



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
First Session

Standing Committee
on
Families and Communities

Ministry of Education
Consideration of Main Estimates

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3:30 p.m.

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First Session**

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

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Standing Committee on Families and Communities

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Ministry of Education

Hon. Adriana LaGrange, Minister

Brad Smith, Acting Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategic Services and Governance

Michael Walter, Acting Deputy Minister

3:30 p.m.

Wednesday, October 30, 2019

[Mr. Ellis in the chair]

**Ministry of Education
Consideration of Main Estimates**

The Acting Chair: All right. Good afternoon, everyone. Once again, welcome. We're going to call the meeting to order and welcome everyone. The committee has under consideration the estimates of the Ministry of Education for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2020.

I'd ask that we go around the table and have all MLAs introduce themselves for the record. Minister, please introduce the officials that are joining you at the table. I am Mike Ellis, MLA for Calgary-West, and I am substituting for Ms Goodridge as chair of this meeting. We'll continue, starting to my right.

Mr. Dang: Good afternoon. I'm Thomas Dang, MLA for Edmonton-South, acting deputy chair and substituting for Ms Sigurdson.

Mr. Yao: Tany Yao, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Amery: Good afternoon. Mickey Amery, Calgary-Cross.

Mr. Neudorf: Nathan Neudorf, Lethbridge-East.

Mr. Guthrie: Peter Guthrie, Airdrie-Cochrane.

Mr. Rutherford: Brad Rutherford, Leduc-Beaumont.

Ms Glasgo: Michaela Glasgo, Brooks-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Walker: Hi. Jordan Walker, Sherwood Park.

Mr. Long: Martin Long, West Yellowhead.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Jeremy Nixon, Calgary-Klein.

Member LaGrange: Adriana LaGrange, Minister of Education, MLA for Red Deer-North. I have with me Michael Walter, acting deputy minister; Brad Smith, acting assistant deputy minister, strategic services and governance; Richard Arnold, acting executive director, strategic financial services; and Jeff Willan, executive director, capital planning.

Ms Pancholi: Good afternoon. Rakhi Pancholi, MLA for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Ms Hoffman: Sarah Hoffman, Edmonton-Glenora.

Member Irwin: Janis Irwin, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Sabir: Irfan Sabir, MLA for Calgary-McCall.

The Acting Chair: Okay. Thank you very much.

I'd like to note the following substitutions for the record: Mr. Dang is substituting for Ms Sigurdson, and he's the acting deputy chair; MLA Hoffman is substituting for Mr. Carson. That's just for the record.

Please note that the microphones are operated by *Hansard* and that the committee proceedings are being live streamed on the Internet and broadcast on Alberta Assembly TV. Please set your cellphones and other devices to silent for the duration of the meeting.

For the speaking order and time, a total of six hours has been scheduled for consideration of the estimates for the Ministry of Education. For the record I would note that the Standing Committee

on Families and Communities has already completed three hours of debate in this respect. As we enter our fourth hour of debate, I will 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 in the rotation where speaking times are limited to a maximum of five minutes.

Members have the option of combining their speaking time with the minister for a maximum of 10 minutes. Please remember to advise the chair at the beginning of your 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 the speaking time is combined. If members have any questions regarding speaking times or the rotation, please feel free to send a note or e-mail to the chair or the 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 five-minute break? Okay. Hearing none, we will have that break.

When we adjourned our meeting this morning, we were at about five minutes, I believe, and 14 seconds into the exchange between Member Lovely and the minister. I will now invite – I don't see Member Lovely – certainly a member of the government caucus side. You have five minutes and 14 seconds. Mr. Amery, continue on.

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you, Minister LaGrange. I am continuing the line of questioning from MLA Lovely earlier this morning. I wanted to highlight a couple of things. First and foremost, we've had the opportunity to have a number of discussions in the past. Certainly, you've had a series of consultations throughout the province. I've been part of those, and I've been following closely.

I wanted to point your attention to page 79 if I could, please, and specifically to line 4.2, the debt servicing highlights. I wanted to ask if you could comment a little bit about the breakdown of the \$27.8 million. Line 4.2, the debt servicing highlights, the decrease of the Alberta schools alternative procurement to \$27.8 million: can you speak a little bit to that, provide us with a little bit of a breakdown?

Member LaGrange: Yes. I did that earlier, but I would be happy to reiterate that. The capital debt-servicing cost is to cover the annual interest payments for the Alberta schools alternative procurement, or P3, school buildings. There were 40 school projects built under the Alberta schools alternative procurement, ASAP, model. Debt-servicing costs will continue to be lower as each payment results in a larger portion of the principal being repaid, and it therefore reduces the interest amount due on future payments. Of the \$27.8 million, it's broken down as: in the first round of P3 projects there was \$18.6 million, which went to 18 projects; in the second round there was \$5.2 million for the ASAP 2 interest portion, which was aligned to 10 other projects; and \$4 million in ASAP 3, which is aligned to 12 projects.

Did that answer your question?

Mr. Amery: Yes. Thank you. My apologies. Again, I wasn't here for the morning session, so I didn't have the benefit of that.

Member LaGrange: No worries.

Mr. Amery: Just as a follow-up – and again I apologize if this has been already answered – we're looking at the 2018-2019 budget and then the 2018-2019 actual, and then you move on to the 2019-2020 estimates. We see progressively lower figures each year. Can you explain why these debt-servicing costs appear to be continually lower each year?

Member LaGrange: Well, again, that would be because we're paying down on the principal, so the interest would be decreasing in conjunction with the amount of principal that we're paying down. Therefore, the interest payments continue to decrease over time.

I will pass it over to Brad Smith if he has any other observations in that area.

Mr. B. Smith: Thank you, Minister. Brad Smith, acting assistant deputy minister of strategic services and governance. As the minister alluded to, these bundles of schools have been in operation for a number of years now. This line: again, at the outset of these builds a capital investment is required, and a repayment of that capital investment is required. As many of you may know, as part of a P3 build there is a 30-year contractual arrangement with a provider to take care of the school for a 30-year period.

Mr. Amery: Okay. Thank you, Minister LaGrange. Thank you to the officials.

I'd like to cede my time to another member.

The Acting Chair: Okay.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: I'm up?

The Acting Chair: You are.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Awesome. Thank you. First of all, thank you to the minister for the tremendous amount of effort that I know went into this. You know, I did get the opportunity to travel with you to one of my school districts and see first-hand the heart that you have for education and your dedication in hearing from stakeholders right across this province. My stakeholders in my constituency are certainly appreciative of that, and certainly as a father of four children in grade school right now I know the importance of providing excellence in education. I kind of see education as that great equalizer in our community. I grew up the son of a poor street pastor. We didn't have a lot growing up, but we did have access to quality education. I'm thankful for your commitment to achieving that here in this province.

I wanted to make a comment about something that was said earlier in regard to investing in education.

The Acting Chair: Thank you very much. Time has expired.

We will continue on to the Official Opposition. My understanding is that Member Dang would like to go next. Go ahead, sir.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to share time with the minister. Minister, I'll apologize in advance. I may cut you off at some points. There are a lot of questions I want to get through with not a lot of time. If you could provide some answers in writing if it would take a lot of time to reply, that would be great.

I'd like to start talking about page 127 of the fiscal plan. It's very high level here, but it speaks a little bit to how there could be value for money in public-private partnerships. P3 ASAP: you spoke about it already. Could you explain to me: is that only going to be for new and modernizations, or is that also on existing projects that have already been announced?

Member LaGrange: I'm sorry. Could you repeat what page you're on?

Mr. Dang: Page 127 of the fiscal plan. It just says that "government will explore alternative financing... including public-private partnerships." Is that only for new projects, or is that going to be for projects that have already been announced as well?

3:40

Member LaGrange: Well, I apologize, because we did answer how capital is allocated. What happens is that the projects are determined through my department, but once they are determined, we hand the project over to Infrastructure, and Infrastructure will continue on with the project. Projects that are already in place already have been assigned a mode of delivery, and ones going forward will be determined by Infrastructure.

Mr. Dang: Perfect. Thank you.

On page 131 of the fiscal plan, then, there's also some talk about project renewal and whatnot. To your knowledge – I understand Infrastructure does the actual construction but that it is your file – are all the current schools that have to open for the next several school years that have been funded before on time?

Member LaGrange: Can you repeat that? I'm sorry.

Mr. Dang: Are all the schools that have been announced in 2018 on time for opening so that there are enough seats for students?

Member LaGrange: The announcements that were made: well, again, when we announce schools, sometimes they are at design stage; others are at full-build stage. Of course, there were a number of factors that factor into whether schools are built on time or not. Our government has committed to funding over the next four years to continue the construction and completion of 63 projects. Currently 11 projects that are delayed are due to be completed during the school year, and that is for a number reasons, including poor weather, the wildfires, the scope. Oftentimes when there's a modernization, once you open the actual building itself, you will find perhaps asbestos, other mitigating factors that can cause a delay as well.

Mr. Dang: Perfect. Would you be able to submit that to us in writing, the list of the schools that are delayed, then?

Member LaGrange: Yes, we can do that.

Mr. Dang: Perfect. Thank you very much.

I'd like to also note that on the same page, page 131, you're anticipating 25 new and modernized school projects and approximately 250 new modular projects. Do you know what the mix of new projects will be versus modernized projects?

Member LaGrange: I shared that this morning as well. I answered that question. I will be providing the details of the capital funding in the near future.

Mr. Dang: Okay. On page 134 of the capital plan is capital maintenance and renewal, and I see that there's not a significant change over time for that. Are you anticipating, then, that as schools age and as renewal is required for these projects, the ministry will be able to keep up with a nominal increase?

Member LaGrange: Can you identify which line you're on again?

Mr. Dang: Sure. On page 134, under school facilities for capital maintenance and renewal, are you anticipating that there will be enough funding as projects need upgrading and things like boilers expire and so forth?

Member LaGrange: I will just clarify that \$193.5 million has been maintained to ensure Alberta schools are well maintained. We also have \$107 million in capital investment and \$86.5 million in operational spending.

Actually, I'm going to turn this over to Mike Walter because he deals with this on an intimate basis.

Mr. Walter: Michael Walter, acting deputy minister. As the minister alluded to, we have 193 and a half million dollars that are dedicated towards the upkeep of school facilities. This includes things like you mentioned: the boilers, gym floors, doors, windows, roofs. Again, boards submit annual plans to us to reflect how they're going to spend those dollars, and we, of course, make sure that they're in compliance with the criteria that we have relative to that. That has been maintained. Again, that's the funding that boards use outside of our major capital announcements to upkeep their schools.

Mr. Dang: Okay. Perfect. Thank you.

I'm going to move on to page 136 of the capital plan, then. Under Renewing Educational Infrastructure I've noted that the playground fund is \$6 million in 2020-2021. Does that mean that after 2020-2021 the playground fund is discontinued?

Member LaGrange: There was a commitment by the previous ministry to allocate \$25 million over the course of a number of projects. This is to honour that commitment. I will be making an announcement in regard to playgrounds moving forward in the near future.

Mr. Dang: So in this capital plan there are no monies moving forward for playgrounds in new builds? Is that correct?

Member LaGrange: It's to be determined.

Mr. Dang: Okay. Thank you. In the budget here I've noted that for school capital projects 2019-24, so new school projects, there's only \$328 million allocated over four years.

Member LaGrange: Can you please identify which page and line item you're on?

Mr. Dang: Same page, 136, school capital projects 2019-24. There's \$328 million allocated over four years for new builds. We know that a K to 9 school costs approximately \$20 million, a high school costs approximately \$70 million. I'm only adding up about 16 schools here. How are you anticipating making up that shortfall?

Member LaGrange: We allocated \$397 million over five years. This is the process that has been ongoing for a good number of years, that projects are in play at various times because, of course, you do not do a full construction all in one year. Typically there's a design stage, then you start digging . . .

Mr. Dang: Right. But, Minister, over five years and \$400 million, let's say, that's still not 25 new schools, right? So where's the shortfall being made up?

Member LaGrange: It is actually 25 new projects. I will turn it over to Michael Walter to explain. As I said, as far as specific projects, that information will be forthcoming very soon.

Mr. Walter: Yeah. I would just reiterate the minister's last comment that the details on the 25 are forthcoming very soon.

Mr. Dang: Sure. I guess my question is that it looks like you're going to be depending on P3s and you've already anticipated that in some of these numbers because there isn't enough money to fully fund these schools individually. So how much money are we anticipating the private sector will have to invest in these schools?

Member LaGrange: I would say that you're presupposing what Infrastructure will do once we announce those projects. That would be a question to better ask Infrastructure.

Mr. Dang: Okay. Thank you. I will take that back to Infrastructure on Tuesday.

I'm also noting here that you said – again, I will ask. I know you probably won't answer me, Minister. That's okay, but I do want to ask. Edmonton desperately needs several new high schools; Calgary as well, and north Calgary especially. Is there going to be monies? Are there going to be new high schools in these areas?

Member LaGrange: As I had indicated earlier today, every school division puts forward their three-year capital plan. At that point it goes into the process. The department looks it over through a very intense metric system that they've put in place. There's a gated system that it goes through, and determinations are made in terms of whether it's a health crisis, whether it's a legal issue, or whether there's enrolment growth, and then the priorities are set. When we are able to announce the projects, we have committed \$397 million to new projects, and those project announcements will be taking place fairly soon.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Minister. One final question before we run out of time here. I've noted that you said 25 new or modernized projects, so 25 projects, but that means that to make up for the 60,000 students shortfall, there's going to have to be 2,400 kids per new project, 2,400 seats per new project. The largest project that was announced under our term, the new high school in south Edmonton here, was only 1,200 seats. How do you anticipate to fill 60,000 seats when you're only funding less than a quarter of that?

Member LaGrange: Well, first of all, the hon. member would know that the growth isn't in one location. That is spread out, of course, throughout the province. Again, I will reiterate something I shared earlier this morning, that right now we're expecting to be completed by September 2020 60 projects which are in flight.

The Acting Chair: Okay. Thank you, Minister, but time has expired.

We will now move on to the government members. I believe we ended with Mr. Nixon.

