're cutting back those supports. Are you hearing that there's a bit of frustration between what folks think the Education ministry can do and what really is in the realm of the individual school board?

Mr. J. Johnson: I think there has been some confusion out there with respect to this.

The Chair: All right. Thank you.

Now, I haven't been asking whether you want to go back and forth or go five and five because everybody has gone back and forth. So if you want to go the five and five, let me know.

We're going to take a break, seven minutes. We can be back in here for 5:15. Great. Thanks.

[The committee adjourned from 5:07 p.m. to 5:15 p.m.]

The Chair: All right. We will call the meeting back to order.

Okay. We will now go to Mr. Pedersen.

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Minister, and your staff for allowing us to question you on this today. It's a great opportunity. I'll concentrate most of my questions to you on the 50/70 plan just to get some more clarification and depth into that and understanding. The first question I have is that it seems, from what I understand – and, you know, you may correct me – that the idea of wrapping a group of schools together to get a bulk build and kind of a bulk design price is the model you're going to stick with for the most part. How do you justify in that case that a bulk is cheaper and more efficient and faster to build than doing, say, a local RFP or RFQ in a certain area?

Mr. J. Johnson: We have several different kinds of procurement methods that we can use to get a school built. You can grant the money to the school board, and then they can just go do it. They hire an architect and tender it out and build it or do the modernization. We do that in some cases. Historically we've done that in Edmonton and Calgary because they have more capacity and bigger boards to be able to do that.

In some cases we do what we call design/builds. We'll bid out a project, and companies bid on actually designing it and building it once there is some preliminary stuff.

Or you do a design/bid/build, where you bring in architects to design it and then you tender out the construction of it.

The other one is the P3s, where you package a bunch together and you say: "Come build them and manage them and maintain them for 30 years. We'll give you a certain amount down. Tell us what the monthly payment is going to be." That type of thing.

The criteria that the team uses – and we have a good team working on this along with the local school boards and Infrastructure; Infrastructure really manages these contracts – is that they have to look at each project and where it best fits, I guess I could say, where the best value for the taxpayer dollar is. You can't bundle typically a small remote rural from northern Alberta in a P3 with a bunch of schools from Calgary because there's the maintenance component. The company wants to build them and maintain them, so there are geographical considerations. There are size considerations. If it's going to be a P3 and they'll all be similar, you like to bundle. You know, they might all be K to 9 schools, so they can be designed virtually the same. You use one design method, and then that saves a lot of dollars. That's how you save time, too.

Mr. Pedersen: Okay. Thank you, Minister.

When you do that design, is there any initiative or incentive in place to have these schools built below that budgetary price?

Mr. J. Johnson: Oh, you bet. Absolutely. Well, I wouldn't say – I mean, we're incented to try to get them in as cheap as we can, but there are no cash bonuses that go to the minister if they come in below. Maybe that's something we should talk about. Typically if we send a project out or money out to a school board to do a project, if that project comes in under budget and there's a surplus, you know, the rule of thumb is that that money is coming back to Treasury Board. It's coming back to be used for another project. In cases we have given school boards latitude to use that for another . . .

Mr. Pedersen: Okay. I'm just sort of relating that to the fact that if the school board had a bit more autonomy with that, it would certainly be an incentive for them to make sure that, you know, the building was either done on budget or ahead of time or they would reduce the amount of cost-plus agreements that are in place or change-order negotiations. Just throwing that out there, and just saying that that might be an option for some of the builds.

Medicine Hat school district 76, I think, is getting their first new school, here. It's been over 30 years, so they're quite happy about that. I think it is in the P3 model. It was interesting. When it was announced, I think it was one of the cookie-cutter designs, which caused a little bit of confusion down there because the builder wasn't even going to put air conditioning into this school. If you've toured Medicine Hat or are familiar with some of the weather we get in the summertime, it does get kind of hot.

Mr. Goudreau: School is closed in the summertime.

Mr. Pedersen: Well, it gets pretty hot around May and June, and it's quite hot in the later times as well in the fall. Around those kinds of areas having that local autonomy would make sense, to give the school board more say and input in that.

Mr. J. Johnson: Yes. One of the things that the guys have done is that as they're building or designing these P3s – even in the P3s, which are a little bit more inflexible, there is still flexibility – they can still be adjusted, customized to a certain extent based on what the local community wants.

Mr. Pedersen: Not a whole lot, right?

Mr. J. Johnson: Not a whole lot. I mean, if it's a K to 9 school, it's going to be a K to 9 school, but there's some opportunity for that, especially if you're talking about air conditioning. Those things can be added at the expense of the school board.

Mr. Pedersen: On the renovation side we've heard lots today about different areas having pressures for requiring new schools. Medicine Hat is one of those older areas where we have schools that are over 100 years old still being utilized. The way that assessments are done on infrastructure: I've talked to some of the boards, and they feel like their hands are tied. They have some older schools with very, very high ceilings, you know, wide hallways, lots of stairwells, rooms in the buildings that fit the time but don't fit now. It's a real burden for them to manage efficiently and effectively and responsibly. Is there any thought or idea of maybe changing the assessment process for older schools still in service for some of these boards so that they don't have this utilization rate negatively impacted by that?

Mr. J. Johnson: If you're talking about the formula we use for the utilization statistics, absolutely. We're looking at that. There are obviously always concerns about how accurate it is and whether it's appropriate. Space of the hallways in traditional or older schools is a lot bigger than it is today, and that's not really instructional space. So we're looking at adjusting the formulas for the utilization rates. You're right. Many of these older schools, you know, need to be modernized, setting aside the infrastructure, just in terms of the wiring and the IT. To keep up technology nowadays with the number of outlets and the infrastructure you need for the new technology and the new learning tools that tie in with that is a challenge for some of the old schools.

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you, Minister.

Again on the renovation side it seems that some of the ideas for remodeling or renovating are kept at a very high level, and some of the solutions that are presented to the boards aren't in their best interest, or the boards feel that sometimes they have a better idea or a better solution. Is there any way that you think that this process could work better so that maybe you come up with what you think is a best idea solution or a couple of options, put a dollar value to it but allow the school board to come back and say, "Hey, look. That's

great, but we think that by doing this and this, we can do it for the same amount or less.” Give them some freedom and latitude.

