



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Third Session

Standing Committee
on
Alberta's Economic Future

Ministry of Education
Consideration of Main Estimates

Wednesday, April 19, 2017
9 a.m.

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Third Session**

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Sucha, Graham, Calgary-Shaw (ND), Chair
van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (W), Deputy Chair

Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-Meadowlark (ND)
Connolly, Michael R.D., Calgary-Hawkwood (ND)
Coolahan, Craig, Calgary-Klein (ND)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (ND)
Drysdale, Wayne, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (PC)
Fitzpatrick, Maria M., Lethbridge-East (ND)
Gottfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (PC)
McPherson, Karen M., Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill (ND)
Orr, Ronald, Lacombe-Ponoka (W)
Piquette, Colin, Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater (ND)
Rodney, Dave, Calgary-Lougheed (PC)*
Schneider, David A., Little Bow (W)
Schreiner, Kim, Red Deer-North (ND)
Taylor, Wes, Battle River-Wainwright (W)

* substitution for Wayne Drysdale

Also in Attendance

Aheer, Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Rocky View (W)

Support Staff

Robert H. Reynolds, QC	Clerk
Shannon Dean	Law Clerk and Director of House Services
Trafton Koenig	Parliamentary Counsel
Stephanie LeBlanc	Parliamentary Counsel
Philip Massolin	Manager of Research and Committee Services
Sarah Amato	Research Officer
Nancy Robert	Research Officer
Corinne Dacyshyn	Committee Clerk
Jody Rempel	Committee Clerk
Aaron Roth	Committee Clerk
Karen Sawchuk	Committee Clerk
Rhonda Sorensen	Manager of Corporate Communications
Jeanette Dotimas	Communications Consultant
Tracey Sales	Communications Consultant
Janet Schwegel	Managing Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Participant

Ministry of Education
Hon. David Eggen, Minister

9 a.m.

Wednesday, April 19, 2017

[Mr. Sucha in the chair]

**Ministry of Education
Consideration of Main Estimates**

The Chair: Good morning, everyone. I'd like to call the meeting to order and welcome everyone. I'd first like to recognize that this meeting is commencing on the traditional land of Treaty 6. The committee has under consideration the estimates for the Ministry of Education for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2018.

Similar to the last meeting I'd ask that we go around the table and have all MLAs introduce themselves for the record. Minister, again, when we get to you, if you can introduce your officials who are joining you at the table. For those southern Alberta MLAs, I promised Member Carson we wouldn't make any Oilers cracks today as well. I'm Graham Sucha, the MLA for Calgary-Shaw and chair of this committee. We'll continue to my right with my deputy chair.

Mr. van Dijken: MLA Glenn van Dijken from Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. Orr: Ron Orr, Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Schneider: Dave Schneider, Little Bow.

Mrs. Aheer: Leela Sharon Aheer, Chestermere-Rocky View. This is my research assistant, Maureen Gough.

Mr. Eggen: My name is David Eggen. I'm the Minister of Education. This is Wendy Boje, Brad Smith, and Curtis Clarke.

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

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

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

Ms Fitzpatrick: Good morning. Maria Fitzpatrick, MLA, Lethbridge-East.

Mr. Dach: Lorne Dach, Edmonton-McClung.

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

Mr. Coolahan: Good morning. Craig Coolahan, MLA for Calgary-Klein.

The Chair: I'd like to note for the record that Mr. Rodney is the official substitute for Mr. Drysdale.

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

Hon. members, a total of six hours has been scheduled for consideration of estimates for the Ministry of Education. For the record I would note that the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future has already completed three hours of debate in this respect. As we enter our fourth hour of debate, I remind everyone that the speaking rotation for these meetings is provided for in Standing Order 59.01(6), and we are now at the point of the

rotation where speaking times are limited to a maximum of five minutes. Members have the option to combine their speaking time with the minister for a maximum total of 10 minutes. Please remember to advise the chair at the beginning of your rotation if you wish to combine your time with the minister. Discussion should flow through the chair at all times regardless of whether or not speaking time is being combined. If members have any questions in regard to the speaking times or the rotations, please feel free to send a note or speak directly with either the chair or committee clerk about the process. With the concurrence of the committee I will call a five-minute break near the midpoint of the meeting; however, the three-hour clock will continue to run. Does anyone oppose having a break?

Committee members, ministers, and other members who are not committee members may participate. A committee member or an official substitute for a committee member may introduce an amendment, which must be in writing and approved by Parliamentary Counsel prior to the meeting. Twenty copies of the amendments, including the original, must be provided at the meeting for the committee members and staff.

Ministry officials may be present and at the direction of the minister may address the committee. Ministry officials seated in the gallery, if called upon by the minister, have access to a microphone in the gallery area. Ministry officials are reminded to introduce themselves prior to responding to any questions. Members' staff may be present and seated along the committee room wall. Space permitting, opposition caucus staff may sit at the table; however, members have priority for seating at the table at all times.

If debate is exhausted prior to the six hours, the ministry estimates are deemed to have been considered for the time allotted in the schedule, and we will adjourn. Pages are available to make deliveries of notes or any other materials between the staff and the gallery and the table.

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

When we adjourned on April 18, 2017, we were seven minutes into an exchange between Member Connolly and the minister. I will now invite Member Connolly or any other member of the government caucus to complete the remaining time. You currently have three minutes.

Connolly: Great. I have one question. Then if one of my colleagues would like to jump in, I have no problem with that.

Good morning.

Mr. Eggen: Good morning.

Connolly: It's only been a couple of hours since we were last here. It's good to see you again.

I was asking about diploma exams and provincial achievement tests. Still sticking with outcome 1 and the pieces on the standardized test, are you making changes to the way that these tests are conducted and what format they're in?

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you for the question, and good morning, everyone. Thanks for coming back. Clearly, everybody enjoyed themselves sufficiently that they would come back.

I mean, we're always building assessments and making adjustments to try to make it better, for sure. I know that some students, for example – I know as a teacher – have some anxiety around timed exams. Certainly, our whole lives are timed in a way, so you can't just have something go on forever, but, you know, we're thinking about some ways to make that more flexible so that at the end of the day we're trying to test a person's knowledge and dexterity with

that knowledge and not necessarily their speed. That being said, it's important that students and teachers and schools build effective strategies because, of course, the world does have time limits and does have different stress factors built into it – this current thing we're in here right now is a good example of that – so we do need to be able to build our skills for students to be able to function under stressful circumstances.

Of course, we have the SLA exams, the grade 3 ones, and we've done a couple of different versions of pilots in the last couple of years on that. I'm looking again in collaboration with grade 3 teachers and parents to look for ways by which we can most effectively use that sort of assessment. One of the things that always sticks in my mind when I think about grade 3 assessment is that, of course, these are seven-year-old children, right? Everyone knows seven-year-olds, and, you know, we want to make that experience for them productive and useful and useful information to build learning plans for kids and not just subject them to diploma-like exams. I mean, that doesn't make any sense, really, even. So we are building a report . . .

The Chair: I apologize. Three minutes has expired.

We will now return to the Wildrose caucus. Continue sharing your time with the minister?

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Chair. Yes, that would be fine. Thank you so much.

The Chair: Proceed.

Mrs. Aheer: Good morning, Minister and everybody. Thank you so much again. Hour 4. I have a few bits of housekeeping, too, just some follow-up questions from yesterday, but I just would like to actually build on what Member Connolly was asking you about just with respect to assessments and exams and effective strategies and all the things that you were mentioning.

For me, my background is in music, and we do massive amounts of testing every year and festivals and competitions and all those kinds of things that really build character and learning to cope with stress. You know, families go through the stress of getting their kids ready and also just the aspect of competing in front of each other, in front of your peers, being judged by your peers and also being judged by people who are experts in their field. One of the things, just in participating in that and in teaching that, part of building that aspect was collaborating with parents and collaborating with the children and the examiners and the adjudicators not only in language of how to critique in a way that they're learning something and taking things away from it and learning how to improve but also teaching them how to lose with grace, I guess, for lack of a better word. Winning is one aspect, but losing with grace and being able to move forward with that and not seeing it as a failure was a huge part of the impact that we have as teachers with those children.

I guess my questions are around – and I don't know if this is attached to a line item or if this is part of the curriculum redesign or the review, but you're speaking a lot about, like, the grade 3 and the experience being productive and useful and being meaningful. In the pilot programs can you give us some ideas and some insight as to how you see that going forward and how it can be productive, how it can be thoughtful, how it's not necessarily a failure but maybe more of a viewpoint into how the children are doing at that point?

Mr. Eggen: Yes, and thank you for that perspective. I know that parents of students of all ages are interested to see where their kids are. Part of what we've been trying to do, as I said, with the existing math curriculum, say, for example, and then all subject areas with

the new curriculum is to build sort of signposts along the way for skills and how they develop and what expectations we might have for a skill at any given grade level.

9:10

What I've seen with the SLAs is that they've been useful. There have been some bumps along the road. We've made adjustments with input from teachers and parents. But what I like about the concept is that it has served as a diagnostic tool to see where a student is at the beginning of the school year so that parents together with the teachers can help to build a learning plan for a student, you know, when they are starting grade 3 and see where they are for different skills. We know that there are quite specific developmental sort of signposts for humans in general at these early ages.

Mrs. Aheer: Are you thinking about stress and those kinds of things?

Mr. Eggen: Well, yes. That's right.

Mrs. Aheer: Okay. Sorry to interrupt.

Mr. Eggen: I mean, for sure, kids come in at grade 3 at quite various developmental levels – right? – in terms of their socialization and so forth.

Back to your original sort of analogy to music festivals and so forth: I think, you know, that's quite apt. I share that same experience personally. It's fairly high stress. It can be.

Mrs. Aheer: It is, yeah.

Mr. Eggen: But when you are adjudicating, the true measure of adjudication is interaction between the instructor or even with your peers and then looking to see where you can improve and where your strengths are, too, right? If we look at assessment in that more general sense, I think that we can find some new creative paths in that way. Assessment is very important because you're not just testing yourself to an external exam but to standards that you might have built for yourself when you're learning in the first place, so that might be more advanced learning with children in junior and senior high. If you can approach, as you do with the music festival, certain parameters around standards of what you want to achieve, then you can carry those with you as you're learning and thus internalize what you want to get done in the first place.

Yeah. I mean, with earlier grades we certainly are, you know, assessing our assessment. We're looking at the SLAs in grade 3 again here later this spring to carry on with some revision. I'm looking at the possibility – traditionally exams, tests, assessments are taking place at the end of the year. The grade 3 one is at the beginning of the year, so I'm wondering if maybe we can't sort of work with some flexibility around that. A diagnostic test, obviously, should be at the beginning but then having something to measure like bookends at the beginning and the end. I mean, we're pretty open to creative evolution of assessments. Of course, as a teacher of 20 years and a teacher of diploma exams for a good part of that time I do see the utility and the importance of having a standard to measure our students.

Mrs. Aheer: Well, and to grow in that, too, because, you know, if we look at the numbers on anxiety and stress of students right now, 64 per cent I think is the number that's sort of being tossed around for anxiety for school-aged children from ages six and up. I know a lot of the discussions that come around testing – that's why I brought up the pieces about being in front of people and stuff because that would bring up massive amounts of anxiety. It does for my students, and as a teacher, too, you're being judged when

your students are up there. The reason why I brought it up is because the stress pieces and the anxiety pieces of that and test anxiety and all that: that's a lot of what we hear about nowadays about testing. It's not necessarily around the type of test or the testing itself, but are we in essence making sure that our students are set up and being able to cope with the stress and being given the tools that they need to sit with the test in front of them and deal adequately so that the knowledge that they've accrued that year and everything that they've put in and their teachers' aspects of what they've gotten into these kids, too, is actually being reflected appropriately in testing as a result of anxiety.

Again, I'm not sure where this relates to specifically other than in your key strategies in terms of making sure that your outcomes are there. If you could maybe elaborate on that a little bit, too, as far as anxiety and what you're doing and if that actually falls into a line item as far as follow-through.

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Again, that's, I think, a very valid comment because, of course, you know, it speaks to the culture that we try to create in any given school. You want a sense of rigour, for sure, but I think anxiety – again, I'm not an expert on this – can reside in thinking that the institution that you're in, the school, is somehow not with you in some way or that you're up against it. The assessment is not just an assessment of your ability to do fractions, but it's sort of you against the school, right? Measuring up to school.

The culture of community in a school I believe is very important. I mean, I've taught in many different schools, and, you know, you can measure the success of how a school feels, if that's something that is tangible or not, by how people build that sense of community. Like, with the high school redesign program I'm seeing a strong sense of culture and co-operation and camaraderie that is built into high school redesigns. So people are helping each other out. You might have a math teacher who's an expert in algorithms or something, and then they might take the lead on that, and another teacher backs away and does individual help. You see libraries turning into these learning resource centres that have, in some larger schools, teachers assigned to them, so it's a place where people are interacting on an individual level on any subject.

You know, some of these programs like school-wide caring, sort of the seven habits for successful people, that kind of a school-wide initiative – the very interesting one for me is this mindfulness initiative that you see in some schools that promotes the sense of being in control of one's intellect and mind and emotions as well. We're seeing measurable decreases in anxiety and violence and so forth from schools that might be practising these school-wide community-building initiatives.

You know, I believe that a sense of rigour must be fostered in everything that we do, and assessment is part of that, for sure, but again if we can reduce the sense of the adversarial sort of institutional separation, I think that that helps, too.

The Chair: I apologize to interrupt.

We'll now proceed to the PC caucus. Share your time with the minister as well?

Mr. Rodney: Yes, please.

The Chair: Okay. Go ahead.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you. Actually, on the heels of the last question I'd love to delve deeper if we could, Minister, into wellness as it relates to education. Mr. Chair, I'll refer to page 50 of the business plan, key strategy 1.5, pilot and evaluate a targeted school nutrition program in selected school boards across the province to help prepare students for a healthy and successful future. I will reference

that for the duration of these questions, Minister, just so you know, but I do want to do a little bit a flashback just to a question in question period directly related to this.

Obviously, with a record-setting deficit last year and this year, it's a concern, but so is the wellness of our children, and it's a constant balance. Some might call it a battle, but as you might know, wellness programs are positive, proactive, and preventative. They help people to be happy, healthy, and out of the hospital. So I had asked if there was going to be any incorporation of some of the things that maybe had come before, and that would include into education.