Do you wish to continue, sir?

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Yes, please.

The Acting Chair: Yes. Go ahead.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Before I got interrupted, one of the points that I wanted to make was in regard to the conversation we were having this morning around putting more money into education. I wanted to point out that spending more doesn't always lead to better results. We certainly saw those headlines back in 2018 about increasing classroom sizes despite the fact that we're pouring more money into the system.

One of things I heard a lot at the doors in Calgary-Klein was concern about increasing classroom sizes but also major concern from folks in Calgary-Klein about how their tax dollars were actually being used.

3:50

Again going back to this fiscal plan and our platform, frankly speaking, I feel that this fiscal plan does everything in regard to what we promised, maintaining if not increasing education spending, seeking greater efficiency, continuing to build schools,

which is important, and to broaden the curriculum review. So thank you again for your effort in working towards all of those things.

My questions are a little bit more technical or kind of specific, I should say, but overall I'm very happy with what I'm seeing here. On page 79, line 2.1, under the capital payments to related parties, it shows an expenditure of \$21,000. Is this expenditure not included in the 2019-2020 estimates?

Member LaGrange: Can you please share which line that is again?

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Line 2.1.

Member LaGrange: Yes. The \$21,000 went to Mother Earth's Charter School. It was given in the 2018-2019 actual year. It was given as a one-time grant to purchase and install a fire alarm system, which I'm sure the hon. member would agree is quite essential for a school to have.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Yeah. I would have to concur that keeping our kids fire safe is pretty important, so thank you for the answer there.

Minister, going to page 84, the consolidated 2019-2020 estimates for school facilities is \$350 million. Does this number include any specific money allocation to playgrounds?

Member LaGrange: Can you share which line that is again?

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Sorry. I'll have to go back and reference the line. It's about halfway down.

Member LaGrange: Oh, here it is. I apologize. The \$350 million on a consolidated basis represents total provincial spending for school facilities in the 2019-2020 year. The 2019-2020 budget is made up of \$349 million budgeted by school boards for the amortization of their tangible capital assets, which is their school buildings. Then there's \$1 million provided by the government to assist school boards in the planning and scoping of new school projects as part of their provincial school capital requirements planning submission. The \$5 million that you're talking about in playgrounds is actually in a different line item.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Okay. Perfect. Sorry; what line item was that?

Member LaGrange: That would be in the Infrastructure budget, which would be the school facilities, \$738,160,000 on page 84. I would be happy to have one of my people elaborate if you would like.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Sure. That'd be fantastic. Yeah. Thank you.

Member LaGrange: Okay. I'll turn it over to Brad Smith.

Mr. B. Smith: Thank you, Minister. Brad Smith, acting assistant deputy minister. Member, to your question, first, under expense for school facilities, the \$350 million: as the minister alluded to, this is pure amortization other than a million dollars for planning funds. This is an accounting entry for amortization versus the money to build schools, which is down below. Up top the \$350 million is really an accounting entry for operating expense related to amortization versus the actual balance sheet entry or the investment. That's why it's under a heading of Investment. It is down below in the \$738 million, and the playground funds are down there.

Member LaGrange: Just to clarify a little bit further, amortization is a no-cash item. It is an accounting piece.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Okay. Perfect. Yeah. Thanks for clarifying that for me. Appreciate it.

In the estimates, page 84, the expense for accredited private schools and early childhood service operators has increased by \$290,656,000. How many children will this account for within private schools and private early childhood service operators?

Member LaGrange: Actually, it has increased by \$4.372 million, so the consolidated amount of \$290.7 million is the net amount that is budgeted for the accredited private schools and early childhood service operators. It's a 1.5 per cent increase, which will support the completion of the 2018-2019 school year and the projected student enrolment growth in 2019-2020 and for higher enrolment for children with special needs.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: So this does include enrolment growth in private schools?

Member LaGrange: Yes, it does especially for children with special needs in those programs.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Perfect. Thank you very much.

Minister, page 87 in the fiscal plan highlights that the new funding framework is expected to "foster collaboration among school authorities in procurement and providing services to realize economies of scale, create centres of excellence and encourage best practices." Now, I know that you've been touring the province since August and have visited with many of our ridings, including my own local authorities. I was wondering, based on your experience as a trustee and as a board chair and based on what you've heard travelling the province and connecting with folks, if you could provide some examples of collaboration that school authorities could start working on.

Member LaGrange: Absolutely. Thank you for that. I have very much enjoyed touring with yourself and many of my colleagues across the province. Something that I heard, as I said earlier, when I visited approximately 65 per cent of school boards, some of which have never seen a Minister of Education in their area – it was very fascinating to have those conversations with them. They were very eager to show and highlight their successes and things that have been working well for them.

There are many – I believe that it's upwards of 70 per cent – that actually share busing, transportation of some sort. There are many instances where they share, actually, school facilities, where there are two systems such as a Catholic and a public and they share a joint facility in the centre, whether it be a recreation centre or a library. There are many examples of that. There are instances where school divisions are sharing resources, and they're sharing specialty in terms of, you know, whether it's a professional such as a speech pathologist. They share on the regional collaborative delivery service items as well. So there are many instances. All of them were eager to explore other possibilities and have been very creative in becoming even more innovative with possibilities.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: That's awesome. So there's already kind of a precedent set on this and something to build on.

Member LaGrange: There is much precedent set, and it continues to expand: IT systems, data hosting, payroll services, transportation, purchasing. Yes. We're seeing many examples of it. As I say, there are even very creative ways that they're involving the community. What I find, especially in rural areas, is that schools are the community hub. They're not just a school where children attend for a certain time period. Those schools are being well

utilized after students are no longer in the classroom during the day and on weekends. Beyond that, community members – there are community partnerships. I see partnerships. When I was a former trustee, we partnered with the local city band so that they had a field house. There are these great partnerships that are developing across this province, and it's wonderful to see.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: That's great. Thank you so much. Well, perfect.

The Acting Chair: Thank you very much. Sorry; your time has expired.

We will now go on to the Official Opposition and Member Eggen. Go ahead, sir.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you. My first question is in regard to the fiscal plan book. On page 88 there is a table that is showing consolidated operating expenses as being flat, right? But I think we all know that we're seeing more than 15,000 new kids coming into our schools – special needs, second-language learners – with more school fees, but still this consolidated table on page 88 of the fiscal plan doesn't seem to show any new dollars for operating expenses. I'm just wondering, you know. I heard the Finance minister say that the government would be funding enrolment growth. Maybe he misspoke, or was he misleading us somehow, or is there some kind of shell game going on here with funding for K to 12 education in this budget?

4:00

Member LaGrange: Well, thank you for taking me to that graph. As you can see, we are maintaining education funding. You look at the 2018-2019 actuals; it was \$8.223 billion. It is, again, \$8.223 billion in the 2019-2020 school year. What we have been able to do is repurpose, reallocate three grants, including one that was due to end as of August 31 of this year, which we have now repurposed into funding enrolment growth.

We know that we have a well-funded education system. You look at one more back, on page 86, and I'll draw your attention to the graph there, where we have operationally funded increases of 80 per cent versus inflation rates of 33 per cent and a 25 per cent increase in enrolment. Operational funding increases have much outpaced enrolment growth and inflation. We will continue to fund education because it is an incredible investment in our young people and, obviously, also of huge import to our government.

Mr. Eggen: Sure. Absolutely.

The Acting Chair: Member, could I just interject for one second here. I have some documents that the minister had promised the committee. I will ask the page to distribute it amongst the rest of the committee. Thank you. You can continue.

Mr. Eggen: Oh, great. Okay. Cool. That's great.

I think what I've seen is this repurposing, then, just to elaborate, the class size initiative – right? – as well as the school fee reductions and then the classroom improvement fund. You know, through the chair, Madam Minister, if you move those monies around to a different place, then you're not creating new funding. New funding for enrolment is predicated on the idea that you fund per student, and you make that increase in the global budget to fund for the new students showing up. I mean, I lost track a little bit, but I think that about 15,000 more kids showed up this fall in September, so you have to reflect that in an increase to the budget, not moving money around inside of the budget but, rather, actually making that choice. I find that a bit disappointing.

I mean, I know that the classroom improvement fund, say, for example, was initiated by negotiations with teachers to look for ways to make improvements in the class based on a collaborative decision-making process. Now, you know, that has just been moved around. I know that class size is a big deal. I as minister took all of the recommendations of the Auditor General to ensure that we did have a proper accounting of that \$291 million to spend on class size reductions, but here we see it now being repurposed. That is not funding for enrolment; it's simply moving money around.

You know, further then, when you're building an operating budget, you can hire teachers to fund for enrolment growth, but you also have to build the schools, too. Right? You can't be not doing that. I do see that you have 25 new schools over the next four years. Have you put out the list of which schools are being built yet?

Member LaGrange: I'm sorry, MLA Eggen, that you missed that conversation. That will be announced very shortly.

I wasn't sure if there was a question in what you had said earlier.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. Have you announced those schools?

Member LaGrange: Well, you asked that question previously.

I just want to reiterate that we have a very well-funded education system, that we have a current model that is not sustainable. We collect approximately \$2.5 billion in education tax dollars, but we are continually spending \$8.2 billion.

One of the items that I'm most proud of is the fact that we will be looking at a new assurance and funding review, which will control the cost of growth, which will allow for predictable, sustainable funding: the predictability of allocating funding to the system, assuring the viability of our rural schools, increasing funding directed to the classroom, and fostering collaboration among boards.

Every single student that is crossing our doors this year is funded at the same base rate as last year. As I said earlier, that \$77 million that was due to expire in the CIF funding has remained within the education system and has been reallocated to support growth along with the class size fund as well as the school fees fund. All of those together have provided increases to other areas as well, a slight bump in transportation and inclusion funding, et cetera, all to support growth within the system.

Mr. Eggen: Right. Well, thank you for that.

In regard to infrastructure, you have announced that you'll put the names and so forth out later. But, I mean, 25 schools over the next four years: have you achieved congruency between the amount of new enrolment that's due to come to our schools over the next four years? Do you have the numbers that actually balance out between those two things? If you don't, then you don't have space for the kids – right? – and that is not the way to run a school system.

Member LaGrange: I would just like to highlight that the 25 new schools or new projects are more than occurred in the past on a year-to-year basis. We currently have over 60 projects in flight. Of those, we expect 27 projects to be completed by September 2020, affecting approximately 19,000 student spaces. This will be 11 new schools, eight replacement schools, and eight modernizations. We will continue to build schools. We will continue to provide spaces. Of course, that all is predicated on what the school boards are asking for in their capital plans because, as you know, they provide their priorities to us, and then they go through the system, through the department, to ensure that we are addressing those growth needs on an ongoing basis.

Mr. Eggen: Yes. What we were tracking over the last number of years, of course, was a very strong growth in the lower grades, but then you need to build the infrastructure and the schools to meet that same group of children's needs as they move through junior high school and high school. I don't think I need to remind you about the absolute necessity of a northeast Calgary school and the south Edmonton high school, that we did announce. There is a significant group of children that are moving through junior high right now that'll need those schools as soon as possible. Again, I think you are aware of things, but I think it's very important to emphasize that again.

Just one more question, then, too: does your ministry have a projection of how many students or what the percentage of enrolment growth is that we should expect here, this year and for next year?

Member LaGrange: The enrolment growth for this year is listed as 2.2 per cent, approximately 15,000 students. Those are actual September 30 numbers.

Mr. Eggen: Yes.

Member LaGrange: Moving forward, we anticipate roughly a 2 per cent increase in the future. Of course, depending on if we can get the economy back working – should the economy continue to deteriorate, perhaps that number changes, but at this point in time we are anticipating a 2 per cent increase in future years year to year.

Mr. Eggen: Well, we saw during an economic downturn that the enrolment continued to grow, so don't bank on – I mean, once the children are here and families are here, you know, they tend to stay, right? So I would suggest that you must presume that what you see amongst the two- and three- and four-year-olds now is that they will go to school and they will need new schools and they will need the teachers to be in those classrooms.

You know, just one more question.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, Member. We'll have to return to that point.

We'll continue to the government side. Who's going? Mr. Walker. Go ahead, sir.

Mr. Walker: Well, thank you so much, Chair, for giving me the floor. Through you, Chair, to the minister, I want to say thank you so much for being here. Thank you for coming, and thank you to your colleagues for being here as well, and it's great to see your staff in the back. Great to see everyone.

4:10

You know, in my area of Strathcona county they were just so happy, and I want to thank you again, Minister, for coming out to Strathcona county to see myself and the Minister of Service Alberta. People there were just so overjoyed. They're still talking about that, that you took the time months ago to come out and see some schools and also meet with some key stakeholders. They have been telling me over the last six months: we haven't seen a minister out and so engaged so early on in their portfolio. That's deeply appreciated by myself and also by residents in Strathcona county. Thanks.

In Strathcona county, too, Minister, we're just a very successful people. We're just doing really well, winning all the time. Economically not only do we have the highest incomes in Alberta and the second highest in Canada; we also have among the highest rates in Alberta of postsecondary graduation. I highlight that because any strong postsecondary outcomes are directly tied or correlated to the education system that we have. I think the bedrock

of our success in Strathcona county and what I hear from residents when I'm door-knocking or having coffee with people is our system of school choice. I just want to talk about that a little bit.

You know, we have separate, public, charter as well as francophone. Our Elk Island public school system: I know it's one of the largest in Alberta; I want to say the sixth. It does incredibly great work. We have about 43 schools in total within the Strathcona county area because, of course, it goes beyond my municipality. We have 24 and about 17,000 students, and we continue to grow. The rural areas might decline a bit, where the urban are growing as well. That was formed in 1995.

Elk Island Catholic schools, our separate system: that was formed in 1998. We have about nine schools in Strathcona county. Some documents show me 10; some show me nine. I don't know if it's a dating thing or what. We have almost 4,000 students in our Elk Island Catholic school system. I've really enjoyed engaging with them as well, and I can tell you that all school agencies and authorities are just so thrilled to have you as the minister given your background and advocacy in the area of education as well as school choice.