Mr. J. Johnson: I think one of the things that I’m, you know, happiest with on the capital side, from my perspective – and I sat in the Infrastructure chair before this one – is how good a job my ministry does working with local schools on exactly what you’re talking about. There’s always going to be a balance between trying to get the most value for the taxpayer and making sure that a project doesn’t go out of control and build a Taj Mahal locally because someone else is paying for it.

5:25

I’ve found through my experiences that I’ve had to intervene very few times and had nothing, really, but compliments from school boards and people on the ground with the people from Infrastructure and Education that they work with to actually work out exactly what you’re talking about. If there are any particular concerns you have on that, I’d be happy to take those, but for the most part we’ve got a great department that works very closely with the community and the school boards. They may not always be able to deliver everything that local parents or students or teachers want, but I think they do a really good job.

Mr. Pedersen: I appreciate that because I know when you have somebody sitting at a desk and drafting a design and it looks good on paper and you try and move that into the real world, it just doesn’t happen or doesn’t make sense. I appreciate that. I do have one that I’ll probably talk to you about, then.

Something that I wasn’t thinking of raising or talking about: another person raised the idea of charter schools. Medicine Hat does have a charter school. It’s one of the first, original charter schools, CAPE. One of the things they’ve mentioned to me – and maybe you can clarify this – is that, I believe, their hands are tied on infrastructure. They have to obtain the building through another board. Is that correct?

Mr. J. Johnson: Yeah. Up until now we haven’t funded infrastructure for the capital buildings for charter schools.

Mr. Pedersen: Is there any talk or plans of working with charter schools to allow them the ability to own or renovate their own? [A timer sounded]

Mr. J. Johnson: Well, they’re not restricted from owning their own. They’re restricted from owning municipal reserve land. But I could get into those details more.

That was our beep? Is that our time?

The Chair: That was our beep.

Mr. J. Johnson: Okay.

The Chair: All right. We’ll go to Mrs. Fritz and then Mr. McAllister and then Mrs. Leskiw.

Mrs. Fritz: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, I would like to talk with you about the government of Alberta strategic plan, page 18. I’d like to focus on the Inspiring Education vision that I know you were a part of as the co-chair when that report was written. I think it was a two-year window that you had for the report. It was a public dialogue, but I thought it was really unique in how it was done. I can recall that it was to look forward 30 years in the future to see for students 30 years from now what it would look like if we changed education today, what the outcomes were for that individual as a whole.

I know that it says in the booklet here that there’s the dual credit opportunity for students, which you had discussed just very briefly yesterday, and the new provincial assessment model for kindergarten to grade 9. I’d like to ask you to comment on what has been implemented today, where you’re at with that, and where you plan to move with it. Where is this in your budget?

Mr. J. Johnson: Just taking a couple of quick notes here. Thanks for the question. The Inspiring Education initiative was actually a really exciting project, and it was one of, I think, three that were launched at the time that really have set a vision and are telling where we’re going to go with education or where we want to go. The reason we were able to do Inspiring Ed and Setting the Direction and Speak Out, which was the student engagement initiative, was because we had labour peace for five years. We weren’t focused on anything else except learning and working with teachers and trustees and all the stakeholders to set a vision. We weren’t sidetracked by, you know, any animosity or confrontations on labour or those pieces right across the province. We really were able to focus on the student, which was fantastic.

The Inspiring Ed initiative was really centred around one question that was given to a group of 22 people that was sent across the province for two years to talk to Albertans. The question was: what does an educated Albertan look like in 2030? What kinds of skills and characteristics and qualities does a kid need walking out of the system in 2030 to be successful in that economy? Of course, they were not knowing what that economy and that province and that globe is going to look like at that time.

We had 22 great people. We went around the province, and one of the premises that was given as we did this was that every Albertan has a stake in the education system. There’s no such thing as just a traditional stakeholder in education. We actually took some heat from that from some of the groups that thought they were marginalized because they saw themselves as traditional stakeholders and didn’t have a strong enough seat at the table.

When we went around and did dialogues across the province, we would go to a community, you know, to a room two or three times the size of this. We would have a third of the room set aside for traditional stakeholders – the ASBA, the ATA, the parent councils, all those groups – we’d have a third of the room set aside for people that self-identified and wanted to come, and we’d have a third of the room set aside for random Albertans. We actually had people that got on the phone and pulled the senior citizen or the gas jockey or somebody off the street that was just an average Albertan to come and talk about education and the future of education in the province because every Albertan has a stake in the education system. It doesn’t matter if you’re three years old or you’re 78 years old, if you’re training someone to take care of you or you’re learning to lay a foundation for your future – right? – or your kids’ future.

Once we set out the vision for education, which was basically the competencies that we want in those kids walking out of the system in 20 years, it hit home for me because I had a daughter entering the system at that time who would be walking out in another 10 years or so. What kind of qualities does she need to have to be successful? If she walks out of the education system and there’s no job for her, can she create her own?

Albertans told us clearly all of the pieces that they want us to instill in children walking out of our education system, and it wasn’t the memorization of content; you know, the history or the math or whatever. Numeracy and literacy: those things are really important. I mean, those are a foundation that will go across all our curriculum. We bucketed the competencies that they wanted to see into three areas, and we called them the three Es. It’s the

engaged thinker, the ethical citizen with an entrepreneurial spirit. The engaged thinker has those qualities like critical thinking skills, creativity, being a lifelong learner, adaptability, innovation, all those pieces. We talk about the ethical citizen as someone who contributes to their community. They've got self-responsibility, a work ethic. These things were moving more from almost an academic outcome to characteristics, to the real character of a person. They wanted to see these things instilled in our children.

The third piece is kind of unique to Alberta. A lot of countries have been looking at this. A lot of leading thinkers in education have been looking at these 21st-century skills. When you see this stuff from leading researchers on 21st-century skills, the pieces I just talked about are predominant, but there's one piece that Albertans were quite adamant about. It was the entrepreneurial spirit, so the third E. Albertans are very proud of their pioneering spirit, and they want kids coming out of the system saying, like I said: "If there's no job for me, I'm going to create my own. I've got that capacity. I've got that attitude. I've got those skills." These are the pieces of that character, I guess, that you would tie to being resilient, self-reliant, independent, competitive, being a risk taker, those types of pieces.

That's just a snapshot of what Inspiring Ed talked about. Those are the outcomes of the system, and then we talked about how we need to shift the system to get us there. So the changes we're making in the system to get us there tie into some of the things you were talking about. The one thing you mentioned was dual crediting.

The Chair: Minister, if I may, you're going to quickly run up to your own five minutes here.