We had the first of its kind, and it's been called the best approach to wellness: Alberta's strategic approach to wellness. Is that going to have anything to do with the ministry going forward? This might actually apply also to curriculum redesign because a lot of work done by a lot of Albertans for a long time has already been done, and it was completely apart from politics. So Alberta's strategic approach to wellness: will it find itself as part of the business plan's key strategy 1.5 on a go-forward basis and/or in curriculum?

Mr. Eggen: Thank you for that question. I certainly took note of this issue that you raised in question period last week, I think, and I was reminded of the home initiative. Of course, we were both in the Legislature during this time. I'm very interested in exploring this. I think that it's a way by which we can promote both physical and psychological fitness, if we can describe it that way, in our schools.

9:20

Of course, I'm always trying to look for ways by which I can achieve economy of scale by getting crossministry initiatives on the go. You know, any time we can reach together into, let's say, Health – right? – to achieve our goals in Education, then I'm very interested in that. I mean, I certainly have the resources of the department with me here, as you can see. But if you can perhaps give me a hand in regard to – because I know you've had a large degree of your own hand in developing this.

Mr. Rodney: Well, I'd be honoured, but it was a whole lot of others, Minister, I can tell you. When we put on, for instance, the International Wellness Symposium, I was asking who has best practices, and there weren't any. In my time in cabinet as associate minister of wellness I thought: well, let's put one on, let's bring everybody here, and let's find out what the best practices are. So I'm so happy to share those. Even when we did the provincial wellness forum and the workplace wellness summit, those sorts of things, happy to be of assistance without getting in the way. Because, indeed, you mentioned it, Minister. It's physical; it's also emotional. I would add, spiritual, cultural, financial. It's all of these different things, and again it's way beyond politics.

I know that there are certain initiatives that are still going on. Unfortunately, Healthy U was cancelled, and that had a whole host of – there was a Healthy U five and one experiment and a great web page, all those resources; be a health champion; there was the aboriginal youth intervention; Communities ChooseWell; and so on. Is there any desire either to recultivate these? Minister, I don't expect you to take any of these hook, line, and sinker. I know it's a new administration, so to speak. But is there any appetite – pardon the pun – to perhaps put a new brand or new stamp on some of these things? Again, it's about kids in education and their wellness therein.

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Thank you for that. You know, as I said from the outset, we're not interested in just building new curriculum or new initiatives for the sake of just doing it again, right? If we do have

best practices available to us – you know, we have quite a strong institutional bench strength in education and in wellness as well. So I would be happy to look at these things as we move forward on building both physical and emotional health, as you describe it. I'm just thinking of one thing that seems to be emerging as quite a positive initiative, and when you have something successful you can pivot off – so with our nutrition pilots I've expanded them to all school boards now to have at least one in each school board for next year. We're building some round-tables on this to talk about how we can move forward because, I guess, nutrition and wellness must be in close proximity to each other.

Mr. Rodney: Sure.

Mr. Eggen: You know, if you'd be interested in maybe coming by, one or more of those, I would be grateful.

Mr. Rodney: I'd be honoured.

Mr. Eggen: Because I know you've done a lot of good work on . . .

Mr. Rodney: Well, hey, again, it's not just me. It's a whole host of folks, including . . .

Mr. Eggen: No, no. Yeah. But, I mean, just . . .

Mr. Rodney: If I can just include a shout-out to folks who were involved with something we called MEND; healthy schools, healthy future; and ever active schools. They continue to do incredible things. You know, we had wellness engagement tours. We had started discussions with Participaction, get out for sport, and I know one of the members is coming forward with a concussion motion. We had done some work, informed dining, sodium strategy. So I'm really glad that you're open to that.

Let's get back because you mentioned just now about the nutrition program. Again, Chair, it's key strategy 1.5. Last year in estimates you mentioned: "in the meantime I have been meeting with a number of groups that already do very [good] work in providing food in our schools. Our goal is to enhance these efforts, not replace them." This isn't a gotcha question, Minister. With the introduction of the new bill is your goal still to enhance but not replace programs that are already in existence? A lot of folks have done a lot of hard work in a lot of places for a long time.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. Thank you for that. It's a good chance to reiterate the frame of the nutrition program, and I deliberately kept my expectations very simple but allowing maximum creativity. It's been quite amazing how the original 14 school boards have taken and really run with the pilot. I think I've visited about 10 now, and I'm just constantly amazed how successful the programs are and how they have nurtured a sense of community and sort of a spirit in the schools in which they are having a nutrition program.

The only three rules, so to speak, that I made were that, you know, they should follow the provincial food guide for nutrition so that they're serving healthy food, that they build some kind of curriculum around the program so that people are learning about any number of things, and then that they're following sanitation standards from Alberta Health Services, too. I mean, I've seen partnerships with, like, the greenhouses down in Medicine Hat providing and helping to grow some of the food for the Redcliff schools. I've seen the supermarket in High Prairie setting up a partnership and providing some of the food and providing a place where the kids can see the food that's being served in the supermarkets so that they can take their parents there and see the thing and buy some of that food. I've seen . . .

Mr. Rodney: But there were some prior existing groups that were doing this kind of work before.

Mr. Eggen: Oh, yes. For sure.

Mr. Rodney: We're not going to bounce them out of existence?

Mr. Eggen: We have, you know, partnerships with existing service groups, right? Again, it's the choice of the school and the school board to make those connections. Like, in Fort Macleod – this one's so interesting; I mean, I want people to pursue it – they have the food program in the school, and then they have a store as well set up for kids to take food home. The kids don't pay money in the store, but they take . . .

Mr. Rodney: You know, as you say, for some people dollar signs go off in their head, so I do feel more obligation to ask you this. I think it's only appropriate to ensure that these programs do make the most effective use of the allotted dollars because there are only so many as possible. I hope everyone hears the last part of this sentence that I'm about to say. How are you ensuring, Minister, that your nutrition program is being as cost-effective as possible in order to provide the greatest benefit to the most kids with the fixed funding that is provided?

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. That's great. I mean, we have to do that, for sure. Again, we use very specific rubrics to analyze this and how schools are doing, their programs. You know, a general idea, just to give you how – it's almost like that kind of loaves and fishes phenomenon, where people have a multiplying effect on this. We had 14 school boards participating in the first pilot, and that ended up being 33 schools having nutrition programs. So they've really done a great job of multiplying with partnerships from the community.

The Chair: I apologize to interrupt.

We'll now move to the government caucus side. Member Carson, would you like to share your time with the minister?

Mr. Carson: Yes, please.

The Chair: Please proceed.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Minister. It's a pleasure to join you again today to hear more about your ministry's initiatives as well as your thoughts behind the ministry's business plan and your budget. I can tell you that I've heard a lot of support for the things that you've been doing so far, from the recently expanded pilot programs around school nutrition to the reduction of school fees, as presented in Bill 1, that's before the House right now. I've also seen great interest from teachers, families, and students alike around the curriculum redevelopment, and I'm personally very interested in seeing the results of that. Of course, for the most part, it won't be seen for a few years from now, many years in some cases.

With that being said, I just want to say that I do have great faith in your ministry and in you as a minister. When we compare what you've put forward to some instances of other budgets put forward by other governments, I just want to say that I'm so proud that you committed to fully funding your ministry and your department because some of the examples that I've seen so far are devastating to children and to those families in other provinces. Thank you for that.

I know that I have a wide variety of questions that I have to ask you, and some of them have been touched on, but I just want to get started around the school nutrition program that was introduced this

current school year in 14 boards across 33 different schools. I'm just wondering where in the estimates we can find the \$7 million in additional funding for this program coming this fall.

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Okay. I will say a sentence here while someone just peeks at that. I think it would be on page 100, I'm guessing, and they will find the line there. Now, the additional \$7 million will allow us to have a pilot in every school board in the province, so that would be a dollar amount of \$141,000 to the remaining school boards to have a pilot. The expectation is that the original 14 school boards that were participating in the pilot would serve as mentors by sharing information and best practices for the other school boards so that we can, you know, build up some choices that people can make. But, I mean, the emphasis is on working flexibly and on a community level.

9:30

I perhaps just didn't realize how food and children would result in not just probably improved learning outcomes for kids and probably healthier children in general but in how it feeds into the community and the sense of pride that goes along with that.

For example, in Lac La Biche they have the high school, with a very beautiful kitchen, cooking hot meals, and then they drive across the way to feed the elementary school, right? People are contributing to this. The community groups are contributing as well. The high school kids are doing something real; they're feeding 300 kids in this elementary school. You know, it has an intangible but, I think, significant positive impact on that town.

While I was telling you that, the \$7 million resides on page 100 of our budget, line 2.1, operational funding.

Mr. Carson: Perfect. Thank you, Minister, and thank you, Mr. Chair.

Just touching on – you mentioned it a little bit – some of the opportunities that students and teachers have in somewhat integrating this into their curriculum, I'm just wondering if that's part of the vision that you see moving forward. Overall, what do you see happening with this program?

Mr. Eggen: Well, again, from the beginning I've taken an important lesson away, which is not to be prescriptive in the execution of the nutrition program, that if you allow the creativity and the energy that exist in a given community, you're much more likely to not just succeed but to exceed your expectations. We've seen that over and over again.

I was just in Wetaskiwin last week, and, you know, they have built a very successful program, again, making lunches. For them, they went for people who want to choose to have that lunch. They were just very discreetly bringing a backpack into each classroom, because that's how kids carry all their gear around anyway, and that backpack is filled with lunches. So people are in their rooms, and they're eating together, and they can take a lunch from there if they want. I thought that was a very creative idea, too.

Another interesting one about, again, unforeseen results of the nutrition program is kids sitting down and eating together and eating together with their peers. It has a nice sort of community, familial feel to it – right? – that allows people to come, settle down, and eat their meals and all that kind of stuff.

I mean, everything is not without challenges. I'm always very concerned about making sure we're efficient with the money and not wasteful with food and so forth. But, you know, you have good-quality food that the kids like to eat, and you're sitting down together to eat it, and people are interacting while they're doing that. I know that it's a special deal when I go to the nutrition program. Maybe they have some nicer food that day; I don't know.

It just seems that each place I've been to so far has just, really, had a good feel to it.

We've seen anecdotal evidence of improved attendance, fewer discipline problems, students more focused on learning, and, as I've said before, community co-operation. We will try to quantify these observations over the next number of weeks here. I can't wait to see pilots in all 61 school boards, well, 60, because Northland already has a school lunch program.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Minister.

I just want to mention that I had the pleasure and the honour of joining you as well as the Deputy Premier and the Premier for the expansion of this pilot program, and it was very exciting. I know that in the schools in my community especially we see poverty. It's important that we tackle that, and this is just one of those opportunities where we're able to do so, so thank you for that.

Moving along, on page 100 of the estimates I see that more than \$14 million is being spent on First Nations, Métis, and Inuit and Alberta's approach to First Nations education. This brings the total annual commitment up to \$78.5 million, and of course this is an area that our government feels is very important and one that was potentially ignored by previous governments. Can you walk me through some of how this funding is being used to benefit First Nations students?

Mr. Eggen: Sure. Thank you for that question. Just if I can clarify your comments, we're spending \$14 million more than what we had done before . . .

Mr. Carson: Yes.

Mr. Eggen: . . . so it's up to \$78.5 million.

You know, we believe that this is an important investment to make. We have a very fast-growing First Nations, Métis, and Inuit population here in the province of Alberta, something we should be very proud of. I believe that Edmonton should be close to or is already the largest First Nations population in Canada as an urban centre, and that's great. It really, I think, adds to the character and the culture and the strength of who we are as a city and as a province.

It's really important for us – and that's a young First Nations population, too, right? – to build education options to improve attendance and graduation rates. I think this is a first responsibility for us in the ministry, so we are taking that seriously with quite a significant investment. We're trying to reach across. Of course, the reason that Edmonton is becoming the largest First Nations city in Canada, probably one of the largest in the world, is that people are moving quite freely from the rural areas into the city and back and forth as well. So we're trying to build a more fluid way by which we can support education on-reserve and off-reserve, for example.

I mean, this has always been a challenge, I think, in not just Alberta but across the country. The federal government is responsible for students' education on-reserve, but, you know, students and families move between those two, on- and off-reserve, in a fluid way, and so they should be able to. But to make sure that the standard of education is comparable on-reserve and off-reserve and that we can track and help students as they move from one place to another I think is part of all of our collective responsibility.

You know, the reinstatement of the democratically elected school board in Northland is a good touchpoint for some of the initiatives that we're trying to do, so I'll use that area as an example. Last year we signed an agreement with the Kee Tas Kee Now Tribal Council to form their own education authority. This is a collection of bands in northern Alberta that will take some more responsibility for education.

The Chair: We'll now proceed back to the Wildrose caucus. Will you continue sharing your time with the minister?

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

The Chair: Please proceed.

Mrs. Aheer: Just a couple of comments on the nutrition program as well, Minister.

Mr. Eggen: Yes.

Mrs. Aheer: It's just more of a statement and a couple of questions with respect to that. You'd said yesterday – this is just some clarity – that you're offering nutritious meals daily in those schools. We've had a bunch of numbers: 60 schools, 61 schools. Is it all 64 public schools, or are there schools that are left out? That is my first question.

Then the second piece, that maybe you could talk about along with that, is: is it actually food in bellies for every single school?

The third piece is: are you also going to integrate special needs, diabetes, celiac, and all of these other pieces, that are absolutely imperative components of food nowadays, in every single school, in every single classroom?

Mr. Eggen: That's good. Addressing the last question first, I think this is an area that we need to expand into, and I appreciate you bringing it up. You know, as I said, with those three rules about how we asked for the delivery of the initial pilot, I think that we need to – I haven't heard any specific challenges around this yet – make sure that we are making provision for food sensitivities, be they physical or cultural. I think that's really important. Thank you for reminding all of us here today about that. I think it's something that we need to put into our groups. Again, I invite you and your caucus to participate in the round-tables that we have on evaluating the initial 14 school board programs and how we can make them better as we expand out into the other school boards.

That will answer your first question, and that is that there are 61 school boards in Alberta. The announcement that we made in Minister Carson's school – not Minister Carson but MLA Carson; he's not a minister yet – was to expand into having a pilot in each of the 61 school boards. Now, it's actually 60 – that's why I always clarify – because Northland already has a food program that will feed all the kids. Again, because Northland is in such a state of, you know, transition to improvement, we're going to have to assess their food program. I think that's part of the strengthening of Northland schools.

