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9:06 a.m.

[Mr. Severtson in the Chair]

Designated Supply Subcommittee- Education

Severtson, Gary, Chairman
Burgener, Jocelyn
Dickson, Gary
Friedel, Gary

Graham, Marlene
Hierath, Ron
Hlady, Mark
Massey, Don

O'Neill, Mary
Pannu, Raj
Soetaert, Colleen
Stevens, Ron

THE CHAIRMAN: We'll call the committee members to order. I'm just going to read a procedural motion that's required before the commencement of our meeting.

Be it resolved that the designated supply subcommittee on Education allocate the four hours allotted to it pursuant to Standing Order 56(7)(b) as follows:

- (a) the minister responsible first addresses the subcommittee for a maximum of 20 minutes,
- (b) opposition subcommittee members then have one hour for questions and answers,
- (c) government subcommittee members then have one hour for questions and answers,
- (d) opposition subcommittee members then have one hour for questions and answers; opposition subcommittee time of 120 minutes total will be split 90-10, with the third party New Democrats receiving a block of 12 minutes to be used in either opposition hour,
- (e) government subcommittee members have the remainder. In the event government subcommittee members do not exercise their right under this agreement to use this final hour, the chair shall recognize any members of the committee who have questions.

I would invite someone to move this motion.

MR. HLADY: I'll move.

THE CHAIRMAN: All those in favour?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed?

I would also like to remind you that in order to conclude prior to the four hours allotted under Standing Order 56(7), unanimous consent will be required. Failure to obtain unanimous consent for adjournment prior to the four hours will be inconsistent with the understanding of the House leaders in their agreement dated March 8, 1999.

So with that, I'll start off with the hon. Minister of Education.

MR. MAR: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my pleasure to present the estimates for Alberta Education for the 1999-2000 fiscal year. This is the year that we cross the millennium threshold. We enter the new century with an education system that is appropriately and sustainably funded. By budget 2001, we will be spending \$599 million more on educating our students than we are in the current year. That is a 19 percent increase over Budget '98 or \$1 on top of every \$5 that we now spend. That is almost \$1 billion- \$986 million to be exact- more than our education spending was in 1995-96, a total increase of 36 percent over six years. As our Premier has said, that is a big chunk of change.

Still, given the concerns our constituents have been raising over class sizes, school board budgets, and learning resources, some people have questioned whether this is enough. Alberta Teachers'

Association president, Bauni Mackay, told me that a 3 percent increase in education funding would leave her euphoric, so I guess she must be over the moon. In the March 16 issue of the ATA news she said: "This \$600 million increase will help alleviate growing problems like increased class sizes, deficit budgets and a deterioration of classroom learning resources." She's right. Dave King, president of the Public School Boards' Association of Alberta and one of education's most outspoken critics, wanted to see an increase of 7 to 10 percent. Our investment amounts to 7.1 percent in the first year and 19 percent over three years. He, too, must be in outer space over this announcement.

We listened to parents, educators and other Albertans. We heard their concerns, and we responded with the biggest ever increase in education spending in the history of this province. That doesn't mean that we're simply throwing money at education. When this government first was elected, we made a commitment to accountability. Our three-year plan for education details the goals that we aim to achieve, the strategies we will use to achieve them, and the outcomes that our efforts and our investment will have on our education system and, most importantly, on our students.

Our first goal and five of the eight goals in our plan remain focused on our students' learning needs. Financially, we are meeting those needs by maintaining and increasing our support for existing programs and learning supports and by introducing two new programs: the student health initiative and the school performance incentive program. The other three goals deal with public accountability to taxpayers and the people of this province. To fulfill all eight goals in the 1999-2000 fiscal year, we will be spending \$3.36 billion, about \$222 million more than we forecast for 1998-99, which is an increase of just over 7 percent.

Now before we go on, on occasion and only for some expenditures I will be making reference to seven-twelfths of the school year. That's because our fiscal year ends in March, but the school year runs to the end of August, and accordingly our fiscal year actually covers only the first seven months of the school year. The other five months will come from our 2000-2001 budget.

As I said earlier, our first and most important goal is to focus education "on what students need to learn" and ensure that "students are achieving high standards." We know school authorities are faced with rising costs for resources, higher teacher salaries, and other cost pressures in the classrooms. To help them meet those needs, the basic instruction rate goes up by 3 percent in 1999-2000. This September the per student grant will be \$3,976, \$116 more than the current \$3,860. That means a class of 26 students will receive over \$100,000 just for basic instruction.

Not only are we providing more support for our students; we are funding more students. We expect our schools will be educating about 10,000 more students this coming school year as Alberta's economy and standard of living continue to attract families to this province. In 1999-2000 we expect a 2 percent enrollment increase at a cost of \$64 million.

Teachers are the single biggest instruction cost for school boards, and they also represent a sizable cost to government in the form of teachers' pensions. In 1999-2000 we will be spending \$25 million more to meet our responsibilities to the teachers' pension plan.

We know that jobs in the 21st century will demand strong

mathematics and problem-solving skills. The new junior and senior high school math curriculum is designed to give our students those skills. To help teachers and others deliver the curriculum, in 1999-2000 we are investing \$2.2 million in in-service training for junior high and high school math.

We have made a commitment to monitor and report on the impact the programs we introduced last year, the early literacy initiative and expanded access to English as a Second Language programs, are having on our students and their learning.

I'm especially excited about a new initiative we introduced this year. The new school performance incentive program was a big part of Budget '99 and is an important part of our three-year plan. It is important because for the first time in Canada we will be rewarding improvements in student learning in a material way with added funding. School boards with their staff will work to achieve measurable improvements in student learning. Twenty-five percent of the improvement target will be set locally, and 75 percent will be set by the province. The only comparison will be between each board's past student performance and its room for improvement. No board will be compared to any other board. When it is fully implemented, the program will cost \$66 million per year. However, there will be no impact on our 1999-2000 budget.

I note that this program is completely voluntary and fully cooperative. School boards that choose to participate with the agreement of their staff associations will work towards their student achievement target in the 1999-2000 school year. Funds earned will be awarded in the 2000-2001 fiscal year.

Our second goal is to ensure that education "is responsive to [the expectations of] students, parents and communities." In 1999-2000 we will be investing \$1.8 million to consult with aboriginal communities, "review and revise the Native Education Policy, and expand monitoring of Native Education projects," all to ensure we are meeting unique learning needs and expectations of Alberta's First Nations.

Supporting educational choice is an essential part of being responsive to community needs. Based on a provincewide consultation, in 1999-2000 we are increasing support for basic instruction in private schools to 55 percent of the public school amount at a cost of \$2 million. Support for private instruction will reach 60 percent of public school support in 2000-2001. To receive these funds, private schools must teach the Alberta curriculum, and their students will be expected to achieve the same educational standards as public school students.

Alberta is also committed to maintaining appropriate funding and resources for Francophone education. In the coming year we are prepared to spend an additional \$2 million to offset the possible loss of federal government support for Alberta Francophone programs.

I also look forward to the results of widespread consultation and input into the school council review. This is one way of ensuring that education in Alberta continues to respond to the needs and expectations of Albertans.

9:16

Our third goal is to ensure that "children in school have access to the support services they require." This government is fully committed to helping every student achieve his or her full potential. In 1999-2000 we are increasing the per student amounts for severe disabilities by 3 percent. In real terms it means that every school board will receive \$348 more for every student with severe physical or mental disabilities, bringing funding to \$11,948 per student, and \$267 more for severe emotional or behavioural disabilities, for funding of \$9,177 per student. Funding for students who are gifted or talented or who have mild and moderate disabilities already is included in the basic instruction rate, which is also going up by 3

percent. Unlike basic education, private school funding for severe disabilities will be the same as public schools at a cost of \$1.2 million. This will allow parents to choose the program that best meets the needs of their special-needs students.

On top of this and in a model of partnership we are allocating \$25.6 million for the student health initiative. Four government departments- Education, Health, Family and Social Services, and the children's secretariat- have worked together to design this initiative so local health supports can be co-ordinated to help meet the special health needs of students so they are better able to learn in school.

Our fourth goal is to ensure that "teaching in Alberta consistently is of high quality." The \$2.2 million for math in-service will help with that. Also, we will be continuing to match the Telus contribution of \$300,000 this coming year and the following year to help support the Telus Learning Connection. This partnership helps teachers develop the technology skills they need to pass on to their colleagues and especially to their students. Other partners will continue to provide in-kind support.

Which brings me to goal 5: integrating information and computer technology to enhance student learning. In addition to helping build teachers' technology skills, again this year we will continue our \$20 million commitment to the technology integration fund. School boards may use this money to buy computers for their classrooms, buy hardware to upgrade their older computers or enhance their networking capability, or buy the software that students need to help them learn.

Goals 6 through 8 are all about accountability. In goal 6 we continue to work to ensure that "the education funding system [in Alberta] is fair, equitable and appropriate." I look forward to the recommendations of the funding framework review that will help ensure funds are being distributed fairly and in a way that supports school board decision-making. We will work to resolve funding issues related to the transfer of special-needs students between school jurisdictions and institutions.

In the meantime, in addition to the major investment in student learning we are also providing a 3 percent increase in funding for operations and maintenance, transportation, and sparsity in distance. This is on top of any increases in these areas based on increases in enrollment. We will be guided by the recommendations of the Rural Transportation Task Force and the funding framework review to make sure these funds are distributed fairly and equitably.

To address school facility needs in the province, we will continue to provide over \$140 million in base funding for essential restoration and upgrading of schools and for school construction where alternative space is not available. A portion of this funding will continue to support innovative capital projects.

Goal 7 is about openness and accountability. The three-year plan for Education itself is part of that openness. That is why I followed the plan so closely in presenting these estimates.

Finally, my department will continue to maximize its own efficiency under goal 8. We ask nothing of the education system that we do not ask of ourselves.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my presentation for the estimates of my department for the upcoming fiscal year. It is a fiscal plan that supports the three-year plan, dedicates the majority of funds to our students, and clearly demonstrates our commitment to our children and their future. I believe that with this fiscal plan we achieve the right balance between meeting student needs and providing fiscally responsible and sustainable funding.

I now am prepared to entertain questions.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

I will call on Dr. Massey.

DR. MASSEY: Thanks, Mr. Chairman, and thanks, Mr. Minister. I had trouble when I first came into the Legislative Assembly in trying to deal with the adversarial kind of position we're put in, given our political system. The best analogy I could come up with- and I've shared this with the minister- partly because there are really good people on both sides of the House, is the roadrunner and the coyote, who at 8 o'clock in the morning punch in, go at each other all day, and then at 5 o'clock at night punch out and life continues. It's been useful. Sometimes I'm not sure whether I'm the coyote or the roadrunner. It's usually dependent on the issue. So I thank you for your comments, but I'm punching in.

You started with some remarks about the president of the ATA and the office of the Public School Boards' Association and their comments about the budget. Those comments have been used often, but they don't seem to match the hundreds and hundreds of letters or copies- I'm only getting copies mostly- of letters that are being sent to the Premier and to the minister about the funding. There seems to be a discrepancy. The letters are coming from across the province, and it's keeping us busy just trying to respond, as I'm sure it is with the minister's staff.

So there seems to be a discrepancy in terms of what is said publicly by people involved at the provincial level and what local parents are feeling in their own school. It's those local school cases and those local voices that I'm hearing, and in the scheme of things I think those are the voices that really count. It's when you talk to a mother who sends her youngster off to a split grade classroom with 39 youngsters in it and five computers for a school of 300 students that you start to feel the impact of the budgeting and the planning. I think as much as it may make us uncomfortable to hear some of those public declarations, we should keep our ears tuned to those classrooms and to parents who have children in those classrooms.

That leads me to the first area that I'd like to chat about a bit and ask some questions on, and that's the performance measures. Once again, if you look at the measures- and I was involved when I was in the school board with some of these measures- if you ask parents, "Are you happy with your local school?" they'll say yes. You'll get close to a hundred percent if you ask parents: are you happy with your local school? They know the teachers. They know the work those teachers are doing. They know the parent council and the struggles they're having, and they'll say: yeah, I'm happy.

If you ask them some other questions, I think you start to get a set of different answers. Are you happy with the teacher/pupil ratio in your local school? Are you happy with the technology available for your youngster? Are you happy with the library collection? I wonder if it isn't time now- we've been trying to get business plans that are useful. They've certainly been a great addition- and I said this in the Advanced Education estimates- to the estimates procedure. They provide just a lot more detail and a lot more information. Has the department, has the minister considered reviewing those performance objectives?

Again, going back to the recommendations of the Auditor General, under the Executive Council section of the Auditor General's report he takes time to spend six, seven pages talking about performance measures. He says that what he says there is applicable to all the ministries. If I can quote, he says "there is a risk satisfaction surveys may be used to manipulate or 'window-dress' reported performance," and I think that's a danger. Has the department reviewed the performance objectives, and what other kinds of performance measures has the department considered?

9:26

One of the performance measures that I hear parents talk about all the time is teacher/pupil ratio. As much as we can argue about the research on whether it makes a difference or that we have to look at

the instructional situation or that teacher/pupil ratios really don't make a difference, to parents they make a difference. The number of youngsters they send their children to school with and the number they're taught with does make a difference to parents. It's interesting. When you ask parents why they send students to private schools, one of the very first things they'll tell you is class size. The smaller classes in those private schools they find attractive. So I would ask: have you considered parent/teacher ratios as a performance measure to put in the business plan?

One of the other measures- and it comes up again to the strategy of saying: we're spending 20 percent more; we're spending \$600 million; we're pouring all this money into education, the biggest increase we've ever had. Yet I look at a performance measure that's used south of the border by the Pugh Foundation and *Education Week*. When they look at the performance of American states, one of the performance measures they use there is fiscal effort. What kind of effort is the government making to finance education? If you look at our province, they use the percentage of money spent on education as related to the gross domestic product.

In Alberta in 1994-1995 the GDP was \$83,303,000,000, and education expenditures as a percent of that were 3.30 percent. Now, over the ensuing years the GDP continued to grow, and the last figures we have are for 1998-99, \$102,149,000,000 and the percentage of GDP at 3.29 percent. With the figures announced, by 2001 education expenditures would be 3.13 percent of the GDP, given the extrapolation in GDP from previous years. So there are other measures that other jurisdictions have used, and this is one that I think is useful in terms of matching the goals to adequately fund education and to match that with dollars. So I would be interested to know what kind of financial figures, if any, the department has considered including and, again, the notion of reporting on the constant student dollars, if that is another measure that might be considered.

The Auditor General goes on to ask in the report that there be more information given about the performance measures. I'm not sure how you'd do it, but it would be interesting to have the questions. He talks about validity, what kind of belief readers of the business plans can have in the information that's presented, the reliability, who was asked, how many people were asked, who did the asking. He makes quite a point and makes a number of recommendations in terms of survey reporting, and I think it would be, as he indicates, useful.