Mr. J. Johnson: Oh, I'm only allowed five? Sorry.

The Chair: Yeah. It's five in total.
We'll go to Yvonne.

Mrs. Fritz: So the minister has five minutes, and I have five minutes? I thought we could combine them.

The Chair: They are combined.

Mrs. Fritz: Oh. So we each only get to talk for five minutes.

Mr. J. Johnson: I'm not the ref. I'll do whatever.

Mrs. Fritz: Can I give the minister my five?

The Chair: Well, if you've got nothing else, he can finish up here in a minute or so if you've got no other questions.

Mrs. Fritz: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Minister, then what I'll have you do, if you don't mind, is that as you move forward to say where you are today with Inspiring Education in your ministry, where I wanted to move with that is about what you can take from that – you had mentioned the engagement, the entrepreneurial spirit, all of those good things – and go back to the questions that were asked earlier about the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people related to their barriers to success, the on-reserve, off-reserve sharing of information so that they can become as successful as they are off reserve, and about whether or not there's any discussion, whether it's, you know, you with other ministers, as you were mentioning earlier, like Minister Campbell and whatnot, with the aboriginal people of having any testing done on reserve, much like the provincial achievement tests but in a different format, in whichever way the aboriginal people would choose to, whether

it's through cultural relation, whatever that would look like, and how you could take that. I think what I recall from the Inspiring Education vision document was that the aboriginal people were involved in your discussions. As you said, you talked with everyone from the age of three to 73.

Thank you.

5:35

Mr. J. Johnson: You bet we did. The things that we were told in terms of how we needed to shift the system really, I think, relate to how we get at greater success in the aboriginal community. One of the underlying things we were told is that we need to make sure the system is focused on students, focused on kids, and that in every decision we're making, we're asking ourselves, "Is this good for kids?" and focusing less on what labour agreements demand and what budgets demand and all the other interests in the system other than the kid.

There are all kinds of examples I can give you, and one would even be the school year; you know, the school year where high school kids have to come back after Christmas to write their exams. Why do we do that? If we want a system that's designed around the student and the student's learning, why don't those kids write the exams before Christmas so that their terms or, actually, semesters are lined up with postsecondary and we're not splitting up their learning like that? If we want a system that's centred around students, why do we . . .

The Chair: Okay. Mr. Minister, I think we're going to have to probably cut that off there. We've gone well over the five for the answer. Thank you.

We'll go to Mr. McAllister, followed by Mrs. Leskiw.

Mr. McAllister: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Minister, I would have gladly listened to the end of that. I've got to tell you, you know, you are five hours plus into this and taking every question that comes at you. I'm asking some of the toughest, and I've probably got one more go-round, maybe two, so thank you for that.

I touched on it at the end of my last line of questioning, and I kind of ran out of time, so let me just go back to it. Yesterday I think you said: communities that exhaust all partnerships and come up with creative solutions are more likely to receive funding for a new or renovated school than those who are not looking into partnerships. Again, I said that I'd absolutely love to hear that if it means we get more schools built. I want to shout it from rooftops to boards about their capital plans so that they know it. Can you detail that for me a little bit more so that I might pass that information on to communities? What might they do to be moved up the list?

Mr. J. Johnson: Well, again, the first thing we look at is the health and safety. Being innovative and having a great partnership won't bump you ahead of a school where we've found mould in the walls, so for health and safety reasons, or where with the enrolment pressures we just don't have desks for kids. The ministries are looking a lot more closely together at what kind of requests are coming at them from the same community so we can plug some of these things together, and we would expect the communities to do that on the ground to help drive this.

All things being equal, if you have a stand-alone school request or you have a request where a school board has gone out and they've approached the francophone school or they've approached the community library or they're going to bolt onto a field house that's being built, that project right now is going to get extra consideration and get bumped ahead of the stand-alone school.

There's one other piece that we're going to try to bring forward in the coming years. We don't have the money for it right this year, but we've never had a program where we actually had an envelope of money where we could take proposals from communities. If a community like Chestermere got together with whomever – postsecondary, Health, their school board – and threw a proposal at the province and said, "Look, the community is building a new multiplex; now is the time to build this together," we've never had that capacity to be nimble and say: "Well, you're not on the list yet. You won't be on the list for years, so we can't consider it." We should be able to consider those more nimbly, so we want to get to that point.

Mr. McAllister: Excellent. I'm happy to hear that. Again, I'm trying to pass this information further.

In my party's debt-free capital plan one of the things that we had pushed for was to allow developers to build schools as a feature of new neighbourhoods, as we put forward, when it makes sense, when all the standards are in place, that we could at least have that conversation. You know, is this sort of part of what you're looking at also? Are you looking at that consideration? With some of these communities, as you know – bam – they're announced, and there are 10,000 residents coming in. There are many people that feel the developer ought to be part of that equation.

Mr. J. Johnson: Absolutely. I think we're open to any creative idea that's going to be good for the community. What you're talking about was part of the motion that the Member for Calgary-South East brought forward. The challenge with that at the outset is that you don't necessarily want communities to be able to circumvent others that are of a lot higher need in terms of the budgeting. I think we can overcome that.

The second piece. You talk about no debt. Well, if a developer builds a school, they're not going to do it for free. Somebody is paying for that, and they're either going to be wanting to be paid out over time – there's going to be a liability for somebody, and if all that is is another way to borrow money, to be frank, we don't need a developer to get the best interest rates in the world. Alberta has got a pretty good credit rating.

Mr. McAllister: Are you telling me that borrowing isn't necessarily a good thing to do? No. That's not what you're saying.

Mr. J. Johnson: No. I'm saying that the borrowing that you're talking about may not necessarily be the best kind of borrowing, and it is borrowing, just like a P3 is.

Mr. McAllister: Yeah. Sure.

Listen, I've said many, many times, you know, that I believe that if all the avenues are exhausted – and this is a very brief tangent, but I only address it because you brought it up – in terms of where you might make spending decisions that eliminate what I think most of the public would view as wasteful and if that's where you have to go eventually, then my party wouldn't be thrilled with me but I would understand that. Like you, I want to see schools built, so I want to see us eliminate all wasteful spending first and then see where we get.

