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**Subcom.A: Education**

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3:29 p.m.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

**Subcommittee A – Education**

Gordon, Mrs. Judy, Chairman  
Severtson, Mr. Gary, Deputy Chairman  
Burgener, Jocelyn  
Cardinal, Mike  
Ducharme, Denis  
Dunford, Hon. Clint  
Friedel, Gary

Hierath, Ron  
Hlady, Mr. Mark  
Jacques, Wayne  
Johnson, LeRoy  
Lougheed, Rob  
Mar, Hon. Gary G., QC  
Massey, Dr. Don

Oberg, Hon. Lyle  
O'Neill, Mary  
Pannu, Dr. Raj  
Paul, Pamela C.  
Sapers, Mr. Howard  
Zwozdesky, Mr. Gene

MRS. GORDON: This afternoon we're going to consider the estimates of the Department of Education as well as their business plan. As Chairman of subcommittee A it's nice to be in the Assembly this afternoon instead of room 512. We certainly this week have all been through estimates in subcommittee, so the proceedings will carry on this afternoon the way they have in the past. I know a great deal of consideration has been shown by both sides of the House in room 512, so I would hope that can continue this afternoon.

With that, hon. minister, if you would like to start the debate.

MR. MAR: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I would first like to comment on the appearance of a number of people from the Department of Education who are currently sitting in the members' gallery, and I wish to say in a very public way and for the record that I think they do a very, very fine job of doing what they do in the Department of Education.

Madam Chairman, it's my pleasure to present the 1997-98 estimates for the Department of Education; 1997-98 is the first year of our new three-year plan, Meeting the Challenge IV. This is the plan that will carry Education in Alberta into the year 2000. As well as taking us into the new millennium, this plan also takes us in a new direction. Previous three-year plans were about restructuring, and now the cuts are over and our plan for the next three years is all about reinvestment and reinforcing the quality of our education system.

First of all, the reinvestment. The budget in 1997-98 is just one-half of one percent lower than the Education budget was back in 1992-93. At the end of the three-year plan Education spending will be almost 2 percent higher than it was in 1992-93. This increase in Education spending over the next three years is due mainly to three factors. Those are, first of all, a greater demand for services; secondly, increasing our support for existing programs; and finally, investment in new or emerging priorities.

The first factor contributing to higher education funding is greater demand for services. An example is higher enrollments. As I said at supplementary estimates last week, Madam Chairman, the Alberta advantage is working. Our economy is attracting families to the province of Alberta. Over the next three years we expect to need an extra \$100 million in basic instruction to meet enrollment growth. This evidence of a growing economy is good news, especially when you consider that in 1994-95 enrollments were on the decline. Of course, education is just one of many areas where we are feeling the pressure of economic growth. The whole purpose of the Growth Summit this September is to address these pressures, and I look forward to seeing the recommendations for education.

Another example of greater demand is the increasing number of

students with severe disabilities. In part, that increase is due to better diagnostic methods, especially in identifying severe behavioral and emotional disabilities. Certainly, changes in provincial funding are a major factor. We used to provide funding only for over a certain number of students. The move to per student funding has given us a real look at the actual number of students with severe disabilities.

The second reason our estimates are higher is because we are increasing our support for existing programs. Our education system is based on a simple philosophy of equity. Every student in the province should and must have equitable access to the same quality of education. To ensure equity, we offset the increased costs associated with delivering education across sparsely populated areas and in far-off corners of the province. The \$8 million reinvestment on equity funding announced on 24 June 1996 addresses these issues by adding money to help meet the increasing costs of rural transportation, operations and maintenance, and sparsity and distance. For example, we are increasing per student funding for instruction starting 1 April 1998. Funding for basic instruction will increase from \$3,686 to \$3,716, and I know school boards will welcome this increase.

Another area where we are increasing funding amounts is capital expenditures, especially for critical space. Increased enrollments are putting pressure on school boards to provide needed space. On top of this is the increased cost of maintaining and modernizing our aging infrastructure. As a result, we can expect our funding for capital projects to rise over the next three years for facility maintenance and for new school construction. Thankfully, because we have prudently changed our capital funding from paying the mortgage to pay as you go, we are able to reinvest money saved in interest payments back into capital expenditures. In 1998-99 interest savings will make up more than \$12 million of our \$18 million increase in capital funding.

The third factor is increased investment in new and emerging priorities. Technology, Madam Chairman, is a good example. As little as 15 years ago technology was not a consideration, and today as we look into the future, it is in my strong opinion essential. Our ongoing commitment to technology is vitally important as we head into the next millennium. I was pleased to announce extending the technology integration fund by another \$20 million for 1999-2000. I'm also pleased that the restrictions have been loosened on what qualifies for these matching funds. Ever since we announced the matching funds grants back in January of 1996, school boards have been telling us they want to apply these dollars to instructional software and network components, and now they can. But to be clear, our focus remains on schools, student-focused technology. Under the new agreement with Microsoft boards can buy instructional software at significant discounts. They can make better use of their technology dollars, and more students and staff have greater access to the technology. It is a win/win situation.

These three factors add up to a very big bottom line. If you

turn to page 139 in your estimates book, you will see that the total support to the public and separate school systems comes to over 2 and three-quarter billion dollars. You will note that the estimates for 1997-98 are higher than both the forecast and budget for 1996-97 and are significantly higher than actual funding in 1995-96. You will also notice that the instruction block gets the biggest piece of the funding pie by far with more \$2 billion. It, too, shows increases over the previous two years.

It bears repeating, Madam Chairman, that \$3 out of every \$4 we allocate to school boards is for instruction, and that money funds basic instruction, early childhood services, including kindergarten, severe special needs, and equity funding, which includes the additional costs associated with sparsity and distance. Of these expenditures, almost \$1.8 billion goes to support basic instruction. What does that tell us? It tells us that students and the quality of their education remain our highest priority.

One final note: these numbers are shown in blocks of funding because that is how we provide the money to school boards. It is up to boards to allocate specific dollars to specific needs in a way that reflects local priorities. For line-by-line detail of where the dollars go that are in the funding blocks in front of you, we look to the audited financial statements that school boards submit at the end of each school year.

That, colleagues, is an overview of the dollar side of education, but the value of a dollar lies not in itself but what it is used for. I want to turn your attention to what we are doing with those \$2 billion instruction dollars. For that, we have to turn to our three-year plan for Education. That plan shows exactly what our priorities are as we head into the next millennium. If you turn to page 142 of your estimates books, under the heading major strategies you will see that we identified four key areas for improvement. These are, first of all, increasing high school completion rates; secondly, improving student achievement in math at the secondary level; third, improving student access to technology; and fourth, improving the co-ordination of services for children. The plan also supports our continuing commitment to high standards, equitable access to opportunity, and accountability to parents and taxpayers.

Turning to page 143 under highlights for 1997-98, you will see that our first priority remains the students. All four of our key areas for improvement are focused on students. Of the eight goals in our three-year plan, the first six directly support student learning. The seventh deals with openness and accountability to parents and all Albertans, and only one goal, number 8, deals with the effective and efficient management of my department. Students and their learning is where most of our focus, energy, and funding should go and where it does go.

