

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, March 15, 1995**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 95/03/15

head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Tannas in the Chair]

THE CHAIRMAN: I'll call the committee to order. Again, we'll ask that members respect the convention that we only have one hon. member standing and speaking at the same time. [interjection] Only the one, yes.

head: **Main Estimates 1995-96**

Education

THE CHAIRMAN: As soon as we achieve that, we'll call upon the hon. Minister of Education to make his comments on the department's estimates so that we may begin tonight's discourse.

The hon. Minister of Education.

MR. JONSON: Good evening, Mr. Chairman, and members of the Assembly. I do very sincerely welcome the opportunity to discuss the Department of Education's budget with the Committee of Supply.

This evening I'm going to make some brief introductory comments, and then I certainly welcome the comments and questions of members of the Assembly. I'd also like to indicate at the beginning, lest it be forgotten later on, that if there are detailed questions or questions which due to the length of time available to us cannot be responded to this evening, those answers will certainly be provided in written form to members of the Assembly.

The second thing, Mr. Chairman, by way of introductory remarks that I'd just like to mention is that assisting me this evening and observing the Committee of Supply are members from my department: Dr. Reno Bosetti, deputy minister, Gary Baron and Jeff Olson from our finance and planning division of Alberta Education, and Brian Wik, my executive assistant. I would like to just briefly make this comment about the Alberta Education staff. This is not unique across government, but certainly Alberta Education has had a great deal of change to develop, to provide background information for, and to provide direction to in changing and restructuring education in this province. It's been a time of a great deal of work, tough time lines, and they've certainly shown skill and commitment in meeting the requirements.

Mr. Chairman, this evening I'd like to begin my comments on the estimates by repeating and reinforcing the fact that education is a top priority for this government. In my remarks this evening I'll mention some of the relevant statistics. Given the fact that Education has to contribute to the overall effort of the government in its paramount role of balancing the budget, the reductions, however, accruing to Education are certainly indicative of the priority given in this area.

Mr. Chairman, we recognize that education is the foundation for our continued economic prosperity and social well-being in this province. As such, our government is committed to ensuring a quality education system able to meet the needs of Alberta's students. The past year has seen significant change and enhancement to education in our province, and this is reflected in our budget estimates. Much progress has been made in the implementation of major initiatives in our education plan, and, yes, a great deal still remains to be done. As we proceed, it is important to

keep in mind that each and every initiative has one singular purpose, and that is an education that is the best possible education for all Alberta students. The restructuring initiatives now under way emphasize to all education partners that students come first. We will have an education system that better meets the needs of students at a cost that our province can afford.

One year ago, Mr. Chairman, when releasing the three-year plan for Education, I stated that the changes to education would be based on a few key principles. I would like to quickly review those now. They have been the guide to everything that has been accomplished to date, and they are the guide for our future efforts. Those principles are: one, all Alberta students must have equal access to quality education; two, we are to have a fair system of funding all school boards in this province; third, our education resources are focused on students and the classrooms; fourth, we have school-based decision-making on the expenditure of education dollars; fifth, there will be greater opportunity for meaningful involvement of parents and the community in local education decisions, and education costs will be reduced to meet our spending target as part of the province's overall deficit elimination plan. This year's Education budget and our updated three-year Education plan are consistent with those principles.

Mr. Chairman, we have met many of the objectives set last year, have made significant progress on the others, and have paved the way for a higher quality education system for Alberta's students. In the coming fiscal year, 1995-96, we will be spending \$2.69 billion on education in Alberta. These resources include \$1.2 billion from the Alberta school foundation fund and \$1.49 billion from the provincial general revenues. This is a reduction of only 1.67 percent from the current year. I am confident that this budget, this reduction, is reasonable and manageable, given the fiscal situation in Alberta. It will enable Alberta to maintain a quality education system yet play our part in meeting the goals of the province's deficit elimination plan.

Mr. Chairman, as I said earlier, education is a priority for government. As such, Education's spending reduction has been the smallest of any area of government spending, approximately 6 percent of total education spending in the three-year period from 1992-93 to 1995-96. The \$2.69 billion to be spent next year will maintain our high education standards and provide every student with access to a quality education.

Last year, Mr. Chairman, in projecting future spending levels, I forecasted that grant rates to school boards would be reduced this year by 2 and a half percent. Instead, they are being reduced by only 1.2 percent. This lower reduction for grant funding has been achieved by reducing the amount spent on administration, by reducing the number of school boards, by reducing the number of school trustees, and by reducing our Education capital spending.

In the past 18 months we have reduced the number of school boards from 181 to about 60. We reduced the number of school trustees from well over 1,100 to less than 500. In that process we have freed up at least \$13 million, and we expect more savings to accrue but \$13 million in the short term for reallocation to student instruction, with more savings to come in the future as greater efficiencies are realized. I would like, Mr. Chairman, to once again commend the efforts of the vast majority of school boards across this province. It was not easy to make this major reduction in the number of school boards, and there was a great deal of co-operation and I think unselfishness shown by school boards across this province in meeting that goal.

Mr. Chairman, our provincial spending on education capital construction was reduced by \$100 million from the 1991-95

capital plan as we focused more on instruction and less on construction. However, we must ensure that we have safe facilities that adequately accommodate our students and meet the demands in the high-growth areas of the province. To that end, we will be spending \$90 million in 1995-96 for the modernization and maintenance of existing schools and for the construction of new facilities.

Mr. Chairman, through the reallocation of savings achieved through reduced school board spending on administration, plant operations and maintenance, and transportation, \$57 million will be additional dollars made available for student instruction. This will see the total amount available for instruction in 1995-96 increase by 1.4 percent, even while our total spending on education has decreased. Administration dollars have been redirected to instruction. The classroom has been a priority and, to the greatest extent possible, protected. It is essential that we direct most of our education dollars to instruction of students and not to administration.

Mr. Chairman, we must continue to search for and to find more efficient ways of delivering education. I will encourage school boards to seek the most cost-effective means of administration and support for the instruction of students. As part of this year's Education budget, with its focus on students, there is also an increase in funding for our ECS programs. Per child funding will increase from \$595 to \$850, and the basic ECS program will increase from 200 hours to 240 hours. Overall, our provincial spending on ECS will increase by 20 percent to over \$60 million. Along with the ECS funding increase, we have ensured that any Alberta child accessing the 240-hour program will be able to do so without instructional fees to parents. All Alberta students will have access to a basic ECS program without charge, a program which will help children meet the learning expectations outlined in our new ECS program statement. The new program statement clearly spells out what is to be achieved regarding expectations in the ECS program, and it will help to ensure consistent ECS programs across the province and help to ensure that Alberta children are well prepared to take on the challenges of grade 1.

8:10

Mr. Chairman, in total in 1995-96 we'll be spending close to \$2.6 billion on public and separate schools, with about \$1.88 billion of that amount allocated for the instruction of students. One of our key initiatives related to the allocation of those education resources is the funding framework for school boards that was announced on February 1 of this year. It is this funding framework that will ensure a fair and equitable distribution of available education dollars and will ensure that those dollars are focused on classroom instruction. It puts in place full provincial funding of education by taking all education resources, both from the provincial general revenue fund and local property taxes, and redistributing those resources in a way that is fair to every school board and every student.

Mr. Chairman, this funding framework ensures that all Alberta students have a fair share of education dollars no matter where the student lives, whether in Calgary, High Prairie, or in Coumts. Every school board in the province will receive an equal per student amount for basic instruction, and this basic instruction amount will make up the bulk of a school board's total spending. Also, that instruction allocation will follow the student to whatever public or separate school board is providing the educational services. Students can attend the school of their choice in the public or separate system, and the instructional dollars will follow.

Mr. Chairman, additional funding will be provided to school boards for special instructional programs, such as for students with severe disabilities, English as a Second Language, home education students, and of course early childhood services. The additional funding will be calculated on the basis of an equal amount per student served. This additional funding will ensure that the educational needs of students with special needs continue to be met.

Funding for support services, such as the operation and maintenance of school buildings and student transportation, is provided to school boards on the basis of meeting cost requirements. For example, Mr. Chairman, transportation funding is based on the number of students needing transportation, and operations and maintenance funds are provided to meet the fixed costs of operating schools.

Mr. Chairman, our government has continually stated that there is a need to downsize administration and place more dollars for services at the front line, and we are following through with that objective. Administrative spending by school boards is strictly limited to ensure that most of the resources are directed to the classroom. School board spending on administration is capped on average at 4 percent of total board spending. This is an average of a 25 percent reduction in administrative spending and will free up about \$60 million for the instruction of students in '95-96.

All school boards, Mr. Chairman, now receive a fair share of education dollars, and this province has a solid base from which to move forward with longer term changes to our education system. In the coming year we will achieve several more milestones in the overall enhancement of the education system. We will complete an extensive consultation process on redefining roles and responsibilities in education, providing the opportunity for greater parental and community involvement in local education decision-making. We will also complete another broad consultation with Albertans on a new accountability framework for education, with the resulting development of a complementary school board and government performance measurement and reporting system on education.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to emphasize that while many of our initiatives and many of our funding measures are designed to provide more flexibility and more latitude for decision-making at the local level, the accountability framework is the anchor, the measure of performance, the measure of success, yes, and the measure of possible weaknesses and needs for correction in the system. It's important that we have a sound, strong accountability framework for education in this province. The framework will result in Albertans being better informed about how well students, schools, and the education system are performing.