One of the other measures that we don't see anything of in the performance measures- and again, the Americans and the Pugh Foundation rate states on the number of buildings that are in need of major repair. They get a grade on the number of buildings that are in that state. I don't think there are any measures in the business plan that address the state of the buildings across the province. Now that the audit of school buildings is under way, it may be possible to include a measure that would give us an idea of what the state of the buildings is. Again, the Auditor General- I'm not sure whether it was in Education or in Advanced Education- is asking for a long-term plan to address infrastructure problems. You'll have to correct me, Mr. Minister, whether it was your department or Advanced Education, but he indicated there had to be some addressing of the risks we are running by not adequately looking after capital assets such as buildings. So those are some of my comments about the performance measures.

I had some correspondence about the decision that was made about computers- and I have to admit that I'm not fully conversant with the whole situation. The complaint I got was that the decision to use Edulink's software was a discriminatory and monopolistic decision. I was told that 50 percent of the computers in the province are Apples, Macintoshes, and there is a cross-platform software that

is available. There was a very, very strong complaint about the decision that had been made. Again, I'm not conversant with all the details, but if you can enlighten us, I would appreciate that.

I want to talk for a few minutes about the whole funding problem and how you determine what is adequate. How do you go about that? It seemed to me that one of the strengths of having schools and school districts put together business plans- and I may be completely wrong. I thought the process would be that they would put forward business plans, that the government would consider those plans, and that on the basis of those plans there would be some decision about funding. If that's not the process, I would be interested to know how it works, because it seems to me right now the system is dysfunctional.

When the government announces money and says it's adequate and no one out there believes it's adequate when it filters down to classrooms, if it was just one school district in the province or a third of the school districts in the province or even the smaller school districts in the province, you might understand it, but I hear from across the province that it's not adequate. So how do you determine the number that is adequate, other than a percentage increase from last year? I would be interested to know the kind of reasoning that goes into determining the number that's going to be used.

I hear the minister talk about \$140 a student being added this year. Yet again, when schools translate that- I had a call from northern Alberta from a principal of a small school there. He said: this translates into \$9,000 for me; we're still going to lay off a teacher. I had a call from Hinton. They translated the money, and they say: you know, we're still going to be down three teachers when we put this money in. So how do you come up with adequacy? You know, those aren't isolated cases. Is it the boards' fault? I can't believe that every board is mismanaging or not managing in the correct manner the funds that they're being allocated.

9:36

I wanted to talk a little bit about the mathematics 10 problem, and I know there's been an announcement of \$2.2 million. I'm getting feedback from those people involved that the problem is still going to be there, that the amount of money available for teacher in-service, the kinds of changes- it's still going to be a problem. I sat with a group of parents last week from W.P. Wagner who have youngsters in the system, and they really are upset at what's happened to those students in the movement from junior high through to high school in the last several years. They are really at a loss to understand why, in their words, their children are made to suffer because of inadequate planning. So could we have some information? I've corresponded with the minister and had a rather lengthy reply, but obviously there are still problems out there.

One of the other areas that I wanted to talk about and that the minister touched on was the health initiative. I need to know: how does a parent access it? If I have a single mother on social assistance with a youngster that needs speech therapy in my constituency office and she wants speech therapy for that youngster or more speech therapy past the third grade level in the case of Edmonton- because the Capital health authority only funds speech therapy up to third grade- just how under the new funding announcement will she access additional speech therapy services? What are the steps that she goes through? Do all the departments have to approve the plan, or are they all going to be funneled through Education? How much additional paperwork is there going to be involved?

I was at one of the inner-city schools talking to them about the funding for special-needs students, and the complaint was that the amount of paper that's involved in the funding has just become very, very burdensome. Is this going to add to the burden? What kinds of efforts are there in the department to streamline things for parents

and for schools that are trying to access funds? If you could take us through a case, Mr. Minister, I think it would be helpful, and we could share that information with others.

One other thing and maybe a clarification. I think it's unfortunate some of the things that have happened the last couple of weeks, and I apologize for my part in them. I'm very uncomfortable when administrators start to become the focus of public statements from either the opposition or the government and get drawn into the battle. I think it's fine for people who are elected to public office. We can always go to the media. We always have someone to appeal to, but it seems to me it's very difficult for administrators and your EA, our people, the superintendents of schools when we draw them into the battle. For my part in that I apologize, and it won't happen again. I hope that we can keep it at a political level when we're going to make those statements and protect those people who are for the most part, I think we all agree, trying to do their jobs and doing them very well for the most part.

With those comments, Mr. Chairman . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Now, just before I call on the next speaker, I want to mention to the minister, if you want to answer now or- it's up to you. What you can do is stick up your hand to get my attention. Otherwise, I'll go to my speakers' list. Okay. Dr. Pannu.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Representing here the New Democrats, the third party in the House, I have only 12 minutes to talk about an area as important as education and the budget estimates, and 12 minutes obviously is unrealistic, so I'll be selective and try to make a few points before my time runs out. I better rush into it now.

Thank you, Mr. Minister, for giving us an interesting introduction at the beginning. I heard you refer to the president of ATA and the executive director of Alberta School Boards Association as, the first one, being over the moon and, the second one, being in outer space. I hope you don't have the same view of the school councils' representatives who met in the city last weekend. I spent half a day attending their activities. They certainly shared the views which Bauni Mackay and David King have come to express following the presentation of your budget, having had an opportunity to look closely at the numbers and at how the moneys that are budgeted for education are going to be apportioned for different activities.

I also want to underline the fact that my own constituents, parents of children who are going to school and others, are also in agreement with the concerns expressed by Ms Mackay, Mr. King, and school councils' spokespersons. While you may think that those who disagree with you don't have their feet on the ground, I want to assure you that my constituents not only have their feet on the ground, they have their feet and their resources committed to and in the classrooms of the schools that operate in my constituency.

Having said that, I just want to make a few general observations here. I'm going to Budget '99, and I notice that under Core Business of Alberta Education, the second bullet, you make a reference to "funding school authorities on an equitable, appropriate and affordable basis." Clearly, the dispute between you and parents of this province who have children in schools and many school authorities is over what's affordable and what's not. One thing that I find missing there is any reference to adequate funding. I wonder why the word "adequate" is missing there. We need to have some public debate about what's adequate and what's not, and you should be prepared to be judged on whether or not the allocations that you and the government make are adequate, are seen to be adequate, and prove to be adequate.

Similarly, on page 105 I again looked very carefully at the priority

areas for improvement. There's a whole lot mentioned there. At least five different priorities are stated there. One thing that I again find missing there is any priority given to considering identifying the optimal size of classes for our different levels of schooling, for elementary, for junior high, for senior high. There's either a complete denial of the problem of class size or certainly a failure to acknowledge that something can be done to engage in debate people who work in the classrooms- that is, school teachers, Alberta Teachers' Association, parents, school boards- and work with them to find what would be an optimal size for maximizing learning and for reducing the problems that the teaching staff and the students experience when classrooms are overcrowded. So that's a general observation.

My time is running out quickly. On page 106, school performance incentive program. I wonder if the minister will produce any research studies, scientifically organized and completed recent studies, that would give us any confidence in the proposal that he has contained here and the program action that he is going to proceed with. I noticed that you are planning to run a pilot project this year. I will need some more information on that, as to why you have chosen particular school boards, particular jurisdictions in which this will be done. There's no evidence here that any consideration has been given to that, and I would like to know that.

9:46

My information, by the way, on any research evidence supporting the initiative that you're proposing here is that there's no such support in recent literature that will give me any confidence to support this particular initiative that will begin to cost \$66 million. That \$66 million could be spent I think in a better way unless we can justify it in terms of hard, sound scientific research and experience. I have looked at some of the literature from across the border. It was a fad, and many places are beginning to retreat from this because they don't see this program delivering anything. It seems to be more an ideological choice than it is based on hard evidence and data.

I was looking at your key performance measure on page 110, the right-hand column at the top: "Percentage of students who receive a high school diploma or certificate or enter post-secondary studies within six years of entering grade 9." I would like to suggest that perhaps this information should be disaggregated so we know if the percentage of those who enter a postsecondary institution increases from year to year or not and how many students go into the diploma and certificate programs and what the relative weight of each subgroup is within the high school population and if there are any changes in it and whether or not those changes can be used to determine whether or not your performance is related to the performance of the department.

I just want to record a few things. My time, Mr. Chairman?

THE CHAIRMAN: You've got about four minutes.

DR. PANNU: Okay.

Mr. Minister, I think it will be foolhardy to deny that there is a pervasive sense in this province of the funding crisis that the education system faces. Not to recognize it would be, as I said, foolhardy. If there's a funding crisis, one should expect that there's an educational crisis that will result from it. Now, I have looked at your numbers very carefully, and I find that after making all the adjustments- I did some per capita calculations, and according to my calculations, by year 2002 we will still be behind by about 7 to 8 percent in terms of per capita allocations, not per student, not per pupil, but per capita allocations in this province, the K to 12 system. This information was tabled in the House. Similarly, another figure on per pupil basic instructional allocations: by year 2002 the

inflation would have eroded the effect of dollars by 14 percent. So even by that year, 2002, we will not have captured the levels of '93-94. These are just a few figures.

To just conclude, I want to draw your attention to a group in Calgary, in your city, called SPEAK, Support Public Education, Act for Kids. Their calculations indicate, at least for their school board, that the moneys that school board will get will mean that CBE will need to reduce staff, both central and system support and teaching staff. Subsidies for programs not fully funded will be needed to be reduced; that is, severe disabilities, ESL, kindergarten. Support for curriculum implementation, special needs, staff development, and parent services will need to be reduced, and CBE will need to focus attention on revenue generation initiatives because its deficit will have grown in spite of the new moneys that will be received by this jurisdiction.

I just want to add that you have been in debate with the Edmonton public school board on the same issue, and clearly the parents in this city in meeting after meeting are again voting with their feet and with their voices on the side of those who say that the new budget does not address the real funding crisis that's around us, that we have been living with.

These are my general comments. One more minute, I guess, or two.

THE CHAIRMAN: Less than one.

DR. PANNU: Oops. I'll just then conclude, Mr. Chairman, by asking the minister to tell us: is there enough evidence now to suggest that the charter schools program should continue? It seems to me that as you increase the class sizes, make conditions in the public school classrooms more unattractive, surely there'll be some pressure for sending children either to private schools or to charter schools on the assumption that class sizes in those schools would be smaller. Now, if you were to remove that condition of the class size, do you think that you would go much beyond 1.1 percent of the student population that's presently in charter schools?

I really want you to take a critical look at why it is that parents want to send children either to private schools or to charter schools. It's not only because of alternative teaching strategies or particular missions that these schools have. One primary reason might in fact be that they just want to make sure that the children escape the conditions of overcrowding in the classrooms, which those classrooms that are not called charter classrooms face.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: I just want to remind members that my watch here doesn't have a second hand. So we're not right on the second, but you did get your 12 minutes in.

I'll call on the hon. Minister of Education.

MR. MAR: I'll just make a couple of short comments here, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to thank the hon. members for Edmonton-Strathcona and Edmonton-Mill Woods for their comments and their questions, which I will take seriously. I find most of the questions to be constructive. Although ultimately we may agree on many things, there are other things that we may not agree on.

I note that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona was concerned about the 12 minutes that he was restricted to. I would extend the offer to him that I would be pleased to answer any other questions that he might have through written correspondence that he wishes to pass on to me, and my reply would come back by written correspondence as well. So he need not feel that 12 minutes is his only opportunity to put these questions forward. I will do my very

best to respond to him in writing outside of the strict confines of this forum.

Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

DR. PANNU: Mr. Chairman, I just want to ask leave. I have to go to another meeting with transportation department officials.

THE CHAIRMAN: I don't have to grant permission.

DR. PANNU: No. I wanted to listen to the minister. In courtesy to the minister, I really wanted to hear him respond, but I can't be here. So my apologies for that.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

I'll call on Mr. Dickson.

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. Good morning, Mr. Minister. Actually, it occurred to me when we started that we should have been holding this meeting in Calgary when I looked at where the MLAs were from this morning. [interjections] I'm sorry. I didn't mean to provoke debate.

9:56

Mr. Minister, I've got a number of questions. Let me start. You made an interesting statement in your initial introductory remarks, and I made a note here when you said that it was important that every student develop his or her potential. Who could disagree with that? Help me understand and help me reconcile that wonderful sounding declaration with the fact that when it comes to ESL students in this province, although you've made a major adjustment by allowing native-born children with English challenges to access that funding, as I understand it, we still have not developed the flexibility that immigrant students of, say, the high school level need.

I've raised this with you before. It may be that I haven't followed the activities of your department closely enough and that maybe you have addressed that, extended that three-year funding provision to five or six years or at least allowed that kind of flexibility. I know you're aware of the problem. It's the sort of thing that's certainly been documented in Calgary, which has such a large and burgeoning immigrant population. This continues to be a real problem. I'm anxious, Mr. Minister, that we take the next step with ESL- a grade to include native-born students in terms of eligibility, but we also need that flexibility beyond the three years. If that's already changed, I'd be delighted to hear it. That's not my understanding, though.

Mr. Minister, just hitting a number of different areas. Vote 1.0.9: I notice the element there dealing with freedom of information. I notice goal 7 where you talk about openness and accountability. Help me reconcile the goal of openness and accountability with the decision of your ministry that private schools would not be subject to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. That strikes me as flying in the face of your stated goal 7. Why would we want a different, reduced level of openness, a reduced level of accountability when it comes to private schools, which are receiving taxpayer dollars? So I need some help understanding that.

To pursue the FOIP thing a little further, we've witnessed over the last year a lot of aggravation, frustration, confusion, uncertainty around FOIP rules in Alberta schools. One of my disappointments was to discover that even the largest school district in the province was leaving it to individual schools to decide what kinds of consents would be required and how many. So you had practices that varied widely within the city of Calgary. It seems to me that this is the area where the province and Alberta Ed should be providing some

leadership, should have developed a standard process and at least ensured that local school districts had a standardized process, because it just creates a bunch of uncertainty that, at least in my respectful view, could be easily avoided.

The Calgary regional consortia. You have these regional consortia around the province. I remember corresponding with you a year ago to extend the funding for a further time, and you did that. You extended it for the year. I'm not ascribing it was my intervention that resulted in that; I'm sure lots of people were writing those kinds of letters. When I look through your budget, and I'm looking at 3.2.1 or 3.2.4, I'm not sure where regional consortia fit in there. Then I look at your business plan book, page 107, and you're talking about a one-time allocation of funding to the regional learning consortia, but it looks like it's dedicated to solely two purposes, to exclusively two purposes. One is the new math program and approving secondary instruction in math.

I may be confusing two different things, but if it's the regional consortia- I've had a chance to meet with the woman who's been running the Calgary regional consortia, and I've been really impressed with the way they've been able to leverage a very modest number of dollars into what looks to me like pretty powerful, pretty helpful in-service training for an awful lot of teachers. So my question is: if there's utility in doing that, why would you limit it just to the math program? As important and as significant a challenge as that may pose, why would you limit it? It strikes me as being quite arbitrary.

Speaking of math, Western Canada high school, probably one of the most distinguished academic high schools anywhere in this province, consistently one of the top performing high schools in math and those areas- I was fascinated to attend a school council meeting there and see the level of concern around the new math curriculum. Now, you did delay and suspend implementation of that, but the question that surfaced at that meeting with parents was: how is it, Mr. Minister, that we could have gone so far down the road of that new math curriculum and have missed the mark so widely? It causes me to question what happens in our curriculum development that you could come up with a product that even Western Canada school, which is meeting IB standards- if it's a challenge identified in a school like that, then that tells me that there must be some significant structural problem or some feedback loop within the curriculum development. I'm no professional educator, and there may be obvious answers to it, but I'm relaying a concern I had in talking to those school parents.