### 3:39

The first key area for improvement, Madam Chairman, is the high school completion rate. That means encouraging a student to finish grade 12. It also means encouraging them to do it within three years. We recognize that many students who drop out of high school do go back to complete it later, but there is an economic and social cost to having these young adults unemployed or underemployed between the time they leave school and the time that they go back, and they can have a better start in life by staying in school.

Making changes in guidance and counseling programs will improve student awareness of career options and the importance of staying in school. The changes we made to the funding framework for high school is an added incentive. Under the old funding formula high schools received funding for the number of students enrolled in courses on a specific count date. Now we

fund by credit enrollment unit, or CEU, which is based on the number of courses a student actually completes. Since 1993-94 we've seen the number of course units per student go from a low of 31.3 in 1993-94 to 34.56 credits per student in 1995-96. Under the CEU funding model high schools have a lot more flexibility in offering courses, and students have greater flexibility in balancing their course loads with extracurricular activities and part-time work. They are completing more courses as a result, and I am pleased to see that paying for results instead of paying for enrollments is working so very well. In our new three-year business plan we will continue to allocate high school funding based on 34.56 credits per student.

Another reason the number of credits is going up is the options students have to build their work skills while they're still in school. We will continue to support co-op projects that help students develop skills they will need to succeed in the world of work. This September the career and technology studies program will be fully implemented in high schools across the province. CTS expands the old home economics, industrial arts, and business programs so students can now choose from 22 strands that will lead to rewarding careers. We will continue our support for the registered apprenticeship program Careers: the Next Generation and joint projects between Skills Canada and the province of Alberta. Most of all, we will continue to work closely with Advanced Education and Career Development, educators in the public system, parents, and business to expand learning opportunities that will help keep students in school.

Still, at the high school level we have to improve math marks on diploma examinations. Achievement test results show that in the lower grades math is not a problem. Just this spring our grade 8 students finished in the top third internationally in the area of math, but the most recent diploma exam results show that one in four high school students who take the math 30 exam fail it. That has been fairly consistent over the course of the last six years. The achievements are a bit higher in math 33.

Too many high school students do not do well in math. The question is: what are we going to do about it? First of all, we're changing the curriculum at all grade levels to emphasize problem solving. That will help students relate math to the real world and make it more relevant for them. It is an approach that we've used before with success, and I expect it to be just as effective for math at the secondary level. To be clear, we are not making the courses easier, but we are focusing on the basics. We are meeting with school districts and will conduct research to identify key factors that affect math results. As part of this research and as part of ongoing communications with school jurisdictions we have already joined in seven semi-annual math symposia and will be participating in another in the month of May. About 100 educators, administrators, and people from postsecondary institutions, industry, and education associations attend these symposia. Continuing a positive dialogue with school jurisdictions and leaders in mathematics, including postsecondary educators, will help us take a collaborative approach to improving student achievement in math.

I look forward to seeing what impact technology will have on math results and generally all results at all grade levels. One of our biggest priorities is adapting and integrating information technology into education. Our technology integration plan has a dual purpose: to use the technology to enhance student learning and to teach students to use the technology itself. We need to establish clear technology outcomes for these purposes. The technology integration plan does just that. It calls for us to establish curriculum standards for student technology skills. Also, we are committed to working with teachers in postsecondary

learning institutions to revise teacher competencies and certification requirements to include proficiency in using and applying technology to student learning.

We will look for boards to address technology integration in their own three-year plans, including ensuring equitable access for all students in every school in their jurisdictions. Technology figures into some of our other education strategies like expanding distance learning and offering program options such as CTS to help students finish school. If we do a good job of integrating technology into education, achievement tests and diploma exam results should go up. Employers and the postsecondary institutions should express satisfaction with the technology skills that our students have when they graduate, and the students themselves should be able to contribute to our Alberta advantage in a technology intensive world.

The fourth key area for improvement is the co-ordination of children's services. It is a sad fact that more students are entering school with complex social, emotional, and physical needs that can be very real barriers to learning, but the causes and the solutions go far beyond the mandate of education. Teachers should teach. They ought not be social workers, health care providers, or surrogate parents. These children are members of families. They have parents or guardians. They are part of the community. Many are, or should be, receiving medical care. The solutions have to be found with parents, in the community, and with service providers. I am committed to working closely with these groups and with my cabinet colleagues in Health, Family and Social Services, Justice, and Community Development to redesign the delivery of children's services in the province of Alberta. I and my department are committed to working with school boards, schools, community agencies and organizations, and parents to better co-ordinate services for children.

To conclude, Madam Chairman, there are over half a million students in Alberta schools. It is my mission and the mission of my department to make sure that every one of those students has the same opportunity to receive the very best education. Alberta Education has a vision of an affordable, accountable system that gives all Alberta students equal access to a quality education, but I want to move beyond that. If you want a real vision of education, imagine a happy grade 4 student downloading information on dolphins from the worldwide web. Imagine a neglected child finding acceptance, security, and help from the school and the community services networked with the school. Imagine a frustrated young person changing his mind about dropping out and getting a head start at a trade instead. Imagine a child with a bright mind being challenged in school instead of getting bored and losing interest. That is the kind of vision that drives me and drives the dedicated people in my department, and that is the vision in our three-year plan. Realizing that kind of vision is what our education funding makes possible.

Thank you, Madam Chairman. Of course, as always I am more than pleased to entertain questions. For those questions that I do not address or respond to today, I will undertake, of course, to review the transcripts and provide responses by written correspondence.

**THE CHAIRMAN:** Thank you, hon. minister, and we will let you interject when you feel the need to do so. We have quite a speaking list.

The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

**MRS. SOETAERT:** Thank you, Madam Chairman. I, too, would like to thank the members of the minister's department for the work that they do.

I have to express some concern, being that it's 10 minutes to 4. We'll probably get until 5 o'clock to debate Education estimates, a \$2 billion budget, and several people want to speak to this. It's obvious not everyone will get to express their concerns, and I realize we'll have a 20-minute conclusion later. So I want to express that, and I'll try to get my issues in quickly because I know there are several more who want to speak.

This week, Mr. Minister, I met with two school boards. You're probably aware that there are five boards within my constituency that I keep in contact with. These are some of their issues that they have presented to me, though I recognize them as probably being issues and concerns across this province.

The minister mentioned equity. In your equity funding formula – I don't know if you're going to create a new one or continually look at it and try to address it – have you considered as part of the formula looking at school boards that have a higher percentage of teachers who are at max? For teachers that stay with school boards and enjoy working in that area, once they're at max, certainly the costs of a school board are higher if, let's say, 70 percent of their teachers are at max as compared to a board with 50 percent of their teachers at max. I guess expenditures are not always a level playing field for certain boards, so I would ask the minister if within the funding formula that equity issue is being addressed.