You know, some things I'd like to highlight on why I think we're so successful are specific special programs that we have in Strathcona county. For example, in the separate system Archbishop Jordan Catholic senior high school has a nation-leading robotics program. I can't wait to get out and see it. I know they do really well on the national stage but also even on the international stage, and that goes back, again, to the strength of school choice.

Then, finally, I would just like to highlight Strathcona Christian Academy. This is an elementary school and a senior high school, 7 to 12, that gives education from a Christian perspective. It was originally private, established in 1980. It joined Elk Island public in 1998, and since then it has been just unbelievably successful in producing great graduates that go on to be contributive citizens. A Member of Parliament, Garnett Genuis, came from that school, for example. They have about 600 students in each school. They have an incredible academic, scholastic as well as sports program. I just can't reiterate enough how important school choice is.

As well, in Strathcona county the first charter school in Alberta – and it might even be Canada – was founded in 1995, the New Horizons School. I'm just really proud of my community. I just wanted to highlight that and the importance of school choice. Again, thank you for your advocacy on that, Minister, through the chair.

My first question. We're going to turn to page 50 of the plan. On page 50 of the business plan key objective 1.1 reads: "Ensure Alberta's curriculum provides students with the essential . . ."

The Acting Chair: Mr. Walker, I'm sorry. I have to cut you off at this time. You've spoken for five minutes. We have explicit rules. You're not allowed to speak longer than five minutes. We'll allow the minister to make a few comments, and then we can return to you, Mr. Walker.

Member LaGrange: Thank you. Thank you so much for sharing your story and your journey. I have appreciated very much coming to your area.

I'm incredibly proud of the education system right across this province, all elements of it. It is a very robust education system that really does embrace choice for education. It embraces children where they're at. Children of any ability or disability are welcomed in our schools, and we have the ability to meet their needs where they're at.

You were going to read that one of our key objectives is to "ensure Alberta's curriculum provides students with the essential knowledge and skills and foundational competencies they need to

be successful.” I absolutely agree with that. That is why we have a Curriculum Advisory Panel at this very moment, who is going to be providing me with an updated ministerial order on student learning, which is the blueprint on how we move forward with education. I’ve heard very loudly, even from our postsecondaries, that they want to ensure that the students that graduate and then come to postsecondary have all of those skills, whether it’s the hard skills or the soft skills, to be successful, whether they choose postsecondary, whether they go into the trades. Of course, we’ve just made a very significant commitment to quadrupling the number of students that, you know, are going to be accessing additional funding to go into Careers: the Next Generation. We have many opportunities for our students, and we just need to continue to move in a positive direction.

The curriculum. The panel will also provide me some feedback as to if we have any gaps in the current K to 4 curriculum that has been developed. Beyond that, there has been virtually nothing developed in the middle years and the same in high school. We need to address that because we have a very old curriculum. We’re working at lightning speed to address those issues and those concerns so that we can have the most up-to-date curriculum in front of our students as soon as possible to ensure that success that you were talking about. Yes, we do value all of the wonderful programs that are being offered in so many different ways to meet the unique needs of every single student, because every single student in this province deserves to graduate and deserves to reach their full potential, whatever that may be.

I do know that we have certain areas where there are struggles that we need to address. We need to close the achievement gap for our First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students. That is something that Minister Wilson and I have – you know, we were on a tour, and MLA Yao joined us in Fort McMurray and up in the Fort Chipewyan, Fort MacKay, Conklin area when we did that tour, where there were some significant challenges that we need to look at and address. I’m happy to say that we’re doing that. We need to take practical steps to address these issues and these concerns, and that’s what we’re doing. We’re putting tangible boots on the ground, taking a common-sense approach to addressing the issues and the concerns and meeting the needs of every single one of our students.

Thank you for sharing your story and your journey. I was thrilled to be able to be part of going and seeing – and the best part of going out into the schools is interacting with the kids. It’s been such a joy to go around. They have great ideas on how we can improve education. I just spent the better part of the weekend at different sections with my ministry’s youth advisory panel. They are just amazing young people who understand the challenges of fiscal restraint yet also know that we can do things better. They had great ideas in terms of how we can improve the CALM program and some of the other programming that they feel is not meeting their needs. I very much look forward . . .

The Acting Chair: Thank you very much, Minister. Time has expired.

We will now go back to the Official Opposition and Member Irwin.

Member Irwin: Perfect. Well, this is a good segue. I wasn’t going to start with curriculum, but curriculum is one of my passions, so I will begin there. I note that on page 50 of the business plan \$2.3 million will be spent on curriculum in 2019-20. We know that much of the K to 4 curriculum had been developed and was ready to be field tested, but of course that’s now been paused while your government adds an additional burdensome layer to the process by

the Curriculum Advisory Panel. Can you tell me the breakdown of the \$2.3 million? How much of that \$2.3 million will for instance be spent on the work of that unnecessary panel?

4:20

Member LaGrange: Actually, if you could go to the very top line, which says, “\$0.15 million is allocated to develop a ministerial order to establish the vision for student learning that identifies the foundational knowledge and skills and foundational competencies students should attain”: that is actually the dollars being allocated to the panel. They are contained within the fund that we have set aside to address the development of the new curriculum. In fact, most of that money is not for the panel itself; it is for the engagement process that will happen after the panel comes up with the ministerial order draft that we will be engaging. We’ve committed to engage far and wide with the general public, so that does come with a nominal cost, and that is included in that. Again, all those dollars are included within the full envelope that we have set aside to develop the curriculum.

I will actually turn it over to Michael as he has more detail if you would like.

Member Irwin: Yeah. Just on the \$2.3 million, then. That would be great.

Member LaGrange: Or was that Brad? That would be Michael. Thank you.

Mr. Walter: Yeah. As to the overall \$2.3 million breakdown, I think we can provide that to you in writing. To date the panel has cost less than \$1,000 in terms of their work with the ministry. Again, as the minister alluded to, all of the costs that are anticipated for the panel have been built into the department budget in terms of, you know, accommodating that. Yes, the minister also spoke to the \$150,000 that has been set aside for the consultation related to that.

Thank you.

Member Irwin: Great. Yeah. We will want time to review just some of those breakdowns, so we’re just encouraging you to get that to us as quickly as you can. I’m sure it’s easily accessible. Thank you.

One of the things I noticed in the business plan – I mean, we know, obviously, that my role is status of women and LGBTQ2S-plus issues, and with the implementation of Bill 8 or the passing of Bill 8, we saw a rollback of supports for LGBTQ2S-plus students in our classrooms. I noticed in your business plan that you’ve dropped any sort of references to ensuring that students feel a sense of belonging. So I’d love to know: what are you hoping to do to ensure that students feel safe and cared for in our schools? I notice that that language around safe and caring schools has definitely shifted in this business plan. Could you speak to some of those?

Member LaGrange: Could you find a line item, or can you show me where in the business plan that is articulated? I would disagree with that.

Member Irwin: Right. My question, I guess, Minister, is that I noticed – because, of course, I worked in Alberta Education, I know that safe and caring school policies were a pretty important pillar, and I’m not seeing a reference in this business plan to a lot of that. So I’m just curious: you know, what will be your indicators? It’s possible I’m just not seeing it or that I’m seeing it in shifted language. Here we go. You’ve got one performance metric on page 58, but I don’t see anything outlined in your – yeah, I’ll just refer you to the bottom of page 57 and the top of page 58. You’ve got

one performance metric that mentions safe and caring learning environments. I just don't see that specifically outlined in your initiatives and objectives, so I just would like to know what you're hoping to do to ensure that students – all students, including LGBTQ2S-plus students – feel safe and cared for in our classrooms.

Member LaGrange: Well, thank you for the question. The expectation is always that every single student that comes under our care, that's entrusted to our care in Education, K to 12, all approximately 720,000 students in K to 12, will be feeling safe and cared for. Under the Education Act, that came into force on September 1, there are the provisions for safe and caring school policies, and the expectation is that each and every single school division has a safe and caring school policy. In fact, we improved upon what was previously there because that includes our private schools now.

You referred to performance measure 4(a), safe and caring school numbers, that parents and teachers and students and school boards feel that they're safe and caring: I would actually show that in 2018-2019 it was 86.2 per cent, and we're looking to target, to increase that to 86.5 per cent. I would also like to highlight – unfortunately, I don't have the numbers right in front of me. I know, when I did comparisons over the last number of years, that over the last number of years, during the previous government's tenure, those numbers on safe and caring schools actually went down, and I was surprised at that. I am now looking at how we can increase safe and caring schools over the course of my tenure.

Member Irwin: Yeah. I would suggest that it might be nice to have some specific objectives that speak to that, just because, again, we know what we're talking about. We have the same goal, Minister, of course, of ensuring that students feel safe and supported.

Member LaGrange: We do have those objectives. They're articulated throughout the Education Act and throughout every policy and through policy and admin procedures that school boards put forward. I know that every school division, every school authority in this province has the utmost care of each and every student as their guiding light. That is certainly something that we have articulated in our budget, ensuring that every single student is funded at the base rate and that that continues and that, beyond that, everyone who has a disability continues to get the funding. Inclusion is funded throughout the whole system. You will note – and I'm not sure which page it is – that we have bumped up inclusion funding, and that is to accommodate the additional growth in that area as well.

Member Irwin: Actually, that was my next question, so you're reading my mind. On inclusion, can you point me to the page where it does speak about inclusion in education?

Member LaGrange: I hope that you can find it. You might be able to find it faster. I believe that it's on page 79.

Member Irwin: Okay. Again, I'm looking at the business plan. My question is ...

Member LaGrange: Page 79 in estimates.

Member Irwin: Oh, of the estimates? Great. Again, I know that inclusive education is a priority of this government, just as it was with ours. However, my question about inclusive education – you're right; it's on page 79. I don't see inclusion or inclusive education highlighted in the business plan, so my question is – I mean, I know there was an inclusive education framework. Has that

been killed? I'm just curious why it wouldn't be named because you're telling me that it's a priority. Why would that not be named in the business plan, and why would there not be associated performance indicators with it?

Member LaGrange: I will address the question that you asked in terms of – if I can steer you to page 79, you'll notice that for inclusive education for the 2018-2019 the actual was \$465,416,000, and in the estimate we are now up to \$470,725,000. It's an increase of \$5.3 million, which is provided to maintain education funding, account for enrolment growth in the 2019-2020 school year, and provide funding for the 2018-2019 school year.

I think something that you would have missed in the fact that you weren't here earlier is the fact that because my budget does not align with the government's fiscal budget, there are an additional five months of operational funding that I have to account for, going from April 1 to August 31.

Member Irwin: Right. I guess my question again is – like, you hear it, I hear it from so many teachers out there who are certainly struggling with inclusive education right now, and they're wanting to support all their students. My point is that the best way to prioritize this is by naming it in your business plan and by being able to track and being able to have some metrics. I'm just asking why it wouldn't it be named as a priority in the business plan.

Member LaGrange: Excuse me for just a second. I'm just clarifying something. I wanted to make sure that I was giving the proper information.

The Acting Chair: Minister, we'll have to pause right there and return to that.

Can we please go to the government members' side? We ended with Mr. Walker. Would you like to continue, sir?

4:30

Mr. Walker: Yes, I would.

The Acting Chair: Go ahead, sir.

Mr. Walker: All right. Minister, thank you so much again. Now, the first question I wanted to ask I didn't quite get to, so I'm just going to read that in again. I trust your wisdom. If you think you've already gone over it, you don't have to provide commentary, but there's a specific thing I'm looking for here.

We're going back to page 50 of the business plan. On page 50 of the business plan key objective 1.1 reads: "Ensure Alberta's curriculum provides students with the essential knowledge and skills and foundational competencies they need to be successful." Further, one of the key initiatives identified as supporting that objective includes \$150,000 "to develop a ministerial order to establish the vision for student learning." Can you describe how you expect these funds to be allocated and how the order will help your department achieve that objective?

Member LaGrange: Yes. I think I covered it somewhat before, but I'll be happy to re-cover it. The ministerial order is the blueprint, the vision, for student learning that identifies the foundational knowledge and skills and competencies students should attain between K to 12. But, as I said earlier, a good portion of that funding is actually going to be going to the engagement process that we will be establishing here very shortly, once we have the draft document in place. The panel will be providing me with that draft updated document by the middle of December, I anticipate. Then we will be going to engagement on that particular piece.

A public engagement process following that work will collect feedback and input from parents and students and teachers and system leaders and a variety of other education partners as well as the public at large to inform the final ministerial order on student learning, which then sets the vision for us moving forward. The ministerial order will help the department achieve objective 1.1 by providing direction on the foundational – as I’ve said earlier, it’s all of those pieces. Basically, it gives us the blueprint. From there we move forward, and we ensure that every single student has the absolute best education possible so that they are successful, whether they choose postsecondary, whether they choose to go into the trades, which we value just as much as any other discipline, or they choose to go into life, that they have all of those hard skills and soft skills.

Oftentimes I hear, even from employers, that while students may have some of the head knowledge, they’re lacking some of the other skills, whether it be the ability to maintain or to understand the complexities of the workplace, some of the things that they need to be successful in the workplace. It’s incumbent upon us – especially fiscal literacy is something I heard loudly from the students themselves when I was with the student advisory panel and as I travelled across the province. The students were saying that they want to know how to do their taxes, how they can apply for a mortgage loan or a student loan. Some of these things are lacking, or there are significant gaps within our current system, and some of these things are the things that we need to address.

I will just pass it to one of my colleagues here if they have any further comments on that. Mike, would you have any further comments on that?

Mr. Walter: No. I think, Minister, you’ve captured it quite well.

Member LaGrange: Brad, would you have further comment on that?

Mr. B. Smith: Just one additional comment would be that of that \$150,000, approximately \$100,000 will be for a survey instrument relative to the engagement piece that the minister referred to. When you go out and survey Albertans, there is a cost to do that broad-based survey, and that’s the majority of that cost.

Mr. Walker: Well, thank you so much for that answer, Minister and to your colleagues as well.