9:40

Mrs. Aheer: So they're still all pilots, all 61?

Mr. Eggen: Well, no. Northland has, apparently, school nutrition programs in every school of the 23 schools. Now, the degree to which they are successful and perhaps need buttressing, again, will depend on the wise counsel of the new school boards that will be elected in October. I'm willing to, as I said yesterday, put some additional resources into Northland to get it back on its feet. We're committing to a 20 per cent increase in funding for them for the next five years to get the ball rolling.

Then your other question, about the food and then food in bellies, again, we've allowed our partners to make choices around how they deliver the food programs in their schools. Most of them I've seen will go with the whole school, right? If it's just 200 elementary kids, they'll go for the whole school, but in other ones, like I said, like in Wetaskiwin, there was a choice. If kids wanted to eat that, then they would. I think they had some way of ordering so that they could

control their inventory and so forth. I'm very conscious of making sure we are efficient and not wasteful with food, and I expect – and I will reiterate that with the pilots and round-tables – that people are not being wasteful.

Mrs. Aheer: Minister, the reason why I asked that is because I just don't want any misunderstandings around politicizing the aspects that people do not want to feed children, as you've heard. My point is that if the logistics of the conversation and the twist and the spin that is going around is that there's politicization of who wants to feed kids and who doesn't, let's just be clear that if the program is not directed to putting food in bellies, it's kind of a weird spin to put on something if that's not the directive, to actually feed kids. Especially with the 14 schools that you chose, there were socio-economic reasons for picking those schools, and they're also being funded differently than the new schools that are being put into the program. So there are a lot of things that we can talk about at length later.

I'd just like to put that out there just to be absolutely clear that we understand how that program is rolling out, the reason behind the program, the choices for the program, that it's local decision-making, all of those important aspects that a good nutrition program will have, and that we're clear about the directive.

Mr. Eggen: Yes. I mean, I've heard nary a discouraging word – right? – to misquote a song. It's been very good. Again, we will make adjustments over time. There are other nutrition programs around the world and so forth, but this is fairly innovative for our province, and I want to just move along. In anything you do as a government, you can only move along with the support of the people. That's what we'll have to make sure we're doing every step of the way. Again, you can see some institutional food programs in other places around the world. You know, there are the famous jokes about crappy cafeteria food and all that kind of stuff and counting ketchup as a vegetable, like happened in the States back 30 years ago. We just want to be really on the ground, community oriented here, again, like we do with everything in Education, reminding ourselves about the kids that we're trying to educate and nurture as good citizens.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Minister.

I have a few questions about infrastructure. If we could go to capital grants, line 3.1 in the budget, page 100, please.

Mr. Eggen: Okay. Just give me a sec here.

Mrs. Aheer: You bet. I'll just ask my question while you're looking if that's okay. It's just for a bit of clarity here. In the budget document on page 100 you have an even \$3 million, but on the website and in the news releases we see \$2.6 million. Is that correct? There's a bit of number clarity that I need there.

Mr. Eggen: Sorry. You're talking about our infrastructure capital budget?

Mrs. Aheer: Yeah, so line 3.1 on page 100.

Mr. Eggen: Okay. Line 3.1.

Mrs. Aheer: I think that's correct.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. So the budget of \$3 million is for school boards to assist boards with planning, scoping, and increasing the accuracy of their cost estimations.

Mrs. Aheer: Okay.

Mr. Eggen: You probably remember that back in – it was maybe the October before last. I realized that more than half of our school projects were not on time. You know, we put quite a significant new matrix in place to try to clean it up, right? I found that one of the places that was causing delay was adequate planning ahead of time for blueprints and site scoping and all that kind of stuff like we talked about with one of your schools, Chestermere, right?

Mrs. Aheer: Yes.

Mr. Eggen: You know, we want to get it going, and if we can help people with site development, then that would really do it as well. Our \$3 million for planning, scoping, and increasing accuracy: that's a new way that we're doing stuff.

Mrs. Aheer: That's for planning. Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Eggen: If you want to see the full capital budget, it's just on the previous page, on page 99. That gives you a much more fulsome kind of thing that's going on, right? I announced the \$500 million for the 26 new projects that we have, but really our capital, I believe, is \$1.3 billion. I'm just using my memory. It's \$1.290 billion because we're covering off the projects that are happening from the previous three or four years probably, right?

Mrs. Aheer: Do you have a breakout for, you know, new builds versus modernizations, then, that kind of thing?

Mr. Eggen: Yes. We do have that, and I think we have quite a significant number of modernizations, for example, with this year's list. These guys will dig it up here for you.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you so much.

Mr. Eggen: I have my infrastructure experts behind me.

Mrs. Aheer: The reason I'm asking specifically around, you know – and I'll use Chestermere as the example, obviously, because that's where I'm from, but I think this is fairly indicative of many schools around the province. We've got a high school that is on a major road spilling out onto a major highway, four lanes of traffic, as we've spoken about in the past, which is an infrastructure issue but, nevertheless, important. We've got no waterlines going out there. They're trucking in water every single day, which is a concern for consumption and safety.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah.

Mrs. Aheer: We've got a school that was built in 1961, added on to in 1985, that is somewhat – the last piece of infrastructure information, that came out in 2011, said that it was still in fairly good shape. However, if you talk to the folks that actually function at that school, I think they would disagree. And growth.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah.

Mrs. Aheer: I'll continue that after. Thank you.

Mr. Eggen: We'll loop back to that one. That's a very good topic.

The Chair: We'll move back to the PC caucus. You'll continue sharing your time?

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Chair. Thank you very much. When it comes to the business plan, key strategy 1.5 is where we left off, Minister, on wellness initiatives.

Mr. Eggen: Oh, yeah. Okay.

Mr. Rodney: One that we didn't mention – and we can talk about it another time – that I did mention last week in question period, was Alberta Get Outdoors Weekend, or GO Weekend. It costs nothing. It's a wonderful thing for people who perhaps are tempted to hibernate during the winter. No offence meant, but let's face it; it's not as quick, easy, or accessible for people to get outdoors and exercise and do things that are better for their wellness. That was to be celebrated a couple of weekends ago. It was not commemorated. A few years ago we had not only seniors and recreational groups and sports groups but also schools across Alberta really engaged. It was a great way to launch things. I mean, steal the idea. Launch whatever programs you have in addition to launching the Get Outdoors Weekend.

Mr. Eggen: Sure.

Mr. Rodney: But let's get back to the nutrition program because that's what we're talking about today. It's related to some of your initiatives launched recently in Bill 1 and, of course, this business plan, key strategy 1.5, regarding healthy, successful futures. A two-part question on the nutrition programs, Minister: how much direction is being provided to school boards in terms of allocating the funding that they receive between actual food and nutritional education, and does your ministry work in conjunction with any of the schools of public health at our universities in order to provide the most up-to-date information with the nutrition programs?

9:50

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Thanks for that. Those are well-constructed questions. We are trying to cover off a lot of this information. It's new ground here in the province. It's interesting that at the new launch to the 61 school boards, we had the representatives from the School of Public Health, I believe it's called, if I'm remembering correctly, that are going to do an academic study of this. They're very excited to see how this will affect the emotional and physical well-being and performance of students, so there is a connection with them.

Just as an interesting point, we've seen that the initial pilots had about 2 per cent administration costs, so I think that's pretty good. We will be evaluating that over time. All of the nutrition projects must submit a budget. We do have site visits for each pilot, and we have meetings with all participants. The selection for the first 14 was based on socioeconomic data, but of course I've decided to now bust it out to pilots in all school jurisdictions. So, yeah, we will be monitoring this carefully, but we will still allow the same latitude that we did previously because, again, you know, I don't want to be prescriptive in the choices people are making around food or the curriculum or the teaching or the community partnerships that they might endeavour to explore.

I can think of two people that I ran across. Some of the best volunteers you can get are people that just recently retired. In these two schools in these two towns there are two women that were just recently retired, and they just took it on. One person's comment stuck in my mind so much. She said: you know, this is the most meaningful thing I've ever done in a school. She had been a full career teacher, and I think she had a doctorate in education. It kind of – I mean, you can't be emotional in politics, but it brought tears to my eyes because I thought: wow.

So we can all work together on this, and if people have constructive criticism, I'm very, very open to that. I think that it should be money well spent, and we can see improved outcomes.

Mr. Rodney: Great. I know some of these school boards are good to go, and, like you say, there are some great volunteers. I've met some of those folks. In my experience I was fortunate. It was well

over a decade and from kindergarten to university and in all sorts of areas where I had my experience. Yes, it was physical, but it was also emotional, spiritual, cultural, financial in terms of wellness. Some of those groups are looking for some help in terms of: how much do we spend on food, and how much do we spend on education? Hopefully, they've got some direction from your group but, as you mentioned, not being overly prescriptive.

Mr. Eggen: No. I don't want to be.

Mr. Rodney: I'm glad that you've got schools and, you know, universities involved.

Now, let's move on to an unfortunate incident in this realm. People are now trading their favourite banana bread recipes if you can believe it. It actually begs a bigger question of: how are you ensuring that good intentions in terms of nutrition don't boil over into inappropriate or even unintentional abuses of power? You know, I think as former educators we can both agree that that could have, should have been handled completely differently. It really comes down to this. How does your ministry intend to balance the desire to implement solid nutritional foundations within our young students with the desire of parents to provide fuel that they feel is appropriate? It can go into every realm, Minister. Like, I care so much about the environment as well, but I don't feel it's my job to shove it down people's throats, so – again, pardon the pun – when it comes to nutrition, where is that balance between implementing solid nutritional foundations within our students and the desire of parents to provide the food that they feel is either appropriate or what they can afford?

Mr. Eggen: Yes. I've certainly reflected on this plenty in the last week. I mean, the individual circumstance that took place in Calgary, I guess, was very unfortunate and inappropriate. I think that we have to put things in context, but we also must learn from individual circumstances to make sure that kind of thing doesn't happen in our schools.

The key, I think, is to not make too many rules around any given endeavour, right? You know, the food coming to a lunch program or kids bringing food to school is part of that connection. It's a tangible connection between your home and your school. It's not just a salami sandwich. It's something that you carry with you that reminds you that your family is looking after you. It's a reassuring thing.

Mr. Rodney: Well, along those lines, Minister, is there anything formal that's going to be done to make wellness information for parents? I know from my time as the associate minister of wellness and as an educator and administrator that oftentimes we're teaching the parents through the kids. It's not that we're replacing the parents for a second, but we often reach the parents through the children.

Mr. Eggen: Yes.

Mr. Rodney: Without them onboard, whatever happens at school might be undone and vice versa. It's got to be a team effort. If the parents come from a place where they're used to healthy eating, active living, then that's one thing. If that's not part of their history, they won't have it to pass along. Without being overly prescriptive, what will you be directing educators to do when it comes to assisting parents in the realm of wellness education?

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. Thank you for that. Again, we know that learning by setting a good example is perhaps one of the best ways to model good eating habits, for example. By setting up these nutrition programs, it's not meant to be replacing students' and parents'

choices around eating food and choosing food. You know, we will have a best-practice document that might come from the 14 pilots, and we can work from it there. You're right. I mean, we do reach into families with everything we do, and we want that to be a partnership so that we're not telling people what to feed their kids by any means. On a personal level, that doesn't fit with the way I would run my family either. We have to be conscious that everything we do has an influence back to individual families and then to the larger community, too.

Again – and this is not my idea – in High Prairie the supermarket chain there, Freson Bros., is supplying and donating a lot of food and then setting up a section in the supermarket where families can go and see that food being displayed as featured in High Prairie elementary or whatever. People can come along and then pick, and their kids can say: "Yeah. Let's get some more of those." I thought that was really cool.

Mr. Rodney: So there's an example of a corporate group doing a good thing. I'll tell you that in my time in wellness we found some really great folks who were in it for the best interests. I would encourage those partnerships.

Mr. Eggen: Oh, yeah. The Freson Bros. are really, really good.

Mr. Rodney: I know we're almost out of time for this segment. Minister, I don't have to convince you that nutrition is just one part of a healthy life. We'll get into the others in our next segment.

Mr. Eggen: Sure. Let's loop back. I'll see you in five minutes.

The Chair: My apologies.

Returning to the government caucus, Mr. Coolahan, would you like to continue sharing your time?

Mr. Coolahan: Yes, please, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Please proceed.

Mr. Coolahan: Good morning, Minister. Welcome back.

Mr. Eggen: Good morning.

Mr. Coolahan: I hope you didn't cry too much at the hockey game last night.

Mr. Eggen: I turned it off.

Mr. Coolahan: It was a tragedy. There's no other way to describe it.

Mr. Eggen: A Pavlovian reaction, right? Just: click.

Mr. Coolahan: Fair enough.

I'd like to turn our attention to the capital investment portion, the overall numbers on page 99. It's just kind of a three-part question here, so I'll go slow. First of all, I'd like you to explain, if possible, to the committee and give us an understanding of how the infrastructure maintenance and renewal program works, how it benefits existing schools, and where it is accounted for in the estimates.

Mr. Eggen: Okay. Let me just process that for a minute here.

Mr. Coolahan: Sure. I can repeat it if you need that.

Mr. Eggen: No, no. I got it. I got the general idea. There are so many acronyms in this job. Are you talking about IMR funding? There you go. We sort of have three main ways by which we address maintenance in our schools. We have more than 1,700

physical structures out there, right? It's big. We have Treasury Board capital projects and plant operations and maintenance funding. IMR is for the life cycle maintenance of a building, you know, things like roofs, boilers, windows, floors, and so forth. Capital projects approved by Treasury Board are to deal with large modernizations that cannot be accommodated under the IMR program.

10:00

When do you go from a routine IMR to a major modernization? I'm still trying to figure that out exactly. At what point do they say: okay; this is now a major modernization? You know, those are significant. You're basically getting a significant reinvestment in that building for it to last a lot longer, right? Those are some of the more complicated major projects we have because you often have the children in the facility while you're doing the maintenance if you don't have a place for them to go. "Decanting" is the word that they use for moving the kids from one place to another.