Going to 1.0.12. I continue to be fascinated by the standing policy committee allocation in this and other departments. Why the increase? How many meetings have been held in the last year, and how many meetings are projected for the next year? What portion of those meetings in the last year have been public? How many hours has that committee met in private after the exclusion of public media and opposition MLAs? How many specific recommendations have come from those standing policy committees that have been translated into specific budget elements or votes or legislative change?

Mr. Minister, I want to take you to the Townsend report from November 1998, that I assume you're familiar with. Once again, to a layperson- I look at the report, and on page 16 there's a table. When those teachers and principals and superintendents were surveyed, it seemed to me to be a credible survey with a reasonable response base. They were asked the question or put the proposition: "Alberta's educational reforms have brought about significant improvements in student learning." That was the issue. What you had was 52.5 percent of school superintendents, 48 percent of principals, and 39.5 percent of teachers who disagreed. Strongly disagreed: you had 13 percent of superintendents, 35 percent of principals, and 51.5 percent of teachers.

Then the other thing that I was fascinated by, table 6 on page 17,

the issue: "Alberta's educational reforms have brought about an overall improvement in classroom teaching practices." We saw there in the disagree category: 42.5 percent of teachers, 55.5 percent of principals, 67 percent of superintendents. Strongly disagree: 44 percent of teachers, 26.5 percent of principals, and 7.5 percent of superintendents. I guess, Mr. Minister, even if we assume that you had come up with the most inspired, most appropriate educational reform this province has ever seen- big if, but even if we were to give you that- how on earth do you plan on implementing it when there's that kind of systemic opposition, suspicion, hostility? That's a huge problem. So I want to know, Mr. Minister, in a practical sense how you plan on carrying out the reforms that you're talking about, when the people who are absolutely essential in implementing those changes have such strong negative feelings about what you and your department are doing.

I want to turn to some specific concerns with the Calgary board of education. Lots of us sitting around this table represent some of those 800,000 people in Calgary and the Calgary region. There was a claim, sir, that there has been in 1997 and 1998 something in the order of a \$68 million overpayment by the city of Calgary for the educational levy. I'd like you to tell us, Mr. Minister, whether you acknowledge that claim, number one. Number two, if yes, when will there be an adjustment made in favour of the Calgary board of education?

10:06

The next question is one that has to do with property taxes, a popular issue for my constituents in the inner city of Calgary. The city tax assessor anticipates that there's going to be another \$22.4 million collected from Calgary taxpayers this year with respect to the education levy, \$12 million of that from, as I understand, residential taxpayers. If you dispute those numbers, please tell me. I'd be very interested. If you accept those numbers as being accurate, then I have a whole series of questions about fairness.

I note the calculation is that we've seen that \$123 million in education taxes from Calgarians have been diverted. I'm a big believer in ensuring that no child should be penalized anywhere in this province because of geography, in terms of where they happen to be born or where they happen to live, but it seems to me there continue to be major systemic problems with the way this thing is operating. When I look at the kinds of problems that are manifest in Calgary classrooms, it seems to me that however noble the goal, however noble the objective, there's a huge negative impact in Calgary classrooms.

Another thing of interest to me is that since you've so severely limited the flexibility that school boards have in this province and since we're looking at the biggest school district in the province facing a threat of strike- I mean, however credible you think the threat is- Mr. Minister, I'd like you to consider what role you ought to have in participating and finding a resolution to that problem in the Calgary region. It seems to me it's not good enough for you to simply stand back and say: it's a problem for the local board. By deliberate acts and decisions made by your ministry, you've removed a lot of the flexibility and a lot of the ability for the Calgary board to be able to deal with that kind of pressure.

Now, there's been some reference to and I know you're familiar with the SPEAK organization in Calgary, Support Public Education, Act for Kids, and I expect you've seen the news release that came out on March 24, 1999. I thought actually they'd done a very effective job in terms of taking the budget announcement and trying to break that down in terms of what the impact is going to be for Calgary students and Calgary classrooms. I'd be interested in whether you in fact accept the calculation, the assertion from SPEAK that after you take out things like teachers' pensions,

private-school money, money that's going out to new children- in other words, dealing with population expansion- and other items, you come down to potentially the CBE receiving about \$21 million. If you accept that, please tell me. If you don't accept it, please tell me what the correct number is.

The concern I had when I met earlier with Teresa Woo-Pau, the chairman of the Calgary board- this was before the budget came out. She told me that the Calgary board of education is looking at a \$35 million deficit. They were required by your department to eliminate that over five years. In my discussions with my school councils I'm thinking to myself: how on earth would the Calgary board of education be able to eliminate \$7 million a year, or whatever other configuration it is, without having a huge impact on reducing teachers and the consequential increase in classroom size? This is a major, major concern in the city we both represent. Mr. Minister, I have to know how that challenge they were facing before the budget came in is going to be changed by the budget announcement. It's not apparent to me- and it may be just because I'm too thick to understand the budget- how that translates into money to the Calgary board of education. I have to know that, and I suspect that many of the parents of those 104,000 students in the Calgary board of education want to know too.

Mr. Minister, I attended a meeting last night that the Alberta Teachers' Association put on in Calgary at the Port O'Call Inn for Calgary MLAs.

MR. HLADY: I was there, and I didn't see you.

MR. DICKSON: Well, I arrived, obviously, after the government members had left.

There continue to be plenty of concerns among teachers in the Calgary region, and it seems that what I view as legitimate concerns- I know many of these men and women. They're hardworking professionals, and there's a high, high level of frustration that their experience isn't respected. Mr. Minister, I have to tell you how disappointed I am every time I hear you talking about the experienced teachers being a liability. I can think of no other profession- law or medicine or any other profession- where experience is seen as a cost liability instead of a valued asset. I want to know what your specific plans are in the '99-2000 budget year to ensure that professional educators, in particular experienced professional educators, are valued appropriately.

Looking to some of the specific items in the budget, I want to go to ECS and ask why there's still no funding for a full half-day, 475 hours of kindergarten. At a time when other provinces in Canada are moving to prekindergarten programs in addition to a full 470-hour regular kindergarten program, I'd like to ask: how is it that in Alberta we have no junior program? If the intention is- and I've certainly heard the words- to give a boost to particularly some targeted aboriginal youth, ESL youth, special-needs youth, why don't we have a program in this province that addresses prekindergarten, pre-ECS? I want to ask you, Mr. Minister, how much of the remedial literacy program is necessitated by the lack of proper early childhood education in Alberta? There has to be some causal analysis. Maybe you've done that, and maybe you're indicating that to me now, but I look forward to your response on the record.

Class size, pupil/teacher ratio. Once again, I don't have the professional education background that many people around the table do, but I continue to be troubled, Mr. Minister, by what I take to be your assertion that classroom size doesn't have a really significant impact on quality of education. So I guess I have to know from you . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, excuse me. It has been 20 minutes of your time.

MR. DICKSON: Thanks for the reminder, Mr. Chairman. Thank you very much. Thank you, Mr. Minister, for your attention.

THE CHAIRMAN: The only person I have on the list isn't here in the committee. Dr. Massey, go ahead.

DR. MASSEY: How much time have we left?

THE CHAIRMAN: Five minutes.

DR. MASSEY: Okay. Good. Well, I can start on some of the second-round questions.

Specifically, if I could ask about charter schools, Mr. Minister. The Auditor General again addressed, as he has in previous reports, problems with charter schools and I think made recommendations as to the necessity of working with charter school boards so that they understand their roles, that there be some sort of development plan. The previous criticism of those boards was that people didn't understand their roles, that they often didn't even attend meetings, that many of them were ill-equipped to take in trust the management or the overseeing of a school. I know that there has been some work done by the department, and I wonder if we could have that work shared with us. How are they addressing it?

10:16

One of the other areas in terms of charter schools that the Auditor General addressed was the problem of their business plans and the fact that the business plans have been in a sorry state and that it's still going to be a considerable time before the business plans can be used to evaluate the progress of a number of the charter schools, in fact all of them, I think he indicated in his report. So a bit of information about the charter schools: the boards, the management of those schools, and the work the government has been doing to try to ensure that youngsters attending those schools are being looked after.

Just one point of information. I found the name of the software program. It was in a press release that someone had shared with me. It's called CellView, a cross-platform program that evidently is being manufactured by an Edmonton firm and has been adopted by the Holiday Inn, for example, to link their reservation systems across the world. So that was the software that I was referring to in the previous question about Edulink and their monopoly.

I want to talk a little bit about achievement test and diploma test results, and I may get a chance a little later to go into more detail. I have a general question about the use that is made of achievement and diploma test results. I remember when the testing program was first introduced by the province a number of years ago. It was introduced on a sampling basis, and I even served on one of those test committees for a while. The explanation at that time or the reason the government gave for putting the tests in place was that it would be used to monitor the program, and that only required sampling of students. You didn't have to go into the cost of testing every youngster in the province, and it would be monitored in that way.

Over the years that has changed rather dramatically so that we are now testing every youngster- and the Auditor General even comments about full cohort reporting- so that the schools would even have to report the performance of those youngsters who don't speak the language, who are special-needs youngsters, and they would have to include the performance of those youngsters in their school results. Somehow or other that doesn't seem to me to be right. It goes back to: what is the purpose of the achievement tests? What are they being used for, and specifically what changes has the department made as a result of analyzing those achievement tests? The question I think I asked last year . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, sorry to interrupt, but the hour has elapsed since you started.

We'll go to the next hour, and we'll call on Ron Stevens.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and good morning, Mr. Minister. As you know from the discussions we've had over the last couple of years, the people in Calgary-Glenmore are very concerned about public education and education generally and have asked a number of questions of me which I've passed on to you in a variety of ways. I think that is good. They have high expectations. They would like the best for their children, and I think what you are doing through this budget and the previous one is making great strides towards achieving those goals.

I think it's important just to make a couple of comments about what the people in Calgary-Glenmore see with respect to public education, because when one listens to the criticism that comes from opposition members, it is often without context and one would think there is nothing good happening. I can tell you, Mr. Minister, that I talk to people in my constituency who in fact say that for them the public education system is working very well. I talk to people who come from other jurisdictions, as a result of knocking on doors, who tell me that on a comparative basis Alberta is a wonderful place to educate their children. I think it's important to understand that that is so. That is not to say that we can't make it better. It is not to say that we should in any way dampen people's high expectations, but I think it's important for you to understand that there are many, many people in my constituency who believe that public education is working very well for them.

I'd also like to commend you on this particular budget. I think it cannot be lost that you have increased your budget by in excess of 7 percent this year, that Health has increased its budget in excess of 8 percent this year, and that between the two budgets you make up something in the order of 50 percent of the entire government budget. You're talking about approximately 7.5 percent for those two departments, yet the entire increase for this government's budget in this year is something in the order of 2.2 percent. So you are doing extremely well, Mr. Minister, in addressing the needs of Albertans and fighting for additional funds for public education, and I don't think that can be lost on anybody who participates in the discussion regarding the appropriateness or the adequacy of funding for public education. You are to be congratulated in that regard.

Having said that, I have a few questions I would appreciate asking you at this time. I'd like to start out at page 130, if I may, under the heading of program 2. I notice under 2.2, private school support, that funding for private schools will be increasing substantially. What I would appreciate knowing from you, Mr. Minister, is whether the schools will have correspondingly increased obligations to match that increased funding.

The next item on that page that I'd like to refer you to is 2.4.2, Learning Resources Distributing Centre. What I would like to know is why the Learning Resources Distributing Centre is now included in the vote estimates in program 2.

Also on that page, Mr. Minister, at 2.5.1 we find student health services, and I note that it is budgeted for \$14,970,000. My memory is that on budget day the amount communicated was in excess of \$25 million. If in fact my memory is correct, I'd appreciate an explanation for the discrepancy and any further details that might relate to this initiative and in particular to the increased differential between the amount stated on this page and the \$25 million.

It's also important in general to address two or three things. It wasn't that long ago we had Growth Summit '97, and of course people development was without a doubt the number one priority arising out of that important public consultation. So, Mr. Minister, I'd very much appreciate it if you could spend some time addressing

whether or not your business plan responds directly to the need to address the importance of people development.

10:26

The last point, Mr. Minister, that I would like you to respond to is simply whether or not your business plan addresses business involvement in education. It seems to me that education cannot be a static thing. It has to reflect changes, and one of the changes that I think is important is the connection with the business community. So I would very much appreciate it if you have addressed that within your business plan.

Thank you very much.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. I'll call on Mary O'Neill.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, I have three areas that I'd like to speak to today and ask a question in respect of each area. The first is in the area of financial investment in education. I go back to the days when I sat on a school board, and a school board to the south of us, the one that I served on, had a per capita student rate of \$19,000. A school board to the north of us had a per student capita of \$782. The reason I mention that is because it is not just lightly laudable that we have equity funding, but I think it is honourable and right that we do have it. I feel it's a sound principle.

With respect to the Calgary situation that I currently hear about and their concern of the school boards there, that so much of the money is going out of their jurisdiction that they have collected in education taxes, I just want to say that those who don't live in the Calgary area are very definitely for the sharing of that money and the responsibility that the equity formula has allowed for other students. I also think, though, that those in Calgary should be reminded that their economy is strong because of the resources and the economic activity that is taking place in other areas of the province.

I feel bound to say that, because it is something that is lost. I have been through the whole discussion. We used to call it corporate pooling. We then started calling it equity funding, and it is a principle that I think you're to be commended on. I think we as government should feel very proud that we have that sharing concept with the resources that are gathered for our education dollar.

Having said that, my question around the financial part is on page 131 in the estimates. I'm looking at the line that speaks of less the property tax support of the opted-out separate boards. My question there is: while I have a sense of it, could you define more specifically and clearly what is meant by the "opted-out separate boards"? In my constituency I have the uniqueness of having the catholic board being the public board and the protestant board being the separate one. So we have a discussion in our constituency with respect to the capabilities of that, and I'd like, Mr. Minister, if you could identify for us not only what they are, what is meant by it, but what, if any, is the financial advantage for boards who do opt out of the ASFF, and how, again if any, in any way does it impact upon our general revenue and actually the sharing concept that I identified originally in the equity funding?

My second topic has to do with governance and the role of the local school boards. I would like to say in that respect, again having been there, that I have a great deal of respect for those who are invested with the responsibility to address local education needs, determinations, and all that goes with the role of the school boards. The role of the school board, of course, is to set policy consistent and also to have financial accountability. I do have a question that revolves around that, and that is with respect to sometimes a conflict of interest that does arise there. I understand that the role of school

boards is again policy and financial accountability and to be the spokespersons for the community at large. However, we have members on our school boards who are members of bargaining units. My question related to this area is: is there in your mind a financial conflict of interest in that particular area?