In June of this year we will introduce our expanded provincial achievement testing program in grades 3, 6, and 9. The program will provide educators and all Albertans with a more detailed assessment of student performance measured against provincial standards.

We will also be putting in place the structure for the piloting of Canada's first charter schools. These charter schools will provide parents and students with a greater opportunity for choice in educational programming and delivery methods. They will also give our education system increased opportunity to look at new and innovative ways of improving student learning.

Mr. Chairman, beginning this tax year, we will begin a phase-in to uniform provincial education property tax rates, which will be complete by the 1997 tax year. This uniform rate will ensure that all Alberta property tax payers share fairly in the support of

Alberta's education system. As part of the process, government has committed that the 1997 uniform rate will be at or below the 1993 equalized average rate. Indeed, when the government assumed responsibility for education property taxation last year, the average taxation rate dropped to the rate of 7.5 mills from the rate of 7.64 mills. That might not seem like a very major decrease, and it is not, but it is the first decrease of that type, as I understand it, in 10 years.

In summation, Mr. Chairman, the education system in Alberta is moving in new directions. They are directions that will ensure that our students are well prepared for the world of work and for lifelong learning at a cost that the province can afford. The details of this year's estimates indicate many of the important steps of that change, but there will be much more to follow. Our restructuring plan will see an education system where the focus is on students, classrooms, and communities. It will be an education system where administrative costs are dramatically cut. We will have an education system where all school jurisdictions have access to adequate funding, and all students will have the opportunity for a quality education. We will have an education system where there is a more meaningful role for parents and where there is increased autonomy at the local level. We, as well, will have an education system that is focused on results.

Mr. Chairman, I will conclude at that point. As I said, I welcome questions.

I would just make one final statement and that is that education is certainly important. I take my responsibilities as minister very seriously in this regard and dealing with the budget is a very important matter. I look forward to comments and questions.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to have this opportunity to respond to the minister and to address the Alberta Education budget estimates this evening.

I'd like to preface my remarks to the minister as I did to the Minister of Advanced Education and Career Development. My question to the minister is: when is he going to issue a business plan for the department? That's a serious question. To back that question up, I would refer him to materials used in the public schools of the province and materials used in the advanced education schools of the province called *The Business Plan Workbook*. I've a sample business plan out of that workbook for the minister and his staff. One of the things it indicates is that what the minister has put before us and what the other ministers have put before us are not business plans because they lack the very essence of a business plan, and that's any numbers.

There's a chapter in the workbook, should the minister and his staff care to peruse it, entitled Financial Projections: How to Add Numbers to Your Activity Plans. So my first question to the minister is: when is he going to do as he has said he is going to do and as this government has said it's going to do and that's present us with a business plan? I table four copies of that sample business plan and four copies of the preface to the chapter in terms of adding numbers to what are essentially activity plans, and that's really what this is.

If you look at the business plan, there's no way that the department can be held accountable for the goals in what is called the business plan. There are no dollars attached to any of the activities. You have to go to the budget estimates, and we have this ridiculous game of the money in one book and the so-called business activities in another book.

With that preface, I'd like to address . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. members, we're forgetting: only one person standing and talking at a time. We've only recognized Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Edmonton-Mill-Woods.

8:20

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to look at these estimates and this business activity plan through the perspective of what kind of a school system the minister wants as it's reflected in these estimates. I think there are several answers to that, depending on which parts of the estimates you look at.

First of all, if you look at the whole focus on evaluation – and these are at 3.1.2 in the estimates – the question that begs to be answered is: how can the minister's department, that in effect puts together the programs, be the ones that design the evaluation of the programs? This becomes an increasingly important question as the amount of testing that local school boards and that local teachers are held accountable for increases. The more that testing is issued out of the department, the more those people are being held accountable for results, and those results are being defined by Alberta Education itself. So it seems to be a little nonsensical in terms of actually evaluating their own programs and making the judgments about their own progress. Has the minister considered an independent body that would put the other tests and make those judgments about how well the school districts and the classrooms are achieving the results?

I'd also ask the minister: how much of the money in program 3.1.2 is being spent on diagnostic testing? I've spent a considerable amount of time in schools lately, and teachers seem to have one refrain. The achievement tests do very little, if anything, to help individual students; that is, in terms of tailoring instruction for student A for the rest of his or her school term, those achievement tests do nothing. They cost millions and millions of dollars to administer. How do they help tailor instruction?

It's also interesting to look at the kind of testing that's been increased and to go back to the kinds of things that we always knew were wrong with testing that led to them becoming in great disfavour in the past. There was a point in our history when the departmental exams were done away with because testing was recognized to have some weaknesses. All those weaknesses seem to have been forgotten in the design of the new programs, and the kind of tyranny that used to exist at the 12th grade in terms of the departmental exams now exists even lower.

I was in a school recently when the 6th grade teachers were brought in and advised to start cramming, to start giving their youngsters the achievement test questions at this point in the year. That was in January. They're already trying to get youngsters in 6th grade ready for the achievement tests that will appear in June by practising old test questions. So exactly the same kind of tyranny that existed in the past seems to exist today, only it's being pushed down to lower and lower grades. I think it's an unhealthy by-product of the testing program.

The whole notion of what kinds of measures you have to collect to make judgments about the system I think have somewhat been lost, and I go back to a statement that was produced by the previous Minister of Education, Vision for the Nineties: A Plan of Action, and I look at what was anticipated then would be a plan for the '90s.

- Assessing a broader range of student learning provincially and locally by using more portfolios of student work, group projects, writing in math and science, open ended and problem solving questions on tests.

My question to the minister is: how much of the testing budget is devoted to developing those kinds of measures? Or was that then, and this is now? So I think that if you look at the evaluation that's proposed, it's a very technical model, and the minister and his staff seem to be wrapped up in a very technical view of education.

I'd like to look at the governance that's proposed. Again the governance model seems to be highly centralized with the notion that somehow or other the Devonian Building can micromanage every school in this province. Look at program 2.1.1 and who decides what goes into envelopes. I'd like to quote from a paper prepared by M.J. Donlevy from Calgary. He indicates that

there are major restrictions on the transfer of funds between envelopes. Alberta Education decides who or what fits into which envelope – not your elected Board. A current dispute exists for example, as to the definition of Curriculum and Program Consultants. The government puts them into the Administrative envelope, not the Instructional envelope. No big deal? Well, if you have a child with Attention Deficit Disorder . . . he/she will have been assessed by a consultant paid for by the District. Deemed Administrative, with the cutbacks to that category, you may no longer have that resource available to you.

So who decides what goes into those envelopes? I'd ask the minister in responding to this: when those envelopes were designed, who had some input? Were local school districts, were local educators such as Mr. Donlevy involved in making those decisions? Some of them, as he indicates, in terms of practice don't seem to make much sense.

I'd like to look at the administrative portion of the estimates, and that's 1.0.1, 1.0.2, 1.0.3, 3.1.1, and 3.2.1. I think that if you add those up, it comes to about a million and a half dollars of administration between the offices and their deputies and their assistants. The question is: how much has the administration really been cut? In the figures that have been provided to us, it appears that for those administrative positions it's much less than the 5 percent that's being asked of others across the province. In terms of the cuts themselves the direction seems to have been not to upper management but to lower management.

For those of you who have looked at Lisac's book on assessing the province, he has a chapter that's entitled the Corporate Province. In that chapter he identifies the role of some of the deputy ministers in this administration and the overwhelming, perhaps too overwhelming, role they play in government policy. The minister's department was singled out as one of those departments where that happens to be the case. Wherever the administration comes from, they're borrowing and leaning heavily as the vision statement did and things before it on a factory model of education.

There's an assessment of those models that I'd like to read to the minister. It starts out:

The central government limited its functions to supervision by means of examinations, to grants on the basis of the results, and to the certification of teachers.

It sounds fairly familiar; doesn't it?

The school examinations covered work in reading, writing, and arithmetic, and were given at four consecutive levels.

Again it sounds very familiar.

This system of "payment by results," by which a school received funds according to scores made by its pupils, proved thoroughly bad; it led to a cramming technique, since school support depended upon how many children passed their examinations. Nevertheless, the system remained in force until 1890. In 1880 elementary education became compulsory and in 1891 it became free.

8:30

So a hundred years ago school systems were playing with the minister's model that's being proposed for this province for the next decade, and that's in *A History of Education: Socrates to Montessori* by Luella Cole.

So we've been this route before, and if you look at the history of education, every 10 to 15 years someone latches on to this model, the system's approach to education, and decides that that's going to be the new panacea. It's going to solve all of our problems. We're going to get the system under control borrowing from those models, and every time they try it, it doesn't work and we're left with things in worse shape than they were before they started.

I would ask the minister: how much thought, how much time is devoted to looking at the models that are being borrowed? Where are those ideas coming from? What are the values that you import when you import such factory models and try to apply them to schools? Are they consistent with values in terms of public education? I think there's some case to be made that they really aren't.

I wouldn't want to leave the estimates without spending some time talking about early childhood. Again if I go back to my initial question – what kind of a school system do we want? – part of the answer seems to be a centralized school system, a mechanistic school system, a technical school system, and a narrow school system. I look at program 2.1.1, where ECS is supported, and I'd like to again quote from a document that talks about ECS in a sister province. The quote is this:

First, early childhood education seems to predispose children to have a more positive view of schooling and of formal learning. Secondly, from infancy children are acquiring ideas about cause and effect, about comparison and contrast, about quantity – in short, about the most fundamental building blocks of thinking and learning – and by the time they are three years old, knowledgeable, skilled and caring teachers can make a real difference for them.