Yeah, foundational competencies are just so important, as is getting out into the schools, as you had mentioned. Just in reflecting, one of my best experiences was doing a Read In Week at a French immersion school in Sherwood Park. I was so struck and I was over the moon at the level of comprehension and reading ability of these grade 1 students. They were so engaged when I was reading them the story. At the same time, I was learning from their teachers about how broad based their foundational competencies are and the different experiences they’re getting to prepare them for the workforce and to be contributing citizens to Alberta.

I was also really struck – I was at the Archbishop Jordan Catholic school’s award ceremony on October 21 at Festival Place in Sherwood Park, and the scholastic skills and achievement of the students is just absolutely remarkable, both academically but also culturally. We have a strong Ukrainian demographic in Strathcona county – it goes back to Alberta’s founding, even before that, in the late 1890s – and we have a strong Ukrainian bilingual program across many schools there. I’m also really excited to attend, hopefully next week, at Strathcona Christian Academy an indigenous food-tasting experience. I’m just so happy that students can have those sorts of very diverse experiences at the school, to develop them socially as well as academically.

For my next question we’re going to turn to page 52 of the business plan. On page 52 of the business plan performance measure 1(f) relates to high school completion rates. “In 2017-18, 84.8 per cent of students completed high school within five years of entering grade 10.” The ministry’s four-year target has that increasing to 86 per cent by 2022-2023. Now, if you contrast that with page 55 of the business plan and performance measure 2(f), the “percentage of self-identified First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students who completed high school within five years of entering grade 10” was 64.4 per cent in 2017-2018 and in four years targets 68 per cent. This is a significant – a very significant – achievement gap. Can you discuss how your ministry plans to increase 2(f) over the four years to achieve your target, and do you think you can do more to close that gap?

Member LaGrange: Thank you for the question. I would like to – you know, I won’t rest until it’s 100 per cent in every single one of these targets. But, that being said, we have set very realistic targets. We do feel that we’ll be able to meet these ambitious targets of moving from 65 to 68 per cent. Alberta Education provides \$54.1 million, or \$1,178 per eligible student, for a total of 46,199 students who are self-identified as First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students.

The dropout rate for self-identified First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students has improved steadily and significantly in the recent past, but we need to go further. The measure of student engagement for self-identified First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students has remained steady and high in the recent past. Both of these measures are leading indicators to an expected continued upward trend in high school completion for self-identified First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students. The department is also working with education and indigenous stakeholders to identify ways to eliminate the achievement gap in a collaborative manner. This new initiative is exploring, through collaboration, opportunities to share leading practices and research for all education stakeholders to implement to help eliminate the achievement gap.

Basically, what I’m saying is that – you know what? – we’re going to work really, really hard: Minister Wilson, the Minister of Indigenous Relations; myself; all of the MLAs out there; all of the school boards. I have just seen tremendous – tremendous – effort going into achieving this measure. We want to address the achievement gap because we need to. We need to ensure that every student, especially our First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students, who seem to be, you know, not achieving as high – there is no reason that they should not be achieving and graduating at the exact same rate as any other student in this province. That’s what we’re aiming towards, and that’s what we’re going to put our resources to. We’re spending significant dollars to do that. We’ve targeted this, and we’re going to continue to target this so that we can close that achievement gap.

Mr. Walker: Thank you so much, Minister.

Chair, how am I for time?

The Acting Chair: You’ve got 17 seconds.

Mr. Walker: Okay.

The Acting Chair: A little bit better than the other folks.

Mr. Walker: All right. Well, yeah, the clock is going to run out here, but thank you so much, Minister, for those comments. I really appreciated them and, again, appreciate you being here.

4:40

The Acting Chair: Thank you, Member.

We will now go to the Official Opposition. I think we last left off with Member Irwin. Are we continuing with you?

Member Irwin: Yeah. I would love to.

The Acting Chair: Go ahead.

Member Irwin: The minister didn't get a chance to respond, so just to quickly recap, I was asking about inclusive education. I can see on page 79 of the estimates that you've made an investment, absolutely, but my point was that I wonder how we can ensure that there will be clear supports in place for all students, that inclusive education will in fact thrive, if we've got no performance metrics. We've got no indicators to show that in the business plan.

Member LaGrange: Okay. I just wanted to ensure that I'm giving you the absolute best response possible to that. I would refer you to page 56, the performance measure on the "percentage of students, parents, and teachers who agreed that students feel like they belong and are supported to be successful in their learning." We are looking at that. We've got the targets in place. A key to that is ensuring that teachers have the skills, the abilities, and the resources to provide that excellent teaching and that inclusiveness to our students. That is obviously highlighted and continues to be reinforced through the Education Act, through school board policy, through administrative procedures. All of those layer upon each other to ensure that every single student in our schools is feeling welcome and cared for and that they are included.

So I would say that, and perhaps I can turn it over to Mike to give specifics on that as well.

Mr. Walter: Sure. On page 55 of the business plan, key objective 3.1, it says: "support the updated teaching quality standard and the new leadership and superintendent leadership quality standards." Within these standards one of the key outcomes is the inclusive education component. We now have standards by which teachers will be working collaboratively with each other, working with their administration as well as their superintendent in terms of enhancing their ability to get at students who have unique needs that need to be addressed in terms of, you know, having equal opportunities for all of their students.

That is within, again, our standards. That is something that we have been working on collaboratively with the ATA, with CASS, and also the postsecondaries in terms of the criteria and in terms of the effectiveness of that. One of the things that I know the minister has heard and we continue to hear about our classes is the complexity aspect, not necessarily the number of students but the complexity behind it that they come to school with. Of course, teachers are saying that they want the opportunities to ensure that they can meet the needs of those students through, you know, their teaching strategies and the professional development opportunities that might be needed to accommodate that.

Member Irwin: Absolutely, and I appreciate that. Again, it's something I hear a lot, the complexity of classrooms. Being a former teacher, I totally get it. I just think there is some value in naming that. I mean, I look at past business plans, and inclusion and inclusive education are named multiple times. I just feel like a reference to it specifically in the business plan would be helpful.

I'm going to cede my time now to MLA Sabir.

The Acting Chair: Okay. MLA Sabir, go ahead, sir.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Chair. I think I have two or three questions, but let me begin by saying that over the last couple of months and

in particular after the budget was presented, we have heard concerns about classroom sizes, school transportation, transportation in particular of individuals with disabilities, discontinuing the classroom improvement fund, and concerns around enrolment growth. However, I recognize that my colleagues have asked those questions, so I will be more specific.

In my first question I will refer to the sheet, Chair, you just distributed, student demographic factors. I think it also relates to key objective 1.1 of your business plan. If I'm reading it correctly, I can see that there are almost 89,000 students with English as a second language. Like many other ridings across this province, this is particularly relevant to my constituency. We also know that research shows that it takes nine years to meet full language fluency while the department is only funding for five. Also, there is no specific mention of English as a second language in your plan. Considering that 89,000 is a huge number, the question I have is: can you please tell me what you are doing to support these students with English as a second language needs, and why aren't you funding for smaller class sizes and more ELL supports so kids can develop the needed language skills and be successful?

Member LaGrange: Well, thank you for the question. English as a second language does receive additional funding. On a per-student funding, these students with insufficient fluency in English or French are getting additional dollars. In the 2018-2019 year there was \$96 million allocated. In the 2019-2020 year we're looking at \$99.7 million. It works out to \$1,178.10 per eligible student.

The change to five-year funding versus the seven-year funding was done in the 2012-2013 year, so we've been functioning under this model for quite a number of years. It is a flexible model where boards can direct the dollars where they are able to get the most impact. Again, we're looking to give school boards the flexibility to meet the needs of their unique students, and we value very much the fact that we have so many new students coming in with English as a second language, because oftentimes they add to the inclusion, the diversity of our population.

Mr. Sabir: Sorry to cut you off, but I referenced research that says that it takes nine years while we are only providing five. So can you please confirm that you have no plan to change that to nine years, that you will keep it at five and will not provide additional supports?

Member LaGrange: Can you reference where you're finding that information in my budget, please?

Mr. Sabir: I think there was a page distributed by the chair, student demographic factors, that has these numbers. I was also referring you to the key objectives that students have essential knowledge and skills. I understand that language is an important skill to be successful. Research shows that you need nine years to be completely fluent. Your model is providing for five. Can you confirm that you will not change it to nine years or more than five years?

Member LaGrange: I will confirm that when your government was in the position to effect change, you kept it at five years, and at this point we are keeping it at five years.

Mr. Sabir: Okay. I think the second question I have is with respect to your capital plan. The second question is broadly about the high school in north Calgary. Parents have been asking about that, and they are concerned. When we were in government, we provided funds for that school, the design phase. I know my colleague has already asked, but you said that it will be soon. Can you please tell

us that the school will be built, and how soon will you be able to answer that? Like, one month, two months, three months? When will parents be able to find out?

Member LaGrange: Well, as I indicated earlier, a capital announcement on the specifics will be coming soon, and that is still applicable. It is still coming soon. As soon as I am able to share the details, I will be sharing them with you.

Mr. Sabir: I think all these schools, these language supports: had you not paid \$4.7 billion in corporate handouts, you would be able to fund these right away, and parents and families would be able to know whether they will get the school, whether they will get the supports, whether they will get the transportation. That would have been a better use.

4:50

The Acting Chair: Thank you, Member. We will return to you.

We'll go back to the government caucus side. Mr. Walker, we'll continue with you.

Mr. Walker: Well, thank you so much, Chair. It's me again, Minister. I'm really enjoying this exchange. Thank you for your forthrightness and candour in your answers.

Strengthening the First Nations educational system is something that I know is very important to our government, to yourself, and you're showing that, but it's also personally very important to me and within my riding. You know, one of my best friends is First Nations, and we grew up at a time when, in terms of the educational content, it was what I would call very Eurocentric or westerncentric; it didn't offer a diversity of viewpoints that reflect Alberta and Canada. The only place that he could sort of get his indigenous culture taught to him was through his mother and his grandmother. I'm so happy that we're working to strengthen the First Nations education system and welcoming through school choice a broad-based curriculum that offers many points of view, not just a Eurocentric or a westerncentric point of view. As well, my wife is an immigrant, so I'm very connected to immigrant communities here, and I just think it's so great that our education curriculum content is becoming more multicultural, including especially our First Nations communities.

Speaking of my own community, we have a major First Nations leader in Sherwood Park. His name is Bill Adsit. He had a tough upbringing, which is very unfortunate. He eventually left school while in high school and went out on his own, made his own way, had to battle many demons. He, too, unfortunately, wasn't brought up to have a broad-based perspective that included indigenous teachings within the education curriculum. He had to learn that a lot on his own as he attended a residential school. Then he became a leader in British Columbia, and his focus was on turning around First Nations communities economically. He was very successful at doing that. We're just so happy to have him and his family in my riding. About 21 of them live in Sherwood Park, and they attend the Sherwood Park Alliance church. I'm just so happy, again, that we're strengthening the First Nations education system.

Also in my riding we have a leader that works with Elk Island public schools. He's a leading First Nations chief. I and the Minister of Service Alberta met with him probably, I would say, about a month ago and heard about all the great things that he does in Elk Island public schools, across the 43 schools that make up Elk Island public schools, to educate all children on the important First Nations perspective, that again I'm so glad to see reflected in our curriculum and that our government is strengthening.

His own story. I think he's about 65, 66 years old, and he, too, said that growing up, he wasn't given the First Nations educational

content or perspective in schools, and that greatly affected his own social development. Moving to Edmonton from his rural setting was also a difficult adjustment. He faced, obviously, severe racism here in Edmonton. I think that broadening the perspective and getting away from the Eurocentric educational perspective, the colonialist educational perspective that dominated pedagogy for so long, is a great thing.

Turning to my question, on page 53 of the business plan objective 2.3 is to "support school divisions to enter into education service agreements with First Nations." Your department has identified a further key initiative to support that objective: \$9.53 million to support the strengthening of First Nations educational systems through various means. Can you outline, Minister, some of the specific work your department plans to undertake to support educational service agreements?

I swear that's my last question.

Member LaGrange: We'll see on that one.

Yes. Thank you. We have, as I said earlier, some tremendous work going on in this area. I was very pleased to meet with so many of our First Nations, Métis, and Inuit over my time period travelling across the province, and I'm looking forward to continuing that. Just for clarification, the \$9.53 million identified in the business plan does not provide financial support to school divisions to enter into ESAs but, rather, supports the First Nation governments and indigenous organizations to strengthen their education system. We have some very unique situations happening: the KTC and the MESC funding framework agreements, which are approximately \$7.5 million; the indigenous languages in education program, which is approximately \$1.8 million; the exploration of funding framework agreements for Little Red River and Stoney education authority is approximately \$300,000.

Regarding the ESAs, I will be reviewing draft education standards to determine if these draft standards will apply or need to be modified. There's no budget associated with this item. The dollars we are providing are simply to enhance the services that are already in place.

I'll turn it over to Mike Walter because he's been dealing with this on a day-to-day basis.

Mr. Walter: As the minister alluded to, the support that's being provided for ESAs: a good number of our school districts are in proximity to First Nations communities, and their students are very fluid in terms of going back and forth between the provincial system and the First Nations. What we're trying to do is to standardize across the province the agreements that are in place in terms of how the funding works, the accountability in terms of the information that's shared between the two systems. We feel that there's a tremendous amount of time that's being used – you can argue for red tape reduction – in terms of each of those entities dealing with the school system or the First Nations in terms of coming to that particular agreement. The work that we're doing on the ESAs, we feel, will simplify things and will ensure, again, that the funding is there to support the kids, be it if they're taking school in their home community or if they're in the provincial system, ensuring that they're being accommodated in that way.

Also, as the minister alluded to, we have provided \$1.8 million across the province to a variety of groups that are really trying to beef up the language component. Again, having the students feel connected to their home community, their home language: we feel that that will get at many of the things that you spoke about in your own friendships in terms of the people that you know. We're, again, investing in that.

The last thing that I would comment on is that, as the minister alluded to, we're spending 3 and a half million dollars to also bring our regional collaborative services on-reserve, so this will be occupational therapists, speech language therapists, these types of services that previously had not been available to the First Nations. We're capitalizing on the work that's already been done and expanding to on-reserve and ensuring that the students that require those services are being served.