The third topic- and then it comes with a question- has to do, of course, with the most important area and the reason why we have education in the portfolio, and that is the children and the students we wish to serve. I'd like at this point to say that I believe through Alberta Education we have a breadth and a scope of courses that is extraordinary. Certainly- and I go back to the Dark Ages in my education- when I see what students can access these days and what they can learn through the curriculum, the teachers, the administrators, and the Department of Education are to be commended for it. But also, though, I'd like to say that because we live in a very free country and a wonderful province also our families and our children have the opportunity of program choices that have an exceptional breadth to them and a scope of interest. I think that's why charter schools- I know their shaky beginnings and in some cases their shaky present time- still provide a program of choice. I'd like in this particular instance to reference the immersion program that I put my heart and soul into helping develop, and it's only one of many programs now. I think we are a very, very rich province for that.

I have a question in my third area. With respect to the instructional block in our funding framework, there seems to be a degree of either reticence or unwillingness, perhaps, of administrators and school boards to identify the allocated money for mild and moderate students in the school. I know it has been done per capita, but because it was rolled in in one budget, prior to my being elected, it is not identified, and I see some difficulty there. So I'd ask you, Mr. Minister, if you would clarify the intent and the purpose and the amount that is allocated.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

I'll now call on Marlene Graham, please.

MS GRAHAM: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, I would certainly echo the comments of my colleagues from Calgary-Glenmore and St. Albert as to your budget this year overall. My questions aren't quite as organized and compartmentalized as my colleagues', but I'd like to start out by asking you if you could address how the current budget addresses concerns that have been raised with me by school council chairs from the various schools in my constituency and also the teachers I've met with from the schools in my constituency. Most recently the overriding concern from my school council chairs has been the suggestion that they are required to continue to fund-raise to cover the cost of basic textbooks, in particular those textbooks required by mandated curriculum changes, as well as other related resources that are needed for implementing the new courses. I've asked my school council chairs to provide me with their financial statements so that I can verify this, and I have yet to receive them, but nevertheless this is a current complaint that I do receive.

10:36

As well, it has been raised with me that the per student technology grant, which was at \$25 per student, did seem to work an inequity for older schools that had older equipment as compared to new schools which were provided with new computers. Those older schools were really not able to replace their equipment or keep up to date with the basic \$25 grant per student. I'd be interested in knowing if there was any way of rectifying that situation, and as well, I'd like to know whether the per student grant has been

increased. I presume it has by the basic 3 percent that has been applied to all grants. Perhaps you could clarify that.

I would also like you to address whether this current budget will address what teachers raised with me, and that is that for their special-needs students in their classrooms they are not seeing the increases from last year's budget. They feel that their special-needs students are still falling through the cracks, and they're not able to deal with them effectively in their classrooms. So if you would address how the current budget will tend to ameliorate that situation, I would appreciate it.

I noticed in reading through the business plan that the cost of educating a student in Alberta's public education system is \$30 per day, and I'd be interested in knowing whether all costs- that is, capital costs, transportation costs, et cetera- have been included in coming to that per student per day cost.

I noticed- I believe it's at page 130 of the budget- that \$25 million has been allocated for student health services. I'd be interested in knowing if this is all new money, or has it perhaps been included in other ministry budgets in the past such as Health or social services? I'm interested in knowing what sort of services are covered under this allocation and how these moneys will be distributed to various school boards in the province.

Dealing with the new school incentive program being piloted this year, I note that upon implementation, which I believe is in the budget year 2000-2001, it is to be \$66 million. I'd like to know whether this is all new money or whether this has come from a reallocation of current budget allocations. I'd also like to know what the reaction of the school boards and schools has been to this new program. How do you see this program benefitting the individual student in the school?

My next question would be this. It may just reflect my lack of understanding. I note that education spending overall will increase 7 percent this year. Increases in most grants will be 3 percent, and 2 percent will recognize enrollment growth. I'm wondering where the balance of the increase is going or where it is allocated. Again, that may just reflect my misapprehension of what I've read in the business plan.

I'd also like to know whether more funding has been dedicated to early literacy programs above and beyond the percentage increase for this budget year insofar as it seems to be that there's more and more support for the fact that early intervention, early literacy programs are so important to future performance by students.

I'm also wondering if you could advise as to the status of the funding framework review. When is the report expected? Perhaps it has already been received. What if any decisions have been made as a result thereof?

Lastly, page 116 of the business plan addresses goal 8, being "Alberta Education is managed effectively and efficiently to achieve government goals." I was impressed to see by the key measure that is shown on a graph how the cost of department administrative services per public school student has significantly decreased from 1993-94 to '98-99. I was wondering if you could perhaps provide some explanation for how your department has achieved that. I'd be interested to know whether the number of employees in your department has decreased from '93-94 and if so, by what degree.

I think at this point that would conclude my questions.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. The hon. minister.

MR. MAR: Maybe I'll just make a few comments in response, Mr. Chairman, and of course I'll be happy to undertake to provide written responses to the questions or comments that I don't address in these brief remarks.

I have enjoyed listening carefully to the comments of colleagues

from both sides of the House, and I found the comments and questions for the most part to be constructive, as I indicated earlier. I'll make this observation, perhaps, about the opposition side of the comments- and again, I don't dismiss these comments- and that is that there is a great deal of emphasis placed on the issue of resources and the inputs to education. I take, for example, the comments the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods made about . . .

10:46

THE CHAIRMAN: Excuse me, hon. minister. The way I read the resolution, the answers you give to the opposition are on their time, and you give the answers to the government members on our time. That's the way I read the resolution that we passed at the start of the meeting, which states that the opposition subcommittee members have one hour for questions and answers, and then the government members have one hour for questions and answers. So in this hour if you could answer the government members' questions at this time.

MR. MAR: I'll be happy to do that, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for that direction and that correction.

If I may make the observation, then, on comments made by government members, I thank members for the thoughtfulness in their comments and what I perceive to be a reflection of what their own constituents are saying.

I believe that always there are high expectations for our students, as the Member for Calgary-Glenmore said, and I don't think we should do anything to try to dampen those expectations. I would say that in dealing with many of the issues that are raised, of course dollars and resources are important, but I think there has to be a broader perspective and context taken in our response in education to how we deal with these expectations. We cannot simply focus on dollars alone; we must also look at the resources people can bring in that are not perhaps of a dollar figure. Certainly when we talk about partnerships with, for example, Telus and the Telus Learning Connection and the money and services in kind that they bring to the table and when we look at the partnerships that are created with other business enterprises in the province, I think we should be very proud of that.

I think we also should not discount the importance of the input parents can have, and I think the involvement of parent councils or school councils has been extremely important. In other jurisdictions throughout the world, I think it would be fair to say there has been a trend towards getting the community to have a greater involvement in matters as they relate to education.

I agreed with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenmore when he talked about: education cannot be static. There have been tremendous changes in education, and clearly we see that reflected not only in the manner in which teachers teach but also in the curriculum that is taught and also the partners that come to the table to help make that work.

A question was raised about the Learning Resources Distributing Centre. The LRDC is the education revolving fund from previous years. In response to the recommendations of the Auditor General and in an attempt to improve government accountability, all of the ministries' revolving funds have been eliminated. Those whose function is seen as necessary now have their budgets included in the voted estimate. The LRDC, as many people are familiar with, of course, provides the education systems and the public with education materials, so LRDC serves as a purchaser and warehouse and the vendor of learning materials as well as producing distance and correspondence education materials.

Much was raised on the issue of student health services, and I can advise people on the background of that. In my discussions with school boards throughout the province many school boards indicated

that the learning needs of their students were not being met because of health issues that impaired the ability of those students to learn. So \$25.6 million is for the student health initiative. It's budgeted for the first year at \$14.97 million. The reason for that is because of the discrepancy in accounting for funds in a school year versus a government fiscal year. For the 1999-2000 school year, September of 1999 through August 2000, there will be \$25.6 million available on an annual basis. The government fiscal year recognizes only the September '99 to March 2000, or seven months of the first year of the initiative, which amounts to roughly \$15 million.

The growth summit. Reference was made to that by the Member for Calgary-Glenmore. People development was a top priority of the growth summit, and since Education has the responsibility for the basic education of Alberta's young people, our first goal has to be to focus on what students need to learn and ensure that they achieve high standards. The goals set out in the Department of Education support the achievement of that first goal.

The hon. Member for St. Albert talked about the previously existing situation as it related, really, to the funding, which wasn't equitable in the province, where the amount of money that was available for the education of students in a particular jurisdiction depended upon the wealth of the property tax base of that jurisdiction as opposed to the needs of those students. I appreciate her strong support for equitable funding. If I may, Mr. Chairman—this issue was also raised by the Member for Calgary-Buffalo—perhaps what I'll say in response is that equity in funding, regardless of whether kids live in Pincher Creek or Red Earth Creek or Calgary or Edmonton or any other place in the province, I think is a laudable goal.

Those people who suggest that we should simply allow dollars that are taxed locally to be spent locally really ignore the real needs of the students. If you accepted that principle, then taking a Calgary example: if property taxes are raised in the district of Mount Royal, then they should be spent on schools in Mount Royal and not shared with schools in places like perhaps Bowness or Forest Lawn. When people are cited that example, I think they understand why we have equity funding, that there should be a sharing of dollars that are spent within a school jurisdiction regardless of whether that school is in Mount Royal or in Forest Lawn. By extension, you would have to agree that that type of sharing makes sense on a provincewide basis among and between school jurisdictions, whether it's Rocky Mountain House or Fort McMurray.

The hon. Member for St. Albert also talked about the breadth and scope of program choices that are available. It is extraordinary, I must say. All of us, who attended school, perhaps have ideas of what school is like, and then as MLAs or perhaps as teachers or in the case of the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods as a former chair of the school board, all of us now know that school is a very different place than the schools we attended. There is a great breadth and scope of program choices available to parents and their sons and daughters. It is one of the things that I think we should be very proud of in the province of Alberta.

It reminds me of the comments made by the Member for Calgary-Glenmore when he talked about the reaction that people have when they have come from other jurisdictions, from other parts of Canada as well as perhaps even other parts of the world, when they look at the kinds of choices that are available and the quality of the programs that are available. I think it speaks well for education in this province and really is a focus on what I view to be the important part of education; that is, the outputs rather than the inputs.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed talked about issues as they related to fund-raising. I have often said that fund-raising has been a part of the education system for a long, long time. I would be concerned in situations where parents and school councils are

expressing that they are fund-raising for things like textbooks, and I would say two things. One is that they should not be fund-raising for things like textbooks. Fund-raising should be restricted to things that are extracurricular in nature or add-ons to the basic education program. If a school council is fund-raising for things like textbooks, I think it is incumbent upon them to hold accountable their school boards and the trustees they elect.

I'm not in any way, shape, or form trying to pass the buck here. I think there is a responsibility of the Minister of Education and MLAs to take in these types of comments. On the other hand, people must also understand the division of responsibilities as they are between MLAs, who are elected to deal with broader issues, and trustees, that are elected locally to deal with the delivery of programs within a particular school jurisdiction.

10:56

The other comment I'll make on fund-raising is that the increase in the basic instruction grant rate should help alleviate some of that if in fact that's what parents are fund-raising for. Again, the basic instruction grant goes up by 3 percent in the coming school year and then an additional 2 percent and 2 percent thereafter. Again, Mr. Chairman, just not to be, myself, falling into the trap of focusing only on resources, as I indicated at the outset of my comments, with the instruction rate going to roughly \$4,000 per student per year, one only needs to look at a class size of 25 to understand that the instructional resources that are devoted to that class of 25 is \$100,000 roughly. That is a tremendous amount of money to be devoted just to instruction. On top of that, of course, is money that is allocated for things like operations and maintenance, capital issues as they relate to transportation. Accordingly, Mr. Chairman, I don't think anybody should ever discount the incredible investment this province makes in the education of children.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed also asked about the student health initiative: are the dollars new dollars, or are they simply allocated from somewhere else? The answer is that it's the former. These are new dollars, and our expectation is that school boards and regional health authorities will continue to provide the same support in dollars for the existing programs they have. It remains to be seen, of course, how those dollars will be used, whether they will be maintained in existing programs or spent in a different way.

I think the important thing to note is that the effort in the student health initiative is to ensure co-ordination of the delivery of services to children so that (a) we can identify where there are overlaps in service providers so that we can eliminate those overlaps, and (b) we can identify those cracks where students may be slipping through. So that is a two-step effort that will be required of the service deliverers for the student health initiative.

The member also raised the question about the school performance improvement program, the \$66 million for the full year. The question was also asked: is this new dollars or reallocated? The answer is that it also is new dollars and is over and above the 3 percent, 2 percent, 2 percent increases to the basic instruction grant.

The reaction around the province, it would be fair to say, has been varied. Generally speaking, school boards have been reasonably enthusiastic about seeing how the details are going to work out and ensuring that we'll work with them to make sure this is a successful program. The reaction of teachers has been mixed, I would say. But overall, when people start to understand the program, elements of it, when they understand that it is not a merit pay system and it is not a comparison of teachers against other teachers, that it is not a comparison of schools against other schools and is not a comparison of school jurisdictions versus other school jurisdictions but in fact is a bold plan to reward achievement improvements based on one

jurisdiction's own historic performance- I think that when people come to understand those program elements, how it's designed, there's much greater support for it to the point where I think some people are very enthusiastic indeed.

With respect to the early literacy program, I can say that the early advice from school boards is that this has been perhaps the best received of the elements of our 12-point plan last year. I think there were many points in the 12-point plan that were well received, but this one in particular stands out as being an area that I think people have had a great deal of support for.

On the subject of the funding framework review: when will it be complete? My expectation is that the funding framework review will be complete within the next few weeks, and at that time the recommendations that come forward in it will be considered through the normal policy vetting process.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I'll be happy to entertain questions from opposition members and respond to a few of their comments.

THE CHAIRMAN: We still have roughly 18 minutes left of government members' time, so I'll go on to Mark Hlady.

MR. HLADY: Okay. Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I can start now, or we could call this the start of the third hour, if you want.

AN HON. MEMBER: Go ahead.

MR. HLADY: Thank you. Mr. Minister, what I would like to do is thank you for your support, for helping the Calgary MLAs in regards to improving our communication link with all the groups we work with in the city of Calgary. We had SPEAK, which is the Support Public Education, Act for Kids group- they have become a very active group in Calgary, communicating with the Calgary MLAs- as well as the school councils, two separate groups still trying to work on creating a better communication process, as well as with the trustees, which we've had a fairly successful process bringing together, and the teachers. We met with them again last night, and I appreciate having your support on that. We're obviously in a changing time in education right now. I think all the groups have the children's concerns at hand, and they want to see what we can do to make it the best education system for the future.

One model school that's out there today- and while it probably may not save us any money, it certainly is trying to present different concepts. It's the Banded Peak school; it's the Galileo system. I haven't had as much time as I want to study this. I'm looking forward to getting some information from you in regards to that, if I can, Mr. Minister, and understanding what that new system is. Is that a concept that moves us to the future?

Speaking with the teachers last night- and they were certainly at quite a level of agreement. You know, we're sitting here with our school system today and we've seen it being tinkered and moved along, but the model is still, to a certain extent in a lot of places, considered a '50s, '60s model in a lot of ways. We haven't done that quantum leap to: what's the next millennium's model of education? How does it work? How do we get everything in there? A lot of it revolves and comes back to communication with the different groups. When the Calgary caucus met with the teachers last night, they certainly were asking similar questions and understandably saying: how can we be part of that answer? They want to be, the local ATA union in Calgary.