Now, I think that quote and that perspective that's held in Ontario is rather dramatic in terms of the kind of perspective that I hear here. I recall, early after being elected, going to a meeting of the financial policy review committee, or a committee of some such title, and listening to the deputy minister talk about his notions of kindergarten, and they appeared to be pre grade 1: you can jam some of the things that are now being taught in grade 1 into kindergarten, and that will justify at least spending half the dollars we used to on it before.

The notion that childhood, particularly early childhood, is a distinct phase in a youngster's development and needs a distinct kind of response in terms of helping youngsters discover who they are, helping them to discover their talents as learners, helping them to develop as inquirers: all that seems to be lost. The notion that the only way you can justify kindergarten is if those youngsters now are going to be able to come out with a prescribed list of preset objectives: I think that's the antithesis of what many early childhood educators would expect from an early childhood program.

So I look under that program, and my questions to the minister would be: just exactly how do you view kindergarten and how do you view early childhood, three-year-olds and up? Where other provinces seem to be moving to more inclusive, we seem to be going the opposite way, cutting it nearly in half and narrowing the program. Just what is the view? Where do you see early childhood services being 10, 15 years from now?

I'd like to move, then, to the whole notion of taxation, and I think again if you look at what the government's done in terms of taxation, it's this great faith in a centralized system and little faith in the ability of local people to control their own affairs or to make decisions.

I go back to Donlevy's paper, and again I would quote from the paper.

As such, there is no local control over school taxes – Catholic or Public. You no longer control the school taxes you pay through your [local] elected School Board. Alberta Education will decide for you what your elected board can do with the money allocated to them each year.

This dilutes the right of Catholics to determine tax dollar utilization within their own schools. Worse, is that with tax revenue frozen at the fixed 1993 level, there is a gradual erosion of the percentage collected from Catholic taxpayers that will be spent independently on Catholic schools. The goal of the government seems clear: dilute the independence of School Boards so as to render them moot.

I think that sympathy is shared across the province, that this great rush to centralize schools, to centralize decision-making has ended up with boards not being able to respond to local school needs.

Again I go back to what kind of school system does the minister envision for our province? The estimates would seem to indicate, as I said before, a technical system, very mechanistic, one that outsiders can manage from Edmonton, one that's centralized, one that's narrow.

With those comments, I'd conclude, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

Chairman's Ruling Quoting Documents

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, before I recognize the next member, it may be necessary for *Hansard* to request copies of some of the things, particularly the one that you quoted at some length, and maybe even the Table would benefit by a copy.

Having said that, I would invite West Yellowhead to make his comments on the estimates.

Debate Continued

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This is always a momentous occasion for me personally and I think for many others, not that my comments are going to be so historical but simply that we're talking about a subject that's dear to my heart and I think to the hearts of lots of people. After all, we're dealing with our youth, and we like to say often that we're dealing with our most important resource and so on and so forth.

I have quite a few things to say. Mr. Chairman, I would like to start off by heeding the words of the House leader, and that is, I'd like to start off by giving out some commendations. First of all, the minister is to be congratulated for having made the least brutal cuts in the Department of Education. I think that is significant. It could have been worse. So there is a commendation. Second, I think the business plan, as I have been looking through it for a while now, and all the other paraphernalia that have been given to us are tremendously impressive. They certainly indicate that once again a lot of the Hinton products have gone into the mill, the grist for the mill, and I'm very pleased with that. They look good. They're easy to read, if one has enough time. That's another compliment I can make and therefore do that. It's great stuff. It sounds so reasonable when you read all this.

Now, upon second thought, though, there are glaring aspects that kind of stand out, that jump out. I have a few here, and I'm sure the minister would like to hear what I have to say on this,

just in case some improvement can be made. I'm trying to find my way between all the documents I have. First of all, looking at the message from the minister in *A Better Way II* – and it precedes the business plans – I was very pleased to see that the minister stated in there, and I'm quoting in case *Hansard* wonders:

The changes, as outlined in last year's business plan for education, give more authority to schools, provide greater involvement for parents, reduce administrative expenditures, and focus education dollars on student learning. These improvements . . .

And this is quite an assertion, by the way.

. . . will ensure that our young people are prepared for the twenty-first century.

That is a bold statement, because who knows what we will need to enter that century. Nevertheless, the minister thinks he's got the ingredients there, and I wish him luck.

8:40

Now, on we go with, shall we say, a dissection of some of the assertions in here. First of all, a reduction in the number of school boards, otherwise known as regionalization and amalgamation. It has already been done, of course, at least on paper. There is a bit of a legal challenge in court, and I hope that the minister has allotted enough funds to look after those. I would imagine they go at the expense of the kids in the classroom, but I guess that can't be helped here. But the minister, I think, has maintained that about \$14 million would be saved by regionalization. I really question that, and I'm looking forward to an accounting, say, a year hence to see whether that in fact has materialized.

The situation is thus, Mr. Chairman, and I have a very good example in my own riding, where one of the school jurisdictions has now increased distancewise, I think, to something like 250 by 350 kilometres. I can tell you that when there is a meeting of administrators in Edson, where the headquarters are, then it will necessitate that three principals from Grande Cache travel all the way to Edson, which is 500 kilometres back and forth. It will necessitate that they spend the night there, because of course it is that long to go back, and when you throw in all the necessary expenses, then I think the savings are going to be very questionable indeed. Also, I've already discovered that if they need plumbers in Grande Cache, they will have to go to Hinton, and again that is a trip of about an hour and a half, and before you know it, again the costs incurred are enormous indeed. Nevertheless, I just wanted the minister to know that I frankly doubt that these savings will be forthcoming, but I hope it's true.

I would also like to state – probably it's a case of reiterating having iterated before – that the voluntary amalgamation that he had brought about last summer, by September 1, was remarkable indeed, and I congratulate him for it, for his persuasiveness. But of course then he wanted to go further and mandated another 14 amalgamations, several of which are now in the courts. I think it's a pity that persuasion was not able to bring that about, even persuasion with perhaps a bit of a financial stick there.

Then we go on to redefining roles and responsibilities in education. Mr. Chairman, that is a topic that is dear to your heart as you were heading up an implementation committee, and as I understand it, the recommendations have yet to be implemented, if I'm not mistaken. I know that a government position paper was released last December, and the regulations are to be expected shortly, I think, but there is sort of, on the one hand, an expectation that there's going to be a major transfer of responsibilities to school councils, to parents in other words, mostly on those school councils. On the other hand, there are also expectations from people who say that things are going to carry on as before. I find

this very interesting, because I think what can only come out, quite frankly – and it may well be that that's what you have in mind – is such a flexible system that it is going to be all things to all men and women so that those councils who wish to undertake and assume a greater amount of involvement can do so, whereas others might indeed just carry on in a purely advisory capacity.

Of course, I still wonder what is going to happen in the situation where a school council decides to assume the greatest amount of involvement possible that the regulations will probably permit. I can foresee some problems there as to who will bear the responsibility, but I am sure that you have . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: I wonder if we could ask the Deputy Whip to quieten that group back there, please. It's becoming more and more difficult to hear West Yellowhead, both for the minister as well as the Table.

The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

MR. VAN BINSBERGEN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. As I was saying, the amount of responsibility given or assumed by parent councils will be up for grabs. It will be probably up to each individual council to decide that.

It was interesting. I just was at a meeting with a lady by the name of Heather-Jane Robertson, who wrote a book, *Class Warfare* – and of course the minister has read it – in which she detailed and chronicled what she perceives as the onslaught on public education. It was a very edifying meeting, because the lady is very articulate and she can advance her arguments very well. At this particular meeting there was a member of a school council from somewhere in Edmonton, and that lady was very concerned about what she perceived as the attack by this government on public education. She asked me: did I think it was as acute and as menacing as she perceived it to be? Now, Mr. Chairman, you can understand that I'm put in the position where I'm supposed to defend the Minister of Education and this government, which is not a natural position to be in, I think, in any event, but of course I did my best nevertheless. I had to remind her that one of the ministers of this government about a year ago went on open-line radio and stated that the invention of charter schools was the beginning of the end of the monopoly of public education. I said that you can take that, you can interpret that as you wish, but to me it says that this government is not the greatest defender of public education. Unfortunately, that is what we need.

When I look at all the stuff we have gotten from the minister, I cannot really discern a wholehearted, unqualified defence of public education, and I think that's what we're needing right now. I kind of expected that from a minister who had gone through the ranks up to the very top, professionally speaking, always in the service of public education. Now, what do we see instead? We see the introduction of charter schools, and that leads me to another topic.

I would, in fact, even look at a few figures here. I'd like to know from the minister, on the subject of charter schools, how much money is actually being spent on the introduction of charter schools. I assume that comes under vote 1.0.9, policy and planning, but I am not entirely sure where that fits in. I would like to know how much is actually spent on the conception of charter schools and the implementation. I'd also like to know, for instance, how many charter schools will be in operation for the next school year.