Member LaGrange: I'm sure that you're probably aware of this, but federal funding is different across the province, depending on which nation we're dealing with, so we actually have targeted trying to lower the achievement gap to really address the unique needs and concerns that are out there. We have a department, and I'll ask Brad to speak to this piece.

Mr. B. Smith: Thank you, Minister. The minister is referring to the federal responsibility for students on First Nations. Alberta's investment, the items that Michael Walter was alluding to, is not intended to replace federal funding. The federal government is responsible for the education of First Nation students who reside on-reserve. Our investment is to facilitate a collaboration between provincial school boards and First Nation students as well as help First Nation education authorities become established, like the MESC and the KTC arrangements that the minister alluded to. The federal government has responsibility for these students, and as the minister mentioned, how they support the different federal schools across the province is slightly different because there's an agreement with each of them.

5:00

Mr. Walker: Okay. Thank you, Minister, and thank you to your colleagues.

Did you want to say anything else?

Member LaGrange: No. I think we covered it unless we missed something that you wanted clarified further.

Mr. Walker: No.

The Acting Chair: Thank you very much.

I hesitate to interrupt. We'll go back to the Official Opposition. We ended with Member Sabir.

I just want to remind folks: after this segment we'll be taking our five-minute break.

Member Hoffman, carry on. Thank you.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'm going to go back to some questions that we started dealing with in the morning. I've been able to find some information on my own, but certainly it would benefit all of us, I think, to have the full and proper information. In the time that we parted, I was able to go and look at these nice tables that are on the Alberta Education website that the minister referred to this morning, that talk about fundings to boards. Then I was able to find for some boards the budget that they voted on and submitted back in the spring.

For example, I have Edmonton Catholic separate school division here. They anticipated their revenue, based on what was said to them through the media and through conversation with the minister, I imagine, being \$486 million. What they got was \$434 million according to what's on the website now, so a net difference, a decrease, of more than \$51 million.

I was able to find it for Calgary Roman Catholic separate school division. Again, they believed in the spring, when they passed their budget, again based on things like being told that funding enrolment

was going to be continued – they anticipated in the June budget \$595 million, and their allocation is \$525 million, so a difference of nearly \$70 million.

What the Calgary school division, Calgary public, anticipated and approved in a budget – I know that there were a bunch of concerns around what that budget would mean in terms of staff reductions – the one that they passed in June, which already was accounting for significant concerns and restraints: \$1.3 billion. What they actually received was \$1.144 billion, so a difference of more than \$163 million over what they planned in June.

These were some that I was able to find because they're actually posted on the boards' websites, but many, many boards don't actually post their Junes. They do submit them in writing to the minister. What I asked for this morning was copies of what was passed in June and copies of what the actual sheets are here. I guess that if the minister isn't – I guess my question is: would the minister just provide the information that has been requested? I know that the chair at the beginning said that it can be done in writing, and I'm fine with us getting it in writing at a later date. But I think that this information is important for us to be able to make a decision about this budget, so I'm asking for copies of those June budgets.

The Acting Chair: As I said earlier, that is certainly an option that is provided to any one of the ministers, but that is a choice that the minister would have to make, to provide something in writing later.

Member LaGrange: Do you want me to answer?

The Acting Chair: Go ahead, Minister.

Member LaGrange: Okay. Again, those assumptions were made by boards using various factors, not knowing their enrolment growth. You know, there are various things that go into creating an assumption. It is just that, an assumption. As of September 30 they would actually have their actual numbers in front of them. Again, I believe I've already answered this question. Boards, now that they have their profiles, are able to compare it to assumptions, compare it to other factors that they now have – they have their enrolment numbers; they have other numbers available to them – and they will be providing an updated budget by the end of November or early December.

Beyond that, I've been talking to boards and will continue to talk to boards. I'm meeting with some boards tomorrow, some of our educational partners. Every education partner knows that they are able to contact my department and speak to Brad directly and review that they actually have accurate numbers, because, of course, assumptions are that, just assumptions.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Member.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. My question is: will the minister provide now verbally a breakdown of every single board's approved budget that they did in June based on their assumptions? If not, will she table it, provide it in writing to all of us, as being a provision provided by the member? I'm asking a question about the June assumptions. It's information that the minister has received, and I think it's fair for all of us to receive that information as well. Some have it posted on their websites; many do not. I think it would be beneficial to all members of this Assembly to have that information.

Member LaGrange: I would just further say that those assumptions are board assumptions, and boards have the ability to post them publicly or to choose not to. Just because the member

does not like the answer I've given doesn't mean that it isn't an answer.

Ms Hoffman: It isn't an answer, Mr. Chair.

Member LaGrange: I have continued to respond to that.

Ms Hoffman: I'm asking for information.

Member LaGrange: I can provide the actuals from last year.

The Acting Chair: One of the clerks told me this, Member, and this goes back to the current speaker and the speakers before. You may ask the question. You may not like the answer that you're going to get. However, the answer that has been provided to you is the answer that is provided to you. I cannot force the minister or her department to provide you anything in writing.

Ms Sweet: A point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Acting Chair: Sure.

An Hon. Member: We have one over here.

Ms Sweet: Was there not somebody on that side first and then me? I thought I heard it, but I wasn't sure.

The Acting Chair: Oh, sure. Go ahead.

Mr. Neudorf: Yes. Just under Standing Order 23(c), "persists in needless repetition or raises matters that have [already] been decided during the current session," this question was asked a number of times this morning, asked and answered. We've been very lenient up to this point in time. That's what we'd like to put on the table.

The Acting Chair: Member.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Did you want to rule on that point of order first, because I will be speaking to . . .

The Acting Chair: Oh, I was going to give you an opportunity to respond.

Ms Sweet: Okay. I can respond to that piece. In response to repetition, because we are in estimates, with the ability to ask and clarify information more than once, a different member of the committee has the right, as all private members do within the Legislature, to ask a question more than once to get clarity if they don't feel like they've had that. Unfortunately, I don't feel like this is a point of order, because at any time a member can ask the minister more than once.

The Acting Chair: I'm prepared to rule. The member is correct. I mean, they can continue to ask the question. Again, you may not like the answer that you're going to get. I do not believe that that is a point of order, so I will continue on to the next point.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just under Standing Order 65(2)(b), "The Chair shall maintain order in standing and special committees and shall decide all questions of order subject to an appeal to the committee" or 65(3), "When a question of privilege arises in a committee or when disorder persists in a committee," I will first address 65(2)(b), that "the Chair shall maintain order." Although I recognize you cannot compel the minister to provide written answers to the committee, there is past precedent in every other committee, and currently, as this government sits, there are ministers in other committees who are providing written answers

to the committee. All members of the Legislature have a right to the information as we all have to vote on the budget when the budget is proposed on November 19. Therefore, although the minister may not want to provide the information to all private members, she does have a responsibility to provide that information on behalf of her ministry to all of us, and although she may not want to provide the information, she has a responsibility to do so to this committee.

The Acting Chair: Okay. Would anybody on the government caucus side like to respond?

Mr. Neudorf: Not at this time, Chair.

The Acting Chair: Okay. Member, you referred to Standing Order 65. Can you please repeat that?

Ms Sweet: Under Standing Orders in Committees, 65(2)(b), "The Chair shall maintain order in standing and special committees and shall decide all questions of order subject to an appeal to the committee."

5:10

The Acting Chair: To the member who raised the point of order: again, you know, I certainly understand that other members are choosing to provide that information in writing, and as the counsel has just provided to me, that is a choice of those ministers. I think you raised it as well. I cannot compel that minister or the ministry to provide anything in writing. I certainly encourage the minister to continue answering the questions. She has staff that can answer the questions. If she chooses to provide something in writing, then certainly that is up to her, but I as the chair cannot compel her to do that.

Ms Sweet: I'm ready to move on.

Member LaGrange: Would you like me to say anything?

The Acting Chair: Minister, go ahead.

Member LaGrange: Again, I'd just reiterate that assumptions are not public documents, and I respect the autonomy of boards . . .

The Acting Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Member LaGrange: Was that time, or could I keep finishing?

The Acting Chair: That was time.

Member LaGrange: Okay.

The Acting Chair: Was there another point of order?

Ms Sweet: No.

The Acting Chair: Okay. You know what? Let's take our five-minute break, and we'll return in five minutes.

[The committee adjourned from 5:11 p.m. to 5:17 p.m.]

The Acting Chair: Excuse me, everybody. If we can come to order. I apologize. I see the minister is ready. We have members from the opposition. We have members on the government side. The deputy is here. We're good to go. All right. Thank you, everyone, for returning promptly here. We will continue on. Members of the government caucus, who is prepared? Okay.

Mr. Long, go ahead, sir.

Mr. Long: Hi, Minister. I just have a two-part question actually. We came in to government with a number of commitments, and one of the commitments that we made was to get rid of the carbon tax. Now, people in my communities were questioning one particular aspect that relates to your ministry, that the carbon tax that the previous government implemented didn't exempt schools and school boards. At the same time as they implemented that, they froze busing fees, so together these two things added a lot of unexpected and unallocated costs to school boards. I know, we all know, that rural Alberta students depend on the school bus system, and public transit isn't plentiful in Whitecourt, Alberta, or Edson or Hinton or Wildwood, for that matter, like it is in Edmonton and Calgary. In fact, there are numerous school boards that reached out with the actual costs, some of them were astronomical.

My two-part question is: can you share with us the steps being taken to protect rural communities and their school bus programs? Then the follow-up to that is a little bit different. If we are assuming that rural schools had a few hundred thousand dollars of additional, unrecoverable costs due to the carbon tax and freezing those bus fees, how would that impact the funding for putting teachers and teachers' assistants in the classrooms? I know that that had been a big push in my communities, that they saw fewer teachers and teachers' assistants.

Member LaGrange: Thank you. Thank you for that question. It was something that as a former school board trustee we were very vocal on, that we wanted an exemption from the carbon tax because, of course, we get tax dollars to fund education, and then we were having to pay tax with tax dollars. It just didn't make sense.

One of our government platform commitments was – that I'm very proud of – to ensure that rural schools have adequate resources to deliver programming in an equitable way. Student transportation is a very important part of that commitment, and decisions related to transportation service levels and fees are rightly placed with school boards. The previous school transportation regulation was very challenging for school boards, as the fee decisions needed approval from the Minister of Education, so there was a tremendous amount of red tape that occurred as well.

I believe that school board trustees are elected to make those decisions impacting their communities, and getting students safely to and from schools is a significant responsibility that boards take incredibly seriously and do very well at. Approximately 300,000 students of our 720,000 students in the province in K to 12 are transported each and every day throughout Alberta on some form of public school transportation.

Looking at the carbon tax specifically, when the carbon tax was introduced in 2017 at \$20 per tonne, it is estimated that school boards incurred additional expenses between \$8 million and \$12 million. This includes an estimated increase of \$1.9 million in increased fuel expenses. In 2018 the carbon tax increased to \$30 per tonne and resulted in an estimated increased cost between \$11 million and \$18 million for school boards. This included increased expenses of \$2.7 million in increased fuel expenses. All those dollars came out of the classroom.

Since the carbon tax has been repealed, on May 30, 2019, boards have had the ability to reallocate those savings from this reduced expense back into their budgets to best meet their local needs. Every litre of diesel fuel that goes into a school bus now costs the board 8.03 cents less than it did under the previous government. Those are significant savings that we are now redirecting, putting back into education, where they belong.

I could also turn it over to Brad because he has a little bit more info on this particular piece, on how that actually played out with the carbon tax over the years.

Mr. Long: So it is fair to say that not having the carbon tax – \$18 million: that's a substantial number of teachers and teachers' assistants, correct?

Member LaGrange: Absolutely. When you look at the dollars that were taken out of the education system that are now being put back into the system.

Brad, would you like to expand on that.

Mr. B. Smith: Thank you, Minister. Brad Smith, acting assistant deputy minister. I would just add that the estimates, the information from school boards is fairly specific because through their transportation grant application information, we do know exactly how many kilometres are being used on those routes in urban and rural Alberta, and we're able to pinpoint fairly closely the impact of the carbon levy with respect to fuel.

Mr. Long: Okay. Thank you.

Member LaGrange: Did that answer your question?

Mr. Long: Yeah, it did.

Member LaGrange: Did you have any residual questions on that?

Mr. Long: Not on that one. Thank you so much.

I'll give my time to . . .

The Acting Chair: Thank you, Member Long.

Member Neudorf, go ahead.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Thank you, Minister. I just want to go back and get a little bit more clarity on one point. I believe that our points of order interrupted some thinking on your behalf. How in the past, when boards have provided their spring assumptions, have those played out in actual numbers in the fall or following that up? Can you explain that a little bit further, please?

Member LaGrange: Sure. Assumptions are just assumptions. They're based on your best guesses at the time. Actually, as we were talking about it and thinking about it, if you go to page 88, there's a graph there on accumulated reserves. If you would look between the years of 2014 and 2016, you will see that adjusted operating reserves and capital reserves had increases. If we could go back to assumptions that were put forward, my department shared that during those years, in the assumptions boards had forecasted deficits, yet there ended up being surpluses.

I will turn it over to Mike, who was overseeing that at the time that those occurred and can explain further how the assumptions are just that – assumptions – yet when the actuals come in, there are often different numbers.

Mr. Walter: Michael Walter, acting deputy minister. To the minister's point, between 2014 and 2016 we put out a postprovincial budget, a release of the specific information, and then of course the boards were required to do the budget submissions to the department. When we looked at the cumulative number – I'm not sure if my colleague Brad Smith has the exact numbers – the overall projections of the boards in those three years showed that the operating reserves would have been drawn down and drawn down significantly. Between that and September 30, when, of course, boards get their actual numbers, then we began to track what their spending was through the entire school year, what we in fact saw was that they did not incur deficits. In fact, cumulatively there was more money put into reserves in each of

those years. So there was quite a bit of difference between what the board had submitted in their assumptions and what the actuals played out at.

I don't know if my colleague Brad has ...

5:25

Member LaGrange: Yes, Brad, would you please elaborate further?