I want to bring your attention to a concern I have from some people in St. Albert, and I know you're aware of it. It has to do with, you know, community partnerships and trying to get schools built through those models. For over a decade – I'm just paraphrasing this to you – in St. Albert their public district has been in talks, they say, with the Alberta provincial government discussing the need to build another school. At the request of the

hon. Mr. Horner the board pursued a P3 partnership with a land developer in St. Albert, and it took them a number of years. In good faith the district brought forward a very solid proposal to the Alberta provincial government, only to be told that a P3 model was no longer an option for them. Now, I'm sure you're aware of it and can justify it, but they obviously see this as: "Wait a second. We did exactly what you told us to do, and now we're being told that it doesn't meet the mark." Are there specific things that you're looking for, and do you know why some make it and some don't in terms of your approval?

Mr. J. Johnson: I think that, you know, this is a great example of one of my previous comments on the community partnership, community capital planning side of things. We have not had in the past a program as a government where we could be nimble and respond to proposals from the community. It doesn't matter how good they are. This is a great example of a community trying to do something creative and innovative and that would work for them and maybe be good for the taxpayer, and the way our budgets and our systems and our programs are set up, we didn't have the capacity to respond to it. So, going forward, I believe and others believe that we need to look at a program where we would actually have a budget for responding and being more nimble and reacting to good proposals like that. We haven't had that in the past.

Mr. McAllister: Any chance of that group coming back to you? I know this is putting you on the spot.

Mr. J. Johnson: Well, absolutely. We're open to any creative proposals like that.

Mr. McAllister: I don't even know, Minister, if that partnership would still exist, but if it did, I'll sure reach out and say: "You know, the minister is open to having that discussion. They've done some things differently and might be able to look at it." That would be great.

I've just got a couple of minutes left, Mr. Chair, and I don't know if it's going to come back around to me, so I would like to put forth an amendment before I go. I'll ask the pages to pass them out. We have the required number of copies and approval today also. Do you want me to wait and read it in?

The Chair: I would say, looking at the time left, that you'd better read it in.

5:45

Mr. McAllister: Okay. Thank you. I'll try and be very quick. Much of it has been discussed already. I'd like to move that the main estimates for the Ministry of Education be reduced as follows:

- (a) for the minister's office under reference 1.1 at page 52 by \$101,000,
- (b) for the deputy minister's office under reference 1.2 at page 52 by \$137,000,
- (c) for the corporate services under reference 1.3 at page 52 by \$1,761,000, and
- (d) for the information and program services under reference 1.4 at page 52 by \$2,817,000

so that the amount to be voted at page 51 for operational is \$4,011,441,000.

The reason for this. I know you worked very hard to find areas to trim, and I believe fundamentally that if you show you're willing to take cutbacks in your own department over and above those that you have discussed, you show great leadership to those boards that are out there talking to the media right now, saying

that they can't make this deal work because you're asking them to do more with less and looking at your department and wondering why you didn't do more.

Fifty-five million has been discussed here in the last two days for developing Alberta curriculum. I don't claim to be an expert in the field of developing new curriculum, but it does seem excessive to me that we'd spend \$55 million a year on that. Then we'll do it over again next year, and we did it the year before. I believe that there are areas that can be trimmed, and I think it ought to be on your department and your office to look to it first.

You know, we talked yesterday about Alberta Education and how many certified teachers you have employed. There are an awful lot of them at Alberta Ed. Again, I know that you have made some concessions, but I think that you could have made some more. There are areas that you could look to. That's why I'm proposing this amendment, Mr. Chair.

Thank you.

The Chair: All right. Thank you. Your amendment has been distributed and accepted and signed off by Parliamentary Counsel.

Just a reminder to the committee that a vote will be deferred until Committee of Supply on April 22.

All right. We'll go now to Mrs. Leskiw.

Mrs. Leskiw: Okay. Back and forth.

The Chair: Back and forth. Yeah. Like I said earlier, we'll just make that assumption unless the member indicates otherwise.

Mrs. Leskiw: Okay. Thank you, Minister. You know, education is dear to my heart. One of the things that I like to talk about besides PAT exams is transportation. As a rural MLA one of the many issues for my constituents is the cost and the hassle of transporting their kids to school on a bus. It can be expensive, and often kids have to stay on the bus for over an hour each way as school jurisdictions are not working together to develop joint transportation strategies to maximize efficiency. My first question to you: has there been a reduction in the transportation pool to school jurisdictions for student transportation?

Mr. J. Johnson: No, assuming that you're talking about the per student or the total number. Next year the enrolments are different, and it's tied to enrolment. The transportation dollars next year for a division that has the same amount of students with the same demographics would be the same except that the fuel price contingency, that top-up, is not there for them.

Mrs. Leskiw: I have three jurisdictions. You're telling me that in my area they would all be getting – let's say that everything is the same – exactly the same this year as they got last year if everything was constant. Is that correct?

Mr. J. Johnson: Well, no. I believe the total transportation funding envelope last year was \$285 million, and now it's \$272 million. The difference is that we took \$22 million off for the fuel price contingency, and then we funded every new kid coming into the system. That's where the difference comes from. There are two envelopes of funding there. The fuel price contingency is tied to transportation. That's where the confusion comes in. That grant is gone. But the transportation dollars will be the same if they have the same amount of kids and the same demographics.

Mrs. Leskiw: So what percentage of a school budget is typically spent on transportation in a rural area?

Mr. J. Johnson: Well, we'll maybe ask the guys to get us an estimate on that. I think that's going to vary quite a bit. The question is: how much is it going to be for a typical rural school board as a percentage? It's close to 4 per cent of our budget, close to \$300 million, but it's going to vary by school board, depending on density and distance.

Mrs. Leskiw: How many millions did you say?

Mr. J. Johnson: Close to \$300 million.

Mrs. Leskiw: Three hundred million for busing?

Mr. J. Johnson: Well, \$272 million this coming year. So \$285 million this school year and \$272 million next school year.

Mrs. Leskiw: Do you dictate to school boards the transportation fees that the parents have to pay or don't pay? Do you control that?

Mr. J. Johnson: No. Any of the school fees are controlled completely at the local level.

Mrs. Leskiw: For transportation?

Mr. J. Johnson: For transportation or anything else. Yeah. Those are decisions the local school board makes, and they need to be accountable to their local parents.

Mrs. Leskiw: The reason I'm bringing this up, Mr. Minister, is because it bothers me that on the same rural road we would have three buses going to three different jurisdictions within one community. You'll have your public bus, your separate bus, and your francophone bus. Typically three neighbours could be living down the street from each other, and because their children are going to three different jurisdictions within the same town, they would be riding three different buses. Three different buses are going down the same road. Are they required to work together so that we don't see this wastage? Money is so short, yet we're allowing thousands and thousands of dollars, if not millions, to be wasted because jurisdictions refuse to work together.