8:50

Now, that takes me back to June 1 of last year, Mr. Chairman, when in this very House I asked the minister whether indeed these

vicious rumours were true, that the regulations to establish charter schools were not going to be finished last September. He said that he didn't know where I got that pernicious information, or words of that nature. He said that they would undoubtedly be done and that he intended there to be several charter schools in existence as of last September 1994. Well, the strange situation is that at this moment, to my knowledge, those regulations still have not been made up, finished, whatever the word is. It must be one of the most difficult birthing procedures, considering it's now been nine months or so.

I hear from people in my area and others who are thinking or have applied to start, to establish a charter school and I hear from the school boards in my area: "When are these blasted regulations going to come out? We'd like to have everybody know the ground rules." Still not known. In fact, one applicant told me that it seems to be impossible to get the regulations now in time for him to start up his school in September. If that means that the minister has not been able to come out with those by that time, in time for a September start, I wonder, quite frankly, if the minister can perhaps improve his grip on the department and crack the whip.

Actually, Mr. Chairman, I'd like to leave the charter schools, but I think I've made the comment that the establishment of charter schools was not a measure that instilled any hope in the heart of this lady who questioned whether this government was actually defending public education. In fact to her, as it was to Heather-Jane Robertson, by the way, it was yet another nail in the coffin of public education. If the minister can reassure us on that score, I would be delighted, but I must warn him and I must caution him that I'm very skeptical indeed.

I'd like to go on, Mr. Chairman, with the next item, which is the framework for funding school boards. As we know, the property tax money has all been pooled into the Alberta school foundation fund, and now the funding will be forthcoming in three main funding blocks: instructional, support block, and capital block. I have some questions there. I still have difficulty discerning the basis, the criteria for that funding. I know the minister has a complicated formula in mind that takes into account distance factors and transportation and number of ESL and all kinds of things. I wonder whether he takes into account the number of low-income families, because that is a factor. I wonder whether he takes into account access to ECS, whether it be free or at a cost. All that sounds to me as if the criteria for disbursement of the ASFF are still somewhat arbitrary. Now, perhaps it's impossible to arrive at any watertight criteria, but I'm wondering if perhaps the minister could elucidate a little more on that particular score.

The new funding scheme, I think it goes without saying, does quite emasculate – if I could use that word without offending any genders here – the school boards. We've made these arguments before, but I want to state it once again. I know from school board members, trustees in my area, that they're simply not interested in running again because of, as they perceive it, all the hassles and all the restrictions and the lack of freedom that they perceive they have. Of course, it also includes the fact that even the appointment of the superintendent now must be approved by the minister.

I think it is sad that there is so much in the way of talent out in these local areas and so much in the way of energetic people who have visions of what education ought to be like at the local level, yet they feel they've simply been excluded by virtue of the fact that their hands are going to be tied. At least, Mr. Minister, that's the way they perceive it, and I must admit that I think there's a lot of truth to that perception.

Then, Mr. Chairman, as I'm winding down – and I know there are many others who are lining up behind me here – there is the accountability framework that the minister waxes very eloquently about. That leads me to some of the key goals, specifically number 9, which states that the aim is to arrive at a more open and accountable education system. Then there are a series of selected key strategies to bring that about and measures to measure, I suppose, any improvement in those particular areas. It's interesting that a measure, for instance, reads:

[The] per cent of Albertans who are satisfied that the curriculum focuses on what students need to learn and that learning standards are high enough.

I wonder what the basis is. Would 5 percent be enough? Or do we say that 50 percent is enough, as is sort of what the department requires to hand out credits? Or do we go for sort of an outcome-based education goal that only excellence can be achieved?

Mr. Chairman, I have lots more. Maybe I'll have to wait.

THE CHAIRMAN: You'll have another chance, hon. member. We now move on.

The hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*.

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I wanted to make a number of observations with respect to the estimates for the Department of Education. When I prepared for this, I thought what would be useful for me was to canvass the schools in my constituency, talk to the people on the parent advisory councils as well as the school principals. In effect what I asked those people was: "I'm going to have a chance on this particular evening to ask questions of the Minister of Education. Give me some suggestions in terms of the questions you'd like me to put to the minister with respect to the budget." I received actually very enthusiastic co-operation, so I heard a number of concerns that I've undertaken to relay to the minister relative to the budget in front of us.

I think what often happens is that my constituents and certainly people active in education query, and I'm speaking here of parents, not just teachers: "We're seeing such dramatic change in terms of education overall. Has the government been aggressive in terms of cutting costs in terms of the administration of the Department of Education?" They share my frustration when we look at items like vote 1.0.4, an increase in financial operations and administration services; 1.0.6, an increase in school finance and facilities services; 1.0.7, a large item for communication at the very same time that the Public Affairs budget has almost a \$10 million budget; 1.0.10, information services, an increase there; 1.0.11, corporate services and information access. The minister might clarify whether that includes a component for preparation for freedom of information, whether this is where it appears, because each department has the responsibility to make that kind of adjustment. I'd like his clarification, and I'm trying to determine the cost in this budget for setting up the education portion of the information directories. I want to ask the minister if it comes out of 1.0.11 and, if so, if he can attribute costs more precisely in terms of what's related to the new freedom of information regime. Those are concerns. I have to tell my constituents that from my view we have not seen anywhere near the same kind of aggressive cost cutting in terms of the Department of Education that we're seeing at the local level. That becomes a terrific concern for my constituents.

9:00

The item that comes up most often – well, there are a couple of items. The one I wanted to mention: still a major problem with

vote 3.1.4, language services. We still have what I regard as an intolerable situation in this province. I have an enormous number of immigrant families, new Canadian families living in Calgary-*Buffalo*. Many of them have children born in Canada and therefore – and I think this is shocking – are ineligible for English as a Second Language instruction. This isn't the first time this issue has been raised. Why, Mr. Minister? How could we possibly defend a limitation on ESL funding that says: "We don't look at your proficiency in the language. It doesn't matter whether you can speak the language or not; if you happen to be born in Canada, you're ineligible"? Well, that just makes no sense. I can't defend it, Mr. Minister. Can you?

I want to move on and then talk about some of the feedback I got. I want to give an example. There's a new parent council at a small school in the Catholic system in Calgary in my constituency, and the president of the parent advisory council says quite frankly: we're having an awful time wrestling with these changes in education. They refer specifically to the roles and responsibilities document. The president told me and I've heard this from many other sources: when will the Department of Education and the minister understand? He and I have both been at forums where this has come up.

Parents in Calgary – and I'm not speaking about parents in his constituency but parents in Calgary for the most part – want to see active parent advisory councils, but there is no strong support for the model set out in the roles and responsibilities document. In fact, the president of this one parent advisory council says: "Look; we have a tough time getting parents out on a regular basis. The concern is that when we talk about this, this simply panics people." People get anxious when they look at this new role that in a very top-down way the minister would want to foist on parents who want to be involved in their schools. I know the minister has heard this from countless sources, but I've seen no movement by the government in terms of backing off this model.

Two meetings I wanted to talk about as well. The first one was in Calgary. The Calgary home and school association had a meeting at Western Canada high school, and the minister was good enough to send a representative from his department, I think a young woman who had something to do with authoring the roles and responsibilities handbooks. The auditorium at Western Canada high school seats 260 people. The place was packed.

It was interesting listening to the comments people made as well as talking to people as they were leaving, Mr. Minister. I have to tell you that you may find support in some part of this province for your roles and responsibilities initiative, but I have yet to find it in any significant degree in Calgary. What parents said repeatedly as they took the microphone – and they were tough on the Member for Calgary-*Currie*, who happened to be at the meeting. They were courteous, but they were tough on your representative. Time and time again people wanted to know what the department was doing and where they were going with trying to give parents a role they weren't asking for. I think that at some point we've got to back up and say that this has nothing to do with dollars. It's part of your three-year plan, but it has nothing to do with dollars. Most importantly it has very little to do with the genuine needs of parents in 1995 in Calgary.

So, anyway, at this Calgary home and school association meeting we had representatives from a huge number of parent advisory councils throughout the city of Calgary, and I have to tell you, Mr. Minister, if you haven't already got the report from the Member for Calgary-*Currie*, who was present, or your representatives, that your plan bombed. It's as simple as that, and I'd like

to hear the government acknowledge that. I know it's tough. You've invested some of your own credibility, your department's credibility in it, but I think that it's a matter of credibility now. I think, Mr. Minister, if you've got support in the city of Calgary, I'd like you to detail that because it wasn't apparent at that meeting.

A second meeting: on January 27 and 28 the Calgary Catholic school system had a symposium. The Member for Calgary-Bow was there, I understand, attended the Friday evening session. I was there on Saturday. They had, I think, 200 parents, some teachers. They had at least two representatives from every school in the Calgary Catholic system. I was impressed. The Calgary Catholic system had done a very good job in putting together handbooks, and the minister will be pleased to hear that the group certainly wasn't partisan. There were certainly some people that were quick to point out to me that they liked some things the government is doing. But, you know, as we went through the workbook and in the discussion groups that I was part of on that Saturday morning, I found people again saying, "Where is this stuff coming from?"

In fact, what's interesting – and I'll just refer the minister to a couple of things in the summary of written responses. I want to point out to members that on March 6, 1995, I filed as a sessional paper the packet of material that came from this two-day symposium put on by the Calgary Catholic board. Let me give you an example of some of the things that were said, and this is in the sessional paper. School Councils: these are just some of the random comments:

- We disagree because we don't feel it is the primary role of school council . . .
- We disagree with the primary role due to "liability" of council members . . .
- We disagree because we feel that a small number of parents attending a school council meeting should not have this responsibility . . .
- We disagree because we feel words like "determine" and "ensure" are too strong . . .
- We disagree because we feel the School Board determines . . . the overall mission, philosophy, policies.