Mr. B. Smith: Thanks, Minister. I'll just provide some information for some historical years. In the 2013-14 year school boards projected a drawdown of reserves of \$203 million. The actual drawdown was \$48 million, for a difference of \$251 million. In 2014-15 boards projected a drawdown of \$192 million, with the actual drawdown coming in through their statements at \$7 million, for a difference of \$199 million. And for 2015-16 boards projected a drawdown of \$144 million, with an actual drawdown of \$21 million, for a difference of \$164 million. That shows that the information that boards use in their spring budgets – there is often quite a delta between what they then report later in the cycle in their audited financial statements.

Member LaGrange: Am I right to say that when you're saying drawdown, that actually means surplus, that there is an actual surplus that is achieved?

Mr. B. Smith: Uh-huh. That's right.

The Acting Chair: Thank you. Time has expired on that segment. I will go back to the Official Opposition and Member Hoffman. Go ahead, please.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much. Given the exchange that we just had, and that was certainly helpful, I'm going again off information. The information that's available shows a delta for Calgary public of \$163 million for one specific board. Has there ever been, looking back historically, through you, Mr. Chair, a board experience a delta of \$163 million between spring estimates and actuals after September 30?

Member LaGrange: What I would say is that school board assumptions are their assumptions. Again, we would be happy to provide the actuals for the 2018-2019 year, and then further provide you the profiles because I think that is the comparison that you need to look at. What did school boards actually get in the 2018-2019 year, and what are the profiles for the upcoming year? Beyond that, the assumptions are, as I said previously, they are assumptions, and they are school board assumptions that are not publicly posted.

Ms Hoffman: Through you, Mr. Chair, what I'm asking for is information consistent with the information we received in response to the last question. That was about all boards being rolled up, and it was about \$200 million. My question is: has there ever been an individual board that has seen a delta difference between their projections and their September 30 head counts? Because that's what the information we just received was for the whole province rolled up. Have there ever been individual boards see differences in the magnitude that we're seeing this year? If that information isn't available now, I'd certainly be happy to receive it at another time, but I'm just asking for information.

Member LaGrange: I believe I've answered the question numerous times over. We're happy to provide the actuals that school boards are receiving from the 2018-2019 school year and then, further to that, their profiles for what we estimate they will be receiving in the new year. I believe that gives you the best picture

of where our school boards are in the financial statement type of setting.

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Chair, I understand that's the information that the minister wants to give. If the minister wants to give that as well, that is fine, but what I'm asking for is information based on the answer we just received from officials about rolled up provincial numbers. I'm asking for the breakdown for individual boards. That's the information I'm asking to receive.

The Acting Chair: Thank you. Through me to the minister ...

Member LaGrange: I'm happy to provide you the information on the actuals that school boards have received and the profiles that they will be receiving, that they've already been provided with. That is the information that I have continually offered to provide and will continue to offer to provide, because when you're looking at comparisons, you definitely want to compare to what you had in the previous year and what you will be getting. Assumptions are just that, assumptions. They are based on all sorts of different, varying factors, as I've repeated numerous times and highlighted specifically where adjusted operating reserves and capital reserves came into force when I ...

Ms Hoffman: I'll cede my time to my colleagues, Mr. Chair.

The Acting Chair: Thank you very much.
Member Pancholi.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate it. It sounds like the minister does have certain information in her possession, especially since we were able to get rolled-up provincial numbers, but is refusing to provide it. I just want to make sure that we're clear on the record that the minister has information and is just choosing not to share it.

I'm going to go on to a different topic, which is line 2.6 ...

Member LaGrange: I would argue with that.

Ms Pancholi: ... of the estimates, which is on page 79.

Mr. Neudorf: Point of order.

The Acting Chair: Hang on a second. There's a point of order. Section?

Mr. Neudorf: Standing Order 23(i), imputing false motives and allegations against a member. When the member opposite stated that the minister has information that she's not willing to share, I think it overreaches what the minister has previously stated.

Ms Hoffman: Am I allowed to respond to that?

The Acting Chair: Absolutely. Go ahead.

Ms Hoffman: Thanks. So 23(i) says: "unavowed motives to another Member." It certainly isn't anything about the motives of the minister. It's a fact that the minister receives information, that we got the rolled-up provincial information and the minister is choosing not to give the breakdown. That's what the member said, so I see no point of order.

The Acting Chair: Anybody else want to make a comment?

Mr. Yao: Precedent has been set in previous estimates by someone who was, as an example, a former Minister of Health, where you refused to answer questions or provide information. I fail to see

where the difference is in this regard, again, demonstrated by your government.

The Acting Chair: Would anybody else like to make a comment?

Ms Hoffman: That doesn't speak to the point of order, but . . .

The Acting Chair: Well, look: 23(i), "imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member." The way I am understanding this is that a comment was made by the member of the opposition. Whether the government caucus members like that comment: I think that is a matter of debate, we'll say. Again I will go back and state that the minister has answered these questions. I believe that, as I stated, with many Speakers that I have known over my five-year period of time, at least three, opposition members have a right to ask a question. They may not like the answer to that question. As I have already previously stated, I cannot compel a minister or ministry to provide that information. I will also state, from the advice of Parliamentary Counsel: "Members may not insist on receiving an answer . . . A Minister's refusal to answer a question may not be challenged or treated as the subject of a point of order or [a] question of privilege." That's page 516, *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*.

At this time I am not going to find that there is a point of order. However, I will ask that everyone exercise caution. There has been a lot of broad latitude, I think, that has been given on both sides. We are certainly nearing the end of the estimates here. With that, there is no point of order, and I will continue and ask Member Pancholi to continue, please.

5:35

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Going to line 2.6 in the estimates, page 79, which is the education system support line, I note that the budget has been reduced to \$74 million from almost \$107 million in the previous budget. If I'm correct, Minister, that line item includes things like student assessment. I would imagine that that would include student assessment for provincial achievement tests. Would that be correct?

Member LaGrange: Just to clarify and to correct something: what you were looking at was a budget estimate of \$106 million. The actuals for the 2018-2019 year were \$91,502,000. The estimate for this upcoming year is \$74,831,000.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Minister. That's what I said. It was budgeted at \$107 million in 2018. I didn't refer to it as actual. I just wanted to clarify that this line item includes assessment for provincial achievement tests. Would that be correct? That's the work that would be done under that line item?

Member LaGrange: That is one of many that are under that line item, yes.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Minister.

I wanted to just clarify: we understand that your government has indicated and you've indicated that you might be bringing in grade 3 PATs, provincial achievement tests. I'm wondering: given that this budget is going down for that area, how do you account for the increased costs that will be related to administering grade 3 PATs?

Member LaGrange: In regard to the curriculum that is being developed, we have a budget surrounding that particular line item. We have committed to the public that we will be developing assessments alongside the curriculum as it's being developed. At

this point in time we do not have that piece in play because we are still in the development process.

Ms Pancholi: Given that that is a commitment that your government has made with respect to bringing back grade 3 PATs – it's hard to tell. I'm just looking now at page 60 of the Education business plan. It doesn't break down in the same way that the estimates do with respect to assessment and where that falls.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, Member. Time has expired.

We will continue back to the government caucus side. Mr. Neudorf, go ahead, please.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I would just like to talk to the minister. In the estimates book on page 84 – I think we may have touched on this before, but again we've gone all around, so I'd like to get a little bit of clarity and just bring things back to this discussion – in the statement of operations, under Revenue, other revenue is estimated at \$187.1 million, which is a \$15.7 million increase from the 2018-19 actuals. Can you just once again possibly explain the difference and what these other sources of revenue are as we just refresh our thinking on this topic?

Member LaGrange: Right. The actual for last year was \$171,350,000. Is that correct? That line item: is that the line item you're looking at?

Mr. Neudorf: I believe so, yes.

Member LaGrange: Now it is \$187,106,000 as the estimate for the 2019-2020 school year, under Other Revenue. That \$187.1 million in 2019-2020 for other revenue is broken down as follows: we believe that \$184.1 million by school boards for revenue items such as sales and services, including lunchroom supervision, after school care, insurance proceeds, property capital, and rental of school facilities – increased enrolment and inflation will lead to increased fees. In this would be the international students. As I said earlier, there are certain school boards that also provide services to other school divisions and to the broader public that are able to recoup fees for those services. The additional \$3 million by the department is \$1.5 million due to previous years' recoveries of grant payments to school authorities and \$1.5 million from sales of educational print services. That total would come to the \$187,106,000 number.

Mr. Neudorf: Okay. Thank you very much, Minister.

Then if we just go to the page before that, on page 83 in the same estimates book, if we look right at the top of the page, Instruction – ECS to Grade 12, in the far-right column, \$6,399,215 is assigned to that line item. Can you provide that breakdown and how that money is assigned to the system?

Member LaGrange: Sorry. Could you just highlight again where you're . . .

Mr. Neudorf: Sure. Page 83 of the same estimates, at the top of the page there, far-right column, \$6,399,215, Instruction – ECS to Grade 12. Just two questions: on the breakdown and how the breakdown is assigned to the system.

Member LaGrange: Okay. I will break it down. The voted budget of \$3.4 billion represents the amounts that are budgeted for operational funding, \$2.9 billion; inclusive education, \$470.7 million; and FNMI and Alberta's approach for First Nations, \$81.7 million. The \$405.4 million, which is not voted, represents the amount for the teachers' pension plan, the employers' portion of the current service pension costs. There's an additional \$8.5 billion, not

voted, that represents the school boards' budgeted expense amount for ECS to grade 12 instructional expenditures. The consolidated adjustment of \$6 billion is the elimination of funding from the department and from the ASFF to school boards for student instruction as the budget is presented on a fully consolidated basis. The \$6.4 billion is the net consolidated estimate for student instruction and teachers' pension, which I know is a lot to take in.

I'm going to actually turn it over to the expert, Brad Smith, who can really delve into the meat of that.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you.

Mr. B. Smith: Thank you, Minister. Member, the purpose of this sheet, as alluded to in its title, is to provide the reader a reconciliation and a description, a path, if you will, between what is voted and amounts that are not voted as well as the consolidation adjustments that occur. You may know that the operations of school boards and charter schools in Alberta are consolidated into the fiscal plan of government, so the operations of school boards have to be taken into account. The purpose of this page and the columns is to take the reader through the various elements of expense and describe where those amounts come from that result in the consolidated operating expense for the ministry on the far right.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you.

Member LaGrange: Does that answer your questions, Nathan?

Mr. Neudorf: Yeah. Thank you very much.

Now I am going to just refer back to your trip to Lethbridge. You came in and spent a day with me in my constituency, so I'm very much appreciative of that. We spent considerable time touring different sites. In particular, we spent time with an early childhood education centre with some daycare, that kind of thing. I'm hoping you can share a little bit about what you and your ministry are doing when we find these scenarios that work crossministry and the difficulties that you've come across – I know a number were raised with you on that day in Lethbridge – of the funding and transfers as to which ministry is covering different things, what we've seen in terms of the silo effect, and how you're working to overcome that and work that because that does relate to the next financial question. But I'm hoping you can comment first on those challenges.

Member LaGrange: Yes. Something that always frustrated me as a trustee was the fact that oftentimes ministries operate in silos and that, at the end of the day, we're looking after the same children, the same families oftentimes, and occasionally there's duplication of services.

Something I've heard of since the day I entered as a trustee is wraparound services. We really want to provide the most comprehensive services to the individual and to the families that we serve. I've already started the conversation with my fellow ministers that are involved in some instances – in the particular one you cited, it's Minister Schulz, who is the Minister of Children's Services – and we're looking at opportunities to co-ordinate our efforts and to better utilize the dollars that we have. Of course, we have finite dollars, and as I said, while we're funding education at a very high level, you know, given that we're only collecting roughly \$2.5 billion in educational tax dollars, we are investing over \$8.2 billion annually. I know that Minister Schulz has finite dollars as well. How can we better utilize those dollars?

In other areas we're looking at having conversations. I'm in conversation with the minister of social services, the minister of indigenous affairs, the Minister of Health – obviously, there's crossover in that department as well – and on occasion the Minister

of Justice. These are ministries, we have agreed, that need to collaborate and better utilize those resources for the benefit of the child and the benefit of the family ultimately to provide the absolute best care we can for those children.

5:45

Thank you for taking me around. It was an absolute pleasure. It's been incredible to go across this province and really see the differences and the needs and also to celebrate the wonderful successes we are having across the province but to say that we can get better. We can do this better, and that's something that I know school boards and school authorities are definitely committed to. It's something that I am very committed to. Being a rehabilitative practitioner by profession, I've worked with the developmentally disabled. I had a younger brother who was born with Down syndrome, so I'm very familiar with the challenges and the necessity of having early intervention. That is something that is very near and dear to my heart: how can we provide early intervention for those that have special needs to give students the absolute best opportunity for success and to build that strong foundation of learning and to really provide them with the services that they need in a more comprehensive manner? Again, we can do better, and we're going to do better.

Thank you so much for that question.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you very much, Minister.

I just remember how many times we heard it on that trip where an individual caregiver said that they would have to talk to multiple ministries about the same client. I think that for the number of times we've been questioned on where we're going to find these efficiencies, this is a very stark, realistic example of those exact areas where we can find interim ministerial collaboration to really eliminate a lot of redundancies in the system as well as duplication of costs and, possibly, maybe even duplication of services offered. I think that if we do that . . .

The Acting Chair: Thank you, Member. The time has expired.

We'll go to the Official Opposition. We'd concluded with Member Pancholi, who will continue.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Minister, I'm just going to follow up on what we were discussing before, which is just confirmation that what we see in line 2.6 of the estimates does not currently include any funding related to grade 3 PATs.

Member LaGrange: Can you please refer me to what page you're on?

Ms Pancholi: Line 2.6 of the estimates, page 79.

Member LaGrange: Page 79? Thank you.

Line 2.6 of the estimates. A decrease of \$16.7 million in 2019-2020 is mainly due to department efficiencies and internal transfers between programs less other functional transfers to governmental reorganization. The department will continue to implement cost containment strategies such as hiring restraints . . .