Projects are selected for replacement or major modernizations through the process in our department along with working with Infrastructure. In this budget, for example, we have \$184.6 million for infrastructure maintenance and renewal, IMR, and that was an increase this year of 33 per cent. Again, it's part of this "put your money where your mouth is," right? I remember, of course, that I used to sit and ask these questions as the opposition, saying: well, you've got to maintain these buildings. You know, that's what we're trying to do. We're building the largest infrastructure build in the history of the province, with 200 school projects on the go right now. I mean, you hear Minister Mason bragging about his roads. That's nothing compared to all of the schools that we're building. Well, he's involved in those, too. I'm just being silly.

So, then, I just wanted to reaffirm that we're putting a life cycle maintenance structure in place that will get the maximum use of this very significant investment. By increasing IMR funding significantly, that's another signal that that's exactly what we intend to do.

Mr. Coolahan: Great. Thank you so much.

I want to look at the 2013 floods. I was impacted by that; my family was impacted. We were homeless for two weeks with a two-year-old. It was the biggest nightmare of my life. Trust me.

I know there were schools that were impacted. I'm not sure how many were actually impacted by the flood. I notice that there is an increase to \$5 million for recovery work being done on those schools. I'm wondering if you could just tell us what's being done at those schools at this time. I also noticed that there was no money allocated for that in 2015-2016 or 2016-2017. Did we not know what the situation was at that time, when we had to put money into the budget to get this refurbishment done?

Mr. Eggen: Well, yes, the flood was significant. We have, I'm counting, eight projects that were on the go: Elbow Park, Rideau Park, St. Mary's, Spitzee, Joe Clark, Senator Riley, Holy Spirit, and Notre Dame. These are ongoing projects that are – you know, I think we're pretty much done those. I know with Elbow Park, for example, it was slow because the school was probably 80 or more years old, right? Part of that money and investment was to do site planning for mitigation of any further flooding that might take place.

What's the school down by the Stampede grounds? Is that St. Mary's? It's really close to the Elbow River.

Mr. Rodney: Yeah, it's St. Mary's.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. I mean, they're in a precarious spot, so I think there's a lot of site work for mitigation of potential future flooding that's going on there and so forth.

You know, we're getting to the end of that cycle. I don't know if we'll see that in the budget next year or not. Watch for it and see. I think we're getting towards the back end of our site work on those eight schools.

Mr. Coolahan: So it could be completed this year or next year.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. I'm just thinking, just using logic – right? – the implication of logic and time here.

Mr. Coolahan: Good. Thank you.

I just want to ask about the capital investment portion again. How much is banked as operating expense, and how much is banked as capital?

Mr. Eggen: Like, for our whole budget?

Mr. Coolahan: Yeah. The line number, I guess, on page 99, the overall capital investment budget.

Mr. Eggen: Oh, the overall capital investment. Okay. Yeah. Let me just check on that. You've got \$118 million previously allocated to capital investment now allocated to the expense section of the fiscal plan, and then you have your \$66.6 million that remains in the capital investment part of that, right? What's the difference between the two? This is new, actually, for our budget this year, and it reflects an accounting treatment of IMR expenditures in school boards' audited financial statements where only the expenditures in life cycle replacements are put under the public-sector accounting standards.

I've asked them about this, actually, because of, again, my previous comment about what is a normal life cycle investment – a coat of paint, a few nails – and what is a major modernization. If we can put the accounting of these things into similar ledgers, you know – and I think that that might be possible, right? Like boards' audited financial statements: 85 per cent of the IMR expenditures are incurred to maintain the value of the asset, which is treated as operational expenses. But then, of course, when we are doing our thing, at a certain point we consider it a capital investment, and it sits on that side of the ledger for us. The degree to which we can harmonize that, I believe, would be helpful. It's certainly something that we are cognizant of. It just sometimes makes the numbers seem a little bit different.

Again, we're sort of a unique ministry because we have a level of government that we are a part of as well, which is the elected board of trustees and all of their responsibilities around accounting that reside there.

Mr. Coolahan: Great. Thank you.

I'm just going to ask you to look into your – I don't know – magic mirror or crystal ball or whatever.

Mr. Eggen: There's no such thing.

Mr. Coolahan: No such thing, no.

I've been touring all of the schools in Calgary's greatest riding, Calgary-Klein, and speaking with grade 6 students. A lot of the teachers and even some of the students were very cognizant of the fact that with the previous government there was some ambition to cut multimillions of dollars from this budget. Now, again, looking into that mirror . . . [A timer sounded] Aw. That's too bad.

The Chair: It was because of that crack about the best riding in Calgary.

We'll move back to the Wildrose caucus. You'll continue sharing your time?

Mrs. Aheer: Yes, please, Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you so much. This is very hard, these little, small chunks of time. I feel like we just get started on our conversations. We were talking about growth and those kinds of things and aspects about how it is that you're determining what schools to build and how that goes forward. On that note, just to follow up with what Member Coolahan was saying about the builds and stuff, obviously, sometimes it's cheaper to tear down a school and rebuild than it is to maintain and renovate and all of that.

You were talking about your modernization replacement processes for choices with infrastructure, \$184.6 million for infrastructure maintenance and renewal. Can you explain how that breaks down in terms of renewals? How are you making those decisions? Are you making them based on growth? Are you making them based on age of school? How are you coming about that information and making those choices? You made some very distinct choices in the budget, and obviously all of us from every other region are going to be hounding you for our schools as well. So if you could please give some information about that.

10:10

Mr. Eggen: Sure. I expect and respect people's advocacy for their constituencies. I mean, it's fundamental, right? I did the same thing, of course, when I was an opposition MLA. The criteria that we use for new schools is predicated with concerns around health and safety. You have schools that are in imminent need of revitalization. I think the Drayton Valley school, for example, had one of its wings taped off with yellow tape: don't go there. It was condemned, right? That was an obvious one. You had, I believe, St. Patrick school in Grande Prairie as well that had imminent problems, really some serious problems. Actually, two schools in Grande Prairie. The other one was, you know, with the actual roof structure having problems.

Then, I mean, enrolment pressures is the big one, right? I don't have to tell you about that. You are the MLA for one of the fastest growing places in not just Alberta but Canada, right? We try to look at a bit of the long game for enrolment pressures, too. I had a very excellent meeting with your Rocky View school district and said: look, you know, I know that you need these elementary schools, but let's do some forecasting about when these kids hit high school, too, because if there's a big bulge in the demographic for elementary schools, lo and behold, then six years later they are going to go to high school. So we try to look at the long game with those enrolment pressures, too.

The rightsizing concept, I think, is not confined to rural areas, but it certainly is part of that. As Deputy Chair van Dijken knows, Neerlandia school, I believe it is – right? – is a good example of this phenomenon, where you get a new school. It's up to date, it's strong, and it's a source of pride for the community, too. I mean, Neerlandia is a vibrant community. You know, they didn't build a bigger school, necessarily – they might have even rightsized it – but then it becomes this pivot point for sustainable community growth for a long time up there in Neerlandia.

Irma is another great example, right? It's even smaller than Neerlandia if you can believe that. They rightsized it, and the community chipped in a lot of money to help that happen.

Then, of course – again, it's not a formula that you can put on a blackboard, right? – there are board priorities. I take that very seriously. I'm not going to bump a school up that's not the top one or two in school board priority because that doesn't make sense.

So I use those criteria. Again, I don't fault any community for advocating for schools in their area by any means. In Calgary and Edmonton there are places where we know we need high schools. I know that very well. I chose to build the schools for this year from the lists from the school boards in each of those cities. I mean, certainly, we'll have another year of school builds here coming up.

So those things are mixed together, and then I can even add one other one, which is some sort of geographical equity – right? – so that we don't build 26 schools in Calgary or whatever, so that there's some spread of geographic fairness, you know. We have one in Medicine Hat. We have one in Lethbridge. We have a number in Calgary. We have one in Red Deer. You know what I mean? Like, you can see my thought pattern on how I do that, too.

Mrs. Aheer: Sure. So, Minister, on that thought, then, if you can look at line 3.2, Alberta schools alternative procurement, in the budget.

Mr. Eggen: What page is that again? Sorry.

Mrs. Aheer: It's page 100.

Mr. Eggen: Page 100. Thank you.

Mrs. Aheer: Line 3.2 under debt servicing. The reason I'm asking about this is because debt servicing has decreased slightly, around \$30 million a year. I mean, I would think that this would be a great alternative in terms of school builds. Do you know how many schools have been built under this process?

Mr. Eggen: If my memory serves me correctly, that is a reflection of P3 schools that we had on the books from before. That is why they are amortized in this manner in our budget, okay?

Mrs. Aheer: It's reflected differently also.

Mr. Eggen: I don't know. Like, I mean, again, I defer to school boards because they are the ones who often will build these schools, and then they have to live with them, too. I haven't run across a school board yet that said: give me more P3s. There have been some problems associated with them. I think the jury is out on whether school boards really appreciate these arrangements or not. I don't know. Some of the limitations that I've heard from them are, you know, in terms of the facility and the maintenance of the facility and the use of the facility and some choices around even the materials that some of these P3 schools chose to use, like drywall in the interior, which breaks quite a lot because there are lots of kids running around and so forth.

You know, my feeling is that the model that we've chosen to build these new schools is working. What I'm seeing now is that over a number of years of tenders and contractors and a long-term commitment to build for population growth, we've built a pretty good system that sees tenders coming in under bid quite a lot, quite significantly, and then a whole cadre of contractors who now have a lot of expertise in building schools because they've now done three, four, five of them, right?

Mrs. Aheer: You would think that they would know what's best and most efficient.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. It feels like we're building a good trajectory to build schools.

I mean, again, I'm being polite. Obviously, I never did like the P3 model and, sure enough, neither do the school boards, so I kind of doubt that it's the best way to go.

Mrs. Aheer: So, Minister, there are no real plans to pursue more P3s, then, obviously.

Mr. Eggen: No.

Mrs. Aheer: Okay. Thank you for answering that.

Have you done any analysis on the increased costs of running new schools or outfitting them? Is that in a budget line item? I mean, we're talking about things like furniture, the equipment that is needed, the impact of the carbon tax, those kinds of things. Like, there are lots of bits and pieces to that question.

Mr. Eggen: Yes. I'm certainly being made aware of these costs by school boards all the time. It's good. They advocate, too, for themselves, right? You know, all new projects do receive a budget for some of these things, like furniture and so forth, but schools make choices around it, too.

Mrs. Aheer: Is it fairly standardized now? I mean, because with your procurements . . .

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. I think it's a formula.

Mrs. Aheer: Right. You would know, I guess. With building infrastructure you were saying that you're getting a better read on how the school is going to look, what it's going to cost, so I would think that there's some sort of consistency as far as the internal pieces, you know, that you would have some idea, I guess.

Mr. Eggen: Absolutely. Yeah. I've been told that we will direct 8 per cent of the total budget for capital projects to furniture and equipment, and then school boards make choices around those things, too.

Mrs. Aheer: Do the school boards pay for those?

Mr. Eggen: Yeah, they can use reserves. They can also pay additional monies if they choose to do so.

Mrs. Aheer: Okay. Thank you so much.

The Chair: I apologize for interrupting.

We'll now move back to Mr. Rodney and the PC caucus. Will you continue sharing your time?

Mr. Rodney: Yeah. Thank you, Chair. On the heels of the last comments about P3s, Minister, obviously, you wearing your glasses and me wearing my contacts, we sometimes see the same thing slightly differently. What I can tell you is that with these two ears, I have heard over and over and over again in my riding that the people are extremely pleased with their P3 schools. That's students, parents, and teachers.

Mr. Eggen: Okay. All right. That's good.

Mr. Rodney: There are three of them. Without trying to ruffle any feathers at all, I'd just invite you – and it's going to be a great experience to open a new school together in the fall, as we've talked about on a few occasions – while you're in the neighbourhood, to tour around. I'm not trying to tell you or sell you on them, but I know that it was an extremely high-growth time and that people needed schools – they needed them yesterday – and they got them the next year. They weren't just pleased that they got them; they were pleased with the design and construction, and they've really

made them their own. You know, no party has a monopoly on good ideas, and sometimes it's this or that or something in between or something brand new.

Getting back to just a couple more questions on wellness before we delve into a different realm, I'm not going to say that we have exhausted the discussion on school nutrition programs, but that's only one component in the life of someone who is well. We mentioned physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, cultural, financial, et cetera. Can we just focus for a minute on the physical?

10:20

Mr. Eggen: Sure.

Mr. Rodney: It's a battle not just in this jurisdiction but around the world, honestly, in education. What's your ministry doing now to teach children good exercise habits at an early age? Perhaps it's part of the curriculum revamp; I don't know. What are you doing to educate them on the health benefits of implementing a healthy lifestyle? I guess what I'm looking for, Minister, as part of this – and I know that you've got your staff working right now on the answer – is: is your ministry considering any long-term studies which could potentially quantify some of the long-term health care savings which have resulted from early implementation of wellness initiatives in our school system?

I want to encourage that because, I mean, it's common sense. We all know that if we are well mentally, physically, emotionally, spiritually, culturally, and financially, that's a good thing. We're living in an age where, unless that's quantified, a lot of people won't buy that. Even if you have a wise investment, whether it's school nutrition or wellness in any other form, they're just not going to buy it. Looking forward, what programs will be offered, what direction will be made in practice and curriculum, and how will that be quantified so that we can prove it for those who really need it to be proven?

Mr. Eggen: Yes. I completely concur with your analysis. We know that we can make choices around physical education that can improve outcomes. It's not just phys ed time, but it's focusing learning in the classroom around physical education, too. Again, if we can break down some of those barriers between, you know, physical education and healthy physical habits and not just try to compartmentalize it into phys ed, I think that's a good idea. Yeah. I mean, my obvious answer is that we are working on a new wellness and physical education curriculum.

Again, the perspective we're taking on curriculum development in general is to look for – and this is the new jargon that I've learned – the crosscurricular competencies that can exist in different subject areas so that, you know, you're not just slotting phys ed in, and that's it. You look for physical elements that can exist in other subject areas and so forth.

I think that, again, you have to be able to try to quantify this. You're right that there are obvious economic benefits from having a healthier population in terms of preventative health care and just a healthier population in general that is more productive and has a better quality lifestyle. I'm definitely interested in doing this and pursuing it. Again, you always have to just advise yourself from your own personal experience. I know the degree to which I am engaged and have a healthy balance, which includes physical activity, one of the main measures that I have of my own quality of life.

Mr. Rodney: I hear you.

Mr. Eggen: What's good for the goose is good for the gander, right?