Mr. J. Johnson: This is one of the discussions we've been having, I guess at great length, with school boards. Some of them do an excellent job of this. I mentioned it yesterday. We've got STAR, St. Thomas Aquinas, out of the Leduc area. The Catholic school board has co-operative busing arrangements with five other school boards that share their footprint because they're not completely coterminous. There are some that are doing a great job. There are others who are not. You're right. We do have some situations where we have up to four or five different transportation systems operating in the same area.

Mrs. Leskiw: The problem with that also, Mr. Minister, is that if one of the school buses has a smaller school jurisdiction, it is feasible that neighbour A travels on the bus 15 to 20 minutes to half an hour less than neighbour B, who happens to be going to a jurisdiction that's larger and is picking up more kids.

Mr. J. Johnson: Yeah. I think what we're seeing out there is that transportation is becoming a competitive differentiator between school boards. Some of them would like to keep it that way because they are after those students. The funding follows the students, and they want their schools to be viable. We need to look at ways where we would incent them to do that and discourage them from not doing that. There have been some good recent

developments. Edmonton Catholic and Edmonton public just recently announced that they're going to review their transportation and see if they can co-operate on that. There are 36 of the 62 school boards that already have some co-operative busing arrangements, but we can go a lot further and do better.

Mrs. Leskiw: In the future is there a way to, I guess, force or require them to co-operate to avoid duplication? They are our kids. It's just one taxpayer that's paying for it. It's not so much the money as it is child A travelling half an hour more than child B when they're next-door neighbours on a rural route.

Mr. J. Johnson: Yeah. There are a whole bunch of pieces to it. It will save money. There's no question that it will save money where it works. It won't work everywhere. More importantly, as you pointed it out, it's going to mean better service for families and kids and potentially shorter drive times.

The third thing is that many of our school boards are struggling to find drivers.

Mrs. Leskiw: Exactly.

5:55

Mr. J. Johnson: They can't find drivers for the buses, and they can't pay them enough, so co-operative busing arrangements and pooling, that management and that corporate side of the business, might alleviate some of those pressures.

The one thing that we did – and it was a great signal, I think, to Albertans and to school boards – was put in the new Education Act that the minister can direct school boards to co-operate on busing. We don't have any intention right now of using a heavy stick or a heavy hand with respect to that, but it's nice to know we have that if school boards need a little bit more encouragement to look at this. I think that, for the most part, a lot of them are trying, and we just need to help put the measures in place to encourage that.

Mrs. Leskiw: Anything we can do to reduce the time that children ride the bus and anything we can do to put money back into the classroom instead of into transportation: we should look at every opportunity to do that.

Mr. J. Johnson: It gets back to Inspiring Education. It's focusing on the student, not focusing on a system or a board or a transportation route. It's what's best for that student. How do we deliver the best programs? I agree.

Mrs. Leskiw: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Okay. You're done?

Mrs. Leskiw: That question.

The Chair: All right.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Minister, and I want to compliment you on the job that you've done answering the questions. You're obviously very, very passionate about education. As a father of three children it shows.

I want to talk to you about my passion. We've heard a lot about aboriginal communities, but we haven't touched on high-risk children. Those are some of the children that we've currently got in young offender centres, some of the high-risk kids that we've got in group homes. I've read through all of Education. You can correct me if you want, please. Where have you dealt with that group of kids?

Mr. J. Johnson: Where in the budget we've dealt with that?

Mrs. Forsyth: No. I've read all of your goals and your priorities and your mission statements. You've spoken a lot about the aboriginal communities, which is obviously very, very important because we've got them dropping out of school, but I haven't been able to find anywhere in your priorities about high-risk children. I'd like to know how much money you're spending educating children that are in the young offender centre, in group homes, et cetera, like Wood's Homes and all of those.

Mr. J. Johnson: There's not investment from Education that I can speak to that's directly into group homes or some of the institutions. The work that we're doing that would affect the children you're talking about is a lot of the crossministry work, some of the local collaborative work that is being invested in and expected out of school boards like the student health initiative program or children and youth with complex needs and that local collaboration between children's services and Alberta Health Services and Health and the school division on the ground to try and, I guess, intervene as early as we can and get involved in helping out those kids that are at risk as opposed to once they're in trouble.

Mrs. Forsyth: You spoke briefly about the collaboration you have with other ministries. You must have a partnership with, say, Justice if you're educating children who are currently in a young offender centre. You must have a partnership with Human Services if you have children at, for example, Wood's Homes. You must have a partnership if we've got children in addiction or mental health. I'm trying to find out what you're doing with that group of kids, how much money you're spending on them.

You know, it's a very complicated, difficult question, and I'm fine if you want to return in writing.

Mr. J. Johnson: It's spread across many different pockets within the ministry, so to pull out one number and point to one place – we can point to the student health partnerships. There's \$50 million there. The CYCN: I think there was \$6 million or \$8 million there. There are a couple of pieces in here that we can point to, but a lot of it is wrapped up in crossministry and institutional work. There's about \$20 million across the ministry in different pockets on top of the \$58 million that I'm talking about. A lot of the work that would be relevant to what you're asking about is really done on the ground by school boards and principals and administrators and superintendents and special-needs co-ordinators and teachers working with our people on the ground from Alberta Health Services or the health units or mental health or children's services and not in my budget but in the dollars that flow out, necessarily, to school boards in these regional collaborations.

Mrs. Forsyth: Can you tell me how many teachers you have on the ground currently that are teaching in, say, the Calgary Young Offender Centre and the Edmonton Young Offender Centre?

Mr. J. Johnson: Those instructors aren't my employees. Those are employees of school boards. The CBE, as I understand it, has got those folks on staff and delivering those programs, not the ministry directly. That's why we have school boards. We have them doing the work on the ground. We flow through the dollars and the supports to them. You know, I could sure endeavour to get you a more complete answer on that.

Mrs. Forsyth: I worry about that high-risk population because of the fact that it was on your priorities last year in regard to dealing with high-risk youth, and I don't see it anywhere here. I'm

wondering if they've fallen through the cracks or, you know, where they've ended up. It's just something that Education always had.