Ms Pancholi: Sorry. Thank you, Minister. I just want to be clear whether or not it included any costs associated with grade 3 PAT assessments.

Member LaGrange: We are going to continue to do our current assessments within the current department budget.

Ms Pancholi: So does that include the addition? Currently the department does not do grade 3 PAT assessments.

Member LaGrange: This is this year's budget. We will be developing budgets for future years in future years.

Ms Pancholi: Okay. The projections that we see in the targets on page 60 of the business plan: going forward, it's just lumped into one line item under Instruction – ECS to Grade 12. There are no line numbers there. I assume, then, that those projections also do not include any costs associated with implementing grade 3 PATs.

Member LaGrange: Again, we have indicated that for this year, for the 2019-2020 year, SLAs are optional. In the upcoming year, 2020-2021, then they would be mandatory. At this point in time there is no change in the way we're operating. The SLAs are optional and no additional cost to our budget at this point.

Ms Pancholi: Okay. To be clear, a few minutes ago you indicated that you hadn't made decisions about the grade 3 PATs because you're doing the curriculum assessment, and now you're saying that it is going to be mandatory as of 2020-21.

Member LaGrange: What we have said and what we have indicated on an ongoing basis is that SLAs for this year are optional, that in the next year they are mandatory, and that in subsequent years we will be providing assessments that are built alongside the new curriculum. That's what we have been very clear on.

Ms Pancholi: Future budgets, then, will account for the additional costs associated with that?

Member LaGrange: Future budgets will deal with future priorities.

Ms Pancholi: But that will be new, mandatory versus optional, right?

Member LaGrange: We are currently dealing with this budget year, so if you could bring it back to this budget year so that I can deal with this year's budget – that's what we're dealing with.

Ms Pancholi: Absolutely. I'll go back to the business plan, page 50, under outcome 1. The last bullet there talks about how it costs \$2 million to simply add a new portion into the mathematics diploma exam. So that's \$2 million just for the cost of adding a new section into the diploma exam. I guess I'm questioning how much it costs to implement grade 3 PATs.

Member LaGrange: I will turn this over to Mike Walter, who has the specifics.

Mr. Walter: As the minister alluded to, we are pulling the SLAs back and using them on a voluntary basis for this school year. Because the resource was already developed, there aren't any costs associated with the use of it. It's ready to go. You know, we believe, from the information that we've received from our staff, that about 25 per cent of those who would be eligible to use that particular assessment will use it in this particular school year.

Within the budget line item that you've identified, there is \$100,000 budgeted for, which would be part of our agreement with Service Alberta. All of our IT has transferred from the ministry over to Service Alberta as part of that consolidation that the minister spoke to earlier. For lack of a better term, they provide us with the lights-on technical support in terms of operating that particular assessment. So it's voluntary this year. Again, because the tool was developed, there are no developmental costs associated with that. There is a small cost related to the upkeep of the IT, and we have an agreement with Service Alberta for the maintenance of that.

Member LaGrange: And that is only for the SLAs for this year.

Ms Pancholi: Okay. Thank you, Minister.

I'll move on to line 2.2 of your estimates, page 79, which is regional collaborative services delivery. I just note that it's, you know, essentially flat. There's no increase, really, there. But you circulated that sheet earlier today with the student demographic factors, and we note, certainly since last year – and I'm sure it's increased almost every year – an increase in the number of children that are eligible for PUF funding. Those are children who have identified developmental or other disabilities.

We know that there is an increase in the number of students who have exceptional needs and may require additional services and supports. As well, you know, you've noted ESL going up and FNMI students and refugee enrolments, which obviously increases ESL requirements. With the increase in the number of students who have diverse needs – and I believe regional collaborative services delivery is one area, not the only area but one area, in which those students are served – and that the budget does not seem to be increasing, I'm wondering how you account for the additional students with those additional needs.

Member LaGrange: Yes. You've got several elements to your question. I'll address it. The ECS program unit funding, or the PUF funding, is being increased under the supports for inclusion, inclusive funding, correct? I'm just trying to see what line this is on.

Ms Pancholi: Sorry. To clarify, it's increasing in terms of the per-student amount or the number of . . .

5:55

Member LaGrange: Of course, it's accounting for enrolment growth, so it's going from \$216.5 million to \$230 million. The maximum per eligible funded student under PUF is \$25,051.20. The maximum for each additional funded child in the unit is \$6,215.88. We have a projected enrolment number of students accessing PUF funding of 11,505 children, so just on that particular piece. As well, PUF is in lines 2.1 and 3.1 and 3.2 of the budget, so it's split over several pieces.

As far as the operating expense that you were referring to in 2.2 of the regional collaborative services delivery, the increase of \$120,000, or .2 per cent, is to maintain education funding and account for the enrolment growth. Of course, this is an estimate, and funding is always based on the actuals.

I will turn it over to Brad, who has probably a little bit more in-depth information and can flesh this out a little bit more for you.

Mr. B. Smith: Thank you, Minister. The regional collaborative service delivery model: there is a formula outlined in the funding manual for school authorities, and the various regions submit plans in terms of their service delivery to the department. There's a formula in the funding manual that will describe how they get their allocation. Again, as the minister indicated, this is an estimate for the '19-20 year, and we will provide or adjust those allocations as required when the enrolments are finalized.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you. I ask as a bit of a follow-up, actually, from Member Neudorf's comments, because when we're talking about early childhood education and intervention and making sure that there's not duplication of services, my understanding is that regional collaborative service delivery is about those wraparound kinds of services, right? It's making sure that the siloing is broken down so that those children are provided with the continuum and spectrum of services that they require. We also see that the number

of children who may require those kinds of services, I believe, Minister, from your own numbers which you circulated, is increasing every year. Again, it goes back to that question. If we recognize that there are values in providing wraparound services to avoid siloing but also to treat the child as a whole, not just when they enter the school system, and we know that there are more children that may require those services yet the funding seems to be flat, I question whether or not the commitment is truly there with the funding supports in order to truly support those children.

The Acting Chair: Thank you very much, Member.

We will continue with the government caucus side. Mr. Neudorf, we'll continue with you next.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just going back to what we were talking about, page 84 of the government estimates, interministry consolidations, this is some of what I think is related to what we were discussing earlier. Interministry consolidations decreased from the 2018-2019 actuals of \$58.9 million to the 2019-2020 estimate of \$3.9 million. Can you explain this significant change?

Member LaGrange: Yes, I can. The \$3.9 million for interministry consolidations are broken down as follows. There's \$2.8 million from Treasury Board and Finance for borrowing costs incurred by the Alberta school foundation fund to cover the monthly payments to school boards. Property taxes are collected on a quarterly basis but are paid to school boards on a monthly basis. Of course, we have to cover that difference, and there are borrowing costs to that. One million dollars from the Alberta Capital Finance Authority for borrowing costs related to school capital projects by school boards is also in that amount. The change of \$55 million is mainly due to the change in accounting treatment towards shared service agreements for the 2019-2020 year.

I know for a fact that Brad has more information on that because he has been dealing with these numbers very closely.

Mr. B. Smith: Thank you, Minister. Through the office of the Controller there was an accounting treatment presented in this year going forward that wasn't in prior years, and that's the reason for the swing on those interministry consolidations. That accounting treatment is being applied prospectively, so the \$3.9 million that is shown in the estimates in interministry is simply those amounts that the minister alluded to between the borrowing costs of the Alberta school foundation fund as well as \$1 million from the Alberta Capital Finance Authority.

Member LaGrange: Would you like an explanation of what the school foundation fund is?

Mr. Neudorf: Yes, please.

Mr. B. Smith: Sure. The Alberta school foundation fund is a regulated fund in government that is in the Education Act, and its purpose is to collect education property taxes from all municipalities in the province, both on residential and nonresidential property, for pooling into that fund and distributing to public and separate school boards for education purposes only. That is the purpose of that fund. However, municipalities only remit their payments into the fund on a quarterly basis, and we pay school boards on a monthly basis. So there's always a timing difference between the payments, and the fund needs to borrow, if you will, from the general revenue fund for two months. The general revenue fund charges a little bit of interest for that service, and that's what is reflected here.

Member LaGrange: That would go back to that \$2.5 billion, that I referenced earlier, that we collect in educational tax dollars. That's where that number comes from. That's what we're collecting, roughly, in educational tax dollars, but, again, highlighting the fact that we do fund our education system very well, to the tune of \$8.2 billion.

Mr. Neudorf: Yeah. Thank you very much for that.

You mentioned the timing difference. I know that this has come up a little bit before, and I'm still trying to wrap my head around it. I'm hoping that you can help me to understand. Now, the year-end for the school differs from the year-end for the government. Can you just explain how those months add up, overlap, or whatever and how that impacts your budget overall? I think that's significant.

Member LaGrange: It has been significant. It was something that I really had to wrap my head around as well. Because of the fact that the government fiscal calendar goes from April 1 to March 31 and my educational fiscal year goes from September 1 to August 31, we have the five additional months between April 1 and August 31 to account for from the 2018-2019 school year. But, of course, I'm also accounting for the full 2019-2020 year. This has been ongoing forever, a very long time, and it has always created a challenge for accounting purposes.

I will turn it over to Brad Smith, who has been dealing with this anomaly for a long time.

Mr. B. Smith: Thank you, Minister. Yes, as the minister described, the government's fiscal year that the members are considering the estimates for began on April 1 of this year, and as has been shown in that fiscal plan table, \$8.23 billion commenced on April 1, 2019. Government, however, committed to supporting school boards until the end of the '18-19 school year, and that decision, you know, requires that that be supported and that the growth associated with that be supported. Then the '19-20 school year and the decisions that government has made with respect to this being a transition year for the system, that a new assurance and funding model will be considered by government in Budget '20: those factors all have to be considered with the presentation of this budget.

Mr. Neudorf: Exactly. Thank you. It does make a significant difference. One, it's a transition year, and two, trying to span those extra gaps, those extra months during the election makes it particularly difficult. Thank you very much for that explanation.

Again back to page 84 in the estimates, so the same page, we see a \$5 million funding increase in revenue from transfers from the government of Canada. Would you be able to explain this particular increase?

Member LaGrange: Yes. I'm just looking for the line item. Intergovernmental transfers: is that the line item?

Mr. Neudorf: Yes.

Member LaGrange: Okay.

Mr. Neudorf: Almost right at the top.

Member LaGrange: Yes. The \$316.6 million for intergovernmental transfers is as follows: \$295.3 million from Alberta Infrastructure for the rental of school facilities; \$10.4 million from Alberta Health Services for health care services provided to Alberta students, one of those services, as I was telling you earlier, that I've been chatting with Minister Shandro about; \$7 million from Alberta Children's Services to support

children in care and community-based prevention and counselling programs; \$3 million from Community and Social Services for family support and community services provided to Alberta students; \$0.75 million from the Alberta Foundation for the Arts to support art-related projects and events in schools; and \$0.13 million from Treasury Board and Finance for borrowing costs related to school capital projects by school boards.

6:05

Again, we're valuing these programs, and that revenue has changed slightly as a result of it. The \$5 million increase is due to interministry consolidation to school boards, and school boards are projecting additional funds from the federal government due to enrolment growth. In addition, the federal government supports the French language programs and courses for French emersion, which is distributed to school authorities by Alberta Education.

I think that covers pretty well everything that you can find in that particular line item, but if I've missed anything, please . . .

Mr. Neudorf: Well, there's just a supplemental question to that. Does that federal funding include any funding for indigenous education or francophone education within that line item at all, or is that just covered in other areas?

Member LaGrange: Yes, it does, but I will turn it over to Brad Smith for the particulars on that piece.

Mr. B. Smith: Thank you, Minister. In that line, Member, yes, there is federal funding for the official languages in education program. That's francophone funding as well as, as I mentioned earlier, the operations of school boards. This is a consolidated statement of operations, so this revenue section and the expense section are both on the department and on school boards. A big chunk of those federal transfers from the government of Canada is going to school boards to support their responsibility for First Nation students where a school board has an education service agreement in place with a band-operated school or where those students are coming from a reserve to attend a provincial school.

Mr. Neudorf: Okay. Can I just get a time check, Mr. Chair?

The Acting Chair: All right. Thank you very much, Mr. Neudorf. We concluded with Member Pancholi?

Ms Pancholi: To Member Dang, please.

The Acting Chair: Oh. Member Dang. Okay. Go ahead, sir. Thank you.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Again, Minister, I apologize if I have to cut you off. We are short on time here, and I want to get some questions in.

I want to go back to playgrounds. On page 136 of the fiscal plan there's a line item, just about in the middle, that says: playgrounds, 2019-2020, \$5 million; 2020-2021, \$6 million. You said earlier that this is for previously announced playground projects, and then you said after that that there may be funding for additional playground projects, including the 25 modernizations or new schools. Will there be funding for more playgrounds moving forward?

Member LaGrange: I will be making specific announcements on the capital expenditure in the very near future. I can say that we have \$397 million allocated for new capital expenditure.

Mr. Dang: Minister, this line item says: playgrounds. Are you using monies from other lines to pay for playgrounds? Can you show me where playground money would come from?

Member LaGrange: In the specific line that you're talking about, they are previously approved projects. There was funding put in place, a grant fund of I believe it was \$25 million by the previous government that was put in place for playgrounds. Moving forward, in the \$397 million that we are going to be providing for new capital projects, my intent is that we are going to fund playgrounds as part of the capital builds, because a playground is essential to the school.

Mr. Dang: To be clear, Minister, in the school capital projects 2019-24, which over four years is \$328 million – and you say that in the fifth year there is an additional \$70 million or whatever it is – there are playground monies in that line?

Member LaGrange: Any new school build in kindergarten to grade 6 will have a playground built alongside the school.

Mr. Dang: Could your department please provide in writing the distribution between what would be playground money and what would be school or modernization money, so separating out the playground line?

Member LaGrange: I will turn it over to my colleague.

Mr. Walter: The previous criterion that we've used, that you would have seen in the \$25 million, was that each eligible school that had, as the minister spoke to, the K to 6 component in it – even if it was K to 9, we still honoured that in terms of that dimension – would have received up to \$250,000 to each allocation. Now, that doesn't mean that they would need it all, or in some cases the \$250,000 was supplemented by . . .