Mr. Rodney: You just introduced me to another TWA. I've formed an acronym for "three-word acronym." It's TWA. You said CCC, crosscurricular competencies. Please don't make it four words by adding "program," crosscurricular competencies program, because that would be CCCP. Somebody already took that, and it didn't end necessarily that well. But that's looking back.

Looking forward, shifting gears just a little bit, whether people like it or they don't, when it comes to – is this wellness? I don't know. Some would say yes; some would say no. It depends. I'm talking about marijuana. Legalization is upcoming in our country. Let's face it; this is going to be a game changer in our country. A question for your ministry: is your ministry preparing additional resources to provide a more robust education about the potential dangers of using cannabis for kids and to take home for their parents?

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. I mean, we've been thinking about this since the new federal government came into power. There's an interministry committee that's working on this, right? Obviously, Justice is the lead, but we have a large stake in it, K to 12 education, and just like with climate leadership, we can be the ones that lead the healthy and informed population around this new development, the potential legalization of marijuana, to ensure that students are learning, so that the law is strong, so that we're protecting children from this new development, and so that we have informed decisions that students will carry with them to ensure that they are not put at risk.

Mr. Rodney: We're out of time, aren't we? How much time?

The Chair: Three minutes.

Mr. Rodney: Oh, three minutes. Thank you very much.

Time enough to go to key strategy 1.4, providing students with more aligned support for career planning, postsecondary learning, and employment training by advancing collaborative efforts with other ministries through the future ready initiative. Minister, I'd just like to know what your ministry is specifically doing. Can you give us specifics on what your ministry is doing to better prepare students for postsecondary opportunities that they may wish to pursue upon graduation?

Folks, this might be a time when some might be tempted to say: well, your government never did it. Sorry. As you know, one of my favourite phrases is: please stop blaming and start governing. The point here is that things are changing all the time. They're evolving. Markets are changing. I think we can all agree on this. Whether you're in government this term, next term, the term after that or someone else is, this is going to have to be continually re-evaluated.

At this point in time, with the markets the way they are – not just jobs but mission vocation, the call that people have in life to make some money but also to make the world a better place – what is your government doing, for instance, with Advanced Ed to make sure that that transition is not only smooth but effective, where people end up with great jobs, not just in terms of making some money but, you know, turning this world into a better place?

Mr. Eggen: Thank you for that. It's certainly important. The future ready initiative is a way to reach across from grade school to postsecondary, but you know I've always made sure to insert that quality of life element to the future ready so that we're not sort of making it into this reductive thing where it's just like a job machine or something like that. That being said, there's lots of work that we need to do because we have one of the lowest participation rates from grade school to postsecondary.

Mr. Rodney: And there's a reason for that, Minister. But the question was: do you have specific initiatives that you're working on? That's what I want to know.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah, for sure. I'm just about there. That was a comma, a semicolon.

For example, we are looking to expand the dual credit program, which has been very helpful, I think, in making pathways to postsecondary schools, especially colleges, right? We have the knowledge and employability practicum as well, which I would like to also expand as much as we can. As we talked about yesterday, I mean, these are programs that have been around, right? It's not like we're reinventing the wheel. These are just places that we can invest a little more juice into, I think, right? We have lots of work experience programming that can be expanded on as well. As I said, with the green certificate program there's a way to . . .

The Chair: I apologize for interrupting. At this time we'll take a five-minute break and resume at 10:34.

[The committee adjourned from 10:29 a.m. to 10:34 a.m.]

The Chair: All right. We're back with government members. Member Carson, would you like to share your time with the minister?

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would like to share my time with the minister. I'm willing to give everyone a few more minutes around the table to get back if that's possible. Run out our time.

The Chair: Okay. That's fine. Your time will continue to run.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm about ready to move forward. I was actually hoping to put a motion forward to find out if the committee would be interested in moving to 10-minute time slots instead of just five.

The Chair: Unfortunately, because it's under the standing orders, you can't. It would have to be a motion through the House.

Mr. Carson: Fair enough. Okay. Thank you, anyway, Mr. Chair.

Back to you, Minister. I'd like to turn your attention back to page 100 around the inclusive education funds increase, and I'm just wondering how you see this funding supporting students and some of the other work that you might be moving forward with to ensure that schools are more inclusive.

Mr. Eggen: Yes. For sure. I mean, it is a significant part of our budget, \$451 million. This represents a 3 per cent increase from last year. You know, we're trying to always align and co-ordinate ourselves in Alberta Ed to build and strengthen the inclusive education system. We do have an education advisory committee, that has education partners and school authorities on it. They've been trying to talk about how we can improve and, you know, use this fund in a more significant way.

You know, I recognize that there's lots of room for improvement in inclusive education. I think that we know that – I know as a teacher myself that inclusion without adequate supports can sometimes be more of a problem, right? I mean, we recognize the principle of inclusivity as being not debatable, right? The idea that these students have access to the very best in a classroom together, I think, is a very helpful experience. But I think that we could really target our efforts considerably, and I'm willing to try to lead that. I know that building resources and guides for school authorities to help us will probably do something for that.

To listen to teachers and parents around inclusive ed, I think, is very important because I'm not going to be one to dictate the direction we should go except that we need to be stronger and more systematic in our approach. You know, training for teachers of students with special needs and support staff for that is very, very important. I mean, I know as a teacher myself that having some direction like that really makes a big difference to success, and I'm certainly willing to take guidance around this from the strong advocacy that does exist within the teaching community and the parent community.

Mr. Carson: That's great. Thank you, Mr. Chair and Minister.

I just want to add that I had an opportunity to be at the Inclusion Alberta conference a few weeks ago. Shelley Moore was there, and she's an instructor from UBC and may or may not have some work being done within the redevelopment of the curriculum. I think it's very important to have that inclusivity within. That's wonderful.

I don't know how much time I have left, but I'll move forward here. I would like to understand better the plant operations and maintenance program. I think it was touched on. On page 100 I see that the funding for this program has drastically increased over the last two years. I'm just wondering what's driving these costs.

Mr. Eggen: Well, we have a lot of buildings that are older in the province as well, so we definitely recognize the importance of setting some direction for proper maintenance of facilities. You know, it's just like a house. You get to that point of no return with the maintenance of an older building. [A timer sounded] Timely investment: you put a dollar in, and you save \$10 out – right? – especially if you're fixing roofs. Was that the buzzer?

The Chair: You have five more minutes.

Mr. Eggen: I have five more minutes, like, right now?

The Chair: And Member Carson does, between the two.

10:40

Mr. Eggen: Okay. That's fine. I just heard a buzzer, that's all. I'm just Pavlovian trained here, you know.

Like, I kind of talked about this a little bit already, right? You know, we have in the budget this year the plant operations and maintenance grant, that supports the day-to-day upkeep of school facilities. That's \$504 million, and that's a 2 per cent increase. Then we have our infrastructure and maintenance budget as well, which is very significant. You know, you're dealing with a lot of buildings, and you're dealing with an aging stock of structures. I can't remember. We had a sort of breakout of how old our schools are. The age has gone down considerably because we have so many new projects in place, but it's still something to be considering.

Then, you know, of course, when we talk about retrofitting and we talk about energy efficiency, those two things are hand in hand. If we can put investment in heating plants and in more efficient LED lighting systems and so forth, then we're very happy to do so because ultimately we're picking up the bill for those things. If you can reduce your utility costs over time, it gives you a double net benefit, triple, really, because you're also investing in the reduction of GHG emissions and creating an education opportunity for kids as well.

You see some really interesting designs of schools. Like, I was in one in Valleyview that used the passive movement of heat exchange – right? – with sort of that chimney effect between the windows and then a way for the heat to move to the outside. You know, you can build into designs or make modifications to the

design of existing buildings and realize economic savings and educational opportunities and the reduction of GHGs as well.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Minister and Mr. Chair.

Do you actually have any numbers behind how many schools are utilizing things like solar panels or programs like that?

Mr. Eggen: We could find something like that for you. I don't have that just at the tip of my – oh, here we go: 36. That's the new schools that we're building that we're going to put solar panels on. I mean, again, this is kind of like the nutrition program thing, where you have existing schools and programs where they've gone ahead and done some of these things. Like, I know that Queen Elizabeth school, adjacent to my constituency, has had panels on the roof for quite a number of years. You know, we want to augment the good work that people have already done. I can certainly get that information for you if you want to see.

I mean, people will take this up on their own, you know, even before we've made it a focus government-wide. Let's say, for example, solar panels, that we were talking about: the price has gone down so much now. You've hit that special sweet spot, where the cost has gone down by half in the last few years, and they're lighter, and they're more economical.

As I said before, I'll be unapologetic that I consider it to be a good investment for all of those three things that I described before, but also it's like a flag that people can see every day when they pull in, drop their kids off or whatever, seeing panels on the roof, seeing that we're moving ahead and that the school is making that investment in different types of energy.

Mr. Carson: Yeah. I think it's great, and I would like to see more of it. I mean, it's inspirational, I would say, for the kids to be able to show up to class and integrate their mathematics into installing solar panels and potentially becoming an electrician.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. Well, there's an app. Have you seen the real-time app?

Do you have that with your panels?

Mrs. Aheer: No, I don't. Mine are too old.

Mr. Eggen: I don't have them on my house, obviously, but when I do have mine, you can literally see the energy that you're generating in real time on your phone, right? That's pretty cool.

Mr. Carson: That's great. Thank you.

How much time do I have, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: You have two seconds left.

We'll now move to the Wildrose caucus. You'll continue sharing your time?

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

Just to follow up with what Member Carson was saying, I just have one question about that with regard to operations and maintenance. Who has been hired for your retrofits and energy efficiency as far as new schools, retrofitting old schools? Who are you contracting for that? That's a good gig.

Mr. Eggen: I believe we run that through a tender from individual schools. School boards make those decisions and choices, right?

Mrs. Aheer: So each school board will hire their own people?

Mr. Eggen: Each one, yeah. We don't have any central command on that, right? Obviously, like I said before, we're 97 per cent outflow of money.

Mrs. Aheer: Okay. Thank you.

Do you have any projected ideas of the costs of retrofits for schools, what criteria an older school or an upgraded school needs to fall under in order to retrofit and be efficient, and the cost relative to the changes that are happening there?

Mr. Eggen: Well, again, school boards will make that determination. I think their number one utility bill is natural gas, followed by, for most schools, bus transportation and then their lights – right? – electricity. Choices around efficiencies in any of those three categories we will certainly encourage, and the degree to which they're willing to do that, again, will be based on the application that they make for retrofits.

Mrs. Aheer: On their application? Okay.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. I mean, they could go for, you know, changing the windows in the staff room, or they could go for LED lights in the whole school.

Mrs. Aheer: And those choices will be made public – right? – Minister?

Mr. Eggen: Oh, you betcha. Absolutely. One of the ones I'm looking at now as I've travelled around talking about busing is that quite a lot of people contract their buses out. But I don't think that that would preclude us from still investing in perhaps the new generation of propane buses, which are pretty good, right? I know that you can realize savings, quite significant fuel savings, from that, and you do get a cleaner burning fuel from that, too.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Minister.

I just want to jump into assessments for a minute. You had mentioned the grade 3 SLAs.

Mr. Eggen: Yes.

Mrs. Aheer: Do you have any thoughts about putting back in the PATs instead of the SLAs or replacing those?

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Certainly, I'm open to evaluating the situation. I know that our department has put a lot of energy and effort into building the grade 3 SLA program and the different pilots. You know, we've taken constructive criticism and feedback to modify the SLAs. I am willing to look at this with quite an open mind, quite frankly. I realize the importance of having assessments and of those numbers being available to students, teachers, and parents.

Mrs. Aheer: Yeah. It's one part of the picture, isn't it?

Mr. Eggen: Yeah, it is, absolutely. I mean, it's good to be an experienced teacher and look at these things in a practical way, right?

Mrs. Aheer: I think so, too.

Mr. Eggen: Assessment is really helpful. You can see progress over time.

Mrs. Aheer: Yeah, and as you know, assessment doesn't necessarily reflect that child. It's only one part of the puzzle.

If you look at seven-year-olds' milestones, what they're capable of, I mean, they're changing their social and thinking skills. They

have greater independence intellectually and emotionally. They have several thousand words. They're serious thinkers, very serious thinkers. They're logical. They're thoughtful. They can describe objects, complex objects. They are good at solving complex problems for their age level. There are so many things. But they also show signs of low self-confidence and things like that, so this is part of that balance of finding out how to test appropriately. As you know, seven-year-olds are awesome at taking direction. They love that, and I think that aspect of it should be taken into consideration. I know it's different at home than it is in the school setting. It's different, mom versus school.

Generally speaking, all individual pieces aside, one of the things with regard to assessments that I think is important developmentally is that we've got children that are immigrating, not just internationally but provincially, right? Again, we have special needs. We have kids that are coming from traumatic backgrounds. There are so many things that are going to impact that particular number. I think that if we're setting up our kids to succeed that way, understanding and knowing that that's coming towards them, it sets them up for success in the future as adults. I just wanted to make that comment.

Along with that, do you have a place in the budget specifically where you've budgeted for the assessments, so for SLAs, for PATs, diplomas, and international exams? Where's that broken out in the budget?

10:50

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. We'll find that for you here just now.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you so much.

Mr. Eggen: You're right. I mean, when you describe seven years old as the state of readiness for learning a lot of very sophisticated things, I totally concur. Again, while we're just waiting for that number, that's part of what I keep in the back of my mind when we're making decisions around the budget. You know, if we have several thousand seven-year-olds at any given time in the province of Alberta, you really want to make sure that you're targeting that, when they're ready to learn, in the most focused way possible. When we try to do that, I always think to remind ourselves of that, and it helps to make the decisions.

Education system support is where this does reside in the budget.

Mrs. Aheer: Education support? What line item is that, Minister?

Mr. Eggen: It's on page 100, and it's line 2.7.

Mrs. Aheer: I could have guessed that.

Mr. Eggen: That's our famous line 2.7, yeah. That's where it is.

Mrs. Aheer: There's one in every estimates. Okay. Awesome.

Mr. Eggen: Well, yeah.

Mrs. Aheer: Okay. Again, just with regard to assessments – and this is a comment, I guess, as much as it is a question; we were talking a little bit about this yesterday – we have the piece where the parent needs to understand how their child is doing in school and have some sort of understanding from a number and a description of what is happening in that school about that child; you know, that Johnny is progressing this way and that this is the percentage or number which he's functioning under.