If the minister had been there, as I was and the Member for Calgary-Bow was, what he would have heard was strong support for the board, the Calgary Catholic board. Those people didn't want to see their board emasculated and neutered. They think that board has got an important leadership role in terms of ensuring that there's a strong Catholic education system. If I'm wrong, I'm counting on the Member for Calgary-Bow to stand up and tell me, because I was there, and that's what I heard.

So, Mr. Minister, I'm looking for some clarification from you in terms of what you're going to do to respond to what I respectfully submit is an overwhelming consensus in the city of Calgary that the roles and responsibilities document is fatally flawed and it's time to scrap it and start over.

The other comment I wanted to make as well has to do with my concern – and this was raised in the House one earlier time. My understanding, Mr. Minister, is that only 10 percent of the schools in a district qualify for your high-needs funding program, only 10 percent. Now, representing a constituency that had three community schools in the inner-city area, three community schools because they were high needs: St. Monica, Connaught, and Victoria – the problem is that your guidelines say only 10 percent of them can qualify for the high-needs funding. Once again, Mr. Minister, I think the issue should be that need should drive the allocation of funds, not some kind of an arbitrary formula.

I raised this one other time, Mr. Minister, and I saw you frowning. If my information is inaccurate, if I'm wrong, tell me. If this is accurate, then I'd like an explanation. I can take you to a number of schools in downtown Calgary that have a strong need, and I'm talking about Victoria community school, Connaught, St. Monica, and Sacred Heart elementary school. So I think, Mr. Minister, that at some point you have to recognize that you're not meeting the real needs of these parents, the real needs of these students, and I want to encourage you to go back to the drawing board and start dealing with it.

9:10

The other experience I just wanted to relate is that I had a chance to go to Rossbarrow high school in the Calgary-West constituency and talk to teachers involved once again with a high-needs area. What we're finding, Mr. Minister, is your department . . . [interjection] Well, since you are the minister responsible for public education, I want to know what responsibility you're taking for the fact that in these high-needs areas and certainly in the city of Calgary – and I assume it's true in other areas as well – the resources are shrinking. The pressure on teachers is increasing. There are not parent advisory councils that have the resources or the energy to step in and fill the gaps, so those children are suffering. The expectation is that they will suffer more as this particular government program proceeds.

So I'm looking to you, Mr. Minister, to deal with that, and I'd like some clarification on the points I've raised. Thanks very much.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I was moved to comment on the issues raised tonight with respect to roles and responsibilities because I think it would be inappropriate to leave on the table and not to hear all of the issues that were addressed.

I guess what I just wanted to identify to the minister with respect to some of the comments that were made was that there is a concern on the urgency with respect to how we implement roles and responsibilities, and it's a fair comment for some school councils who are coming to terms with this new process. I would also say, Mr. Minister, that there are a number of schools who are already involved in these procedures and would like to know how they will do a transition from where they are now to the provincial model that's being developed.

I did hear at the meeting that was referred to by the Member for Calgary-Buffalo lots of discussion about the intent of this document: was it really to bring parents onside to the responsibilities that are rightly theirs? The question that was raised was that the structure doesn't necessarily allow them to deal with that. In some conversations I've had constituents have asked how they as a small school can implement these roles and responsibilities when they don't have the same resources as a larger school. How will they be able to do site-based management when their budgets will not necessarily follow dollars to students because of their structural arrangements in place?

They gave me one example, Mr. Minister, which I would ask you to comment on at some point. If the site-based management budget provides for so many dollars per student for instructional purposes but that school has to purchase a particular piece of equipment, set of textbooks, et cetera, that would be less onerous a bill if they had a larger number of students. The question is: are smaller schools going to be penalized because they just don't have the same volume of dollars but they have to buy some

similar equipment, be that basketballs or copiers or things like library resources? So there was an inequity in their understanding of how the fiscal framework would be implemented.

Some of the other conversations that I've heard are that parents want very much to have a say in the process, but they don't know that they can effectively change anything if contractual obligations, be they a PTR issue or control of a district's siting school facilities in certain communities – they will not have the say in what school facility they occupy if that's made at a board level. So some of the implementation processes are very unclear, and I think one of the concerns about the end of June deadline is that some of these details haven't been worked out.

I have had a great deal of success in talking to parents about the roles and responsibilities in the context of a provincial framework. When you talk to people and identify that we're looking at a model that will allow us to bring the same level of involvement across the province and that what you have in a larger centre or in a school district that's already focused on parental involvement is at one end of the spectrum versus a school district where the proverbial sign that says "Parents not allowed beyond this point" is the one that's in place, when you explain that roles and responsibilities are within that provincial context, I don't find the reception to it as difficult or as negative as my colleague would have alluded.

In fact, Mr. Chairman, I would like to identify that I received a number of phone calls following the particular meeting that was mentioned identifying that there were certain groups of people who felt that their agenda had not been heard, and therefore they spent a fair amount of time arguing that position. It was a public meeting, so I have no problem with that, but to colour the whole meeting with that negativity I think does a disservice to some of the people who were hearing a number of issues.

I do think, Mr. Minister, there is a concern that within the school council framework within the province of Alberta we are everywhere from A to Z on the spectrum. I would urge, on behalf of constituents that I've talked to, that we examine those that are already up and running and successful and where we need energy to develop school councils that have yet to come up to scratch.

Another question that has been raised – and I don't know how it would be identified in the budget – is that what we really want here is effective parental involvement, but we may have parents or community members who don't have the skills to take on the leadership that they would like to proceed with. One of the questions that was asked was: will there be dollars to follow the training, the professional development, whatever you'd call it, in order to really target that group of people who have taken ownership for this? I know we have Vitalize '95 coming to Calgary I think about the 10th of June, which is a major volunteer co-ordinated effort bringing together all of this organization. I do think that as we move into roles and responsibilities, we might need to focus on appropriate workshops either from a district level or perhaps using that forum of Vitalize '95 or the following year Wild Rose Foundation, take that on as a possibility. Clearly we have a responsibility to assist those who want that responsibility and embrace it but lack the skills.

Another issue that was clearly identified was the extended role of the principal in that as site-based manager they had some major responsibilities to produce in the classroom and in the school system best knowledge and best learning. It is my understanding, from talking to a number of school communities, that if you have a principal who is committed and dedicated to an understanding of teaching methods and training, et cetera, that reflect the needs

of the community, generally speaking you will have staff that are drawn to that type of model and you don't end up having to reinvent the wheel. You've got a working unit. But that same principal may not be able to select the staff he wants because of current negotiated contracts, and I think there's a real danger that the principal will be held for ransom, if you will, because the goals and the objectives are all common but the structure doesn't allow him to make some of those decisions. I think we're going to have to have a way to fine-tune that.

If the school community identifies that perhaps they want a language program, that they might want to have library specialists or ESL or parenting reading groups, that they've got a cultural weakness in English but not the fiscal resources to do it because, again, of these contractual obligations, I think, Mr. Chairman, through to the minister, this is where a lot of the fine-tuning will be needed.

What I would like to identify to this House is that in all of the negativity and the concern for absorbing these roles and responsibilities, there are some very appropriate and valued questions that are being asked. We should not see good, constructive criticism as a negative. It has to be said, and it has to be asked for. It is a discussion paper, and the fact that the opportunity was extended I think shows that there was a real interest in hearing from the majority of Albertans on this issue. I have found those discussions to be more than positive when you get past some of the rhetoric.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: Before I recognize Edmonton-Highlands-Beverly, I'd like to ask permission of the committee to revert briefly to Introduction of Guests. All those in favour, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed, please say no. Carried.

The hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

9:20

MRS. ABDURAHMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to introduce two Alberta psychiatrists, who I hope indeed are analyzing the proceedings this evening. I'd like to introduce Dr. Maggie Tweddle and also Dr. P.J. White. I'd ask you to rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

head: **Main Estimates 1995-96**

Education (continued)

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Beverly.

MS HANSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to comment just briefly on program 4 of the estimates, Mr. Minister, the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities. I would like to point out that some of the changes in the delivery of services will need to be watched very carefully as the system is implemented. The budget remains the same as last year, and it should be adequate for the coming year. But we must work very closely with the Premier's council during the transferring of the support services to the regional authority, because there's a fair bit of concern about that and some very touchy issues.

In that the intention of the community supports model is to assist Albertans to live as independently as possible in the community – and that's a laudable goal; I think that's what we all want – many disabled people are concerned that under the Capital health authority the medical types of services may be a higher priority than the social supports and that the services could be delivered by health workers who don't understand social issues. That's something that I'm sure will be monitored. Many disabled people believe that the staff need to be people with broad and general skills, generally speaking. Certainly there are some exceptions where people need more specific medical treatment, but they seem more concerned about the social aspect of it.

In regard to the assured income for the severely handicapped there have been some sad incidents where people were cut off, but sometimes they were reinstated. The numbers really weren't very substantial, so the council feels fairly comfortable in that area at this point.

In the past it's been difficult for many disabled people in the community to get service because of funding limitations. They feel that it's important that a greater range of support services be available, apparently a certain range of services that people found difficult to acquire – I don't have the details on those, or didn't bother to bring them – the goal being as many people living in the community as possible instead of being institutionalized.