There is a point from one of my colleagues, who isn't here today. He has put some numbers together in regards to the Calgary board of education, and I would be interested to hear your position or what you have to say on that. His comments and the numbers that he's taken from all the school boards across the province he's put down

on paper. He's come up with the conclusion that in essence the Calgary board has the highest overhead, while what they're paying their teachers is not the highest. He has come up with the conclusion that they do have the highest overhead of any school board in the province and are paying uncertified staff somewhere in the area of approximately \$10,000 per person more than any other board in the province. This has brought in an overhead of over \$30 million and up to \$41 million more than any other board in the province as well, obviously affecting the Calgary board of education, which we're all fairly aware is under a lot of pressure these days, as they're in tough negotiations with the ATA and trying to come up with answers to where they're going to find that money. They're sitting there with this large overhead that has limited them and have painted themselves in a corner over the last number of years, making it very difficult for the existing board to come up with the opportunities they're looking for to meet the teachers' needs as well as the future students' needs.

11:06

In your opening comments you talked as well about student health. I'm curious: how do we communicate better so that the public and the parents have a better understanding of where the dollars break down that you're putting into the system, \$600 million over the next three years, \$220 million in the next year? How does that affect their student health? How does it affect their ESL? It somehow doesn't seem to be getting to the average person in Calgary right now. Is there a better way that we can facilitate that communication so that people understand that this is actually happening and here's where it's going?

On page 125 you show an item for \$1.926 million in dedicated revenue, and I'm just wondering if you can explain for me what this accounts for. That would be really helpful.

Another specific question, on page 127, the teachers' pensions liability fund. Now, that's increased from \$63 million to \$85.5 million, so I'd like to understand that a little better. It's interesting. You know, back in '93-94 when we were going through the restructuring, I know there was a lot of pressure on the teachers because there was a new agreement coming back, and we were saying: how are we going to take care of an unfunded liability for the teachers' pension? I was hoping that was the restructuring that was done, that it was taken care of. So my concern being: are we now at a point where a larger portion of teachers' cheques are going to have to go to that as well?

I know it's very tough if you look at the deductions off an average teacher's cheque: union fees, pension fees, and the other deductions for federal and provincial tax as well. It certainly takes a big chunk of their cheque, and they do a really important job for Albertans, for Calgarians. With all those deductions the bottom line is: how much money are they still having in their pockets? My concern is that this could lead to a larger amount that wouldn't be able to get into their pockets.

Another couple of specific questions I have are around high school completion rates. Across the province and across the country we have an understanding that the higher the education, the better the potential for success. Are we getting a higher completion rate? What is it today? How do we address that so that we have as close to 100 percent as possible, obviously that being the ultimate goal. Having every child that goes through our school system get that is not exactly realistic, but what can we do to move it as close to that as possible?

Some of the other folks in here today have spoken in regards to math results, and I would like to get a little better feeling on how you are addressing improving the secondary math results. If this is the new applied math that you're putting in, is that really addressing all

the needs? Is it just taking care of a sector of the problem? The overall picture on that would be helpful for me as well.

Does the business plan also address access to services for children with special needs completely? Do you see that you're going to, over the next three-year period, meet all those needs completely? Are you concerned at all in regards to not meeting the special needs, ESL, the different handicaps that we see as demands coming up? Is there projected growth in those particular areas?

I think that's all I have for now, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. Thank you.

I'll call on Mr. Hierath.

MR. HIERATH: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, I'd like to just start off by saying some things about the restructuring that went on in '95 and '96 with regards to equity funding- I know some of the other members have brought it up- in the consolidation of school districts and the realignment that had to take place across the province, particularly in the consolidation of school districts in rural parts, the smaller school districts in the province. One of the things that appeared to be a fairly substantive change also at that time was the school-based management. It seems to me that there's a real mixed bag out there about what the meaning of school-based management is. I'm wondering how you and your department are monitoring the school-based management and if it is as wide a variety of management as I think it is. Some school districts welcomed school-based management and perhaps others didn't. Maybe school councils or school principals were the same way: some of them embraced it and some of them didn't at the school level. So I'm wondering how that's being monitored by Alberta Education and by you in particular, Mr. Minister.

Also on that note, accountability of school budgets and the guidelines of school budgets. How is the accountability back to taxpayers of money in school budgets? I get the feeling that in some school budgets the administration of the school, the principals, account directly to school councils for how money is spent. In other schools it seems that the principal possibly accounts to the school trustees. I don't know exactly where that sits.

With regards to the 7 percent, or \$221 million, increase in education funding for the coming year, in your goals and business plan you state that this funding increase anticipates enrollment growth of 2 percent and recognizes the higher cost of education programs by increasing funding rates by 3 percent. When teachers in my constituency read that, they do want to have the feeling that class size may be decreased. I have had teachers in my constituency tell me that they would give up pay raises in lieu of less students in classrooms. They do tell me that classroom size is unmanageable in some cases. But it seems that that kind of an issue gets lost when the ATA and school boards start to negotiate, or I'm wondering whether it does or not. I do concur with what some of the other members have said about classroom size. It seems to me that teachers will get more militant and rightfully so. You know, they try to stay with it by demanding higher wages because classroom sizes are higher, and it becomes a vicious circle. I'm wondering specifically what we might do to address that.

The school-based incentive program. I'm not exactly clear when you expect that to be operational. The guidelines for it- I'm not sure in my mind whether they've been developed or whether they are being developed. I do applaud you for going down that road. I think incentives are good things, not bad things, but I do hope that they are able to be objective and transparent, to have good measuring devices. I'm also not sure on the school performance incentive program whether the money goes to the school district or directly from the provincial government to the school.

Those are the only questions that I have at this time, Mr. Chairman.

11:16

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. I've got about three minutes left for the government side. Did you want to go ahead, Mark, or do you want to add it on to the others?

Oh. Gary wanted to make a few comments. Just briefly then.

MR. MAR: Just maybe some quick ones, Mr. Chairman.

Just a quick comment about Banded Peak school. I don't know if the education critic from the Liberal side has gone to that school, but it is an extraordinary place in Bragg Creek. There is a recognition that technology will play an increasingly important role in our education system and that there must be a focus on teaching not only kids how to use technology but to make sure that our teachers have the right kind of skills that are required.

It is in my opinion a model school, and it is not inexpensive to operate that school. It does require a large commitment of money from not just the Rocky View school division but those school divisions where they choose to send a teacher to that school for an entire year for their own professional development in a classroom setting. It is an extraordinary place, and I applaud the kind of work that's being done there. I hope that it provides a model and an encouragement for other school jurisdictions to do the same thing.

High school completion rates have for a long time been at about 69 percent. Now they're at 70 percent. It is increasingly difficult to improve the high school completion rate when the economy is doing as well as it is in the province of Alberta, but it is critical that we do try our best to improve that completion rate. My prediction for the future is that there will be two kinds of Canadians: those that are well educated and those that are barely employable. Accordingly, we think it'll be important to continue to do that.

A very specific question was asked on page 125: the \$1.926 million for dedicated revenue. That money comes from \$600,000 in high school transcripts and \$400,000 for the Telus Learning Connection, for a total of \$1 million in program 1, and then in program 3, \$275,000 for diploma exam rewrite fees, \$51,000 for the sale of diploma examination questions and classroom assessment materials to third parties, and \$600,000 for fees related to teacher certification services.

THE CHAIRMAN: Sorry to interrupt, hon. minister, but the government's hour is up now. I don't know if you want to go to answering the questions from the opposition side or entertain more questions.

MR. MAR: I'll be happy to hear questions from the member that I've not yet heard from and then perhaps try and sum up at the end of that.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. We'll call on Colleen Soetaert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Minister. I'm pleased to have this opportunity to be here today. I also want to thank your staff that is present here today. I know they'll be spending hours after either replying to or filling in some of the questions that we haven't had the opportunity to chat about.

I also figure as part of your staff, of course, the many teachers and people who provide all the services that it takes to provide for our children. I guess as the minister you must feel the responsibility that they are your staff and that their wellness and their morale are very important.

I do have some concerns about the morale of the ranks, you might say. When I hear people talking about- well, when you boil down all the numbers, what it really means is a 3 percent instruction grant. Then people say: well, teachers are going to get a 3 or a 4 percent

raise, an increase. Then we hear people talking about: well, teachers would maybe agree to a smaller class size and less money. I think that's a terrible dilemma for even them to have to discuss. I know that when we got our 5 percent back, none of us were faced with: "Well, do you want to sit on more committees or get your 5 percent? Do you want to have a larger constituency or get your 5 percent?" That wasn't part of the mix when we got our 5 percent back.

Now, we see all these questions and education providers talking amongst themselves saying: well, God, if I didn't have to mark 34 papers at the end of the day, maybe it might be worth not getting the raise. I think that's an unfair predicament to put them in. I know that how much money is enough money is the chicken-and-egg question. So within that I have some questions about where we put the dollars and how we best serve our children by also taking care of the people who provide for them by teaching.

I want to start with- I know it's been mentioned before- the math program for grade 10. My very specific question on that is: where will the present math 13 students fall? I know you've corresponded with our critic. I have met with teachers in St. Albert and Spruce Grove and Sturgeon, and they have told me the math applied will be a tremendous expense to deliver, just a tremendous expense to really deliver it the way it should be delivered, just to get the materials. You know, cutting oranges and peeling them is just a small part of it, but the cogs and the wheels for the whole program- they're wondering where the money is going to come from to actually deliver 10 applied. Math 10 pure they feel is quite academic, which is fine.

The problem in there is that if math 13 is gone, where do those kids go who fall between the ability of getting a 50 percent to a 65 percent? If they can't do applied or pure, they're either going to make trouble in the class and not learn and fail it, or they will drop out or take math 14, which is probably below their level. So that's the group of kids I am truly worried about, because they used to be able to get into NAIT and maybe Grant MacEwan with the math 13, 23, 33 program under their belts.

We can teach teachers all we like. We can give them the tools to teach the courses, and I'm sure they can deliver the course, but I don't want a whole chunk of students that just can't do the applied or the pure and are too good for the 14. I really haven't heard an answer to that yet. There hasn't been an opportunity I realize, and maybe this is something that we'll get straightened out this year.

11:26

You well know I taught a lot of those students who fell into that 13 category. School is a tough road for some of them, but they can usually do the 13 and go on to other academic areas that are more to their interest. It's amazing how well they do when they find something of their interest. So I have real concerns over it.

I have several teachers and administrators calling me saying: I don't know where this is going. I'm glad you've given it another year to work out the kinks. I appreciate that. I really hope that the frontline workers who deliver this and who know the kids and who will deal with that troubled kid who is in a class that is not suited for him or her know, and I hope they are included in part of the solution to this.

I won't dwell too long on the pupil/teacher ratio, because several people have dealt with it, but I see it as part of a bigger dilemma. We have school boards who have decided that they can't deliver quality education at this level of funding, so they've run deficits. Maybe that's a philosophy that they've decided on: "You know what? I don't care that we're going in debt. The reality is we have to deliver good public education." So they decide to run a debt.

Then we have school boards who say: we will not run a debt; it is our mandate to not run a debt. They make changes by having 34

children in a class consistently across the board, by losing programs that other school boards offer who are running a debt. I don't know if I'm clear in the dilemma that I see. So where do I want my child to go to school? Well, maybe with the school board who is willing to run a debt, because they won't be crowded in that classroom. That's the dilemma. I don't know the answer to it. I don't know how you're addressing it.

You know, Sturgeon and Parkland will not run a debt. They are good money managers, and they're very concerned about it. Edmonton borders along Sturgeon for part of it, as well as Parkland, and maybe there's a school there that says: hey, we can't deliver it any way. I'm not faulting either board. If I were sitting on that school board, I'd probably be one who would say: we're delivering good quality education and to heck with consequences; that's what I want. So I see that as real dilemma, and as a result in some of my schools I see huge class sizes.

Speaking to parent-teacher interviews. I was out in my neck of the woods, 34 children in a class. Trying to fit in quality time with those parents to let them know how each student is doing is almost impossible. At the end of the year this one teacher said to me: "You know, at the end of the year I always think: could I have done more? Could I have touched more kids? You know, with 26, 27, 28, boy, there were very few that fell through the cracks, but this year I've got 34. Though they're average and pretty good kids, I know I'm missing some."

You know what I realized? Part of that is parents' responsibility, I know, but I also know that teachers are not there as a job. I really believe it's a calling for most of them, and that I think even adds to the stress because they can't reach the kids like they'd like to. Maybe that's part of the resentment that I sense around the province. I really believe that the minister is doing the best job he can with the money you have. We may disagree on some of the programs, of course, and some of the deliveries, et cetera, but that resentment from teachers I think stems from their own frustration at not being able to deliver education like they would like to. So that's part of my concern.

I really have to spend a moment- and I know it's been talked about- on this incentive program. I've got to ask: whose dream baby was this? I'd love the handout you give schools that says: this is what you can do. I'd like to know who was consulted, if you don't mind. Were teachers or parents part of this initiative? I'm looking as a parent: what would qualify for improving the school where my son goes? More guest speakers next year? More field trips? Winning the basketball tournament? Maybe even more students going into a fine arts program. Maybe that's an incentive. I don't know.

My concern with this is that our school is going to have to hire somebody half-time to figure out: okay; what can we put down on paper that would show that we've done more than the year before? Dare I say this? I'm not slamming any professionals out there, but if I were looking at it as maybe a teacher and as a parent, "Okay; what form can we fill out to get more money for this school?"- I hate to use the word "manipulate," but unless it's very, very structured and if it's very structured, how do you evaluate the magic moment in a classroom when a kid gets it, when a kid suddenly can tell time? You can't evaluate that. This performance incentive to me may work well in the workforce for inputs and outputs and products, but children all have different times in their lives when they excel. Sometimes it may be grade 6 when that achievement test is there, and sometimes it may be grade 8 when that achievement test isn't there.

If a grade 6 class gets 7 percent higher on average than they did the year before, but you're only going to count a 3 percent cap of improvement, as far as I understand, what does that mean for the

next year? They'll have to get even higher. So are we going to encourage mediocrity by saying: "Oh, no, don't improve too much this year. You've got a real bright bunch of kids coming through this next year, and they're excellent students." But what's it going to do the following year? We'll lose that money. I don't know if you've thought of that. I'd love to hear the answers to it. I want to see how this will work.

I'll eat crow if I'm wrong, but I'm afraid the ministry is going to be eating crow in a couple of years when they say: well, we had to draw so many restrictions around us, we limited schools, and it got so that teachers were teaching to a test. Often for our younger kids teaching to a test means vocabulary. Science is applied. It's experiments, and it's all kinds of things. But when you come to a written achievement test, it's almost a vocabulary test for our younger students.

That's \$66 million, I believe. I really wonder how it's going to be distributed fairly. Will it be the schools who know how to play the game of filling out forms and jumping the hoops? That's my concern. If that's it, then there will be some parent councils that catch on pretty quick and teachers that figure: ho, ho, I've got to keep last year's test because I'm going to teach to a test. To me that's a crime. I don't want to have to teach to a test. I want to teach students, and I want to teach them how to learn. I know you know my bias in this area, and I'm actually quite proud of it. So there are my concerns about that incentive program.