I'm going to just quote a recent article where they were saying: parents say that they're not getting enough information to understand their students' strengths and weaknesses. So they're feeling

like the grading system is too vague. I realize that this is a school authority decision, and I realize that this is also a teacher decision, so oversight from you is not necessarily where this comes from. However, how is it, then, that you're going to reconcile, from the ministry perspective, meeting or exceeding expectations and how they compare to their peers, which is an important assessment tool, and then also integrating the importance of making sure that local decision-making is there as far as their determination of how that goes forward? Then how is that information transferred to the parent? Also, for the future, when we're going into secondary education, how does that all transfer there? It's a very loaded question; I'm sorry.

Mr. Eggen: No, no, no. It's perfectly valid, right? You know, you're right. It's important to recognize the autonomy of boards to make choices around these things, but at the same time as a minister and as a teacher and as a parent you want to have a fulsome exchange of information about any given student, and you want to be able to see progress over time. You want to be able to have that meaningful interaction, right? I think that there's a way forward on this. I mean, I encourage all of our school boards to make sure that they have a quantifiable and fulsome program for interacting with parents and with students to demonstrate progress in skill areas. I think that that's absolutely essential. If they are making different choices about that, that's fine, but there has to be a fulsome way by which you can have that conversation and be able to quantify progress over time.

One of the places that I think might be able to bear some fruit here is the standards that we're building for teachers and for principals and superintendents as well – right? – to use the standards as a way by which we can clarify rigour around reporting and assessment. I mean, that's a way that, you know, I want to pursue it.

Mrs. Aheer: Sorry to interrupt you.

Mr. Eggen: No. You go ahead.

Mrs. Aheer: Would grade inflation and those kinds of issues also be part of those standards for teaching? That might be something worth looking into.

Mr. Eggen: Yes. You're right. Yeah, I think so, for sure. Again, I always look at these things as a tension that can bear some constructive fruit, right? I mean, you're not going to solve grading issues, but you can . . .

The Chair: We will now move back over to the PC caucus. Mr. Rodney, will you continue sharing your time?

Mr. Rodney: Well, actually, in this case, Mr. Chair, I'll just ask a two-part question and then throw it back to you because we've only got five minutes for this segment.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah.

Mr. Rodney: We left off, Minister, with the business plan, key strategy 1.4. You know, I can remember that one of the subject areas I really enjoyed teaching was actually a subject area that other teachers didn't want to teach, so they asked me if I'd do it, and I was happy to. That was career and life management. But I'll tell you that back then and obviously even now I hear what you could call complaints or suggestions about this entire realm. So the two-part question begins with this. During your curriculum review process how are you ensuring that our education system better prepares students for the realities of adulthood? By this I mean that

we're talking about continual complaints from parents and young adults that students are not taught in any great detail about things like mortgages, credit cards, how to do your taxes, et cetera. That's the first part of the question.

The second part. With the economy still struggling, many recent high school graduates will be competing against individuals with better qualifications who have been laid off but who are now seeking employment below their previous employment levels in order to make ends meet. What is your ministry doing to assist recent graduates in finding employment as they enter an even tougher job market?

Mr. Eggen: Good. Yes. Thank you. I'll perhaps address the first part of the question first. We know that career and life management is a place for improvement. You know, if we're looking for the most improvement, then career and life management needs, I think, in our curriculum review to be given some considerable attention. I noticed over the Christmas holidays some reflection on this and how students will take it. It's created this mini-industry of taking CALM in the spring and the summer because you can take it in, like, two weeks. But the whole thing around that is that it's like taking some medicine that you have to take, but you don't like it. I think that if you have any kind of program like that in your education system, it's not serving the overall confidence and the intention of education in general because you say: oh, yeah, it's something I don't like that I have to take. It's like bad medicine.

Really, there are lots of very important things that we saw in the survey that everybody – the public and teachers and students – really wants; for example, developing real-life financial literacy skills. It's a good point to bring up. This whole idea about civics and citizenship: again, it does not deserve to be put into a course that people try to get through because they have to and it's a two-week-long thing. I mean, we need to integrate these in a much more meaningful way into the curriculum through crosscurricular competencies and so forth, integrating those concepts into all of the core subjects that we do have.

In regard to the second part of your question, yes, students are entering the work world and into a job market that's very competitive, and I think that the key to success is to have interactions between the larger business economy and schools in different ways, with different choices that people can make, like the RAP program. It's a long-standing, very successful program that allows students to have some apprenticeship connection to a business outside. I know lots of kids that really benefit from that and so forth.

I think that it's important for students to enter the workforce not just to earn the money that they need to survive but as a way by which you can build responsible skills that will carry you forward in the next choice that you make in terms of your career. I know from hiring practices we have that you might look at five people that might be applying for a job with similar qualifications. They even have that job at the Starbucks where they managed a shift, and then suddenly that is a whole new set of responsibilities and knowledge that is invaluable in some sort of a labour management sort of way, in some small, modest way, but it demonstrates leadership.

The degree to which we can tap into those things, those interactions with businesses, with different apprenticeship programs and, you know, off-campus CTF opportunities, I think that really helps to not just give kids a broader education, but it helps them to be more confident and to compete in the workforce, as they should. Young people with enthusiasm and good attitudes and a good education from an excellent system are very competitive in the workforce at any given time.

11:00

Mr. Rodney: You know, Minister, I think there was a little misunderstanding with the chair. They're five-minute blocks, correct? So we still have five minutes?

The Chair: You have four minutes and 30 seconds.

Mr. Eggen: Five and five. Yeah. That's right.

Mr. Rodney: If it's okay with you, can we . . .

Mr. Eggen: We can just interact freely. Yeah.

Mr. Rodney: Can we shift over to indigenous relations?

Mr. Eggen: Yeah.

Mr. Rodney: In the business plan the last paragraph under Strategic Context, on page 50, is that to embrace reconciliation, Alberta has committed to implementing the objectives and principles of the United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, that some people call UNDRIP and TRC. I'll just read this into the record, Minister, and you can get back to us as you can in the time remaining or otherwise. It's all related to UNDRIP and TRC. How are schools and students participating in TRC; in the process, that is? How are schools being supported for UNDRIP initiatives? And can you give us an update on the status of the Amiskwaciy Academy and explain how the ministry is supporting this rather unique school?

The fourth point here is about estimates, a quotation from you from last year: "We will also be pushing hard on our federal peers to address the gap in funding between students living off- and on-reserve." Can you outline for us what progress has been made in this area?

The last couple of points. Realizing that a large amount of the responsibility for on-reserve initiatives falls to the federal government, what are you doing to support on-reserve education for indigenous students in Alberta? Finally, what's your ministry doing to recruit and retain teachers for on-reserve schools, which is obviously a serious challenge?

Mr. Eggen: Good. Thank you. That's an excellent canvas of many issues. You know, to honour the commitment that we made to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, we are working with our education partners to enhance curriculum and to provide additional opportunities for students and teachers to learn about residential schools and treaties; First Nations, Métis, and Inuit history; and to infuse these lessons through curriculum programming from kindergarten to grade 12.

Also, in our joint commitment to action, that I signed in June of last year, we're working together with the Association of Alberta Deans of Education, the Alberta School Boards Association, the College of Alberta School Superintendents, and the Alberta Teachers' Association together with the national Truth and Reconciliation Commission to build professional development for all staff in the province of Alberta over the next 36 months in no particular order. I mean, I can give you a more fulsome answer, but time will tick away here.

It's interesting that you just mentioned Amiskwaciy – right? – which is a focus for me personally as well. It's in my constituency of Edmonton-Calder, and I know the principal quite well.

We've put a commitment to Ben Calf Robe school, which is the Catholic school board First Nations focused school, in this last budget for a major renovation. We're just in the process of trying to get the two schools, Amiskwaciy and Ben Calf Robe, to work

more closely together to provide innovative programming for tracking kids here in the city of Edmonton. We're looking for some facsimile of this in the city of Calgary as well.

I think part of my strategy over the last year is to look for reserves in close proximity to active school boards that have innovative programming that are willing to work and to build something new for looking after kids on- and off-reserve. I met with the minister of indigenous relations – is that what it is? – Carolyn Bennett, in Calgary a few weeks ago to press the case for having an equalization of funding between on-reserve and off-reserve schools and students.

Mr. Rodney: How did that go, Minister? We need some results for that.

Mr. Eggen: It was pretty good. You know, it's hard to read these guys, right? The feds are a bit of a poker-faced crew.

The Chair: I apologize for interrupting.

Mr. Eggen: I'll get back to you on that.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you.

Mr. Eggen: I'll tell you that I've got a couple of good things.

The Chair: We'll now move back to government caucus. Mr. Coolahan, would you like to continue sharing your time with the minister?

Mr. Coolahan: I would, Chair. Thank you.

The Chair: All right. Please proceed.

Mr. Coolahan: Minister, I'd like to start this 10 minutes, I guess, with line 2.7, the education system support.

Mr. Eggen: Okay. Line 2.7 in the budget?

Mr. Coolahan: In the budget on page 100.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. Okay.

Mr. Coolahan: Actually, there is a decrease projected or being submitted for this estimate. Now, what is actually covered under this?

An Hon. Member: Good question.

Mr. Eggen: What the heck is it? That's right.

Mr. Coolahan: That should take up 10 minutes.

Mr. Eggen: I mean, in the last couple of days we've mined into it, right? But perhaps I can give a more systematic picture of the famous line 2.7.

Mr. Coolahan: Sure.

Mr. Eggen: This is our administration budget, if we can describe it generally that way. It's administrative spending in regard to curriculum program implementation; student assessments; teacher certification; First Nations, Métis, and Inuit supports; school facilities support; financial management and planning. You'll see that this is where we did realize a reduction of \$1.7 million with this budget as a result of further department efficiencies that I did demand, that were delivered, and then some lower costs, including pensions and so forth.

You know, we tried to look for ways to save money – right? – which is your job every time you build a budget, especially during this difficult economic time. Plus, there's the decision that we made to move forward on the school fees reduction bill a year earlier than what I had budgeted for. So we will reduce spending by \$15 million in this area to contribute to that objective. Overall, Education will look to a reduction, or savings, of about \$42 million in this budget and \$16 million in each, by making grant adjustments.

It's important to realize that in the whole budget, of the \$8.1 billion that we have in Education, only about 2 per cent of that is running through our Alberta Education budget. So we do quite a lot with what we have. I've been looking hard to make sure there's the balance between thrift and economy and sustainability – right? – so that I have a high-functioning department under us to make the right choices but to make sure the costs stay under control. That's kind of the combo that we do have there. You know, I'm certainly willing to provide any more detail that you might require.

Mr. Coolahan: Okay. Thank you. Well, I really do appreciate that in this difficult economy the government and your department are trying not to allow education to suffer as the result of a poor economy. It shouldn't take a hit just because the economy is bad. We need to move forward with educating our children. So thank you for that.

On that, everyone seems to be quite interested in 2.7. Are there other parts in the budget that you can just point us to where you've tried, at least if there's not a decrease, to keep it status quo? How are you trying to sustain the budget so that it doesn't grow too quickly, I guess?

11:10

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Well, the budget growth is largely due to enrolment and population growth. You know, we're the youngest population in Canada. Families are not leaving, and they're continuing to have children, which is great for education and, really, for our future, isn't it?

I know that we have been seeing savings by, you know, quite aggressively tendering and negotiating for our new capital builds. We're seeing those come in lower than we might have thought a couple of years ago. I mean, you're spending money there, but you're spending less money, and you're getting important capital buildings out of the deal.

We have been looking at the DM's office – right? – all of the budget line items around sort of lines 1 to 1.5 on page 100. You'll see that ministry support, my office, has realized some efficiencies and reductions. The deputy minister's office, again, has demonstrated long-term reductions over time and so forth. That's always one of the first places I try to go. Again, I'm very cognizant of the scope of our responsibilities. You probably can see it anecdotally. You know, it's a busy ministry, so you don't want to be short-staffed of the high-quality people that we need to make important decisions on the fly to ensure the high quality of education for our children.

I mean, that's the balancing act that we do. We did realize some reductions that allowed me to invest in An Act to Reduce School Fees a year earlier than I thought, so I'm pretty proud of that.

Mr. Coolahan: Good. Thank you so much. I think you should be proud of that. It's been a big hit – that's for sure – with the people I've spoken with.

How much time do I have left, Chair?

The Chair: Three minutes, 30 seconds.

Mr. Coolahan: Three minutes and 30 seconds.

Mr. Rodney: You can turn it over to us if you want.

Mrs. Aheer: I have lots of questions.

Mr. Coolahan: We'll get to you.

I'm going to look to page 103 right now in the budget. I want to draw your attention to the funding being provided under operating support for public and separate schools. Can you just tell us what that funding is used for and how it benefits students?

Mr. Eggen: Sure. You know, the Education budget at first glimpse seems to have different numbers in different places. I believe the \$2.46 billion is the money from taxes. You know, that represents only a part of the total operational support that we give to public and separate school boards.

Oh, I see what it is. I apologize. The \$2.2 billion is for the education property tax. Okay?

The other amounts along this line item – plant operations and maintenance, transportation, class size, and so forth – are essentially the funding that we provide to school jurisdictions through the funding framework to support students. You'll see that the \$2.46 billion includes approximately \$181 million more than last year. That's enrolment, basically. The funding framework provides funding to school authorities through a per-student grant. That's the system that we use. Our projection through Treasury Board is for an increase of 1.8 per cent, 12,000 students, for the school year. So we're covering that off.

We found that we had exceeded the projection for school enrolment last year. Just as a word of caution, you know, depending on what's happening out there for kids, we can see that number fluctuate. We get the final numbers in usually by the end of September, I think. We compel the school boards to give those numbers to us, and then that's how we set the budget.

Mr. Coolahan: Great. Thank you so much.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you.

Mr. Coolahan: We're down to one minute. Okay. I almost hesitate to start a question because I'll get half an answer.

Mr. Eggen: No, no. That's fine. I understand. There's no shame in passing it on to the next person.

Mr. Coolahan: Maybe I can start the question, and then we can come back to it. On page 105 of the budget . . .

Mr. Eggen: Page 105? Okay. I see that one.

Mr. Coolahan: . . . there's a reference to an increase in revenue being taken in by the department.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. Okay. I mean, I think you're looking at the consolidated total for the budget. That's \$3 billion, and then . . . [A timer sounded] We'll get back to that.