**3:49**

The other issue that to me is an equity issue is rural transportation. As I understand it, some boards were very efficient in their transportation services. Because of that, when the funding formula came out for rural transportation, they based it on what they spent prior. So boards that had a higher expenditure kept that base and you added to it, but those that were very efficient kept their low base and you added to it. I'm thinking specifically of Sturgeon in this scenario. For example, their funding per eligible passenger is like \$534, whereas another jurisdiction with similar geography and demographics is \$711 per passenger. So I guess I question the equity funding there and what the minister is addressing about that.

I'd like to speak for a moment about how the minister is considering helping boards address different financial costs. There are cost increases in the employer contribution rates for the Canada pension plan. Have you considered that in your budget for school boards? Certainly insurance premiums are now payable on every dollar earned, and most of the board's employer premium costs are paid during the first six months of the school year. The employee benefit plan premium increases, and salary and wage expectations increase. Certainly with the nurses settling for more than 1 percent, I know boards are concerned about how they're going to settle for about 1 percent, or if they can.

Technology cost is another area. I had concerns from St. Albert Catholic, I think it was, that said: could part of the matching dollars be the dollars they've already spent on computer technology, on setting up labs? Could that not be considered matching dollars rather than fund-raising what they've already invested in computers? I think that's a fair request on their part.

Another concern is curriculum change costs. As we change curriculums so often, the cost of the textbooks, et cetera, and not having opportunity to do pilot projects is very expensive. I'm wondering if the minister has looked at how boards are to pay for those continual changes.

There are some operating costs that are beyond a board's control; for example, utility costs, especially over this last winter, diesel and propane fuel costs, certainly for buses – I'm sure you've heard that one – capital costs of school buses. Those

certainly are all areas they can't control, and I'm wondering if the minister has addressed those needs.

Certainly in both jurisdictions that I met with this week, with the money allocated to special-needs children, the high needs seem to be covered but the mild and moderate are not. Boards are feeling that the basic instructional grant is being directed to special education and out of the basic instruction, because mild and moderate have not been identified or extra dollars given to them. So is the minister considering assisting them on the mild and moderate issues? There is a case that I am sure the minister is aware of where one special-needs student actually may be considered a child that would need funding under possibly Health. I know that has gone through a few appeal processes. I guess I'd like to know how the minister is going to address that in the future, because we can't have education dollars being spent on what would be considered health needs. I realize that is still in fluctuation, but I'd like to see some sort of commitment there, probably from Health. I want Education dollars spent on the classroom and on educating all children, but we realize that some special needs, extreme special needs, maybe should be covered by other departments.

A few other questions and some requests about technology. A recognition of computers and associated support as a yearly operating cost for boards and not just a one-time investment. I guess the issue of the expense of ever-greening technology, and, you know, just keeping jurisdictions up to date: it's a constant cost, I know, even in our offices and homes to keep modernized, and I know it would be a major expense within the education system.

I'd like to speak for a moment about capital improvement and modernization of buildings. I'm sure that's a headache for you. In many cases our buildings are of 1950 vintage and certainly need addressing. One question: I don't know if we can do this, but can we not tie into that infrastructure program that the feds offer and that we supplement? I realize that it has to go to municipalities, but maybe with some co-operation with the federal government we could get some of that infrastructure money going to our schools. Certainly that would be a wise use of those dollars, in my humble estimation, and I think a good suggestion from the Liberal caucus.

Bus safety. I know it along with transportation, Mr. Minister, is within your jurisdiction. I guess the funding for buses and transportation: truly I have concerns that they cannot replace equipment, and within a few years I don't know what they're going to do. We are going to have issues of safety that are a concern for all of us. I know you are well aware of the situation in St. Albert. That created a great deal of concern.

I guess I would like to see more initiative – you referred to it, but I guess it's going to need funding – to get some integration between Justice, Health, Family and Social Services, and Education to properly meet children's needs. I think it needs more than just lip service; I think it needs an actual co-ordination of those services. Of course, the school seems to be the place where we can base that. It's the building where many people gather, so maybe Education has to lead the way in that. But instead of everybody protecting their own domain, I would like to see more co-operation on that.

Generally, one overriding concern that continues is that there just is not enough money in Education right now. I know you've heard that. I know that probably the school boards are going to come up with one resolution at their convention that will urge the government to adequately fund education. I do share their concern. If we continue to undermine public education, we will see the detriments of that down the road, as you well know.

Those, in quick nutshell, are some of the concerns I have. I realize there are many others who want to speak in this short time frame of an hour and 10 minutes to debate these estimates, so with those points, Madam Chairman, I will sit down.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you. I would like to just mention for all of the members that until the estimates are approved – I mean, it is possible to recall a subcommittee.

MRS. SOETAERT: Good. That would be very good.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Wainwright followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

3:59

MR. FISCHER: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Mr. Minister, first of all, I would like to compliment you on your good job working with the Department of Education, that \$2 billion business that certainly is a big operation to run. I give you full credit for the way you have been handling it. I know that you've spent a lot of time going out to schools, visiting with schoolkids, visiting with boards, and getting a real good feel for what education is all about in this province. I want to say thank you very much for your visit out to our Clearview region as well as our Battle River region.

I've got a few things, and I suppose most of them will relate back to some of the things we had discussed in your visit. I do notice that our goal is to have children access our education system in a fair and equitable way. Certainly I feel strongly that possibly our sparsity and distance formula and funding is not fair for rural Alberta, and I think that we have had a fairly good look at it, and we've had some good examples of it not being fair. I would just like to ask you: are you considering reviewing that formula? How would we be addressing some of those things in the future?

Certainly the transportation formula – and I don't know whether it needs to be driven entirely from boards or entirely from the department, but when you offer more funding for transportation, then the first thing that happens is that the school boards look at that and say: well, we can, then, close the school, and we can transport those students farther away to another school, supposedly to offer them a better education. Consequently, you close down a lot of our smaller schools. I don't say that that is entirely a negative thought. Efficiencies do have to come into play. I realize that boards have a difficult choice when they have to start voting on whether to keep a school or whether to close it down.

We also say that we want to have parent and community involvement, and we don't get a lot of parent and community involvement when you put a student on a bus for two hours a day or more or sometimes a bit less. Students traditionally don't – at least I didn't when I rode a school bus – learn very much on the school bus. There are a lot of things that you learn on there that you'd be better off if you waited till a little bit further. Sometimes you need parent advice and influence at that stage. I'm speaking about students now from grade 1 to probably junior high, maybe up to grade 9.

I think that in rural Alberta we need to look at some of those policies in a far different way. When you go to a community where the school has been closed down, the people say: well, you took our tax dollars away from us by our new funding formula, and then you won't give enough back to us to operate our school. That's the way they see it. Now, we see it from an academic point of view and say: yes, we can have better computers and

more students use these computers in a bigger school and have more efficiencies.

As far as the academic side of it, yes, I agree with you. I think we have to strive to have a balance with that. But the other side of it is community influence and parent involvement. Young children from grades 1 to 6 need a lot of parent involvement along with the academics. I have to say in my own mind that maybe it's half and half or more parents. So what we're doing when we put a student on a bus, we're taking them out of the parents' hands for two hours a day or whatever it is. In some cases it's more; in some cases it's less. I think that your department or we as government need to address that. I feel that communities want to and should have the right to have as much influence over their own kids as they can possibly have. We are taking some of that away.