Another area of concern is housing. It needs some work and some commitment from government. Housing for the disabled needs to be innovative and of course it needs to be accessible. Stronger building codes are needed I think with the disabled in mind. Barrier free designs that allow wheelchair access are fairly common now, certainly more common than they were a few years ago. There are various other kinds of disabilities that are overlooked. Just one example would be for blind or visually impaired people: in a building where there's an elevator, they can't see the numbers on the elevators, but it would be a simple thing to put the numbers on in Braille as well as in regular type. I do believe that consultation with the Premier's council in regard to building codes probably wouldn't have to be a very big deal. There are a number of things that most people don't think about as far as building codes go that would be appreciated, make living a lot easier.

The other area, of course, is jobs, retraining for jobs. That is really important. The percentage of disabled people who are unemployed is the highest in all categories, and we're really missing the boat if we don't make good, effective retraining a priority, practical kinds of retraining.

Those are my comments. Thank you very much, Mr. Minister.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

MR. DAY: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I think there are other members across the way who want to comment and also the minister wants to before the normal adjournment hour of midnight – I mean 10 o'clock – so I'll try and be brief. A number of the issues that I wanted to speak to have actually already been discussed tonight. As we consider estimates of the department, I realize we can be quite specific in some areas.

[Mr. Clegg in the Chair]

I want to congratulate the minister for being responsive to a number of presentations and concerns that I have brought to his attention on behalf of the Red Deer school district, both the public and separate schools. Some I think we're still looking for some

response on. Though he has been pretty careful to look at all the issues brought forward, there are still some that he can get back to me on so that I can respond to our officials in Red Deer.

It's interesting: the federal budget with the elimination of the utilities tax is going to be a burden on costs for school boards. I know we are negotiating with the federal government to try and deal with that in some way, but what's the anticipated action going to be there failing a change of direction by the Liberals on that, which we would like to see but being realistic we don't know if it's going to happen? Who's going to absorb those extra utility costs? It's a case of something being totally unanticipated in budget planning and then being a factor.

I'll move quickly from that to funding grants for high school students that complete courses. Could you get an update to me on what the policy is there at this point? There was a concern from the Camille J. Lerouge school, from the principal there, that I think is valid. First of all, there should be pressure on schools – no question about that – to make sure that students complete their courses. Grants: there should be a tie-in there obviously, and I agree with that.

What accommodation is there for some unique situations? For instance, at the Camille J. Lerouge school they have the co-op education home study program, and that's directed to students who are really at risk of just sort of disappearing somewhere in the system. When the school works with those students, they realize these are students at risk, and strictly on a course-finished basis the results may not be that high. They talked, for instance, in the last school year about 14 students, as the principal there put it, who are at risk of sort of disappearing into the ashes. Of the 14 students, three successfully completed that program, but to do that, they had to take a chance with 11 others that frankly didn't finish. Those are the special circumstances where the funding for high school courses completed, which I agree with, needs to be somehow mitigated so that schools wanting to make the extra effort to reach out to these students can do so without fear of financial penalty.

You've heard a lot already about parent councils and roles and responsibilities. I've already passed information on to you, which you have acknowledged and I appreciate, so I won't go into a whole lot of depth and detail. But I think I'll reflect some of the comments already made tonight in that parent groups and councils that I've met with and that have had meetings at Lindsay Thurber high school early in January and in a number of separate schools and meetings at St. Pat's school and G.H. Dawe – there's definitely a theme running through the concerns of parents on the councils. They do want to be involved, but they don't want to be weighed down with micromanagement issues. Parents clearly want to be in a strong advisory position. There is concern from parents and administrators alike that principals may be unnecessarily weighed down with administrative issues. Some concern there.

Then there were specifics that I wasn't able to answer at some of these meetings. For instance, what would constitute a quorum at a parent council meeting? If you only have a small group of parents – and that's traditionally the case, actually – at one of these meetings, to suggest that a quorum would be a certain number could mean that the meeting wouldn't even go ahead. So what's anticipated there?

It was interesting to hear from parents who are strong believers in democracy, yet the process of electing parents in some areas, it was suggested to me, could be intimidating to parents who otherwise might want to be involved. What kind of allowance will there be for a local model to emerge that may in fact not involve elections but have a consensus from the parents there that

they'd like that particular governance model to go ahead? That's a question they had, as they strongly believe in democracy and electing representatives.

I guess other questions that came forward can sort of be backdropped with the question: what degree of local autonomy is there going to be for the development of local models that specifically meet a need and in fact are acceptable to the parents in that particular district? Are they going to be able to have that kind of liberty and that kind of autonomy? There was a lot of work put into the discussions by the parents and by the teachers in these particular areas.

9:30

MS LEIBOVICI: A point of order.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

**Point of Order
Decorum**

MS LEIBOVICI: I'm having a really difficult time hearing the hon. Minister of Labour, and I would appreciate if the Chair indicates that. [interjections]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Order. [interjections] Order. See? That's why we can't hear. Everybody's talking. Just calm it down a little bit and everybody will be happy.

I notice, hon. Government House Leader, your voice is a little low today. Would you just speak up a little bit, please.

MR. DAY: Well, I'm both humbled and encouraged at the same moment; first, that the member of the opposition would actually express concern that she couldn't hear me. I am truly humbled by that, and I'll try and make sure she hears every word. Second, to be encouraged to speak louder is not usually the encouragement the Chair gives me, Mr. Chairman. I'm somewhat in confusion as to this different request, so I will raise the tenor a bit.

Debate Continued

MR. DAY: I just want to capsule my remarks. I could go into great detail on the concerns brought forward also by the Association of Independent Schools and Colleges in Alberta, and of course I can't leave those unexpressed. The minister has the report. I can only encourage serious consideration of a request coming from a group of schools that are approved, accredited, have accredited teachers, in most cases use the Alberta curriculum, and will offer to do the job at a rate less than is presently being done in the public system. I'm not comparing the two systems; I'm not getting into any of that tonight, any of the details. I'm just saying that it's so basic a commonsense approach that schools which already receive some funding are acknowledged as doing the job and doing it in a credible fashion, that we would acknowledge the fact that here they are as a group willing to do the job for less, with no capital request requirement to go with it, at some significant saving. We must give that the most serious and urgent consideration, especially in a time of fiscal restraint when it would actually save money in the public system.

Therefore, putting all philosophic reasons aside, which I also feel strongly about, I appeal to all members of the Assembly just to be brutally mercenary, if for no other reason, and say: for a dollar-saving factor, here's a group that will do the job for less money; let's give urgent attention to their request.

To the minister through the Chair, I'll close with the correspondence still from the home schoolers in the province concerned about the degree of regulation and how that may be excessive. I can only underline the fact that the vast majority – and I would say in the high 90s percent – of parents who want to take on the task of home education show, just by the very fact that they're willing to take that task on, a high degree of commitment to their children and to the education of their children. We must look at ways of staying out of the business of parents doing a good job and look very carefully at the question of excessive intervention.

Home schooling parents have brought forward concerns such as: if their children are to be tested, with the fact that they might move to a different facility or move into a school situation to be tested or be tested by people that are not known to them, these are different requirements being put on those students than would be put on public school students or separate school students or even independent school students.

Rather than going into detail, because I see the time is fast fleeting here, I would ask the minister to be very sensitive to the area of unnecessarily intruding in an area where parents are willing to take this responsibility on.

I will thank the minister for consideration of all these comments and look forward to his reply, either verbal or written.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you. I always enjoy listening to the Minister of Labour, and it's probably good for this Legislative Assembly that we don't always agree. Otherwise, I guess there would be no reason to have different political parties within Alberta.

I'd like to take a different tack. The minister in one of his closing remarks indicated: let's just look at the cost value of what a certain school system is; let's be "brutally mercenary," to quote the minister's statements. What I'd like to say is, well, let's put the dollars aside. Let's just say that for once we can put those dollars aside, the issue of the costs, and say: what do we want in education for our children? I think what we will find is that we'll probably be looking at something a little bit different than what we're seeing right now in the business plans and what we're seeing right now in the various documents that the Department of Education has put out.

When I look at these particular documents, what I'm beginning to see is perhaps a vision of education that is not quite what the words seem to indicate. When I look at what the estimates indicate and when I look at the words, the bureaucratise that we see within the Better Way II document, it seems that somehow they don't quite match. What I'm beginning to see emerge is a two-tiered, mostly privatized education system with a curriculum that may well be determined by private industry. I'm projecting not next year and not in two or three years, but I'm projecting maybe 10 to 20 years down the road. I see the hon. members on the other side of the Legislative Assembly shaking their heads and saying, "No, this will never occur."

I would like to put a challenge forward to the hon. members. The hon. members of the Conservative caucus made the time to meet with Sir Roger Douglas, it's my understanding. My challenge is that perhaps you might want to make the time to have a meeting with Heather-Jane Robertson, and then the viewpoint that is put forward from the government may well be a little bit more balanced than what we're seeing right now.