You talk about engaging the aboriginal community. I think you're doing a fabulous job on some of your priorities for the aboriginal community. But I can't find anywhere where you're talking about high-risk youth. You know, when Mr. McAllister talked to you about the students that are rewriting exams over and over again and the amount of money that you spend, I'm sure some of these high-risk youths would be caught in that group, having to write exams if they're moving from a young offender centre to a group home to gosh knows where they end up. Honestly, if you can get me that answer, if you wouldn't mind sending it to me, I'd appreciate it.

Mr. J. Johnson: Member, I've got a specific number here if it'll help you. There is \$20.1 million, and it's within the operational support. It's not itemized, I don't believe, but it is institutional support. It's money that we flow through to 19 separate school divisions who are delivering programs in 51 different centres and institutions.

I hear what you're saying, and I'm happy to take that away.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thanks. I appreciate that.

I don't know if you've had time to read the CBE letter. They've obviously rejected the agreement. It's interesting. I've only had a chance to casually read it, and you've been sitting here for the last three hours, so I'm sure you haven't had even a chance to do any in-depth reading or to even get briefed by your staff, but one of the things that they're talking about is an internal school jurisdiction review committee. I guess that's part of the agreement. I could be wrong. They were wondering about the costs of that. I know that as soon as I head home tomorrow, we're going to start getting lots of calls. Do you have any idea about what the cost will be on that?

Mr. J. Johnson: Well, no. I don't know that that needs to be so exhaustive that there is a big cost to it. I would suggest that that review should almost be an ongoing evaluation of the value of the initiatives that we have not just at the school board level but at the provincial ministry level. The intent in that is to look at, essentially, the red tape and the burdens on teachers and the things that we're doing today. Do we still need to be doing them?

There are things that the ministry rolled out years ago in the reporting that was required of teachers. Maybe they don't have value anymore, so why ask them to do that? Why not take a formal look at that? If we're doing that, why can't the school boards do the same and just have a look inside and remove any of the extra things that are not bringing value to the classroom? It doesn't need to be, I don't think, a high-cost item. It doesn't need to be a multimillion-dollar review that's going to take years. This is something that should be going on all the time, right?

Mrs. Forsyth: We have, I think, about two minutes, and I have two questions. One is on the government MOU with the aboriginal communities. Is that a tripartite agreement or a bilateral agreement?

Mr. J. Johnson: Tri.

Mrs. Forsyth: Okay. You've got the tripartite agreement with the federal government, yourself, and the aboriginal community, which means that you're probably getting money from the federal government. Could you elaborate on that tripartite agreement?

6:05

Mr. J. Johnson: The federal government and the chiefs of the province and the province have signed on to it. I'm not sure about the exact number of dollars that are dedicated from the feds other than, I believe, to invest in the Indigenous Knowledge and Wisdom Centre and to be a part of the discussions. The eight subtables were established to come up with a long-term strategic plan in each of these eight areas, so we're going to get a sense of where the group thinks we should be going on those and how much those would cost. Those would go back to the parties once that's brought to us.

Mrs. Forsyth: That tripartite agreement: is that effectively on-reserve or off-reserve funding? I signed a tripartite agreement when I was minister, and of course it depended on on-reserve/off-reserve funding. I think if you're signing a tripartite agreement, it's key to know if it's on-reserve or off-reserve.

Mr. J. Johnson: Well, there's no funding outlined, necessarily, in the MOU per student or what those funding commitments would look like. It's more of a strategic direction, and we're going to get funding requirements out of that.

The Chair: All right. Thank you, Minister.
We'll go to Mr. Goudreau.

Mr. Goudreau: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. It seems I've been sitting at estimates for eight and a half hours now in total, and I finally get to ask my first question.

Minister, I really appreciate your candid answers. I, too, am interested, but I want to take a different approach. Yesterday you started your comments by talking about growing communities in the province of Alberta and a growing Alberta. I live in a different part of the world, where I fear a school closure every time I turn around. Since being elected, we've probably closed well over a dozen schools. I would just be very, very pleased to be on a waiting list for a school opening, because we've got burgeoning school populations, and anticipating new schools somewhere in the future rather than a closure and the despair that comes about in a community when they lose a particular school.

You know, there's no doubt that there are always tough decisions for communities and there are challenges. In my area, as I've indicated, my population is actually declining. Certainly, we struggle with the fact that as our numbers decrease every year, it's very difficult to ensure that rural students have the same opportunities as their more urban counterparts. To you, Mr. Minister: what are we doing for those smaller communities? Every time I close a school, I add anywhere from half an hour to an hour of travel time. I've got students that are presently travelling 93, 94 minutes every morning, every evening, yet there are still threats of those schools being closed. So I'm curious as to what's happening there.

Mr. J. Johnson: You know, I really sympathize with that question because I have a similar problem in my constituency. Being a rural MLA and born and raised in rural Alberta, I know exactly what you're talking about. We closed three schools in my constituency last term alone.

There are a number of things happening, and obviously you know that declining enrolment is the big factor that's creating this problem. It's putting pressure on capital in rural Alberta in a different way than it is in metro or urban Alberta. In the growing centres we don't have enough desks for kids, but in the smaller centres we also need dollars for capital because we have to

rightsize schools so they're efficient to run. We're wasting a tremendous amount of money running schools that might be at 30 per cent capacity, but we can't close the school, or we need dollars to consolidate the schools. We may have two or three communities, and it would make a lot more sense programming-wise, for the benefit of the student, to bring them all to one school, but we may need dollars to renovate that school. For example, it might be a high school, but you want to add elementary kids in there, so you've got to rightsize the washrooms and the classrooms and all of those things and put in a proper playground.

One thing that I'm really happy about is that we have the commitment from the Premier on the 50/70, and it's not just new schools because predominantly the new schools will go into urban and growing areas. The modernizations are going to be really valuable for rural Alberta because they're going to allow us to rightsize some schools and to consolidate some schools and to help school boards that are wrestling with that really difficult decision about closing a school. That's one of the tough decisions local boards have to make. But if they can make it because it's going to give better programming to the students, putting the students at the centre of this thing just like we talk about in Inspiring Ed and not the building and managing the building, then it's the right thing to do, and parents will buy into it. We have to help them with that piece.

The other thing we recognize and always have in Alberta – but whether we've got it to the right formula, the right tune, is going to be an ongoing question – is that every community is different, and there's a lot of diversity in the system. That's a strength of the system, but that's also a cost. When you have private schools or charter schools or a diversity of programming, there are costs to that. But it's worth it. It's a good investment. It costs more per kid to run a school that has 20 kids in it than it does a big high school with 2,000 kids – it just does – on a per student basis because the economies of scale aren't there.