It is driven also by the capital dollars. It was mentioned by the Member for Spruce-Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert that they had some buildings that were 1950 vintage. I can take you to one out in my area where it's 1917 vintage, and they're still going to school in it. There's been a lot of work done on it, but we don't seem to be able to get those types of buildings fixed up. I know that the school boards are waiting and looking, and it's a long ways from somewhere else. When I say long ways, it's probably 30 miles from another school. They're waiting until the dollars are short enough. They'll put the dollars in the bigger centres because the bigger centres have a little more political pull. Well, it makes sense. It makes sense with the equipment and so on to move those students that far. I don't know if that's the right thing to do, but the capital dollars drive the decisions on where the school is going to be.

I have had quite a bit of experience in this last couple of years with this. In our area, where there's a number of schools that would be under a hundred students, under the formulas we've got in place now, many of those are going to just disappear, with more school buses and longer rides. There is a very negative impact to that if you carry it out and research back into the students themselves and the harm that it has done, as well as the good training that we've done. So I'd sure like to see us do some work on that, and I look forward to your answers on it.

One other question I would have in the case of two of my schools. They are asking me: "Close our school if you're going to. Please, then, give us charter school status. Let us fund our own building and our own transportation. We want our school." Are you prepared to do that for those types of schools? I think that we're going to see in rural Alberta quite a bit more of that school closure policy, and I would like to see the parents within that community and not the boards make that decision.

Thank you very much.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

4:09

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I want to start by congratulating the Minister of Education for his opening statement. It certainly is clear. He states his objectives clearly. I also want to thank his staff for assisting him in preparing the estimates and giving him advice on preparing his opening statement.

Madam Chairman, I want to underline the fact that the Education portfolio is one of the most important portfolios in this province, as it is, I guess, in most other provinces in this country. Education is and has been throughout this century one of the key instruments of social policy. It's been used not only as an

instrument of economic growth but also as an important instrument for redressing the inequities that a market-based economic production system necessarily and inevitably produces. In other words, education is seen as an arena of opportunity in which students coming from unequal social/economic backgrounds can enter and hope to compete on more or less equal ground.

It's often been the case that in order for students who come in particular from economically, socially poorer backgrounds, disadvantaged backgrounds, underprivileged backgrounds have been given special attention in the educational system itself at the classroom level, at the school level, at the system level. Attempts have been made to compensate for the disadvantage that they start out with, and I hope that our present government in its single-minded pursuit of the objective of economic growth does not lose sight of the social purposes of education in addition to the role that it obviously plays in economic growth.

I'm particularly concerned about the future levels of equality of opportunity that, until recently at least, have been achieved in the educational system of the province of Alberta, but with changes in levels of funding, downloading responsibilities for raising funds to the level of school boards and school boards in turn downloading those responsibilities to the level of each school – having to do this in order to raise funds to supplement funds that come as a result of the funding policies and decisions that the department and the Minister of Education make at the provincial level is likely to erode those conditions of equality of opportunity radically if this matter is not addressed soon.

The present funding arrangements, which require school boards and schools in particular to engage in fund-raising, necessarily produce schools that have the capacity, because of the intake, the social context in which they are located, the districts in which they operate, because of the average economic wherewithal and status of the students and parents, to raise more funds than schools located in areas where the average income and the economic status of the parent population is much lower. This inequality in the capacity of parents to generate school-based funding has the potential for seriously threatening the equality of conditions in schools in which students, regardless of where they come from, need to have the right to learn.

Having made these general remarks about the potential negative consequences of the funding framework that this government has adopted and that this minister certainly is presenting to us, I do want to commend the minister for taking the step in the right direction in seeking to increase funding for education. I applaud him in this effort. I hope that in the cabinet he will fight for the children of this province and their interests and seek increases in funding that make available to schools adequate resources to carry out the obligations that the educational institutions have.

It's not clear to me – and it's impossible for me to address the question in the short 20 minutes that I have – whether or not the increases that the estimates do indicate in the overall budget are adequate, that they will in fact be sufficient to address the shortages of resources, the difficulties for schools and school boards to fund appropriately the activities for which they have legal obligations. I want to, obviously, applaud the minister for taking this step in the right direction, but my fear is that the increases he has presented to us today are not adjusted for inflation. So in terms of real dollars the size of the increase is an overestimate. It appears to be more than it in fact is, given the fact that the inflation erodes the real value of the dollars that are committed to activities such as education and also others of course.

Now, if I may turn briefly to making a few observations on the stated goals in the business plan, page 142. I find that two things

are missing. One, there's no stated goal here which addresses the question of the difficulties and the challenges that increasing numbers of children in this province who live under conditions of poverty face. I think it would be a serious oversight on the part of the Minister of Education to not state publicly, to not commit his department and his government to addressing the special needs of poor children. If the goal were to be stated here, we would know that this is a priority of the government. We'd be able to come back next year or two years later and ask the minister to give us an accounting of what he has been able to accomplish in addressing that goal. So I regret the fact that there's no attention paid here at the goals level to that important challenge we face.

Secondly, in order for the goals that are stated here in the document to be effectively pursued, it is critical that some attention be paid to educational workers, who play a critical role in achieving these goals. I refer here to the teachers and their level of job satisfaction. What's wrong with clearly and publicly and officially, formally stating increasing teacher job satisfaction as an important goal? After all, if we didn't think that the teachers played a critical role in the achievement of education objectives, why would we have them? Why do we pay lip service, then, to saying that teachers play an important role yet don't pay attention to whether they need to have something in the way of job satisfaction in order for them to do a good job? Any studies done by industrial work specialists, specialists on work in workplaces, indicate that worker satisfaction is directly and strongly related to worker productivity. To not pay attention, therefore, to the issue of teacher satisfaction at the level of goals is, in my view, to commit a serious omission.

#### 4:19

I now turn quickly to the next page, page 143. I think the minister rightly states in the first paragraph on top of that page, under highlights for '97-98:

Funds are focused on instruction to enable Alberta's young people to achieve high standards and prepare for work, further study and citizenship.

All three I think are important focuses to pursue. I cannot disagree with the minister's desire to highlight these. However, when I look at the performance indicators, I don't see any reference to citizenship goals there, that third element in those that are highlighted in the paragraph that I just referred to. How do we know that the minister really is serious about pursuing the whole issue of education for citizenship? Are there any performance indicators needed to assess whether or not that, as one of the three major objectives highlighted by the minister, is pursued seriously, receives resources and instructional, educational attention? Can we be sure that they are being achieved?

Moving down the same page, now I want to perhaps go on to talk a little more specifically about some of the issues. But one more general observation here. Under "Focus on Students" the minister has I think rightly drawn attention to the need for integrating technology. Under technology integration \$22.5 million is allocated for the purpose, but it's in the form of matching funds. Those school boards who can produce matching funds will be able to access that particular fund. Now, what school boards do, of course, is pass on this responsibility to individual schools, so schools are then required to raise these funds if they want to have new computers for their children. We know which schools, what kinds of parents supporting those schools are able to raise these funds, if at all, and what schools will not be able to do this, another source, in my view, of growing inequality across our schools, within single school board

jurisdictions as well as across school board jurisdictions, in respect of whether or not schools can in fact take advantage of public funds for purposes of technology integration.