Just for me to take an example, if I look down the margin, in the interests of time, what I see are statements like, "Help students be the best that they can." Then I look at the fact that kindergarten is no longer being funded for the full 400 hours. Well, to me that is a basic contradiction in terms. Education is indeed a lifelong process that starts the minute we are born, but our first contact with the education system is generally – has been for many – kindergarten. The argument I hear about ECS is that it costs too much, and again we get down to what is the dollar line, not what is best. Again what I hear is that, well, it's not needed, but we've yet to see any studies that really show it's not needed. The third one I hear – and this is the one that's most astonishing for me – is that it's a babysitting service. Well, anyone who tries to work and tries to get a child to kindergarten knows that that's an impossibility, because kindergartens do not have the same kind of hours that any workplace does. So kindergarten cannot be a babysitting service; it is impossible for it to be a babysitting service. Those are the kinds of things that I hear.

Again I'd like to say: why don't we really say what the vision is for education in this province, and then where are the dollars? Where can we find the dollars? At one time Alberta had the number one education system in Canada. Right now the figures put us dead last. Dead last. Is that good enough for us to be competitive? Is that good enough for us to build an Alberta advantage? I don't think it is.

9:40

What I'd like to do – and I think some of the hon. members preceding me may have touched on these issues a little bit. When we look at the departmental support services, which is program 1, when I look down the list of where there have been increases and expenditures from '93-94 to '94-95 to '95-96 and when I look at where the decreases have been, surprisingly enough the only increases have been to departmental support services. Now, what does that area include? That area includes the minister's office, which had a decrease. It did. It had a thousand dollar decrease. The deputy minister's office is the one that had the biggest hit. It's a 3.18 percent hit to the deputy minister's office. The ADM of planning and information and financial services has also had a bit of a decrease. The ADM of student programs and evaluations has had a \$3,000 increase. Then I look at areas such as financial operations and administrative services: a 3 percent increase there. Educational grants: of course we would have a decrease there, but at least it's only a .3 percent decrease.

Communications: now this I find interesting. I think probably if we looked at each department across government, we would find that communications, human resources, and some other administrative areas seem to have increased, and this is the one area where the Premier has stood steadfast and said: we're going to cut from the top. But when I look through the budgets, when I look through the estimates, again that doesn't seem to come through. So then we see that communications has had an increase. Now, the question there is: was some of that the promotional video? Or is the increase in communications in order to sell your program, in order to try and assure Albertans that really what we are going to have is the best education within this province? My guess is that that's what it is. It's to try and allay the fears of Albertans who know what the reality is, because they see it whenever they walk into a school. They see that resources are not what they used to be. They see that they have to put their hands in their pockets for certain fees that they did not have to pay before.

While I'm on the topic of user fees within schools, you can look at the transportation fees, tuition fees, textbook fees, band

fees, locker fees, field trip fees, et cetera, et cetera. At some point when you look at these user fees, someone has to make a distinction and say: "You know what? Public education is no longer public. It has become private." Because the only way you can access the services within the public education system is to be able to afford to pay for those services for your child. I've heard stories within my constituency of parents who have not been able to afford to send their children on field trips, so the children do not go.

What is interesting, however, in this area is that when you look at vote 1.0.12, all of a sudden we've got an area within Education that's generating revenue. It's going to generate \$530,000 of revenue this year. My question to the minister is: where is this revenue being generated, and has the department looked at what the impact of that revenue generator is to those individuals who have to put their hands in their pockets and provide the dollars?

I have questions when we look at efficiencies. As in all departments, efficiencies is another buzzword that's utilized. Usually what efficiency means is some form of privatization. What we saw in Calgary is where the custodial services were contracted out to a private contractor, and within a very short period of time it was evident that the private contractor was actually more expensive than having the custodial services within the school. The Calgary school board had to terminate the contract with the private contractor because it was too expensive to use the private contractor, on top of which the services were not being done properly. The schools were dirty.

The other area that I'd like to have addressed by the Minister of Education is with regards to . . .

DR. WEST: That's union propaganda.

MS LEIBOVICI: I can provide the minister of transportation with documentation that says exactly that.

The other area within the schools that I'd like to have the minister address is where there are provisions for safety within the school systems for workers who are left alone at night. There are various jurisdictions across Canada – and again if the Minister of Education or the Minister of Labour does not have that information, I can provide it to the appropriate minister – that are looking at putting in place certain kinds of regulations or certain policies so that the incident that we had here in Edmonton where a woman custodial worker was assaulted when she was alone on a school site will not occur again. I think this is something that needs to be provided for.

I have a question for the minister as well. I was looking for where the dollars were that were allocated to the traveling road shows in terms of the various areas for consultation with the citizens of Alberta. I can't find it here in the estimates that are provided, and I would appreciate the minister providing the cost of those committees because I'm sure that they did cost dollars.

I'd like to make a comment on charter schools. I think that charter schools are a foot in the door with regards to privatizing our system. When one looks at the consequences of charter schools, that is what happens, and one needs to look also at the history of why charter schools were initially formed. It's my information – and if the minister has additional information, I would appreciate that – that they came out of Alabama, where the reason for the charter schools was to ensure that segregation continued. Again I would appreciate it if the minister can trace that history to our times at this point in time.

I have some other questions with regards to early childhood services private operator support. That's vote 2.3.1. That has decreased. Now, with the decrease in that particular vote I would

like to know if the minister has information in terms of whether that means there is an increased dollar amount that parents will now have to pay to send their children to private ECS schools because it is no longer provided within the public system.

I have one other, I guess, series of questions that has to do with the role of teachers within these documents. Once in a while teachers are mentioned. Unfortunately, without teachers our children would not be taught. I think what we need to do is give a big thank you to our teachers and look at some of the provisions that are being put forward with regards to issues on the ATA as well as provincewide bargaining.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MR. HENRY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will make a few comments, specifically in questions and requests for information, and perhaps invite the minister if we can get into an ideological debate or a debate on policy in another forum. I would like to do that, and we've done that, and we'll continue to do that over the next couple of years anyway.

Some questions to the minister specifically with the . . . [interjection] After I finish, Mr. Chairman, I'll let the minister of transportation say whatever he wants to say.

AN HON. MEMBER: You're giving permission?

9:50

MR. HENRY: Exactly.

Line item 1.0.7, which is communications, in the minister's budget. If you recall, this caucus raised the issue of the video that was being produced with department money regarding achievement testing. As a result of that, we've have two, actually, requests for more information regarding other operations of the department with regard to communications. What I would like is a more detailed breakdown of the communications budget and expansions over the last two years by project and personnel. These are several requests from individuals that have been given to me. I'd also like a breakdown by the 700-odd department employees for the last two fiscal years up to this year, whatever's reasonable, December 31 or January, whatever makes sense in terms of the department, of out-of-province travel by department employees. I know that was identified as a restricted item by previous administrations, but I've been asked to provide that information: out-of-province travel by employee and for what purpose.

Also, I'd like the minister to specifically identify what steps the department is doing to implement any sort of longitudinal study with regard to the changes in the ECS program, if indeed research is being carried out or not. Or are we simply going to redefine the program and therefore offer that particular service rather than looking at the impact? One of the results of the minister's and the government's policies has been a myriad variation in numbers of hours of ECS programs offered around the province. There are some students who choose not to go, to 200-hour programs, right up to 400-hour-plus programs. Especially with the new information systems that the department is installing with regard to tracking students through the system, it should be quite easy to contract with an outside source, perhaps one of the university departments, to do a longitudinal study and look at the impact of those changes, and then we can have Alberta-based research telling us exactly what's happening.

While I'm on the subject of evaluation, what plans does the department have for evaluation? The department has talked about evaluation of school boards and school divisions and schools, as well as discussion about teacher evaluation, but there's been very little discussion on the evaluation of the initiatives of the department or of functions of the department. I'd like to know specifically what measures the minister is taking to ensure that there is evaluation of the various initiatives and of the effectiveness of the department functions as a whole. Specifically what external evaluations are going to be taking place and have been taking place? If there are reports, I would like the minister to provide those. If there are not, then I'd like the minister to consider implementing such a procedure in terms of external evaluation. Mr. Chairman, by external I want to be clear that I don't mean an external committee that might be appointed by the minister but really, truly at arm's length, whether it be a university or a research firm or maybe even out-of-province. That can be argued.

With regard to school-based management, the minister and I don't disagree on the issue of having in a generalized way school-based management around the province. We've had it in the city of Edmonton public school board for some time, and while there are limitations to it, it has a lot of good points. Obviously with school-based management the minister, I believe, has recognized that there are going to have to be some things put in place in terms of training for people, et cetera. I'd like to know what sort of transitional dollars are being put aside for those jurisdictions to be able to provide that kind of training or again, in specifics, what the ministry is doing to help provide that kind of in-service for the players in that field.

I've heard from several school jurisdictions with regard to the estimate of the funding that the school divisions will be receiving for the next school year and their own calculations vis-à-vis the funding framework. There seem to be discrepancies. I've heard from several jurisdictions saying that the department has published that there is going to be X number of dollars less than we had last year, and in fact it's going to be a million more or X number of a hundred thousand more. I'll provide the minister with some specifics about that, but I'd like him to respond to where those differences come in. Is it in enrollment? Is it a difference in the calculation? I'm aware that the formulas are ongoing in terms of development and whatnot, and I'd like to know, you know, if we're dealing with earlier or later figures.

There's also been a major concern I'd like the minister to address - there are two parts to this concern - with regard to disabled children, the mild or moderately disabled. School boards have indicated that the funding has been cut for those. I'd like the minister to explain the rationale for that and why that is being lumped in with the regular funding. From a parental point of view I've heard from associations of parents who are saying, "If it's being lumped in with the regular block funding, how can we then track that that kind of money is actually being spent on our children?"