When I talk about the 20 envelopes of funding that we have, some of them are there to recognize the cost of a lack of economy of scale. We're not just funding a child. We're not just funding a per capita head count. This funding following the student – you know, the U.S. voucher system would absolutely destroy rural Alberta. We can't just give a set amount to every parent per child and let them send it where they want, as much as we'd agree with their choice, because that would devastate small rural communities and it wouldn't provide the funding to kids with special needs.

We have top-up envelopes for things like small schools by necessity, small school boards. We have the equity of opportunity grant, and part of that and the transportation grants are measured and funded based on density and distance. So there are ways that we try to top up and support rural Alberta so that there is an equity of opportunity. That's really what it needs to be about at the end of the day.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you for that.

You know, I want to move to maybe talk a little bit about the fuel costs and the changes there in terms of the fuel support. A lot of it was talked about, and I just want to put it on record that I've got seven school boards, and probably geographically one of the largest school boards is in my part of the constituency or overlaps it. For them to lose some of the fuel support is extremely significant. I would hope that that would not force them to take money out of such programs that you're talking about to allow for bringing students to school.

Mr. J. Johnson: The fuel price contingency funding envelope I know hit rural Alberta harder. There's another decrease that we did, and it had to do with the Alberta Distance Learning Centre. So for students that are taking courses through the ADLC, the local school board will be getting less money next school year than they did this school year.

There are some adjustments that we've made that hit rural Alberta harder. One of the recognitions of that, that we put in place, was that we adjusted the formula for the equity of opportunity grant. That's \$107 million that the Premier put back into the system last year. Part of it is based on just a per-head count, and part of that formula is based on things like density and distance. We just massaged the formula a little bit to take some of the weighting out of the per capita and put it into the density and distance. So that helped rural Alberta.

One of the other items is the inclusion funding formula that was changed in the last couple of years. We added \$68 million to that bucket last year. Most of that money went into metro and urban Alberta. As an example, the Edmonton public school system got a \$17 million extra bump in their base for special-needs inclusion just last year alone out of that one envelope. But because we adjusted the way we run that formula, it was going to hit a lot of the rural boards, some of them quite dramatically. Battle River, for example, was going to get hit by over \$3 million to the bad. It was going to be reduced.

Last year we had a transitional amount in the budget that would basically hold those rural boards harmless so that we weren't going to hit them with that decrease for year. We were going to give them a year to adjust. Some of them were very significant, \$2 million or \$3 million, decreases. What we did in this budget now is that we've extended that transitional funding for three years. Some of your boards will be very happy about that because we've said: "Okay. We're going to give you more time to adjust. We're going to set that floor and hold you harmless for the three-year budget cycle."

The last thing we did to try to support rural Alberta because, like I said, some of the things we changed really hit them is put in a mitigation formula, a mitigation program, so that no board in Alberta was going to get a reduction of more than 2 and a half per cent. Any board, through the new formula changes and enrolment decreases that we have, could be assured that their budget, their total global dollar amount, was not going to go down by more than 2 and a half per cent. That might be small consolation, but without that some of them would have been down 5 per cent.

6:15

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you.

There appears to be quite a decrease in funding for online education. Again, in rural Alberta that's extremely critical. I guess I'm just wondering if you're not concerned that this might discourage a growing area, especially in our part of the world.

Mr. J. Johnson: That's one of the areas that I said we reduced. That, you could argue, is going to hit rural Alberta more. What was happening previously was – we fund high school by credit. So you put in the time, you get the credit, and you get the dollars for it.

Are we out of time?

The Chair: We are now.

All right. We're going to go to Mr. Pedersen, and then we will try and squeeze in a couple of minutes for Dr. Brown right at the very end.

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thanks again, Mr. Minister. Concerning goal 4 in your business plan, 4.1, what are you anticipating you'll develop for regulations and policies to support the Education Act? Do you have anything?

Mr. J. Johnson: You know, there's a lot of work to be done there. Any time you bring in an act or a bill, you can't put it into force until you've put kind of the fine-tuning around it in the form of a regulation. The Education Act is one of the biggest acts we have as a government, one of the biggest pieces of legislation that we've got.

There are, I guess, a couple of different things that are going to happen. One is that there are a lot of what you might call administrative or housekeeping kinds of regulations that have to do with financial reporting for school boards. Those aren't really going to change a lot, so those can be done fairly quickly. But there are going to be some that will be far more contentious and need to be looked at more closely like the establishment of a separate school system and home-schooling regulations, regulations around charter schools and those things, and school fees.

The intent is to send out a small task force to consult with Albertans right across the province. I'm going to guess that it's going to take the better part of a year to do the consultation. They'll be guiding the department as they build those regulations, and then those regulations come to cabinet and get approved or not. But it'll be Albertans that will build that, and we have to do consultations with everyone to make sure everyone's got a voice in that. That will roll out here shortly, and that will take some time.

My guess is that the Education Act is on a timeline to be proclaimed with regulations for the 2015-16 school year. It's basically two years of work to get the i's dotted and the t's crossed and then give people some warning and put it in place for the 2015 school year.

Mr. Pedersen: Okay.

That would include the antibullying, that portion of it.

Mr. J. Johnson: Right.

Mr. Pedersen: Are you hearing – a lot of the boards in the education industry are moving forward with that with their own plans, I think.

Mr. J. Johnson: Oh, yeah. I think we've got a great Education Act, and it's one of the best in the country in terms of its language on antibullying and making those statements, but I would never want to suggest that the act is out front of our people on the ground. The schools and the teachers and the parent councils are doing incredible work on some of the antibullying stuff. You know, they're out in front of us. The act is reflective of what they want to see.

Mr. Pedersen: Supportive. Right. I appreciate that.

About the demographic numbers that are used in the capital planning, you're using workforce statistics, birth rates, StatsCan numbers. Are these numbers published anywhere, or can you supply these numbers?

Mr. J. Johnson: You know what? We may have to get you a more detailed answer on that, but I'm guessing that some of the stats are public, that you can pull right out of StatsCan, pull right out of public documents, stuff that would be published even from a municipality. Some of them would be more sensitive documents,

maybe accessible to government, with respect to the records a school division would have, not necessarily health records but, certainly, birth rates and all those types of things. Some of those are public. Some of them would be more internal to the Department of Education. If there is a specific question on that, you can get that to me in writing, and we can try and cover it.