There's a general feeling, hon. minister, among parents in this province that school funding has been seriously inadequate. If you will permit me, Madam Chairman, I would like to read six or seven lines from a letter which has been addressed to the Premier. This one is dated April 12, 1997, and the minister has, I understand, received a copy of it. I read the following from this letter to make the point about the inadequacy of funding and the concerns that citizens in this province have about that.

Schools are being forced to fundraise to stay afloat. Children are being compromised, begging for a future as they travel from house to house. They are doing anything from peddling chocolates to scrounging pop cans in order to raise money to purchase new textbooks, supply new books for the library, upgrade computers, equip science classes with materials, and garner new balls for the gym. Are these things not important enough for our children to warrant adequate government funding?

In the wake of a 244 million dollar write-off by our provincial government recently for the Millar Western pulp mill, let's be conservative and take a chance on a sure thing - investing in our kids. Let's not write them off too!

I have copies of the letter, that I'd like tabled.

The inadequacy of funding, Madam Chairman, has created in this province serious problems. What are these challenges and problems? More and more children needing special attention with special needs cannot get that special attention. Teachers have less time for each child because class sizes are too large. More children arrive in school unable to learn because they are hungry, lack sleep, or suffer from emotional stress. Less time is spent on teaching and learning because teachers are busy meeting the medical and social services needs of children. Support services such as teacher-librarians, counselors, and specialists have been reduced, and school fees and fund-raising activities have increased to make up for inadequate funding, and so on and so forth. These are some of the challenges and the problems that have resulted from the last eight or more years of rather dramatic cuts to education.

What needs to be done? I think what we obviously need to do is increase professional and sports staff to help ensure that all children, especially those with special needs, have a genuine opportunity to learn and succeed in school; increase funding to school boards so they can reduce class sizes and ensure that students get more individual attention; provide necessary teachers and equipment to implement technology in schools; eliminate the need for students and parents to pay for curricular support materials; and arrange for the delivery of noneducational services to children so that schools can concentrate on teaching and learning.

I would like to close, Madam Chairman, by making a few comments on the key performance measures section and making a few suggestions about what the minister might want to include in this area. I'm looking at the first table there on page 144. The minister has already expressed some concern about the stagnant scores on the math 30 performance of grade 12 students. I wonder if the minister can tell us why it is that that might be the case. Why are we not making progress in this regard? What needs to be done?

I look at the next table there on school completion, and we again notice . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: Excuse me, hon. member. Your time has expired.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: For clarification before the minister answers some questions. A few minutes ago when I commented that subcommittees could be recalled for consideration, what I actually meant to say and should have said is that there would be another opportunity to consider the estimates of the Department of Education next Wednesday when the subcommittee rises.

4:29

MR. MAR: Well, Madam Chairman, if that's the case, then there's no sense in me trying to kill the clock.

I want to thank the hon. members, all of them, for making their comments, most of which I found to be very constructive and some of which I found to be rhetorical and a little bit difficult to answer, but I will attempt my best to address in general terms some of the concerns that were raised.

Madam Chairman, I have undertaken to tour as many schools as possible in the province of Alberta. There are some 1,500 schools in the province, and I've visited between 300 and 400 of them. I've been not only in Calgary, Edmonton, Red Deer, Lethbridge, but Grande Prairie, Peace River, Fort McMurray, Red Earth Creek, Blairmore, Delburne, Benalto, Fort Chipewyan, Fort Vermilion, Fort Macleod, Foremost, Manyberries, Dunmore, and other places. Me and Hank Snow have been everywhere, man.

I would make this general observation of our schools, and I've said this many times. We have a very good education system that is occasionally excellent. What we strive for is an excellent school system that is occasionally only very good. I think much credit must go to many different partners who are involved in the area of education: students themselves of course, their parents, their teachers, school administrators, and school board trustees. I think members of the Department of Education also deserve a great deal of credit.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona indicated at the outset of his remarks that Education is a very, very important department. I agree. It is, in my opinion, not only a key to personal success and wealth, or as my Deputy Minister often refers to, life chances. It is also a key to the economic wealth of a province or a state and a country. Madam Chairman, I think that it is an important point to make that the future wealth of this province, in the words of the former Member for Redwater now Senator Taylor, rests not with the mining of the resources that rest in the ground of this province but the resources that rest between the ears of our students.

The comment made by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona about downloading responsibilities. I would like to address that just for a bit. I do see a downloading of responsibilities, but I take it from perhaps a little bit different perspective. I think that over the last 20 years, Madam Chairman, there have been in my observation downloading of responsibilities upon schools. So often we hear people respond by saying: what are our schools going to do about it? I see a downloading of sometimes parental responsibilities upon schools by parents who say: I pay taxes, and accordingly I expect the school to look after this child of mine. I also see perhaps community downloading of responsibilities upon schools and teachers. I have often said that teachers are very good at what they do, which is teach, but they ought not be cops and they ought not be social workers and they ought not be health care deliverers, but perhaps most of all they ought not be surrogate parents, in my strong opinion.

I think, Madam Chairman, that the advent of school councils

will go a long way towards helping reverse that trend. I think it is important that parents do get involved in schools and that people in the community get involved in schools. I think that's important because the school, in my opinion, is an integral part of the community, and the community will benefit or accrue the consequence of the success or failure of the product of that school. Accordingly, the community does have a responsibility to look after its schools.

The hon. member did talk about fund-raising being a function of the wealth of the community, and that could create inequality. I think it would be important to note that there can be exceptions to that. Anybody that has visited Alex Taylor school here in the city of Edmonton – it is not located in a community that one would ordinarily expect there would be tremendous resources available to the children of that school, but that is in fact the case, Madam Chairman.

I also want to point out this issue with respect to what I view to be a correlation but not necessarily a cause-and-effect relationship between poverty and performance in schools. I believe very strongly that children who come from less fortunate financial circumstances often are written off by people as not being able to perform well in school. I think that is not a correct assumption to make, Madam Chairman. I strongly believe that poverty, while it may be an issue, is not, in my opinion, an excuse to allow for poor performance of students in such schools. Again, I believe that there is a correlation between impoverished circumstances and poor performance in school, but it is not a cause-and-effect relationship, in my strong opinion.

[Mr. Severtson in the Chair]

The question of whether increasing teacher satisfaction is an important issue. I think there are tremendous teachers in this province, Mr. Chairman, and the majority of those teachers I have met do have the interests of their students front and centre in their minds as they go to work each day.

The issue of special-needs students was raised by both the Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert and the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. It is my opinion, Mr. Chairman, that special-needs students are deserving of an education and that we should not apologize for the fact that we do spend a great deal of money, time, and resources on such students.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona did refer in his remarks to what he called dramatic cuts in education. This is perhaps touching upon my comment at the outset about comments which I think to be perhaps a bit rhetorical and difficult to respond to. I have tried at the outset of my remarks to establish a framework for consideration of whether these reductions in education are large or not. In my opinion they are not. I think that we've looked at the numbers from the time frame of 1992-93 to the current '97-98 fiscal year, and it is in the magnitude of about one-half of 1 percent. There's no doubt, Mr. Chairman, that Education did reduce its budget, but in my opinion it is not what I would refer to as a dramatic cut.