Mr. Coolahan: Yeah. We'll come back to that.

Mr. Eggen: We will come back to that. We've got lots more time.

The Chair: All right. We will now move to the Wildrose caucus. You'll continue sharing your time with the minister?

Mrs. Aheer: Yes, if you don't mind, Chair, a little bit off and on. Do you mind if I read some of my questions into the record?

Mr. Eggen: No. I understand.

Mrs. Aheer: Okay. Thank you so much.

Mr. Eggen: I used to be sitting in your chair, so I remember how it works.

Mrs. Aheer: I have so much stuff. I appreciate that. Thank you so much, Minister.

I'm going to be flipping back between outcome 2 of the business plan on page 52 and page 100 of the budget. Probably, I'm assuming, 2.7 will be in there, but we're going to be at 2.8 as well, just for a little difference. In the business plan you talk about the systemic education achievement gap between First Nations, Métis, Inuit students and all other students – right? – and that you want to eliminate that. We read that there are still significant gaps between FNMI students and other students in Alberta. Obviously, addressing that gap is a priority for the ministry, and it's critical. My questions are more about the student achievements, again, both off- and on-reserves, and then some budget questions as well.

I'll start with the budget line number questions. That's, as I said, on page 100, line 2.8. Then with regard to the business plan, you're committing to the curriculum initiatives that allow all students and teachers to "learn about the history... of residential schools, treaties and the diverse perspectives and experiences" of our First Peoples here in Alberta and Canada. I was just curious: just some general questions around your objectives, the costs of how that's going to work out. Also, federal funding for that: what part is that? Obviously, crossministerial interactions as far as bringing this forward, the co-ordination of that work. How and when will that new curriculum hit the classrooms? Do you have an ETA on that? I know you've got K to 4 worked out. How much have you budgeted for those activities? As a provincial government are you responsible for all those costs, or is there a funding agreement between the federal and provincial counterparts and band funding, I guess, as well with that? That's my first chunk of questions.

I'd also like to know along with that if you've had interactions with First Nations so far, how that's gone, and the response to that. Also, do you have First Nations representatives in your ministry?

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Well, starting with the last question first, I guess, certainly we do. The FNMI division of Alberta Education is very strongly represented by First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Albertans from top to bottom – right? – representing different cultural groups, representing all three treaties, representing different geographic locations and genders as well. It's a very strong group. Their interactions with both the treaty political structures and then each of the bands that we have in the province are a very important part of how we move forward on FNMI education here in the province.

You know, every step of the way I'm very sensitive to ensure that we're working as partners with individual First Nations, with each of the three treaties, and with our urban First Nation population, too, because, I mean, I'm sure that lots of decisions in the history of education were made with the best of intentions, right? I don't doubt that. I'm a student of believing in the best of human beings in general, but things can go off the rails. I mean, the history of residential schools, which was an education program – right? – has made a lot of people in First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities very suspicious about governments coming up with new programming to help education on- and off-reserves. So every step of the way I'm superconscious of that and trying to make sure that we don't just use the word "partnership," but we really do do that on the ground every step of the way. Sometimes that makes things a bit slower, but diplomacy – sincere, authentic diplomacy – must be undertaken in that way.

We've seen some success as well. Like, the education authority partnerships that we established with Kee Tas Kee Now Tribal Council, I think, are a good example, that other people in Alberta are taking notice of. I have Maskwacis as well. I think there are three bands involved with that initiative that want to set up something similar. It's an association where there's ownership being taken of education by the bands, and then we interact as an affiliate with them...

11:20

Mrs. Aheer: How does that work?

Mr. Eggen: ... Kee Tas Kee Now, up just east of Peace River, and five bands, including Lubicon Lake and four others sort of between Peace River and Wabasca, you could say.

How is it going to work? Well, you know, we're negotiating as we go – right? – so that they are establishing standards for education on their own so that we are supporting schools on- and off-reserve. As the Lubicon Lake treaty is negotiated – I think it could be this year – then we will work with that and adapt to that, too. The key, as I say, going back, is to be working as full partners straight across on each of these initiatives every step of the way.

It is garnering, like I said, some attention. People want to do something similar in Maskwacis, maybe in southern Alberta, too. It's garnering some national attention, too, I believe, this approach. When I went to visit the minister, Carolyn Bennett, down in Calgary a few weeks ago, you know, what I was pushing for was a pilot or pilots in places where we can have the equalization of education money on-reserve and off-reserve occur.

Again, talking about history and people being justifiably either cynical or suspicious of these things – right? – because of what happened in the past, you know, when we move in and give more money provincially for First Nations education, people are afraid that that will compromise the treaty agreement that they have with the federal government, and the federal government will pull back on their funding because they'll say: oh, well, Alberta is giving out money. One of the things that I did achieve with Carolyn Bennett and her group two weeks ago was to write a formal statement in a letter that they will not reduce their federal funding based on any new arrangements that we might undertake provincially. It's kind of like a reassurance letter for First Nations, that they can continue interacting with us to ...

The Chair: I apologize for interrupting, Minister, but you've utilized the full five-minute block that's allocated, so the remaining time would be Mrs. Aheer's.

Mrs. Aheer: Oh, thank you very much. Okay. Maybe we can go back and forth for that last two minutes. Thank you very much, Chair.

Thank you. Please finish.

Mr. Eggen: The chair has been rough.

Mrs. Aheer: I know. He's good.

Please finish your thoughts there, sir, and then if you wouldn't mind ...

Mr. Eggen: Oh, yeah. I mean, this is, you know, what we want to try to do. My goal, I think, everyone's goal, I'm sure you would concur, is to try to have equal funding or comparable funding for every student in Alberta regardless of where they happen to live, right? I mean, there are some individual circumstances of geography, but for a student to be funded by a third less because they live on this side of a reserve line compared to the kids over

here – what you see is that lots and lots of families, if they have the means, will take their kids to our schools because they're better funded on the provincial side. I would like to see this equalized.

Just as the federal government has been compelled to at least begin the work of equalizing social services that might exist on the federal reserve, so too must they be compelled to equalize education on- and off-reserve. I'm willing to work with that. I mean, we're not just going to pick up the bill and let the feds walk away, but I think we're in a historic moment where we can start to actually make this happen.

Mrs. Aheer: The reason I asked about your representation in the ministry was mostly because, as you know, the diversity even within the bands is very unique. Having a comparable person within the ministry to be able to understand – and as you know, it's not just about negotiating; it's like a separate country, right? This is a completely different nation, a completely different group of people, thought processes, everything. The respect that needs to be had between both sets of government and both sets of people and generally the expectations for how it is that we interact together are of high importance because, as you know, with many of the other things that are going on right now, those interactions have not been particularly led, maybe, in the most appropriate ways, so you end up with roadblocks simply because of lack of consultation or consensus or all these other important things. That's why I was asking about your ministry. The diversity is wonderful, and that's great to hear, but diversity also, you know, within that is important.

Mr. Eggen: But we can always do better, too.

The Chair: I apologize for interrupting.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you for clarifying that, though.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah.

The Chair: We'll now be going to Mr. Rodney and the PC caucus. You'll continue sharing your time?

Mr. Rodney: We have 10 minutes in this segment, correct?

The Chair: Yep.

Mr. Rodney: If we can go back and forth, Minister, we'll do that.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Rodney: We left off dealing with Indigenous Relations and your department. I wonder if we could turn to page 52 of the business plan, outcome 2, which states, "The systemic education achievement gap between First Nations, Metis and Inuit students and all other students is eliminated." Obviously, I completely support this, and I applaud the work. We need to get this done.

It's a three-part question, Minister, so perhaps you can just see the topics within. First of all, during estimates last year you were speaking about on-reserve students, and you said, "We know that there's more that we can do to support our families and to encourage our students to attend school." I'm looking forward to finding out what results you might have had from then to now in this area and wondering if you see an increase in graduation rates amongst indigenous students for this year or the next year, going forward, compared to last year.

The second question in this vein notes that performance measure 2(e) seeks to measure the percentage of self-identified First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students who complete high school within five years of starting grade 10. Now, there seems to be a problem

here. Perhaps there's an explanation. The last time there was a metric for this was 2014-15. That was actually before your government took office, so maybe there's a quick and easy answer to that. Of course, if we're going to do something about it, we need to be able to measure it.

Then the last part, the last question on this line related to page 52, is: what specific supports has your ministry enacted in order to support students who do not graduate within the allotted three years but would still like to finish their high school somewhere like Centre High here in Edmonton, where I believe the current Education minister used to teach?

Mr. Eggen: A little bit, yeah. A little bit.

Well, thank you for all of those questions. Certainly, we can see that we've set ambitious goals for improving graduation rates and school attendance rates for First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students, self-identified. I think that we have seen at a board level in a number of places initiatives that have demonstrated success. Whether we have numbers for this year: I need to get back to you on that, hon. member, please.

Mr. Rodney: Okay.

Mr. Eggen: I don't have that right at the tip of my hands, but I certainly will give it to you.

I believe that being more flexible and having alternative programming for students, not just in the big cities but in the other communities, is very important. I've seen more high school completion opportunities coming from different colleges like Lakeland and Fairview and Olds and Red Deer. You know, we know that we've had some success. We've engaged with an interesting not-for-profit group called Frontier College, that works in the summertime with kids to have summer camp school, right? I went out to visit one at the Paul band, and it seemed really successful.

I mean, we know that, again, it's a go-forward situation, but by focusing our attention on Northland school division, we will be – it's about 97 per cent, I think, First Nations, Métis population on that school board. We know that we can make some marked improvements by focusing money and time on this school board mostly because the results in attendance and graduation are so low right now that you will realize improvement, for sure, just because the situation is not good to start with, right?

11:30

Yeah. I mean, I believe that it's important to set a long-term goal to equalize the graduation and achievement standards for all students in the province. I know that it's an ambitious target, but I also believe that it's the only target that we can set, ultimately, that every student must over time be achieving and improving the achievement of our population in an equal and just manner.

Mr. Rodney: Okay. Let's move on to key strategy 2.4 then, and I look forward to your responses to the other questions, as you suggested, perhaps, later in writing.

Mr. Eggen: Which one? Sorry, hon. member.

Mr. Rodney: It's 2.4. "Collaborate with education stakeholders, communities and other ministries to strengthen First Nations, Metis and Inuit education programs, policies and initiatives." A four-part question. Let's get to whatever answers you can provide in the time that we're allotted here today.

First of all, having culturally competent staff is an integral component of ensuring our education system is inclusive for Alberta's indigenous students. I'm sure we can all agree on that.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. Absolutely.

Mr. Rodney: Question 1: what is your ministry doing to improve the cultural competency of teachers in Alberta specifically related to indigenous history and culture in Alberta? That's question 1.

Secondly, how does your ministry work with Advanced Ed to attract more indigenous students to various teaching programs at PSEs across Alberta?

Thirdly, what is your ministry doing to work with Advanced Ed to increase the number of indigenous professors in our teaching programs at PSEs across Alberta?

Finally for this section, what is your ministry doing to attract and retain more indigenous teachers at school boards across Alberta?

Mr. Eggen: Excellent. I can follow your line of thought, and it's sound.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you. Let's hope the answers are, too.

Mr. Eggen: Well, they have been so far. That's for sure.

I think that for us to have an educated population of teachers and support staff and administrators in regard to elements and the findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and indigenous history and culture is absolutely essential. I've already talked about the agreement that we made with the national TRC to achieve this, but we're also embedding this expectation into the teaching quality standards, that we'll be putting out here straight away, for teachers and for administrators and for superintendents as well. So we are formalizing that into quality standards and expectations for all teachers and the other groups that I had mentioned.

In order to do that authentically, we need to reach into our postsecondary institutions to have that programming built into their teaching of teachers, student teachers, and for their postsecondary instructors themselves to have those same standards built into their systems. While I'm not the Advanced Education minister, I do have a regular interaction with the teaching and training colleges here in the province to focus in on that. Indeed, I have had specific conversations with them very closely very recently, you know, with them asking with bated breath, excited to have the teaching quality standards entrenched into their own postsecondary curriculums.

We know that our First Nations, indigenous studies programs, at the University of Alberta, say, for example, have been strengthening their position considerably in the last number of years, and we know as well that the success of school boards such as Northland in no small measure depend on our ability to attract and to train and to retain First Nations teachers that can be the pivot point for these schools and the school board, not just teachers but also administrators, First Nations administration. So we've been in conversation with the University of Alberta to have an administration program for training First Nations principals and superintendents for these school boards, too.

I think that's an important thing to do. I mean, it's modelling for the kids. It's showing respect for the community. It's the partnership writ large by actually putting those leaders into place. We do have an FNMI teacher bursary program with the University of Alberta. It's \$1.7 million. And we are expanding to – I mean, I think a big part of showing respect is to have . . . [A timer sounded] Not buzzers going off. That's not respect.

The Chair: I apologize to interrupt, Minister, but we will be moving on to government caucus time.

Member Carson, would you like to share your time with the minister?

Mr. Carson: Yes, of course. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you, Minister. Moving back to a question my colleague from Calgary-Klein had, on page 105 there is reference to an increase in revenue being taken in by the Department of Education. I'm hoping that you can walk me through where this revenue came from and why it's trending up so significantly.

Mr. Eggen: Okay. Yeah. Revenue collected by the Department of Education, the \$29 million thing: is that what it is? We break that down as follows, then: \$16 million for the French language program, \$6.4 million for IT development, \$1.5 million for diploma exam fees. Then you have \$1.5 million for education print services, \$1.4 million for high school transcripts, and then \$775,000 for teacher certification fees. Obviously, we don't generate a lot of money, but we do have – I think that other revenue would include some of the international use of our curriculum in different places; that could be that – some modest ones, and we have seen increases based on that list that I just gave you.

Mr. Carson: Thank you.

Also on page 105 there is detailing of interministry consolidations. I'm just wondering: what other ministries does Education work with, and what services are supported or streamlined through this collaboration?

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. I mean, we work through quite a few different other ministries. I'd like to see more, really – well, not more but more robust, I think, is the direction I would like to go. The Alberta Foundation for the Arts, for example, through Culture: we have art-related projects and events that work through that. We have Alberta Health Services with programming to provide health care services through that arrangement, a \$10 million deal. We also have Alberta human services – well, I guess, Children's Services and Community and Social Services now – to provide school boards with supports for children in care. We also have a small arrangement with Service Alberta to upgrade our student information system and curriculum and so forth.