If I had the answer to this, I'd willingly give it. I have had some concerns expressed to me about the home schooling situation. I very much support parents' rights and abilities to choose the schools, whether they be charter, private, public, or home schools, but I have come across concerns where children who are being home schooled are coming back into the school system at least two years behind. I have some excellent home schoolers out in my constituency who I chat with regularly. I spoke to one who is one of the organizers out there and I said: how do we catch those kids? How do we make sure that some kids aren't falling through the cracks? You know, we even have situations where until the new children's services are set up and as people move jurisdictions, until that is all flawless, can you see the concern of children who may be at risk, may be possibly abused? Their families move out of the public system, move to a different area, and then possibly home school.

11:36

That's an extreme, and I am in no way insulting those people who home school and do a marvelous job, but I have seen families in my own riding whose children are coming back into the system way too far behind. I realize that they feel it's intrusive to evaluate, but I don't know. I know they're tied to school boards, but often the school board is a computer and a phone. It's not a person who shows up to see what's going on. I know school boards, with their stretch of dollars right now- I don't know if those people who are coordinators of home schoolers or whatever their title is have the time to assist those parents enough or to help in their evaluation. I'm not saying that they have to take the same tests, but certainly they should be at the same level in some capacity as the children of the same school grade in the public system.

I didn't mean that whole spiel at all to slam home schoolers, because I have many friends out in my area, but they themselves know some of the weak spots. I don't know if they have the answers for addressing that, and I have real concerns about those children.

To go to something quite different- and I'm hopping all over the place because as things come to mind, I write them down. I think I'm so fortunate that I get to have this undivided time with you, Mr. Minister, so I'm going to hop all over the place.

In St. Albert a couple of the schools have pine shakes on them,

and that's a tremendous expense for a school board, an unexpected expense. It's not due to their decision that they earlier made. So I'm wondering: has the minister looked at that? I don't know how many schools would qualify for that, but I know that that's the situation for the greater St. Albert Catholic. So that's just a small question on the side.

There are two schools, not right in my riding but very near: Guthrie school at the base and Muir Lake school just west and north of Spruce Grove. Both have got asbestos problems. They're old facilities in need of work. I know that we could list many across the province, but when it's asbestos and the children are getting sick and the learning situation is impossible- we wouldn't sit in those unsafe conditions, and we certainly cannot ask our children to try to learn in those situations. Those are just two schools that come to mind that I've parents calling me about that I'm sure you've heard about, but I wanted to make note of those.

Parkland Village school is in my riding. It is a school that is in a mobile-home park. Some of the children there, because of population changes and moves, et cetera, et cetera- in many ways that school could be compared to an inner-city school. I'm just wondering. It seems that inner-city schools in Edmonton and Calgary, I believe, have some sort of extra programming, extra money for different programs. Maybe I'm wrong. Are there qualifiers for schools that are not located in Edmonton and Calgary but who I think may qualify, with the same types of children and the same types of disadvantages, you might say? Would they qualify? Certainly I know that when the literacy program first came in, they did not qualify. Now, I'm not sure why, but I would just like to ask that question.

I have a question about teacher burnout. Are there stats kept on that, or is it too hard because they leave for different reasons?

THE CHAIRMAN: I'm sorry to interrupt.

MRS. SOETAERT: I was just on a roll.

THE CHAIRMAN: I wasn't paying attention; you actually had an extra minute.

MRS. SOETAERT: An extra minute. Oh, my.

Well, thank you very much. I'm hoping to have another opportunity. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay, hon. minister.

MR. MAR: Mr. Chairman, thank you very much. I appreciate the comments made by members, particularly the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, who I'm sure will use her model behaviour in this venue to carry on to other venues of the Legislature.

Mr. Chairman, earlier on when I was addressing some general observations about some of the comments that were made by opposition, I wanted to say that there seemed to be a great focus placed on resources. Again, I don't discount the fact that money is required to make our school system run well, and I don't discount the importance of teachers and resources, and I don't discount issues as they relate to things like pupil/teacher ratios and such. However, I will say that in my view we can be overly focused on that to the detriment of really looking at an overall big picture of education in the province of Alberta.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods talked about using fiscal effort I think was his expression as a measurement of, you know, the quality of our education. My recollection is that he suggested, as an example, a percentage of gross domestic product

spent on education as being a measure of our performance in evaluating education in the province. In looking at fiscal measurements, whether it's per capita spending or whether it's percentage of GDP spent on education, I think that can really lead to a misleading notion of what education ought to be doing.

As an example, if we look at per student spending in Canada, the highest spenders are found in Yukon and the Northwest Territories. Yet I'm not certain of what goes on in those schools. I'm sure that they do the best they can, but I'm not certain if anybody in Alberta would say that we don't have a better education system than they perhaps do in those jurisdictions. One recognizes that in their education budgets they spend a great deal of money on transportation and plant operations and maintenance because they have such sparse and distant population distributions in those jurisdictions. So to simply take the number of dollars that is in an Education department's budget and divide by the number of students I think can be a very misleading measurement of the education system.

I suppose that what we could do if we wanted to use that as a measure is take dollars that we spend in Social Services and in Health and in Justice that deal with students of school age, as they do perhaps in some other jurisdictions, and we could roll those dollars into the Department of Education and then purport to have greater per student spending, but of course people would recognize that that wouldn't make any difference at all to the delivery of education, which must focus dollars, in my opinion, on classroom resources. We certainly do that here in the province of Alberta.

On the measurement of percentage of GDP spent on education, I'd have to check my records, but to the best of my recollection the province that would measure the highest on that scale would be the province of Newfoundland, and that is because in our GDP per capita the denominator is a much larger dollar figure than it would be in the province of Newfoundland. Accordingly, to look at fiscal effort expressed as a percentage of gross domestic product would be again, in my view, perhaps a bit misleading.

11:46

The issue of mathematics has been brought up by a number of people including the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, and I agree that it's a concern. It's an area that we want kids to do better in. We note that students are generally doing well in most subject areas across the province, but math is one of the areas where we'd like to see much improvement. I think the Member for Calgary-Buffalo suggested that maybe we were focusing too much of our attention in support for the regional consortia on the subject of mathematics, but I can say that it is the area that seems to have the most amount of attention paid to it for good reason.

In other areas such as science, as an example, our results have been exceptionally good. That's because we've gone through a process of evaluating our curriculum and making sure that our curriculum is solid, and we've gone through the transitional period already of the introduction of that curriculum. We are now going through a transitional period with respect to the introduction of a new math curriculum.

I think the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert asked questions like: what kind of resources will be available; what will happen to these kids? I think that's a fair comment, and that's the reason why the mandatory implementation of this particular curriculum has been delayed by a year. But I think it would also be fair comment to say that when the curriculum was developed through the western Canadian protocol, teachers throughout Alberta, of course including nominees from the Alberta Teachers' Association, were involved in the development of the curriculum from its inception back in 1994, and that has taken place throughout the period from '94 through the present. When people ask, "Where

does this curriculum come from; who's asking for it?" well, teachers themselves. Teachers of mathematics and postsecondary institutions had a great deal of input in terms of the type of elements that were included in that program.

It is a fair comment as to whether there were sufficient resources or time set aside in order to implement this, but I've listened carefully to those comments and acted accordingly in terms of devoting the dollars, \$2.2 million, for in-servicing at the junior and senior high school levels and as well holding off the mandatory implementation of the curriculum for a further year.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona talked about the issue of perhaps setting class sizes for different grade levels. While class size is an issue that is raised often, I will say that after speaking with many different parents and of course teachers themselves and Bauni Mackay of the Alberta Teachers' Association, I don't think it would be prudent to set a provincial standard for class size. Bauni Mackay advises me- and I believe this is true from my own observations- that class size is dependent on a lot of different things. For example, for safety reasons I can understand why in an automotives shop we would have only 10 or 15 students in a classroom, and in other classroom settings it might be more appropriate to have larger classes.

It depends on a lot of different factors, in my opinion. It depends on what's being taught. It depends on who is teaching it, how they teach it. Because of that, I don't think it's a decision that should rest with the Minister of Education or the government to determine in each case what the appropriate class size is.

What I observe in schools and among school boards is that generally speaking there are smaller classroom sizes for younger students, and then the class sizes increase, and then in high school, because of the proliferation of options that has occurred, some classes end up being smaller, there being a smaller number of students interested in certain subject areas. That necessarily precipitates a larger classroom size perhaps in another class. So that's a decision that I think rests properly with school boards in terms of the allocations of resources.

I can say that there have been some innovative things that I have observed. An example would be a junior high school where 125 students learn in the same math class. Ordinarily they would be taught by five different teachers in classroom settings of 25 or 26 students per classroom. What they do instead is that they have taken one teacher whose teaching style seems to lend itself to the learning styles of the majority of those 125 students, and that one teacher teaches all 125 students at the same time. What I'm told is that the majority of those students are able to follow that particular teacher. Seventy-five percent of the students are able to follow, and 25 percent of the students from time to time have difficulty keeping up. Those 25 percent of students, or roughly 30 or 40 students, have the benefit of the remaining four teachers, who teach them in tutorial sessions in effective classroom sizes of 8 to 10 to 1.

That is an interesting reallocation of existing resources. It challenges the notion of what a classroom should look like. In my opinion I think that is an innovative thing to do, and I'll be interested in seeing how students do under that kind of a teaching model. It is perhaps an extension of a team teaching system that we more typically see with perhaps a couple of teachers, but here it's a situation where five teachers are team teaching, and I'm quite impressed by that.

I think the issue was raised by the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona about inflation having an effect on our schools. He went back to comparing school spending back in 1993-94 with the present and asked the question: are we behind? I guess I would have to respond by saying very strongly that we have a very different system today than we did in 1993-94. At the risk of repeating myself again

and again and as I've often commented in the Legislature, in 1993-94 we had 181 school boards. We now have 60. We used to pay for school capital through the issuance of debentures. We don't do that anymore. We paid down some of those debentures. That's freed up millions of dollars. The reduction in the number of school boards has saved tens of millions of dollars.

So over that same period of time we've seen that the dollars we spend in education expressed as a percentage of resources for the classroom has gone up to a full three-quarters of the dollars that we spend. Three out of every four dollars that we spend go to classroom resources, and I think that is a prudent thing to do. It is focusing on where our dollars should be spent. Again, as a general comment- and I know that many others have said this- it's not a question of how much we spend so much as where we spend it and making sure that the amount of money that we do have, the sizable amount of money that we do have is spent properly.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo talked about a number of different things, some of which I've already addressed: the subjects of the math curriculum and regional consortia. He did talk also about the issue of property taxes in the city of Calgary and if they are being used outside of the city of Calgary. Again, I think I've addressed that in general terms in that it is a matter of fairness and equity. But I also point out that Calgary from time to time has been a net recipient of dollars from the overall equity funding framework, so we should not be too quick to suggest that Calgary would always be a net contributor. It is sometimes a net recipient.

The Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert talked a bit about teachers and the morale and if I consider them to be my staff. I have to say that they are an absolutely vital partner to the enterprise of education in this province, and they play a very important and vital role, but I don't consider them to be my staff, although they are people that I have a great deal of respect for.

11:56

Actually, that reminds me of some comments the Member for Calgary-Buffalo made with respect to whether I was of the view that the burden of a deficit should be placed upon the shoulders of experienced teachers. I said no such thing, and I want in the firmest comments to state that I have a great deal of respect for teachers. My observations with respect to experienced teachers is not a comment on the quality of their teaching but on the fact that any human resource strategy for any organization must include a balance of new and experienced teachers. In my mind the issue is one of the quality of teachers and not necessarily of whether they are young or whether they are old. So I want to say in the strongest terms that I am not placing the blame of deficits upon experienced teachers. That is not the point I've been trying to emphasize.

An interesting point was raised with respect to school boards who ignore fiscal parameters. I'd have to say that the overwhelming majority of school boards in this province are fiscally prudent, and I believe that we share much in common in terms of making sure that we can provide schooling that is in the best interests of our students, but recognize also that there is a fiscal responsibility to make sure that we do not spend more money than we have. School boards ignoring fiscal parameters: I suppose if there is a school board that does that, they do so at their peril.

With respect to the school performance improvement program, questions were raised as to, you know, what kind of indicators would be appropriate for local measurements of improvement. Could it be issues like the number of alternative programs that a school offers or the number of options that a school provides? It can be those things. It will be a matter for local decision as to the types of local criteria they wish to be evaluated on. I will say this: I made the observation from time to time that the only person that wants a change is a wet

baby. I'd have to say that this kind of change is a significant shift in thinking as far as how it is that we fund schools. I am prepared to be criticized if this doesn't work two years hence, but I will not accept the criticism that we didn't try to do something different. Combining this with the increases to the basic instructional grant rate I think that it's something that makes sense.

We think that we have a good system, but we certainly want to improve it. As I've said many times, you don't have to be bad to want to do better. I think the increase to the basic instructional grant is a recognition that we have a good system that we want to continue, but the school performance improvement program is one different way of looking at how we should motivate our teachers and how we should recognize how education is a team effort requiring not only the efforts of teachers but also at a school level of the principal, of the custodial staff, of the teachers, of the teacher/librarians, of the parents who are involved in the operation of the school.

On the subject of school capital, the Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert made mention of a number of schools both in and around her riding, and to the best of my recollection I think the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods also mentioned the issue of school buildings. Members will recall that a task force headed up by the hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake has come up with a number of recommendations with respect to school capital, and those recommendations are very good ones. I think the evaluation of school facilities through the audit process over the next year or so will be very helpful in terms of helping identify the types of conditions our schools find themselves in.

With respect to the specific issue, for example, of asbestos in Guthrie school, I've attended Guthrie school and seen firsthand some of the conditions in that school. I can say categorically that whenever issues of health and safety of students have come up, the Department of Education has always acted promptly and without hesitation to deal with those issues. Guthrie school will be an example. In other cases throughout the province where health and safety issues have arisen, we've gone in and we've taken a look. School boards have been very good about identifying the specific problems and identifying the types of capital plans they have in order to address some of those problems. So that will be the case also with Guthrie school.

Mr. Chairman, maybe I'll just make this last comment on capital.

THE CHAIRMAN: Sorry, hon. minister; I was just going to call. You used up the 20 minutes. You may be able to get in after the next set of questions.

Which member would like to go? Dr. Massey.

DR. MASSEY: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I would like to preface the second round of remarks with some comments. There have been some comments about the opposition and our focus on the resources. I think you have to understand where we're coming from. We're strong supporters of a public school system, and in this city that history dates back to the 1880s, 1882. The city and the ratepayers at that time voted to have the system supported out of tax dollars. We're interested in a strong, open, publicly supported school system, open to everyone regardless of creed, race, or colour and particularly to all regardless of parents' ability to pay. That remains a strong goal for us and something that we value.

We've made great progress. If you look at the last 30 years, the number of elementary teachers that hold a university degree is now 100 percent. Thirty years ago that would have been- I'm not sure of the figures- 50, 60 percent. So that's in terms of qualifications.