Also, because of the transition in terms of moving to the uniform mill rate and moving to the equity system that the minister's put in place, some jurisdictions are experiencing significant drops in addition to the overall global drops that have been announced by the provincial government. My question to the minister is: what plans or what consideration would the ministry give to transitional funding for those boards that are having a hard time in terms of that kind of downsizing so quickly over and above the average downsizing that's happening? I think the minister understands the point? [interjection] Thank you.

Roles and responsibilities. I know the minister is considering the regulations. I'd encourage the minister to get those out as soon as possible. There are a number of issues, and the minister might note that I've been perhaps unusually silent on some of the issues with regard to roles and responsibilities because I think we all agree on the goal of encouraging more parental involvement. I think we need to see the regulations so that we know what we're talking about and we're not fear mongering or extrapolating, I guess is the word. When are we going to see those regulations?

Also, school parent councils have specifically asked me to ask you when we will see the regulations in place, because, as the minister knows, there are going to be several transition kinds of things from the parent advisory groups, with money, and with people and all those kinds of things over the summer months, and some school parent councils want to have whatever they need to have in place before the 1st of June. They need time to plan, et cetera.

I'd like to know specifically how many charter school applications have been received by the ministry directly, how many the minister is aware of that have been received locally, what are the nature of those, and from what parts of the province.

I have a question regarding the proposed licensing and certification for our teachers. The minister will be aware that last year and earlier this year there was significant work done with regard to changing the nature of certification of teachers into a licensing model, and the minister, as I understand it, has either canceled or postponed that project, has said that that's not going to happen. But there was significant work done, and there was a paper circulated. I'd like to know very specifically with regard to that paper: who approved it; how did that whole process get started? I am aware it's happening in some other jurisdictions. I would like to know: did the minister personally approve that initiative? I'd like to know how much public money in terms of staff time and resources was put into the development of that proposal to the time that it did get canned by the government.

I'd like the minister to provide on a jurisdiction-by-jurisdiction basis, or provincially, information with regard to the change in user fees across the province, both regular fees for entering into school as well as incidental fees.

I note that the department's statistics, which have been fairly comprehensive in some areas in terms of assessment and whatnot, have been provided on a yearly basis and have been quite useful information to those who are planning. However, the last information that's publicly available is '92-93. The minister I believe understands the document I'm talking about, the statistical financial report of the department with regard to the number of students served, et cetera. I see his head nodding yes. I'd like to know: since the last information we have is '92-93, where's '93-94? I guess '94-95 will be coming out, but where's last year, and when can we expect those numbers to come out?

10:00

The next issue. The minister is now collecting all the property tax revenue for education in the province. First, I should say that we are aware that the minister has said that over the next three to five years we're going to move to a uniform mill rate. The concern that's been expressed out in the public as I've traveled around this province meeting with school jurisdictions and municipalities and, frankly, ratepayers – the facts are that the transition will impact significantly on some ratepayers in some areas of the province. Some will go down; some will go up dramatically. But the minister has said two things. Number one, we will have a uniform mill rate in the future, and the total

amount of dollars taken out in terms of that will remain the same. I believe the minister is on record for that. I'll come back to that one.

Specifically, what I want to know is at what point is the minister going to release the three- to five-year plan or whatever it may be so that the municipalities and homeowners and, specifically, large local ratepayers, apartment owners and landlords – I have one landlord, for instance, in my jurisdiction that owns over 30 apartment buildings. It's not an mega international megacorporation; it's a local family-run enterprise in Edmonton. They want to know what, if anything, is going to happen with regard to their property taxes so they can plan over the next three to five years. What I'm asking the minister is: if we're going to that uniform mill rate, when will he be able to produce the phase-in, what will be the mill rates for each region, and will he do that for the entire period and not have people waiting year to year so that businesses and homeowners can plan? That was specifically raised by a businessperson.

I've got several other questions, but what I will do is leave it at that, and perhaps we can come back at another point. I'll let the minister have a few minutes.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Chairman, I would like to respond to some of the key issues raised this evening, but I would not in any way claim that I'll be able to cover the entire list. I would thank those that have participated in the estimates debate, and I would thank those that have raised relevant and good questions.

First of all, I'd like to respond to the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Beverly, who raised some issues with respect to the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities. The concerns that she expressed with respect to the implementation of the community supports unit model are quite well taken. They have been identified to the ministers that are involved in implementing that particular project. And, yes, I know the Minister of Family and Social Services and the Minister of Health and myself are sensitive to the need to implement this carefully, to involve those people who do have a concern about coming under a Health model of delivering certain services. I would like to say that we recognize that concern, and every effort will be made to communicate and to provide the information that people need so they can be comfortable with going into a community supports model. There are two things I'd just like to emphasize: the idea of a community supports model has the support of the council – it's been one of their major, major goals – and to do it, you have to have somebody co-ordinating. We made a very careful decision. We spent time deliberating over this, and the decision was made to take advantage of the leadership of Health in this regard. So that is where it is going, but I do note the concerns that you raise.

Also, I acknowledge the certainly relevant concerns that were expressed with respect to building codes, elevators, those sorts of things, and your point on retraining. We'll reply with respect to that.

I would like to just go on, Mr. Chairman, to comment on some of the other speakers. First of all, with respect to Edmonton-Mill Woods' comments, it's easy, you know, to trot out certain irrelevant historical documents and say that there's not a plan and so forth, but the three-year business plan, which is not unique as a concept to Education but is across all of the departments of this government, is a plan for delivering the needed services of this government to the people of the province. Until we took the leadership role here under our Premier Ralph Klein, I do not

know of any other provincial government in this country or the federal government that went to this degree of planning and specificity in terms of what we're looking towards doing over a three-year period. Certainly, anything can be improved, Mr. Chairman, but that there is a plan there, a very definite plan there, should be acknowledged.

I have a real difficulty. I see a certain degree of schizophrenia in the remarks of the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods. On the one hand, it seems that he's interested in a system which performs. He's sincerely interested in quality education, but he doesn't want it to be evaluated, or he doesn't like the measures that we're taking to evaluate it.

DR. MASSEY: You weren't listening, Halvar.

MR. JONSON: Oh, yes, I was, very carefully. Very carefully.

I can assure the hon. member that we do base our evaluation system and our evaluation tools – tests, in other words, and diploma examinations – on standards. We don't just adhere to doing everything on the bell curve. We do set standards for our programs, and we do evaluate on that basis. A good point was raised with respect to diagnostic tests and instruments and material to help teachers, and one of the initiatives in our plan deals with providing that type of material to the teachers of the province. More can be done, I agree, but that need has been recognized by my department.

With respect to the funding framework, there were some concerns there. One of the questions that was raised was: who was involved? Well, that is quite well known publicly. We had an implementation team made up of members of this Legislature. They were aided by a multistakeholder advisory committee plus a multistakeholder technical committee. There were regional meetings across the province. Input was invited. I commend the Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti and the work that implementation team did with respect to coming up with a fair and equitable system of funding for the province.

A good area of questions raised by the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods and common to many of the speakers this evening, Mr. Chairman, was questions with respect to the department. Alberta Education over the three-year life of the business plan is taking a 20 percent reduction in its spending. I can provide answers to the detailed questions that were posed this evening, because yes, there have been shifts, depending on the priorities and the things that need to be done within the department, between budget lines and among budget lines. The reduction of 20 percent is there, where for the system as a whole, as I indicated earlier this evening, we're looking at a 6, 6 and a half percent reduction in the overall budget. So we take the message that's been pointed out and referred to here this evening quite seriously.

The other thing is that the numbers of staff in Alberta Education are at 1971 levels, and when you think back over 20-plus years and the increase in enrollment and the size of the system outside the department, I think the overall size of the department is certainly somewhat in line.

10:10

With respect to the comments of the Member for West Yellowhead, I acknowledge his compliments. It's nice to get one once in a while from across the way. But I did notice that he launched fairly quickly into other concerns. Mr. Chairman, I will stop with this particular but I think very fundamental point. In the Member for West Yellowhead's comments and also to a lesser degree in some comments later on references to some of the catchwords of the opposition to change in this province were used: attack on public education, two-tiered system. I have heard that around the province, just parroted in a large number of cases. Some people, I acknowledge, can defend what they mean in terms of definitions there; a large number cannot, because it becomes a catchword to try and buck change, period.

In terms of the public education system, yes, I am a defender. I regard myself as a defender of the principles of public education, but I have never accepted, and I don't expect other people to accept, everything in public education year after year as being the best it can be. It has to be open to self-examination. It has to be open to constructive criticism from outside. It has to be prepared to perform and to be subject to evaluation and to show its value to the public that it serves. I do not think that constructive criticism, well-thought-out change is in any way an attack on public education in this province.

I will conclude at that point, Mr. Chairman. I understand that there may be the possibility of my being before the committee again some time in the future. In any case, I will certainly follow the commitment I made earlier to respond to all questions and issues raised this evening.

I would move that the committee rise and report, Mr. Chairman.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Dunvegan.

MR. CLEGG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions of the Department of Education, reports progress thereon, and requests leave to sit again.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to file copies of documents tabled during the Committee of Supply this day for the official records of the Assembly.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you. Does the Assembly concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

[At 10:14 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