You know, these are all places that we have gone in the past. In the future, I mean, I'm looking to have more wraparound service between, say, Alberta Health Services and Children's Services to work in schools – I think that that really helps us – and to have Advanced Education as an entry point for kids more aggressively, too, right? We know that if we provide postsecondary dual-credit opportunities for kids in school, it really does help with advanced education, too. We end up with more kids, especially in some colleges like Olds and Fairview, Red Deer College, going to postsecondary that wouldn't normally go because we've given them a nice, easy access through high school. My expectation is that Advanced Education would work with us more closely to make that even stronger.

11:40

Mr. Carson: Perfect.

Just moving back to wraparound services, on page 111 there is \$10 million allocated to Alberta Health Services in our schools, and I'm just wondering what tangible impacts you see that funding having. What sorts of programs? I believe Mr. Rodney had brought it up earlier, but I'm hoping that you could discuss some of those programs and what you see as considered successful with the implementation of that funding.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. I mean, I totally agree. This does also include the use of nurses on-site for supports for students in regard to immunization, community health initiatives, and then resource supports for students and for teachers to be able to reference the

skills of registered nurses to help families. We're often the first point of contact for any given family for any sort of provincial service because the kids go to school and then you might identify other things that they can use to help them, so we like to keep our eyes and ears open to make good use of that interaction with a student, kids, and new Canadian families especially.

In addition, Alberta Health also supplies the healthy school communities through their healthy school community wellness fund and their ever-active school initiatives, so this does exist. We juice it up, of course, to make it more active. It will be ever and ever active, maybe something like that. The Alberta healthy school community wellness fund also provides facilitated support to school communities to advance school health, comprehensive school health and so forth. To date the wellness fund has contributed support to almost all of our schools, really, in almost all of our boards, so that's great. You know, we have school-aged children in funded schools having reduced obesity rates compared to the national average, so that's got to be good. The ever-active school initiative is there for us to allow boards to make creative decisions to promote healthy lifestyles.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Chair and Minister.

Moving along, in outcome 1 of your ministry's business plans you discuss the future ready program, and I'm just wondering: what are some of the next steps for your ministry in implementing that program, and what do you see for the future of the future ready program?

Mr. Eggen: Well, you know, we've sort of talked of this. In the last two days we've talked about it a fair bit, but one area of interest that hasn't been mentioned yet is the bridge to teacher certification program. I strengthened this considerably here a couple of weeks ago, and it allows more trained professionals to be in the classroom as teachers. We've seen this expanding and as quite valuable. Kids really glom onto it, too, because they – let's say, in a high school kitchen they'll have these red seal chefs that are there that have worked in restaurants and have experience in baking and all that kind of stuff, and then they bring that to the school. I mean, it's not to say that your regular teacher isn't interesting and worldly and, you know, has lots to offer but from a guy who's a chef, who actually has one of those big chef hats and has worked in restaurants for years – you can tell that the kids are just really jazzed about that.

I think that the bridge to teacher certification program allows trades professionals to be in the school teaching and getting their certification over time at the same time. They're not a teacher yet, necessarily, but over a couple of years they can do so in the summer and so forth by correspondence. Yeah. It's very successful.

We see cosmetology being a common place for this to happen as well and automotives and welding and so forth. You know, I think it's a great way for kids to see successful trades professionals in the school and teaching and for them to get their teaching accreditation at the same time.

That program I expanded out quite a lot. I can't remember. Did we double it or more? I think I did. You know, so I'm curious to see how that goes, and if it works, we'll make it even bigger, right? I think that's a good idea. Yeah, we doubled it, basically. We more than doubled the bridge to teacher program.

Also, future ready is just a good way for us to remind ourselves about career training with every sort of initiative that we have. Future ready is a way for us to always remind ourselves of this important responsibility that we have to create an educated and flexible workforce through our schools. I mean, again, not to say that that's what the only function of schools is, just to create workers, you know, but that it's important for us to remind

ourselves of that. The future ready initiatives that we do, like I've been saying here in the last couple of days, around working with colleges and working with apprenticeship programs and giving kids credit for all of those things . . .

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

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

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Chair. If it's all right with you, Minister, can we kind of do it like we did last time, and you'll let us know . . .

Mr. Eggen: Yeah, I understand exactly. You want to get your questions in, and we will be sure to answer them in a timely manner.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you so much. I'm going to kind of hop between the business plan, pages 49 and 50, just to follow up with some questions from my last little chunk there, and then I'd like to end with looking at the high school redesign a bit, at 2.7.

Mr. Eggen: Roger.

Mrs. Aheer: Okay. The questions that I'd like to ask around pages 49 and 50 were with regard to the gap and the priority focus on a persistent and systemic approach to the gap. I just want to understand how you plan to strengthen accountability for funding in those expenditures, to make sure that we're seeing that. The strategies that you're implementing to monitor student success, which I think falls a little bit on what Member Carson was saying: does that include testing, for example, with diploma exams as well? What systemic changes do you foresee where the results are not achieved? And is there a line item for your collection of data, or was there already a mechanism for that? Is that how you approached this particular outcome?

The other one that I wanted to ask about is – and I was really interested in this – what is a stand-alone competency? That's on page 50. Where is that line item? If we're looking at the geography, just northern and western Canada, there's a diverse geographic area, varied culture and linguistic backgrounds, and students attend schools in a variety of settings, including urban, rural, and isolated communities. How is that curriculum being rewritten and created to help support teachers, who need to understand that diversity of the students? And are you integrating as well the holistic experiences – making connections, active participation, oral communication – into that future ready perspective?

Again, just another question around that, on the assessments and strategies and supports that are going to be created for closing those gaps. If you could at some point provide a line item – I'm assuming that it's 2.8, but if there's another one – and just a statement that it needs to go beyond incidental inclusion, right?

Mr. Eggen: Yeah.

Mrs. Aheer: That's my first chunk.

And then I'll jump over, if you don't mind, to . . .

Mr. Eggen: No. Feel free.

Mrs. Aheer: . . . high school redesign, back to 2.7. The first question I wanted to ask, actually, was from one of my Wildrose caucus mates, and this is actually a really interesting question. With regard to the redesign, is there a space for Albertans that you are having included in the redesign, for retired teachers and parents and students as well? I know that you've talked about the inclusion of those folks, but is there another way, or are you looking to reach

out again more into the communities to have them involved in the curriculum rewrite? I'll ask that question as well if you don't mind. I'll just read it into the record.

Then moving on to 2.7, one of the first questions I'll ask is: how much of Inspiring Education is in the initiatives going forward with this plan that you have? One of the things is that we're not quite sure where in the budget we see the funds for moving forward with the high school redesign, so if that can be pulled out as well. How much have you allocated, I guess, to that in the budget? And are you tracking student learning as a result of where we're at, where you're going, that sort of thing?

The next piece I wanted to ask was on the funding model for the CEUs. In changing the funding model for CEUs, are you moving to block funding as a way of implementing flextime? Is that correct?

Mr. Eggen: Not entirely. I mean, it's the direction. Like, we've given options for high schools, and then it just sort of started to trend that way, right?

11:50

Mrs. Aheer: Oh. It just trended that way?

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. You still have people using the traditional credit system, but we've hit that point where there are more people using the high school redesign block model now, just by choice.

Mrs. Aheer: Okay. If we could have some – like, that provides some clarity. If there are changes, if you could let us know if that's happening.

Mr. Eggen: Absolutely.

Mrs. Aheer: We've been getting asked that question quite a bit.

Mr. Eggen: Yes.

Mrs. Aheer: Reflecting the block funding, you encourage school boards to take anyone up to a maximum age, and then after that there's a freeze on the head count. Is that correct?

Mr. Eggen: Block funding up to a certain age, and then it's – I'll have to get back to you on that. I mean, we only fund up to a certain age.

Mrs. Aheer: Because you want kids to complete their courses, right?

Mr. Eggen: We do. That's right. You know, I've been reflecting on that. I mean, I can make it so that you can get my five minutes here. Don't worry. We'll make it so that I'm not going to take your time.

Mrs. Aheer: Okay. Please go ahead.

Mr. Eggen: You know, one of the changes is if we increase the age of access, right? But, I mean, it's not cheap. So we do fund to age 20 at this point, and then I'm just trying to find some innovative ways by which we can get kids to keep – you know, because things happen. Who knows what happens in a kid's life, why they have to drop out of school, and then they want to go back. Most kids that do drop out go back by 21 or so to finish up, but we want to make that easier somehow. We've picked up that information from boards, and we are sort of analyzing it now to try to figure out the best way to move forward on it. I mean, if it's block funding, though, if they're in a CEU situation, they still get the money to age 20, period. So that seems to be the way.

Mrs. Aheer: Okay. Thank you for that clarity.

Mr. Eggen: Are there any other questions you want to ask me?

Mrs. Aheer: Yeah, if you don't mind.

Mr. Eggen: Absolutely. Let's go.

Mrs. Aheer: Okay. Thank you so much. I appreciate it.

Mr. Eggen: Go ahead.

Mrs. Aheer: This is again page 50, outcome 1 in the business plan, Alberta's students are successful. I want to understand a little bit about the funding for this outcome. For instance, there are several targeted funding pieces in the budget that may not provide for independent schools. In the funding manual you have additional allocations for differential cost factors. So those are not available to independent school authorities, especially in section 1.10 of the funding manual. I don't know if you have your funding manual here, but that's not available. Then it also says in there specifically that it's only available to school jurisdictions. So if you're an accredited funded private school, we can only assume that when that funding comes down for ECS operators or other school jurisdictions – I'm just not sure. Are those funds only available, then, to school jurisdictions, or is it also going to be funding independent schools as well?

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. I'll check on that for you.

Mrs. Aheer: Okay. If you can get back to me on that, that would be great.

Then you go right ahead, sir. It's your time. Thank you so much.

Mr. Eggen: You're welcome. Thank you for asking very thoughtful questions. I'm just randomly going back through . . .

Mrs. Aheer: I'm sorry. I threw a lot at you.

Mr. Eggen: That's fine. You know, on building the curriculum and trying to include as many people as possible, I really want to try to do that. In the next go-round of engagement in the next couple of months or so I want to increase the presentation capacity to the curriculum working groups. I think we did probably a hundred and some interactions last time. I want to try to break that out. I mean, retired teachers are a very good one, right?

On engagement with general society, I think people need to start to kind of formalize themselves. Like, for example, when I talked to the Energy ministry yesterday, some of these energy companies said: well, can we present? And we said: absolutely. I really want that. So I think people start to cop onto this process. We will continue over the next six years to have those interaction times available for presentation to the curriculum design teams. The curriculum design groups as well: I mean, there are hundreds of people in there. It'll change over time, too, I imagine, over the six-year period. You know, people will come and go, and that's probably healthy, too.

Perhaps just moving along on that same theme, we've got all kinds of things here. If I just pasted them together, I could make a funny sentence, that's for sure. In regard to what private schools receive, there's no capital investment or transportation or small-school investment, but we did have the private school enrolment funding increase in synchronization with the increase to enrolment for all schools.

Mrs. Aheer: Which would make sense, of course. That's obvious.

Mr. Eggen: That's right. That has carried on. I'm in close communication with the independent school association. I have a good relationship with them. We've worked together on a whole bunch of different initiatives to strengthen independent schooling and to strengthen home-schooling as well.

The Chair: I apologize for interrupting, but the final three and a half minutes will be for Mr. Rodney and the PC caucus.

Mr. Rodney: Since we're down to minutes, I'll just list the questions, and then we can look forward to answers in the future when the department can get to them.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. That's great.

Mr. Rodney: They have everything to do with page 53 of the business plan, outcome 3, Alberta's education system is inclusive. Here's our top 10. Last year during estimates there was discussion about integrating incoming refugee students into the education system. Can you comment on how this is going and what specific initiatives you are implementing to make this process as easy as possible?

Two, we have heard that funding for English language learner, ELL, students continues to be an issue. What is your ministry doing to work with school boards to ensure that there are proper supports for students, including Syrian refugees, who will be relying heavily on these circumstances?

Three, do you happen to know roughly how many school-aged children of Syrian refugees have chosen to enter the public or Catholic system versus the private or charter system? Obviously, there could be a natural affinity for schools like the Edmonton Islamic Academy.

Four, has your ministry provided additional training to teachers and/or schools who have experienced an influx of refugee students?

Five, given the influx of refugee students from Muslim majority countries, what specific initiatives has your ministry implemented to educate children about Islamic culture in order to prevent exclusion based on lack of understanding of cultural differences?

Six, cultural understanding is an enormous part of acceptance and inclusivity. What is your ministry doing to foster and support exchange programs for both students and teachers?

Seven, what are you doing to support additional heritage language education in public schools in support of international language programs?

Eight, last year in estimates you mentioned how the Alberta curriculum is being used in some jurisdictions internationally. Has

there been an increase in that happening this year, and what are you doing to help market the Alberta curriculum abroad, noting that this is an excellent first step in developing long-term tourism marketing and supporting new market development?

Nine, last year in estimates you noted that over three years you had built in \$10 million in savings by reducing salary expenditures by about 2 per cent. Have you experienced any impact because of this within the department or the services it provides?

Ten, again last year you noted that you've trimmed the Education department administrative budgets from \$161 million in 2014 down to \$142.5 million last year. Has this impacted front-line services of the department at all?

I have more questions. How much more time do we have?

The Chair: You have a minute.

Mr. Rodney: One more minute. Here we go. I didn't think I was going to be able to get through all of that. Actually, having to do with the school board – we finished that one.

You know, Minister, maybe I'll just turn it back to you because we have the opportunity in question period to answer questions. Well, at least to ask them. I'm not sure about answering.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. We'll be together in an hour and a half again.

Mr. Rodney: Perhaps an overall comment about inclusivity. What could you say, in an elevator speech of a minute or so, with regard to page 53 of the business plan, outcome 3, Alberta's education system is inclusive? Can you give us a present situation, and where are you looking to go forward to ensure that people not only survive, but they thrive, especially new Albertans?

Mr. Eggen: For sure. Thank you so much for your questions. You know, that list that you gave us just now has a lot of really important things that I've been thinking about over the last year – right? – since we did this. It's very interesting to see how dynamic our . . .

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

Congratulations, everyone. This meeting completes our consideration of the 2017-18 main estimates. Thanks, everyone, for your participation.

This meeting is now adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 12 p.m.]