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you.

Just tying it back to our last conversation, Minister, we were talking about charter schools. Is there any intention of maybe broadening their scope so that they're allowed to operate more like a public school or a school within the Catholic system?

Mr. J. Johnson: Well, I think that that's a discussion we haven't had yet in the province. One of the discussions I think many people would like us to have is: what is the role of charter schools going forward? They were established to be an innovative piece of the system, and they're capped in terms of how many we can have and how large they can be. I guess some would argue: hey, the experiment is over, and they're permanent. There is some permanency to them. So now we need to have discussions about how they fit, what they deliver, where they sit in the system, and what their future holds.

That's a great discussion for Albertans to have as we go out and do consultation on the regulations of the Education Act. I'm hoping that they'll help paint a vision for what charter schools might look like in the future, what role they might play. I think we're capped at 15. We don't have 15; we have 13 charter schools in the province right now. Six of those have a 15-year charter, kind of a long-term charter now.

Mr. Pedersen: Perfect.

I know it's always a tough question to answer, but a lot of boards are dealing with, again, as was mentioned today, the pressure for new schools or renovations. Is there any way that school boards can get a better idea where they are? I know we've always asked: where are people in the queue? A lot of times renovations for schools are a real, real issue because you have an infrastructure in place that you're just not able to utilize to the best of your ability. Is that forthcoming, do you think?

Mr. J. Johnson: You know, a greater transparency on that to let people know where they're at is difficult just because we're literally talking about a list of thousands of projects right now. Where they fit is dynamic; they change. As an example, right now school boards are finalizing their capital plans, and a revised capital plan will come to us in May. That's going to potentially change the profiles that we have. We're very reluctant to roll up our sleeves and do all the due diligence, which costs money in terms of scoping out projects and then deciding how you're going to tender it, until we know our cash flow from Treasury Board and until the school boards' lists are finalized. It's a difficult one to answer in that it's so dynamic.

Mr. Pedersen: One of the problems is that when you have a new school going across the street from an existing school or renovations taking place and the other board is sitting in their school and they're waiting to renovate, all of a sudden they see this new development going on, and they're worried that they're going to lose students. They do. I mean, there's a siphoning situation that goes on because students want to go where they can have a better chance of a better education or better access. Not knowing where they are in the queue to tell the parents and the students, "You know, just hang on. We're going to get ours, too" is a problem.

Mr. J. Johnson: I don't have much more to say on that. I know that these are difficult things to weigh against each other across the province.

When your party came out with the capital plan here recently, there was the suggestion by your Finance critic that 30 per cent of the schools we're currently building don't need to be built. I'd like to see that list to see which ones maybe we should remove to make space for other projects. We're trying to do the best we can with these lists, and now that we have our cash flows, we'll be able to start announcing schools in the coming months.

6:25

Mr. Pedersen: Okay.

How much time? One minute?

The Chair: A little over a minute.

Mr. Pedersen: Okay. Results-based budgeting. Where are you guys in this process? I know there was talk that it was going to be rolled out in stages. Are you into it? Are you all the way through it? Where are you at with this?

Mr. J. Johnson: It's an ongoing process, and every ministry is involved with it. The idea was that every program within the government would be evaluated over the three-year cycle. One of the main ones we're involved in right now is an RBB on early childhood development. That project is between us, Health, and Human Services, which covers children's services; the old children's services ministry is in Human Services now. We're really looking at everything that touches those kids in the early childhood development piece and whether we're getting the results and the outcomes we want and the dollars are in the right places. This is an exciting one. Once this gets finished, which I think will be – what do we think? – by the end of the fiscal year, this budget year, we're going to be able to have a lot more, I think, to talk about with respect to full-day K and what changes we might make. But it's going to be ongoing, and that's just one.

We'll be involved in a lot of other ones, and I expect one thing we're going to look at is the transportation file.

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you, Minister.

The Chair: All right. Thank you, Minister.

Dr. Brown, we'll give you the remaining . . .

Dr. Brown: Two minutes?

The Chair: About three.

Dr. Brown: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'll just try and be very brief. The first thing is that the capital plan has \$332 million allocated for 35 new and modernized projects for schools. I have a community, Evanston, in my constituency which is a very fast-growing community. Their elementary students are being bused anywhere from 20 to 45 minutes, depending on traffic, out of their community. They're currently listed as third on

the Calgary board of education priority list. Two questions. One, can you offer any ray of hope to these parents in the Evanston community that their school might be funded in the near future? Secondly, can you explain what the department's role is in determining the funding priorities for schools like Evanston?

Mr. J. Johnson: Well, I can certainly offer some hope. I mean, we've got one of the most ambitious capital plans from this ministry that we've had in a long time. One hundred and twenty projects is significant. When we announced what was ASAP 3, that was a huge announcement: \$550 million, and that was 35 projects. So we're talking about 120 that we're going to have to roll out over the coming year or two. So there certainly is room for optimism for many areas of the province, and I know that there are a lot of pressures in Calgary.

Dr. Brown: Well, given that they're third on the list, what I'm asking is: who determines which schools get funded? I mean, if they are tied for third on the Calgary board of education list, which is the largest school division in the province, how does that fit into the program?

Mr. J. Johnson: Well, we've talked about that at length today and yesterday. We have to take all those lists. There are 62 school boards, and each has a list, and each has a number 3. You know, the CB's number 5 or number 6 or number 7 might be a higher pressure than another school division's number 1, especially when you consider enrolment pressures and health and safety concerns. So I can't give you any certainty on where that school is on the list. That would be a new school, right? Or is this a modernization you're asking about?

Dr. Brown: No. It's a new elementary. There are no schools in Evanston at all.

Mr. J. Johnson: I can't tell you with certainty today that that would be one of the 50 new schools. We're working through that now that we've got our cash flow from the budget, and assuming the budget is approved, we're going to get those 50 new schools built. By then, which will be May, we're going to have a new capital priority list from the CB as well.

Dr. Brown: Thank you.

The Chair: All right. Well, that brings us pretty close to 6:30.

I'd just like to thank you, Minister, and your staff and all of our members for everything going so smoothly for this last six hours.

I thank our researchers also and support folks and our clerk, of course.

I'll remind our members that our next scheduled meeting is on April 8, 2013, to consider the estimates of the Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General.

Thanks again, everybody. The meeting is adjourned.

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