The hon. Member for Wainwright talked about a number of things and focused on small schools and rural schools and school closures. I of course have attended with him at a number of schools in his area, including fine schools in places like Stettler and Halkirk and other places, Mr. Chairman. I, for background information, attended a high school in Calgary where there were approximately 2,000 students. It is a dramatically different experience from going to the many schools that are much smaller throughout the province of Alberta, and I must say that I am most impressed with the skills of the teachers and the involvement of

the students and the performance of many of these smaller schools. It perhaps has changed my mind on what I view to be a positive education experience, from my own experience.

The hon. Member for Wainwright talked about sparsity and distance funding not being fair for rural Alberta. The formula for sparsity and distance is reviewed annually by my department, and the most recent review was part of the equity funding review. In consultation with education stakeholders the stakeholders expressed preference for minor adjustments to the current formula rather than large-scale adjustments. I did of course recently, Mr. Chairman, announce \$2.2 million more for sparsity and distance, commencing on April 1, 1998. In addition, \$3.1 million has been allocated to address sparsity and distance costs in the operations and maintenance of schools.

4:39

Now the issue of capital was raised by both the hon. Member for Wainwright as well as the Member for Spruce Grove-St. Albert. Having gone to many of these 1,500 schools and attended literally thousands of classrooms, I would make this observation of our capital facilities. We do have some very wonderful schools, but we do have an aging fleet of schools. I think that it's important – and you'll know this of course, Mr. Chairman – that the MLA from Innisfail-Sylvan Lake was appointed to head up a task force to deal with the issue of capital. I think that's an important issue to address because we spend a great deal of money on these facilities that are sometimes open 12 or 13 hours a day and 210 days a year when perhaps they should be open 20 hours a day for 360 days a year. It strikes me that we should make very strong efforts to get more mileage out of the capital dollars we spend, and I think it's appropriate to discuss joint-use facilities.

Mr. Chairman, I was recently at a high school exchange program between Japanese high school students and Alberta high school students, and I was advised by members of the Japanese delegation that in fact primary schools were built in nursing homes in Japan. I think that is an excellent idea for consideration of an appropriate joint-use facility. In other jurisdictions throughout the world there have been rather unique capital projects that have been put together. I think that's something we should consider.

I'd like to address briefly the issue of mild and moderate funding, which was raised by the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-St. Albert. Mild and moderate funding, it is true, is no longer explicitly recognized, but the money is still there, Mr. Chairman. The basic instruction funding is intended to cover the cost of dealing with the students with mild and moderate disabilities. Now, previously there was a separate allocation for such students, but school boards asked, and I think it is appropriate for them to have flexibility in dealing with their budgets. Accordingly, the mild and moderate funding was rolled into the basic instruction grant, and I think that makes a great deal of sense.

Mr. Chairman, I think that will really conclude my comments at this time. I of course will be happy, as I indicated earlier, to review my comments and the questions that were raised in this House and provide written responses to those questions that I have not yet addressed.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the opportunity to make some comments on the Education budget and

estimates. I'd like to start by saying how pleased I am personally that we have the current Minister of Education. I think he brings to the ministry an enthusiasm and a caring that's apparent to all who are fortunate enough to come in contact with him. He certainly is very frank and open about what he intends to do, and I think that's healthy for all those involved in the school district. It doesn't mean, of course, that we don't have some questions about what the ministry is proposing.

I'm delighted that the minister is spending the kinds of time that he is going to the schools. I think it's got to be good for those schools where you appear. It shows people that you do care. I would caution that you come away with a particular kind of information and the judgments you make about schools should be bracketed, maybe, with the notion that you do get a view of schools much similar to the view I used to get as chairman of the school board when I walked into schools for visits. The contrast between what is really going on and what people who are coming in to look at a project sometimes see can be quite dramatic. I was reminded by one of my students who spent a year in one of our elementary schools studying that school and the school staff that they are very, very complex organizations. There's a great deal going on that until you have actually lived awhile with those people we're not privy to. So I just hope that judgments about the system are made with that kind of knowledge as background.

I wanted to start with a couple of questions. The first one is one that the estimates have tried to address, and that's: how do we keep students in school and encourage them to continue past high school? I was at the advanced education estimates the other evening, and we've been proud of our participation rate in postsecondary institutions. We lead the country in terms of the number of students who leave high school and pass on to postsecondary institutions, but it's still low, that part of the population. We seem to get caught up and pride ourselves that we're better than Prince Edward Island or we're better than Saskatchewan, and that kind of measuring is quite different from what is done in places like Australia, where they have set participation rate goals.

By the year 2012 the Australians have targeted having 95 percent of their high school leavers participate in some kind of postsecondary education program. It may be a short course or it may be a full college degree that you'll pursue, but there's the clear goal that they want the bulk, the overwhelming bulk, of their high school graduates to take part in a postsecondary program. I think that's a consideration that we should look at rather seriously and maybe not just be complacent or pleased that we're at 40 percent or whatever that particular figure has to do. If they're going to go on to those postsecondary programs, I think we have to get a good handle on what happens to them in high schools and in high school programs.

On page 142: "increase student awareness of the importance of staying in school and support alternatives to traditional schooling." I think that's really extremely important, but I wonder if increasing their awareness is really a problem. I'd like to table, if I could, Mr. Chairman, four copies of an early school leavers longitudinal study that was reported by the Edmonton public school board in November of 1996. It's a document that's been around, been public for some time. The early school leavers that they tracked – and they tracked 4,629 grade 9 students through their high school experience – didn't need encouragement, didn't need to be made aware of how important school was, because the vast majority of them intended to go back to school. So it wasn't that they were unaware of the importance of school. There were a whole lot of other things that were involved in their decisions to leave school. What was going on in schools had great impact on



what happened to them. It's interesting, because the minister has commented on poverty and the performance of students. If you look at the Edmonton high schools that are listed here and you plot socioeconomically where the high schools are located, there may be a correlation. It may be cause and effect; I'm not sure. But it's a fact that if you live in a low socioeconomic area of the city – and I suspect that the same holds true for across the province – then the chances of you leaving high school early are much greater. The numbers are there to confirm that. So I think this goal of trying to keep them in school – I hope that there's some work done on what exactly is needed to keep them in school. Awareness may not be where we should put all our energy and our resources.

#### 4:49

I thought the announcement about the performance bonds recently was an interesting announcement. It obviously is an attempt to keep students in school and working at their course of studies. Yet I wonder, if we're going to do something about trying to keep students working and being successful in courses, if performance bonds are really the very first action that should be taken. We know why high school students don't do well. We know that as soon as they get that first set of wheels, there's a dramatic drop in grades. We know that as soon as they start working part-time, there's a drop in grades for a number of students. So we have some information, and we know some things that contribute to youngsters not doing well. I wonder, rather than thinking of some penalties at the end for taking a course over again, whether we might not spend some energy looking at what we can do to make it possible for them to spend more of their time focusing on studies and being successful at them.