If you look at what's happened to teacher/pupil ratio, during that time the government stopped funding classrooms by square footage

size. They used to fund them at 1,000 square feet per classroom because of the number of students. The drop in student numbers in classes caused them to drop the square footage to 750 because they weren't accommodating the same number of students.

If you look at the addition of speech therapists and psychologists and librarians and technology, we've made great progress. We applaud that progress, and we're going to try to do our bit to make sure it continues. I guess we're alarmed when we see what seems to us the government drifting away from that ideal, in particular user fees and parent fund-raising. That's where I'd like to address my next comments.

[Mr. Stevens in the chair]

I was at Greenfield elementary school last night at a parent meeting. There were about 100 parents or a few more there. One of the parents stood up and made comments to the effect that she thought her role in the school was not to raise money but to be there to assist and support teachers and the classroom. Great applause broke out. I've heard it over and over again- at Kate Chegwin a couple of weeks ago. When the issue of parent fund-raising is raised, there's almost unanimous agreement among parents that they're fund-raising fatigued. They don't see it as their role, and they resent the pressure that's being put on them to raise those dollars. The Auditor General in his report made some comments about fund-raising. I think the comment was:

Although \$105 million in school generated funds was reported last year, 77% of school jurisdictions' auditors had concerns over the inadequacy of controls over the completeness of this revenue.

We don't know how much money is being raised. We don't know how much money is going into basic instruction for textbooks.

12:06

There have been comments made about equity. I think there are great inequities creeping into the system and that already are there amongst schools based on parent fund-raising. I go into schools in my constituency, into a junior high school that has marvelous computer technology and access for students. They run a casino and bingos yearly, and that money goes into those endeavours. I have another junior high school where parents aren't involved to that extent, and the contrast in what's available to students who live blocks apart is dramatic. It's a direct result of parent fund-raising.

So while we're talking about equity, dollar equity, in terms of the dollars distributed by the government, is one kind of equity, but there is inequity. The notion of that local fund-raising is of real concern, and it parallels the concern the government had with local boards raising different revenues because of their tax base. I think it's a concern, and I'd like to see it addressed in terms of, first of all, getting some information on just exactly what is going on. It's really hard. Some of those parent groups resent being asked how much they're raising, and if some of them are forced to report, they will go and buy the equipment and drop it at the school door. They aren't going to be subjected to regulation or accountability. So it's a thorny problem, but I think if we really are concerned about equity, then it's something we should at least get a handle on and know what's happening.

The Auditor General has addressed the issue several times. To talk about how much funding each student in the province gets, to say it's equal- he indicates we don't know because of the kind of extra dollars that are being placed in those programs. I do know, because we have tried to at least use the reporting done by school boards- we've kept track of it for the last three or four years- that it's steadily increasing. I know that in response to my questions in the Legislature the minister indicated that these were often flow-through funds from cafeterias, et cetera. If that's the case, the price of

hamburgers is really going up in this province in some jurisdictions, because the increase is dramatic in many school districts in terms of that funding and those flow-through dollars.

So it's a concern, and it's a concern of parents. I think you can't look at that fund-raising without also looking back and asking a question about adequacy. If the funding for schools is adequate, then why are parents engaged in this kind of activity, activity that used to be confined to extras like the end-of-year trips and different kinds of music programs, et cetera?

If I can move on. Technology in schools was used as an example. I want to know if the government has a long-term plan. When do they realistically expect- I think the year 2000 was set- that schools will reach the 1 to 5 ratio that's out there in terms of computers to students?

[Mr. Severtson in the chair]

What's going on in schools in terms, again, of equity? I think there is great inequity right now. I had a call from a principal from out of town who said that he had 320 students and 20 computers and was really frustrated. I've talked to a lot of schools about this. The evergreening is a huge problem: how do they keep the equipment up to date? I had one of the principals talk about the notion of industry dropping off their used computers and how that sounded good but in fact just didn't solve the problem. You ended up with a bunch of mixed equipment, none of it compatible, and the companies standing around expecting great thanks and applause for what they were doing. It was well intended, but in terms of being functional within the school, it was less than useful.

I think there's been another myth perpetuated with the technology notion, and that's that somehow or other this is going to save money. I think the minister touched on it when he talked about the model school, that that's probably not going to be the case, that it's probably going to be more expensive. I think of sitting in a classroom up in Fort Chip hooked into a university professor at the University of Alberta- maybe it was more a commentary on the professor's performance than on the students- getting a course. It was an interactive one; they could talk to the professor. I asked them what they wanted. They said that they wanted a teacher, that they needed a body right there. So for those who have faith that this is going to be a money-saving proposition, I really question that.

The notion of partnerships has been raised and the involvement of Telus. I was in the Lethbridge area, where Telus has been involved. I confess I don't know all the details, but the fear there was: what's going to happen when Telus is finished two years hence? Where are they going to be in terms of the provision of that service? So the technology thing, the variety of equipment, evergreening: just where are we going? I think it's almost out of control in terms of having any handle on it. There are great inequities, depending on where you happen to go to school and even within a particular school district.

Just a couple of comments about home schooling. Again, when I was in the Lethbridge area, I met with a group of teachers who were really distressed with what was happening. A grade 7 teacher talked about youngsters being placed back in her class in December who had been home schooled and were reading at a grade 2 level and the kind of demands that that made on the school's resources to try to get in place the help for those youngsters. That particular school I think had had seven returns from home schooling, making horrendous demands on the school's resources to try to cope with what they were being faced with trying to remedy. I wonder about the monitoring that's being done.

I was talking to a reporter who was starting to look into the whole business of home schooling, and it seemed to be an area where there

are going to be some stories that those of us who are involved in education are not going to be happy about when they actually surface: the notion of what's going on and what's happening to some children who are being home schooled. Again, that's not to deny that some are doing an excellent job. I've tried to work with some in my own constituency, have their children here and help parents who are trying to get them out and to enrich their programs. But I'm fearful of the monitoring that's going on by some boards, not all of them.

MR. MAR: Of it being insufficient?

DR. MASSEY: Yeah.

A number of other speakers have talked about the performance funding. I looked at it, as I'm sure everyone did once it was announced, and I still can't understand why the partners, the teachers, were not involved in the discussion of what was going to be planned before it was announced. But that's a different issue. I looked at some of the schemes that are used south of the border and the information given that there are really three states- Connecticut, Kentucky, and New Jersey- that have what you could call complete or full-blown schemes in preparation. But they seem to operate quite differently. For instance, the Kentucky scheme provides additional money for the schools that do poorly. So additional assistance can be given to schools that don't do well, that don't make the gains.

12:16

That's true of the scheme in Connecticut. Those students who are measured and perform below remedial levels are open to additional school funds, which seems to make eminently good sense. If you're having trouble and you can't get youngsters up to some performance level in terms of expected performance, then maybe you need more resources. I thought it was interesting that we would borrow some notions from elsewhere about student performance and spending yet seem to interpret it quite differently from other boards. They do allow for boards, for districts and schools that increase. They do reward them too, but there is this other piece of it, which I think is rather interesting.

I thought that in the review I read, it was rather interesting that there was some reservation. They said really that some of the schemes work, some of them don't, but for all the time and effort put into them, they really didn't seem to be that worthy. It just depended on the characteristics of the students and so many other factors that there really was some question about going into the whole performance business.

They also made an additional observation about the use of achievement tests and international tests and indicated that international tests are structured for comparative data but that most experts caution against using those tests as a basis for educational reform or educational funding. I thought it was an interesting observation for us in Alberta, given the route we seem to be going. I guess basically my question is: what are the benefits that we expect from performance funding? Just what do we think are going to be gains and what is going to be the downside of this scheme? Is that the best use of resources at this time, given the state of the government's funding?

I had a question about the School Buildings Board and the role of the School Buildings Board. I've been out at a number of schools: sometimes I follow the minister; sometimes he follows me. I had a call from just outside Calgary from a school board who asked me the question: is the School Buildings Board an autonomous authority? They had the feeling from their correspondence and their

communications with the department that the School Buildings Board made decisions that were not subject to ministerial approval or disapproval, that they were autonomous. That's not my understanding of the . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, I hate to interrupt, but the time has elapsed. The whole hour is up.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: At this time I'll call on Mark Hlady.

MR. HLADY: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to move a motion right now pursuant to Standing Orders 56 and 57 that the designated supply subcommittee on Education today now conclude its consideration and debate on the '99-2000 estimates of the Department of Education prior to the conclusion of the four-hour period allocated.

THE CHAIRMAN: Before I call the question, I want to make sure everybody knows that this motion needs unanimous consent or we continue on. All in favour of the motion by Mark Hlady?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE CHAIRMAN: Very good then.

I'll call on Mary.

MRS. O'NEILL: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I wanted to ask some questions that do pertain a bit to the budget. I'd like to ask you if there's a way in which they are inherent in the designation of the items in the budget; I'm not too sure that they're there. Maybe you can identify them.

[Mr. Stevens in the chair]

I'll speak specifically to the ways in which children learn in light of the ways teachers teach, for instance. I read an article most recently that they have identified 126 different learning modes by which children learn best. I'm sure there are many more; they probably just haven't identified them as yet. So my question is: is there anywhere in the budget where funding has been allocated to either second a teacher or an administrator who is an educational theorist to look to ways in which we can respond to the students whom we have in all their varieties of learning capabilities? Is there anything in the budget or anywhere in the budget that would identify that? Or is our budget so tight that we cannot address that kind of looking to the future for it?

My second question is something that I have heard a number of teachers say to me recently. I was always familiar with it at the high school level, but I understand it's more noticeable in some classrooms to the teachers at the elementary class level. That has to do with students with behavioural problems. I know people commonly say attention deficit disorder, but I'm thinking more of those teachers who say to me that the children come into school and some of them have never sat still in the chair. Some of them have not learned the basic human behaviour of what I'll call manners or interaction with other human beings. We seem to have a number of students who don't have that, by virtue of whatever kind of societal behaviour we accept or know about. If this is identified by a number of teachers of children with behavioural problems, if they become

disruptive to what is commonly perceived as the mode the teacher has chosen or been directed to teach in that classroom, can they be included in our special-needs funding? Are you aware of any school boards that do include them if they aren't generally directed or identified as qualifying at a provincial level?

Just those two areas that I'm curious about. I'll just conclude by saying that I think if we don't look to ways of adapting our educational system- because I do find that I walk into some schools and see teaching done in the same modality that was taught when I was in school. I have a fear of that because I think the students in the classroom are quite different. Their ability to absorb and their way to absorb much more in the learning process is quite different. The other, of course, is those who don't behaviourally fit into our expected norms.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Thanks very much.

Next on the speaking list is Gary Severtson.

12:26

MR. SEVERTSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just want to make some comments and also maybe ask some questions to the minister. I think I would like to start off- I guess what piqued my interest a little bit was the Member for Calgary-Buffalo's comments about equity and Calgary paying more than its fair share. I go back to when Jim Dinning was Minister of Education, when he went around the province and talked to various schools, school boards, and municipalities on the growing inequity in school funding. At that time there were schools that were spending up to I think \$20,000 per student and other schools down as low as \$4,000 per student. One would think, then, that the one that was spending \$20,000 per student probably had a high mill rate. In actual fact, if you analyzed it, a lot of the schools that were spending \$4,000 per student actually had the highest mill rate, and those that were spending up to \$20,000 had a low mill rate. It was definitely to do with the amount of industry and assessment they had in their jurisdiction.

The government had an equity pool of about \$80 million, if I recall rightly, but the difference between the various school boards across the province was growing wider and wider as we put more money into the equity funding. Then Jim did a lot of work trying to incorporate corporate pooling, and that's where he spent an enormous amount of time, I think about a year and a half, to come to some kind of agreement. I would say that again it was split. The Alberta School Boards Association, the Public School Boards' Association, and the Catholic school boards association couldn't even agree on how it would be done.

The various school boards were fighting one against the other, and it wasn't a case of urban versus rural. A number of rural schools were very wealthy; as well, some urban school districts were very wealthy. Then the minister changed. I think it was '93 that the minister Halvar Jonson came. He came in completely equity funding, and the government took over setting the mill rate across the province. I'd have to say that by and large it's worked very well. I say that even when I represent an area whose mill rate had to go up 25 percent after we went to provincewide taxation.

In fairness, I always have to put in a little plug for my school district at this time. At that time it was Red Deer county public school system. They were below the 75 percent average mill rate in the province, but they also had the fourth lowest spending on education. To go back to the minister's comments earlier saying that money doesn't necessarily mean quality education, they were giving a quality education and spending 75 percent. They had the fourth lowest per student spending in the province, and that's why their mill rate was below the 75 percent.

So I hope the minister- I know he represents Calgary, where the

complaint is coming from- doesn't change his mind and think that we have to go back to the system we had before, because I think it would be devastating for the kids of Alberta. So I compliment you for keeping to your guns on that even though you represent Calgary.

Another comment I would like to make is on the school performance incentive program. I find this very exciting. Quite frankly, nobody knows for sure if it's going to work. From my knowledge in looking at other jurisdictions, mainly in the United States, indeed it has worked. It has definitely worked in industry. Ever since I've been involved with schools and education, everybody seems to knock the fact that there should be an incentive: you can't pay for merit; you can't have an incentive. I don't see why it can't work. In fact, it has worked in some of the states.

To me it would be very interesting- I know the school jurisdictions get to make up 25 percent of the criteria, but what I'm really looking forward to is what type of agreements the various jurisdictions, the 60 school boards, are going to come forward with. I hope it's not just a straight across-the-board for all staff. I hope they look at some other ways they can improve education with the money they receive as a bonus, because various school boards have said that we target our funding so much and that they have no way of doing their own thing in any initiatives. This is an opportunity, in my mind, to have agreement with all staff, whether they're teachers, cleaning staff, bus drivers, or administration, that if they do receive some money, they can key some of the funding to where they think it would make a difference to their jurisdiction. So I'm looking forward to it. I think it might not work, but it sure won't hurt to try something, so I look forward to that.

I guess I would also like to mention a little bit about school facilities. As was mentioned, I chaired a task force that went around to schools and met with the general public, the school boards. I found it very interesting. I see on page 130, in 2.1.4, the dollars to be put into infrastructure. I guess the question to the minister: does he feel that that is adequate funding to maintain school facilities at the state they are now or in fact improve the facilities? With depreciation I think we have an estimate of about \$7 billion worth of school facilities, and I'm not sure in my own mind if \$140 million, I think it is, would be adequate to keep up just to the state the schools are in now, let alone improve. So it would be interesting to hear those comments.

Also, you mentioned the audit of the school facilities. When does the minister expect that audit will be done? Will it be done fairly soon so we can incorporate it in next year's budget, so we have an idea what is needed out there and document it? And I guess putting a plug in for school facilities and tying in the school performance incentive program, if the achievement isn't met to qualify for the \$66 million, does the minister have the ability in that budget year to allocate funding in a different manner? In this case into school capital after the results are in on the school performance measurement.

Then a jump to another area is the student health program. I think it's roughly \$25 million that's going into that. I understand it's funded through the Minister of Education. Does each school board- at what level do they start co-ordinating? Is it at the school board level with the health authorities? Or is it in a school-based area that they do the co-operation to work with community delivery of services in the health area?