Mr. Dang: In the majority of cases they need much more.

Mr. Walter: . . . fundraising or whatever the parent committee or parent council or the school or the school board decided to supplement that with. That was our criterion.

Mr. Dang: I guess the question is, though – the minister has just told me that there will be playgrounds built with new schools. How much money is going to be allocated to playgrounds out of those new school funds? Could that be given to me in writing later on?

Member LaGrange: Once we make the capital announcements, then you will see which are new schools and which will be receiving those dollars for playgrounds. The commitment is to continue to build playgrounds. We see playgrounds as an essential item. They're as essential as a gymnasium in a school.

Mr. Dang: Minister, do you know how much these playgrounds will cost the government?

Member LaGrange: Again, that would be details of Infrastructure once the capital is determined.

Mr. Dang: Thank you. I'll bring that question back to Infrastructure, then.

Moving on, then, I want to look at the new school builds again. Now, you're telling me that some of the monies in that line item we were just talking about, \$390 million or whatever it is, are actually going to be playgrounds as well. We know that the majority of playgrounds in this province cost well over half a million dollars. If we're talking about that line item, it's now actually less than 16 schools you can build. Could your department give me a breakdown

of how much you expect to receive in P3 funding? How much do you expect to leverage government dollars for? How much value do you think you're going to get on this line item?

Member LaGrange: I believe that the hon. member is speculating. What I would say is that we are providing \$397 million for new infrastructure. When those items are revealed to the public, those dollars are handled by Infrastructure. Infrastructure will make the determination on how those projects move forward. What I have . . .

Mr. Dang: Do you know if you have enough money to fund all the projects without P3s?

Member LaGrange: Again, this is something that Infrastructure takes care of.

Mr. Dang: Minister, are you saying that you don't know if you can actually afford to fund all the schools you're announcing in this budget?

Member LaGrange: Obviously, I would say to the hon. member that we are providing \$397 million to build infrastructure, to continue to build schools. We have \$1.4 billion that . . .

Mr. Dang: Is that enough to build 25 projects?

Member LaGrange: . . . is currently in play building schools, creating modernizations. We have an additional \$25 million in this upcoming year that we're providing to build modulars that we desperately need.

Mr. Dang: Right. But is this line item enough to build 25 new and modernized projects? If it's not, how much will you have to leverage?

Member LaGrange: Again, going back to the way the process moves forward, I will turn this over to Mike Walter.

Mr. Dang: So, Minister, you don't know. You have to refer it to somebody else. You don't know how much money these 25 projects are going to cost you. You'd have to refer me to another minister. Is that right?

Member LaGrange: I believe . . .

The Acting Chair: Minister, hang on a second.

Member, the minister has answered the question. Let's continue with the ministry.

You can either continue to answer, or I think you had indicated that your staff might want to interject.

Member LaGrange: Yes. I just wanted to reiterate to MLA Dang that we are providing \$397 million, which will deal with 25 new infrastructure projects, and I will be providing the details very, very soon. Obviously, all of the details will give that clarity.

Mr. Dang: Minister, you're asking me and every member of this Assembly to vote on that \$397 million this November, so we want to know that information ahead of time. How much are you leveraging that money? Can you provide that in writing in terms of how much you expect you'll have to leverage it?

6:15

Member LaGrange: I will turn this over because the money is there to account for the infrastructure projects that we are building moving forward. I have been very clear that once the projects are made publicly known, then it transfers over to Infrastructure . . .

Ms Hoffman: Point of order.

Member LaGrange: . . . to continue forward with the building of them.

The Acting Chair: A point of order has been called.
Go ahead, Member.

Ms Hoffman: Yeah. I guess I'll do it under 23(a) as well as (b)(i):
speaks to matters other than
(i) the question under discussion.

I guess what I'm hearing is a question: can we be assured that this information will be shared with all private members prior to the budget being considered in main estimates? If the answer is yes, I would love for the minister to say that. If it's going to be public and she doesn't need to share it in writing, that's fine. But if it's not going to be shared publicly before we vote on the main estimates, I'm hearing my colleague say that the information is fundamental for his ability to do his job as a member of the Assembly in making a decision about this. If the minister can either say if it will be provided in writing prior to it being voted on or delivered publicly prior to it being voted on, I think that's the question that the member is asking.

The Acting Chair: Member, I'm sorry. You referred to 23(a)? Is that correct?

Ms Hoffman: I'm going to do (b)(i) instead, actually: speaks to a matter other than the question under discussion.

The Acting Chair: Okay. All right. Member Glasgo.

Ms Glasgo: I think we've given a lot of latitude in this committee as far as speaking to matters in the general vicinity of what is going on here. I know, Mr. Chair, you've been more than lenient with both sides of this table. I guess I'll cycle back, for lack of a better word, in allowing members to speak and use broad language. On many occasions there has been no reference to actual line items in the budget, which I believe is the convention of this committee as well. I would argue that this is not a point of order and that you've already said – not in a specific ruling – that in fact it's up to the minister and her discretion and her department's discretion whether or not they would provide written notice to this committee of exactly what the member is asking for. This is not a point of order.

The Acting Chair: Is there any new information, Mr. Neudorf?

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just want to also reiterate what the minister has stated numerous times in this discussion, that Infrastructure and Treasury Board, those ministries, actually have authority in terms of building and procurement at that time. This ministry just allocates funds to that. The actual procurement and building of that project is within the Ministry of Infrastructure, so it's even outside of her jurisdiction to be able to speak to that question being asked.

The Acting Chair: Okay. Thank you.
Are there any further comments at this time?

Mr. Guthrie: Yeah.

The Acting Chair: Okay. Go ahead, Mr. Guthrie.

Mr. Guthrie: Yes. Not liking the answer is definitely not a point of order. The question is asked. The minister has provided the answer. Just because you don't like the answer does not mean it's a point of order. There's no point of order. This would be the same as being

in question period when one member is asking a question of the other. I don't see how in any way, shape, or form this falls into that category.

The Acting Chair: Okay. Thank you very much.
Sorry. Do you have a comment?

Mr. Sabir: Yes.

The Acting Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Sabir.

Mr. Sabir: Yes. Thank you, Chair. You have ruled on several matters that – it's not about liking or disliking the answer; it's a complete refusal to provide information that my colleague needs to make an informed decision on this budget. There is a line item saying that 390-some million dollars is going to something; we are asked to give this minister carte blanche and sign off on those dollars without knowing where these dollars are going. It's a very reasonable request from my colleague. It's just about information. It's not about liking or disliking the answer. It's just a complete absence of information that is needed for the member to make an informed decision on whether he should support this budget, this line item, or not.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, sir.
Go ahead, Mr. Yao.

Mr. Yao: The minister has been quite clear in explaining that the budget that is available for new schools, which is the question of the member – the member might be asking for some details that, quite honestly, the minister might not be privy to. It might be under another division. But, ultimately, the answers being provided are related to the estimates that we are discussing and have been provided to us already, again, no different than what has happened in previous years. To imply that the minister is impairing the members in opposition from doing their job would be to also imply that for the last four years the previous government impaired the previous ...

The Acting Chair: Okay. Is there nothing further to add, Mr. Yao? Thank you.

I think I'm prepared to rule on this at this time. The point of order appeared to be under at first 23(a), and it's now under 23(b), which says:

- speaks to matters other than
- (i) the question under discussion.

As I have already stated several times, you as a member, no matter what side of the House that you sit on, have a right to ask a question. You may not like the answer that you are going to get. The second part of this is that I cannot compel – I cannot stress that enough – a minister to provide an answer that you like or to provide a written statement.

That being said, given that this is under 23(b), speaking to matters other than the question under discussion, I do not believe that this is a point of order, and we will continue on with the government caucus side.

Mr. Dang: Point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Acting Chair: Sure.

Mr. Dang: A point of order under 13(2), which is that a chair or Speaker would explain his ruling. I'd like to ask: is it the position of this chair and is it the position of this committee that it is acceptable for a minister to refuse to answer questions? The minister provided answers that are not even tangentially related to

the questions. In that case, they're not speaking to the matter under consideration. They're not speaking to the matter that we are sent here to ask questions on. In that case, my question for you, Mr. Chair, would be: is it going to be, going forward, acceptable for ministers to either refuse, speak to matters other than the questions that were asked, or even not answer at all? I think that those are important questions for us.

Ms Glasgo: Mr. Chair, I think that the implication here or even the assertion that this minister or any minister in this government caucus has not been answering questions is absolutely ridiculous. We have been listening for the past – I don't know – upwards of five hours, closing in on six hours, to this minister specifically and other ministers. I know that this committee also heard from Seniors and Housing as well. Like you said, Mr. Chair, just because you don't like the answer you've been given doesn't mean that it's not an answer.

Further to that point, I think that it is really interesting for the member to be calling a point of order on this after you've already ruled not once but twice. I think it's been pretty clear that you have made a decision on this.

Mr. Guthrie: Actually, I believe that the minister has answered the question and answered it clearly, that this falls into Infrastructure or into Treasury as far as how the allocation of funds are going to be doled out. The amount was provided, and Member Dang has been asked to go to Infrastructure for the remaining information, and I think that that was been made clear.

The Acting Chair: Okay. Thank you.
If you wish.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you. It's just 13(2) ...

The Acting Chair: Just remember that we're eating into the time of estimates.

Ms Hoffman: Fair enough.

The Acting Chair: Okay. That's fine.

Ms Hoffman: I appreciate you giving us the opportunity to thoroughly explore this. I just want to clarify that it's 13(2). What Member Guthrie just said isn't relevant to the point of order, and the point of order was with regard to explaining the decision of the chair.

The Acting Chair: I have explained my position as the chair. Again, this may be something that you'd like an answer to, but I have explained my ruling, and we're going to continue on.

We are going to continue with the government caucus side.

Mr. Yao: Minister LaGrange, I wish to thank you and your team for all of your hard work on this budget. It was a difficult budget, we understand, and, you know, it was important that we demonstrate some fiscal prudence. These are debts that we don't want these very same children that you're trying to educate to be burdened with, quite honestly. Anyone that understands basic economics might respect and appreciate that, but others may not, like my comrades from across the way.

Mr. Dang: Point of order, Mr. Chair.

6:25

The Acting Chair: A point of order has been called.

Mr. Dang: Under 23(h), (i), and (j), Mr. Chair. Very clearly here the hon. member has made not only allegations against other

members; he's also imputed motives. Very clearly under 23(j) he's using abusive and insulting language that is intentionally trying to create disorder in this place, saying that other members do not understand or are comrades, as it were. I think that very clearly this member is trying to cause disorder in this place, and that would be something that he should withdraw and apologize for.

The Acting Chair: Any other further comments on the government side? Ms Glasgo.

Ms Glasgo: This is clearly a matter of debate, Mr. Chair. I know I've heard the word "comrades" used in several speeches that are lauded by the members opposite. I'd be interested to hear how that is an inflammatory remark. Also, I believe that the member was clearly trying to ask the minister a question, and we should get back to the matter at hand, which is the estimates. This is just a matter of debate. This is not a point of order.

Mr. Amery: I'll also simply add that "comrade" is defined as a companion who shares one's activities or is a fellow member of an organization. There's absolutely nothing derogatory in that remark whatsoever.

The Acting Chair: Just for further clarification and so I have a full understanding – and maybe I may have missed something – I will actually go back to Mr. Dang. Was there anything else that I missed in regard to the comments made by Mr. Yao that you would like to address?

Mr. Dang: Yes, Mr. Chair, and thank you. I think that Mr. Yao very clearly made allegations that members of the opposition caucus did not understand economics. He made allegations that members of the Official Opposition either did not understand or were not educated. I think those are the types of phraseology, the types of comments that are insulting such as under 23(j). Those are the types of allegations under 23(h). They're things that simply should not be used in this place, and he should withdraw and apologize.

The Acting Chair: Do you actually have anything further to add, Ms Glasgo?

Ms Glasgo: Just based on what he said, yes.

The Acting Chair: Okay.

Ms Glasgo: To say that somebody doesn't understand: I think we hear that every day in question period. We have heard it several times in the House, where we have members opposite question the

competency of ministers. I don't think that this is a point of order. Once again, I think it's a matter of debate.

The Acting Chair: Okay. I'm prepared to rule.
Go ahead, Mr. Sabir.

Mr. Sabir: I think the committee, as I understand it and as I have seen it over the last four years, is way different than question period. It's an opportunity for ministers to explain the numbers, the budget, line items, everything. It's an opportunity for private members to know about the government budget, to know about what they are spending their money on. Question period is not a reference that is appropriate or, I guess, a comparator to this committee, where we are trying to get information on the budget in a six-hour time frame for this particular ministry, not in 35 seconds. Committees are used to having more robust discussions.

The Acting Chair: That's a fair point. However, we do follow the rules as per the Chamber, I guess, with the exception of names.

Look, I will ask the member, Mr. Yao, to certainly use caution. It's been a long almost six hours here. Certainly, there's been a lot of back and forth. I think that there's been a lot of good debate on both sides. I know that it's very tiresome for all who are involved in this debate going back and forth for the estimates. I guess I will rule that I do not believe there to be a point of order. However, I will ask that the member use caution and ask the minister pointed questions without referencing anyone else in this committee, please.

Mr. Yao: Thank you very much, comrade.

Minister LaGrange, again, thank you very much for your visit to Fort McMurray. I guess my question does relate to infrastructure and the difference between the infrastructure funding and funding for repairs and upkeep of facilities. As you saw, you have a very difficult file that has a lot of difficult, how do we say ...

The Acting Chair: All right, folks. Thank you very much. I apologize for the interruption, but I must advise the committee that the time allotted for this item of business has concluded.

I'd like to remind committee members that we are scheduled to meet tomorrow, October 31, 2019, at 9 a.m. to consider the estimates of the Ministry of Children's Services. The document that was previously distributed has been posted on the committee's internal website, and the minister will be tabling that document for the benefit of all members, I'm assuming, tomorrow.

Thank you very much. The meeting is adjourned.

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