The second question I had – if I can leave early school leavers for just a moment – is the overwhelming faith placed on technology and the promise of technology for our schools. I hope there was some serious, serious thought about the role of computers and technology in our schools before the kind of commitment that appears in the budget was embarked upon. I'm old enough to remember back to the advent of educational television and the great enthusiasm, at least in this city, for educational television. It even led to some unusual co-operation between educational agencies who gathered together and started their own educational television station. That's how convinced they were that this was going to be the panacea. We were going to have larger classes. We were going to be able to reduce the number of teachers we had because students were going to be able to learn from this wonderful new medium that was going into classrooms. The same scramble we're having now talking about trying to get computers into classrooms we had then, talking about how do we get television sets into these schools and how are we going to get this new technology and how are we going to get the price down so that it's affordable. The promise, for many reasons, of television was and never has been, I think, fulfilled in terms of what we thought at the time it promised for instruction.

I look at where we're going with computers. I've had a Macintosh since – I ordered one six months before they were on the market, because it was finally a machine where you didn't have to know anything about computers. You could just sit down and use it. I had gone and taken three hours of instruction on an IBM where you went through pages and pages of hold this key down and hold that key down, so I was delighted when Macintoshes came along.

I think of my use of that computer. I now have my fifth one. I haven't been able to give up any of them, haven't been able to

sell them because they aren't worth anything. I've been on CompuServe, the equivalent of the Internet, since the '80s. Certainly it's a great tool and it's a great aid and it's a great asset, but it has a place in my life. It hasn't taken the place of my interaction with other people, my need to go to the library. I still spend many hours roaming the shelves in libraries looking for information. So I worry about the focus on computers.

Yes, I think we need them. They have to be available. I wonder about the kinds of computers that we're buying. I look at my own. It's got power untold, that I'll never use or never know how to use. I use it primarily for word processing and some minor mathematical calculations, spreadsheets. I wonder, for instance, if there has to be some attention paid to the kinds of computers that we're putting in schools. Do we need the kinds of expensive machines that many schools are out fund-raising money for, or can we take the lead in demanding of computer manufacturers a school-type computer that could be much more reasonably priced than some of those that are being purchased these days?

I look at the use of computers in instruction, technology instruction, and again I wonder about the motivation. If the motivation is to improve the instruction, to make instruction more excellent, then I applaud it.

I had the experience of traveling to Athabasca University, and I was up to Keyano College. Students there were taking a course from the University of Alberta on television. They had in their classroom a teacher aide, and they sat watching the television. It was interactive television. They could talk to the instructor in Edmonton. I went to a board meeting at Keyano College, and the students made a presentation. In their presentation – they were members of those classes – they were asking for a teacher. They were students, and they said, "Look; the television is great. We can talk to that teacher, but we need not an aide; we need a teacher here with us."

So before we put all of our eggs in the basket of instructional technology going to be able to solve the problems and save money, my prediction would be, first of all, that it's not going to save money. Using technology in instruction is an expensive proposition. If you want to see some of the problems, watch the Access channel or what used to be the Access channel.

MR. MAR: Still is. Alberta's education channel.

DR. MASSEY: Right. Watch some of the university courses that are on there, and you can see how quickly dated the content is. They're rather expensive films, things that have been produced for parts of those courses. So I think it's an expensive proposition to get into, and I think it's untested, and I'm not denying the role that computers are going to play in the lives of students.

I go back to that early-leaver study and what those school dropout students said in terms of the subjects. Question 17 asked them the subjects they found most useful at school. Now, again, these are not good students likely, many of them students who hadn't applied themselves. What did they think was of number one importance in school? It was mathematics and close behind that was English. If you go down the list, you'll find that vocational courses and computers ranked much lower. Students found them much less useful than they did those core courses of English, mathematics, social studies, and the sciences. Now, they can't be the measure, but I think it tells us something about students' views of computers and the role in their lives and what they think is important.

I go back to the staffing, the number of teachers we need. We made a proposal during the election, our side of the House, that

we would work with boards to hire a thousand new teachers. We need more than a thousand new teachers. We've lost about 1,500 since 1993, if the teachers' association figures are to be believed. I think it's important, more important than computers, that we have those teachers in those classrooms talking to students like this, allowing those students to test their ideas, being able to make enough assignments so that they can mark them and get back to the students on a personal basis. Again, if it's a trade-off between more teachers and more computers, I think I know right now where I would make the decision.

#### 4:59

I'd like to move, if I might, to a third question, Mr. Chairman, the whole business of key performance indicators, that have really taken over the whole government operation. I mean, I've visited colleges, and the staff there were spending a great deal of time generating key performance indicators, and some of them weren't doing it very enthusiastically. It's a system and seems to be a system that the government has adopted wholeheartedly. I wonder how much reflection there has been about what kind of a tool it is and its limitations. The key performance movement, or the management-by-objectives movement – and that's where it has its roots – is embedded in some assumptions about human behaviour and some assumptions about progress and some assumptions about management. I wonder: if those assumptions were made explicit, would there be the great enthusiasm there is for key performance indicators? I suspect that part of the enthusiasm, at least in education, is that some ex public school board employees are now part of that department.

The indicators are useful. I look at some of the ones that are here, and I wonder again how useful it is to ask parents about their overall satisfaction with their children's education year after year after year. I think you could predict what they're going to say and that that's not going to change. They're going to be happy; they've sent a youngster off to school. Great support for local schools always has been there. Is that a good indicator?

Then another one: asking the public how satisfied they are. Again, I think that can be misleading, because there are some pretty good indications that that public is not monolithic. For instance, there's a study in education where it clearly points out that corporation leaders consistently are not supporters of more tax money for public education, and that's quite different from the rest of the public who are not involved in corporations.

I'll get a chance to come back at this again, I understand. Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I can certainly hold an audience; can't I? I used to teach high school, and this reminds me of Friday afternoon, the last class of the day. So I'll try to be brief, and I'll try to be quite quick too.

Mr. Chairman, to the minister in his absence and also to those of his department who are here . . .

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, you're not supposed to comment on the presence or absence of members.

MRS. O'NEILL: To the minister, who is here in spirit, I'd like to say a couple of things. As I say, I shall be brief.

The documents that we are scrutinizing today and have in the previous couple of days certainly are good-news documents, as far as I'm concerned. These estimates do not in and of themselves suggest that the department is – and I quote the Member for

Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert – undermining public education. I think we should acknowledge that from the very beginning.

I have four questions or areas that I will articulate my questions in. One has to do with special-needs funding, the other with compliance funding, the third with adequate funding, and the fourth with CEU funding.

With regard to special-needs funding for students with special needs in our public school system, I would like to ask the minister: what are the time lines for implementing shared funding for students with special needs, students who are welcomed and are cherished within the education system? The education system currently bears the financial burden, if you will, and I stress "financial burden" as they are certainly not a burden in any other way within the system. So I would suggest that perhaps in the projections we could take a look at Education taking a lead in implementing that shared funding from other departments and from other services as well.