With that, Mr. Chairman, that concludes my comments and questions.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Mr. Minister, do you have any comments to make at this time? Marlene?

MS GRAHAM: No. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: All right.

Mrs. Soetaert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to continue with some of the other concerns that I wanted to put on the table before this meeting is over.

[Mr. Severtson in the chair]

12:36

One of the things for me specifically is the transportation funding. It's interesting. Within my riding I have the Parkland school division that will be losing money with the new funding formula that's being slowly implemented, and I have the Sturgeon school division who will gain money with the new funding formula. Each has a different dilemma. One has to slowly get used to not having that money, and the other is waiting to get that money. They've been underfunded.

Sturgeon sent me a brief. The Member for Redwater I know got the same brief, and I'm sure he has forwarded it to the minister. It seems that historically supplementary requisition covered shortfalls of funding. Boards such as the Sturgeon school division operated longer bus routes and larger buses and as a result incurred a smaller shortfall and smaller requisitions. Now with the changing of this, with the new rural funding it will be based on a block grant by the rural transportation review committee. This grant uses a grade-weighted formula based on distance from the assigned school. Based on that, Sturgeon will get an increase of about \$200,000 once it's in place. I know Alberta Education decided to implement it over years. Please correct me if I'm wrong. A limited increase in any one year is 5 percent. So they've got a ways to go before they get their full funding, and they're finding that difficult with the stress that's been put on current bus contractors and employee costs and bus replacement costs. It isn't profitable to run a bus anymore, and the idea behind running a business is hopefully to make a buck.

In addition to that, new interpretations by Alberta Ed indicate that students who are eligible for transportation but transport themselves or are transported by their parents are ineligible for funding. At first glance that might seem reasonable, but the school board is still required to reserve a space for these students because they may request to ride on the bus once in a while. So it is their request and they feel that all eligible students should be funded. So that was specifically for Sturgeon.

I want to get to some really specific questions. I know our time is limited. Lately in St. Albert there was an article about the Catholic school system really deliberating over lottery dollars and what they're going to do about that. If the government keeps putting in infrastructure dollars, onetime shot, as lottery dollars, I guess what it says is that we don't value education enough to properly fund it, that we once in a while give it shots from lottery dollars. That's a dilemma that I know that board- right now the discussion is in the local paper- is going to meet about. They have some real concerns about it.

I was in the middle of asking the minister about burnout for teachers. Do you have any stats on that, or is that even possible to get? If I may be so bold as to suggest to the minister that if he wants to meet with a very wise woman, who is, I would say, the best advocate in Alberta for education, he really should have a chat with Lois Hole. She's been saying that wherever she goes too. I would recommend a visit quickly, because certainly she is a person I very much admire who believes in trusteeship and believes in children and educators and all those who provide those services. If I may be so bold, I really think that would be something that you would forever be appreciative for.

Also, a letter came to me from parents in Parkland requesting- and they sent it to Wayne Jacques' committee- consideration in the funding formula accounting for experienced teachers. There's just no two ways to cut that. The minister spoke earlier of that. Maybe that should be accounted into it. You know, often our new graduates will go out to the rural places to get their first couple of years' experience, and then as opportunities change, they often end up in the bigger centres. So you have places like St. Albert and Spruce Grove and Leduc and those areas around the city of Edmonton having a higher percentage of experienced teachers. There's no doubt that it changes what they can deliver. So I want to ask about that.

I will get very specific now. Is there any plan to increase the full funding to 475 hours of kindergarten? Right now it's at 400. I met Myer Horowitz once, and he said: I can't believe it, Colleen; back in the '70s I was lobbying MLAs to fully fund kindergarten, and here I am some 25 years later lobbying again. It was a wonderful conversation I had with him and learned quite a bit. I'm wondering if that's ever in the plan.

Prekindergarten. Other provinces are moving to those kinds of programs in addition to the 475 hours with the intent, I think, of boosting disadvantaged kids, especially with ESL, special needs, native. So I just wonder: is that even in the vision or the plan? Maybe that'd be something you could risk your neck on. We'd support you, I bet.

I see in the budget there is some money for native education. I'd love an explanation of that. As you know, I have a reserve in my riding, and most of their funding, I believe, is federal funding. Within that would you mind explaining what that supports?

The literacy program. I'm glad it's there. I can't help but question if it isn't there because of the underfunding of kindergarten a few years ago. I don't believe you were the minister at the time. Just to point that out.

I have some concerns about mild and moderate special needs. It's been indicated earlier. It seems to be mixed in with just the general per student grant, and there's no doubt that those children need extra help. I would mention that, again, if the minister can find a way to designate funds so that they are reaching those children- I know here we are back on money and funds, but I feel they're the ones that are falling through the cracks, and they're the ones we'll pay for later on.

The health services money that was announced. I look forward to seeing that being very successful. I think the best place to deliver the program is at the schools because the kids are there. That co-ordination I look forward to seeing. I'm interested in finding out more about it. I want to make sure the money actually reaches the children. So I'm interested in that.

I'd like to ask: when you plan your budget, is it based on this is how much money we have or how much is available this year, or is it based on the overall picture of what we need? Sometimes I think it's a Treasurer's reaction saying: you've got this much money; make it sell. I also want to question why support to public and separate school boards is up 7.2 percent, while private school support is up 11.2 percent. I really would like a good explanation for that. I have private schools in my riding. I have neighbours who send their children to private schools, and we have lots of good chats about it. I support their choice, but I have always said that the public school system is where the money- that's what the minister is ultimately responsible for, that public education system. So I urge you once again to look at that balance.

12:46

Do you have an idea of what the enrollment will be by school jurisdiction by September? Given the migration into this province, I'm wondering if you have any ideas on that.

I was talking to a businessman who owns a hotel, and he felt that we should really promote learning about Canada. I know it's in the curriculum, but he had the vision to say that we really should be moving our children around and making sure they get across Canada- they all go to Disneyland, but nobody goes across Canada, he said- to learn about Canada. I thought, well, just let me flag that one for the minister and see what kind of funding that gets. In reality I know we can't do that. The school programs where children do- that's with some of the fund-raising they do and the planning they do- within Canada is I think very strong, and certainly exchanges with Quebec I'd like to see encouraged.

In my riding in Broxton Park school there's a snoozeland room. I don't know if you're familiar with that kind of room, Mr. Minister. It is a room that has all kinds of different stimulation for very severely handicapped children. It's a wonderful concept, and children are reacting in very positive ways. It was totally sponsored by McDonald's. A part of me was very happy that those corporate dollars and those corporate citizens cared about those children, and the other part of me thought: is that not our role as well? Do we not try to give them the best opportunity? It was about a \$30,000 room that they renovated and changed. Anyway, if you have a chance to see that room that I've heard about, it's an interesting concept and, I think, a wonderful concept. The only way people get it now is by applying to corporate fund-raisers.

A question about computers came to me through Sturgeon. They felt that the rules of the game have kind of changed in the middle. Now they're being asked to change all their computers from Apple to IBM. To be very blunt and frank, they wanted to know who was getting rich on this scheme, and they're wondering: is it truly on the up-and-up? Who's got the contract? Where did this come from? I realize IBM is the business world and that we're going to that. I accept that. But that was the very blunt question asked of me, and I relay that to you.

I don't know if you're going to wrap up, but I know my colleague here has a few more questions. I don't know if he'll be able to ask them, so my last comment will be that I hope you've seen the movie *Mr. Holland's Opus*. It's a marvelous movie, and I think it speaks strongly of public education and the value of all programs; you know, the arts, the fine arts, the music. In it he says that if we don't promote the fine arts, we won't have anything to read and write about. I know you have just tonnes of free time to watch movies, Mr. Minister, but if you have the chance, along with meeting Lois Hole, you might enjoy that movie.

If there's time later, I have a few more, but I also realize my colleague may want to ask a few.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. I'll call on Ron Stevens.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you. It's a pleasure to be able to get back on the list to ask questions to the minister. I know that these two topics that I'm about to talk about have been raised by many of the colleagues around the table, but I think it's important to reflect upon what I've been hearing from people in Calgary-Glenmore on the areas of special needs and fund-raising. I think the context that I would like to emphasize ultimately, Mr. Minister, is the issue of monitoring and accountability as it relates to those two particular areas.

What I'd like to do is essentially share a couple of specific instances with you, Mr. Minister, which I think will help focus the point that I want to make. I have a junior high school in Calgary-Glenmore that I attended recently as a result of a request of a parent. The purpose of my attending was to review the special-needs programs at this school and how they were being dealt with.

This is a very good school in my opinion. Both of my children have or are attending it, and from my point of view it offers a very good quality education and one that my children have benefited from. There are just slightly in excess of 400 students at this school, and there are 40 mild and moderate special-needs children. So we are clear, Mr. Minister, we are talking about students who have been assessed as such. We're not talking about somebody just feeling that. These are assessed students, mild and moderate. So in other words, approximately 10 percent of the student population at this school have been assessed, and I know as a result of my work in the Private Schools Funding Task Force that the average that is often used by people who are expert in this area is 10 to 12 percent. So from my perspective, this particular school demonstrated an accepted average number of mild and moderate special-needs students.

I know, Mr. Minister, that part of the instructional grant applies specifically to funding for special-needs students. I believe that number is something like \$325 per student as part of that instructional grant. When you take into account the 10 to 1 ratio- in other words, that 10 percent of students have special needs and that 90 percent do not- what you do is you get a gross up factor so that there is approximately something in the order of \$3,250 per special-needs student on average that is available for that student in addition to what otherwise would be available to them as part of that instructional grant. So it was in that context that I got into a discussion with the principal and the parent at this school as to what additional resources were available.

What I found, Mr. Minister, is that at this particular school additional resources were in fact allocated by the school board, and what they did in this particular case was provide .3 of a teacher, I believe, and an additional \$650 or thereabouts for classroom supplies. Now, what that works out to in dollar terms is something in the order of \$16,000 for the .3. So we're talking \$17,000 in round figures. But when you take into account the numbers which I previously referred to of \$3,250 per student as being additional on average for mild and moderate special-needs students, if this particular school received additional funding, you would on average have something in the order of, say, \$120,000 rather than \$17,000 allocated to this school.

Now, I appreciate that there is direct funding and indirect funding in that there is a need for special-needs assistance outside of the specific school location, but I must say, Mr. Minister, that I was surprised to find that there was such a discrepancy between the average and the amount that in fact went into the school. To the school's credit what they did was they took .2 of a teacher from the regular program so that they devoted one half of a teacher additionally to the special need.

12:56

What was very interesting was that that did not translate in any way into additional classroom resources, because that .5 of a teacher assisted the teachers who in fact had the special-needs students in their classes by providing additional program assistance outside of the classroom, by doing and assisting in the assessment programs and so on. It did not demonstrate to any parent with a special-needs student that there was additional classroom support. In short, from my perspective we ended up with teachers who had these students in their classroom with some additional support outside of the classroom at this school and additional classroom resources, \$650, but that is all. So I sympathize with parents of students at that school who would say to me, "I don't see any additional resources in the classroom," because I couldn't see any either.

Now, the point I want to ask you, Mr. Minister, as it relates to that is this: are you doing anything to monitor that type of situation so

that we can determine how resources are being used for special-needs students? The flip side of that is: what do you have in this budget that relates to accountability for how the funds are in fact being used?

I believe that the average Albertan who is a parent with a special-needs student does expect that that special-needs student is receiving something extra as a result of the disability that they may have. I appreciate that there's a wide spectrum here, Mr. Minister, but the fact is that I think parents do expect to see something, and this particular example I've shared with you is one where it is difficult to see that if in fact you are a parent of one of those 40 children.

The other situation I would like to discuss with you is the fund-raising situation. As has been said by many of our colleagues here at the table today, we are told often that fund-raising is going on so that necessities, things such as textbooks, can be purchased for the school. I know that in Calgary the school-based decision-making is at the lower end of the scale with something in the order of \$100 per student being provided. That certainly would be true of the Calgary board of education. I know that there are other jurisdictions where there is a greater degree of discretion at the local level.

Mr. Minister, what I would like to know is this: what in this current budget are you doing, if anything, to monitor the responsibility of school boards to supply the necessities to the local school? What are you doing, if anything, to determine the fund-raising efforts of parents both in terms of dollar volume but I think more importantly whether or not there in fact is a situation where true necessities, things like textbooks, which I think are beyond doubt among any of us here at this table today, are in fact being purchased by fund-raised dollars as is indicated often.

I find that when people raise this with me, I don't have the information available to determine it. So in the situation that most recently came before me, I responded to the parent who raised the concern by saying: please share with me the budget of your school, and share with me the budget of your fund-raising group so that I can see how the school is spending its discretionary dollars at the local level and so that I can see how you are spending yours, because without that information I can't take the next step. I'd like to know, Mr. Minister, if you, in fact, through your department are taking some steps to attract that type of situation to determine both the monitoring of the specifics plus the accountability of the school authorities in performing their obligation of providing the necessities for the students.

Thank you very much.

MR. MAR: There's been a number of areas that have been raised. Again, the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore has raised issues as they relate to special needs and fund-raising and to particularly the issue of mild and moderate students. The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake talked a bit about funding equity and infrastructure and student health, and the hon. Member for St. Albert talked about different learning methods.

Just a quick observation about, you know, different learning methods. I sometimes wonder whether we do pay enough attention to the use of research as it might relate to teaching kids in schools.

As an example, recently I was looking at some research from McGill University that talked about a comparison of students that were involved in bilingual education from grades 1 through 9 and then a group of students that were in bilingual education from grades 7 through 9. To my surprise and contrary to what my intuitive conclusion might have been, there was no appreciable difference between the results of students who'd gone through the 1 through 9 versus the 7 through 9 bilingual programs.

That would have, if correct, some profound implications on how it is that bilingual education ought to be delivered. The argument would be, perhaps, that it should only be provided starting in grade 7 and not starting from grade 1. Again, it gives me reason to question from time to time whether our methodologies are based on an intuition or whether they are in fact based on something that has been sound in research.

The subject of course of the performance incentive program and where the research is for that- I can say that there would be a relative paucity of research that would be relevant particularly because this program is relatively unique. Members from both sides of the House have commented on the fact that it is unique. There are some elements that are common to programs that have been instituted in other jurisdictions, notably New Zealand, the United States, and the U.K. What we've attempted to do is look at all of those programs and determine what it is that we are hoping to achieve in our program and try to avoid some of the difficulties that have been experienced in other jurisdictions with these types of programs.

So there would be a paucity of research that would be specific to our particular program, and that shouldn't be surprising since it is somewhat unique.

The Member for Calgary-Glenmore talked about the issue of mild and moderate students and more broadly perhaps about the tracking of dollars that are spent in the special-needs area.

THE CHAIRMAN: I'm sorry I have to interrupt, but our four hours are up, hon. minister. I'll call on Ron Stevens for a motion.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to move under Standing Order 56(8)(b) that the designated supply subcommittee on Education conclude discussion of the 1999-2000 estimates of the Department of Education and rise and report.

THE CHAIRMAN: All those in favour of the motion, say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE CHAIRMAN: Carried.

[The subcommittee adjourned at 1:06 p.m.]