[Mrs. Gordon in the Chair]

My second question has to do with what I call compliance funding. Budget allocation should never penalize, I believe, those who do their homework and who play by the rules. Mr. Minister, I would therefore ask for consideration from your department of, number one, grandfathering funding for those who implemented the technology component before the matching funds technology grants program was identified and set. Secondly, I would ask you to consider rewarding capital renewal funding for those boards which demonstrate cost efficiencies and good stewardship with regard to their building upkeep.

I'd like to speak about adequate funding too, which has been raised. These are concerns that are raised always among the parent population in my constituency. I'm a veteran of the equity funding battle. In fact, I go so far back as to remember when we talked about this process under corporate pooling. Mr. Minister, in this particular document that I've been looking over, I would like to say: let's stay the course for providing for have-not communities. In fact, that was the principle that drove the equity funding process. Let's stay the course with it with that intention. I would also suggest that when we look at the figures, we should be ever vigilant that the funding levels are adequate for all. Once we do look at the distribution of funds for equity and for programs that will provide those opportunities for students, we must remember that we have to maintain it consistently throughout.

The money is used for so much more, I would just add, than for the ATA agenda. Remember that it is used for the students, for the delivery of programs. I'm a former member of the ATA, and I feel that in many ways they have their mandate, and I think it's good. These figures before us are funding what I believe is the delivery of education.

Finally, I'd like to speak with regard to the high school CEU funding formula. My question is to the minister. When are these payments made to the school boards? I don't have the answer to that, but I do have a sense from those who are working with these dollars that perhaps there might be the opportunity to work with school boards to find a way of funding, using the same dollars, the best scenario to serve students, particularly those students whom we identify as students at risk. Often these are students who leave a program or leave a course after September 30 or February 28. The school boards have already allocated certain moneys to a teacher, and then often that formula kind of breaks down. Perhaps there could be creative ways of doing that and spending those moneys allocated to that area.

I would conclude, and I'm sure that you, Mr. Minister, do have some answers and some suggestions for me for my constituents.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Education.

5:09

MR. MAR: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I guess I have some wrap-up comments to make. At the outset I'll say, first of all, that I found everybody's comments today to be constructive and helpful in going through this budget exercise. I also note that today is Thursday, that special day of the week when MLAs leave their loved ones and return to their families. It gives me pleasure to be the last speaker in this matter today.

Madam Chairman, some comments were made by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods. I first wish to thank him for his kind comments and reciprocate by saying that I've always found his comments to be persuasive. I do note his comment and caution about what to expect to see in schools, and he harkened back to his experience being the chair of the board here in the city of Edmonton. There is, of course, an effort that is made by students and by teachers to put on their best face and show you what's going on in their school that is so fantastic. But I can assure the hon. member that upon retiring from the more public vistas of a school and going to a staff room, teachers are not shrinking violets in terms of telling you what their concerns are. I can assure the hon. member that I do hear about concerns that teachers may have.

The promise of technology. I take very seriously his comments in that regard. I wish to share perhaps this short story, Madam Chairman. My brother Kirby, who is quite a whiz with technology, has long commented that it took 25 years for overhead projectors to come out of bowling alleys and to get into classrooms. So now that he sees computers in bowling alleys, he's encouraged what might happen in schools.

I think the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods also talked about libraries. I'll perhaps share this story. I think that literacy is very, very important, Madam Chairman. I think that television is a habit, I think that reading is a habit, and most people opt for the habit of television over the habit of reading. This gives rise to his concerns about whether television could ever replace teaching staff. I think the answer is almost certainly no, and I think most people would accept that. I think that 10 years ago we would have seen advertisements on television that would last 50 or 60 seconds, and now we see television ads that run 10 or 15 seconds. Of course, the advent of remote controls has also reduced, in my opinion, the ability of young people to concentrate on something as mundane as a book. I think that the role of libraries and librarians in schools and literacy in general is absolutely critical. We should not expect young people to know how to write if they do not read, because that would be like expecting a child to know how to pronounce words if they could not hear.

From my own personal experience with libraries, Madam Chairman – when I was young, my brother and I, who I referred to earlier, would always get dropped off at the Chinook branch of the Calgary Public Library about 9 o'clock in the morning every Saturday. My mother and father would leave us there while they went to do their grocery shopping, and they'd pick us up at about 12:30 or 1 o'clock, after having shopped at what was then the Woodward's food floor at Chinook Centre. I have to confess that it wasn't for many, many years, wasn't until fairly recently actually that I found out that it didn't take them three and a half hours to do their shopping. They did it quite quickly and then

went home. So the library and the librarian in a very real sense were an important part of my life and certainly a part of my baby-sitting service.

Madam Chairman, there are many other things which were raised. I see some comments were made with respect to matching funds and having to raise money in order to purchase text books. That question was raised by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. I have to state in very strong terms that schools have always provided some money for technology. The question is, you know, whether it was enough. Our funding was intended to add to that which they had before, and this is the basis of our matching. So I think that it is important to note that schools ought not to be fund-raising for what I consider to be basics, and that includes textbooks. We do hear from time to time these stories of parent councils or school councils raising money for textbooks. There is, in addition to our instructional grant that goes to the school boards on a per student basis, an additional \$9.30 per student to assist in the purchase of textbook materials.

The issue of classroom sizes did come up. I have from time to time commented that among red herrings this is the king of tunas, in my opinion. I think that in some circumstances it makes sense to have smaller classrooms. I can understand why in the case of an autobody shop you would not want to have more than 15 or 16 or 17 students, related to the safety of dealing with students. I can tell you that I have been to schools where I see teachers who team-teach classes, and those classes will have 60 or 70 students in them, and the teachers will alternate in terms of their teaching. I think that in some cases we do have to challenge whether or not reducing classroom size will have a significant impact upon student learning. I would be happy to entertain the research that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods has referred to, but in my observation, Madam Chairman, there is very little relationship between classroom size and student achievement.

There was a concern that was raised about provincial down-loading of fund-raising again and the issue of equality of opportunity. In my submission, Madam Chairman, we do provide sufficient funding to ensure that every student in Alberta receives a quality education and the services that they deserve. An interesting point that I'd like to put forward is that user fees were increased in 1995-96 by 7.9 percent. It should be noted, however, that according to audited financial statements filed by school boards, those same user fees decreased by 21.8 percent in the year 1996-97. I think that goes a long way to demonstrating that there is adequate funding for programs in our schools.

With respect to textbooks, this is an issue which has troubled me, the question of whether or not there is sufficient money and resource materials for things like textbooks. In my observation, after having done a great deal of investigation into this issue, I have come to the conclusion that the answer is: yes, there are sufficient resources to deal with things like textbooks.

Having regard, Madam Chairman, for the time of the day and my review of the clock on the wall, I would move that this committee now rise and report.

THE CHAIRMAN: It has been moved by the hon. Minister of Education that the subcommittee rise and report progress to the Committee of Supply. All those that concur, please say "agreed."

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

[The committee adjourned at 5:19 p.m.]

