



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Fourth Session

Standing Committee
on
Families and Communities

Ministry of Education
Consideration of Main Estimates

Tuesday, March 7, 2023
3:30 p.m.

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Fourth Session**

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Lovely, Jacqueline, Camrose (UC), Chair
Sigurdson, Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (NDP), Deputy Chair
Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (NDP),* Acting Deputy Chair

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Also in Attendance

Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (Ind)
Hoffman, Sarah, Edmonton-Glenora (NDP)

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Standing Committee on Families and Communities

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Ministry of Education

Hon. Adriana LaGrange, Minister

Christine Sewell, Assistant Deputy Minister and Senior Financial Officer, Financial Services and Capital Planning

Andre Tremblay, Deputy Minister

Jeff Willan, Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategic Services and Governance

3:30 p.m.

Tuesday, March 7, 2023

[Ms Lovely in the chair]

Ministry of Education
Consideration of Main Estimates

The Chair: I would like to call the meeting to order and welcome everyone in attendance. The committee has under consideration the estimates of the Ministry of Education for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2024.

I'd ask that we go around the table and have members introduce themselves for the record. Minister, please introduce the officials who are joining you at the table. My name is Jackie Lovely. I'm the MLA for the Camrose constituency and chair of this committee. We will begin starting to my right.

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Chair. Muhammad Yaseen, MLA, Calgary-North.

Mr. Smith: Good afternoon. Mark Smith, MLA, Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Hunter: Grant Hunter, MLA for Taber-Warner. Good to be here.

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

Mr. Long: Martin Long, West Yellowhead.

Member LaGrange: Adriana LaGrange, MLA for Red Deer-North and the Minister of Education. With me today I have my exemplary team, the best team in all of government: Andre Tremblay, deputy minister; Christine Sewell, assistant deputy minister of financial services and capital planning; Emily Ma, executive director of K to 12 fiscal oversight; Matthew Hebert, assistant deputy minister of systems excellence; Jeff Willan, assistant deputy minister of strategic services and governance; Jennifer Cassidy, assistant deputy minister of curriculum; Lisa Haggerty, assistant deputy minister of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Education Directorate; and Kindy Joseph, assistant deputy minister of program and system support. I also have my excellent chief of staff, Nicole Williams. Also, Savannah, Erin, and Annaliese, I believe, are still with us today.

Mr. Barnes: Drew Barnes, MLA, Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Ms Hoffman: Sarah Hoffman, Edmonton-Glenora and the Education critic. This afternoon Sybil and Annie are here with me.

Member Loyola: Hello. MLA for Edmonton-Ellerslie, Rod Loyola.

The Chair: We'll go to members participating remotely. When I call your name, please introduce yourself for the record. Let's start with MLA Fir.

Ms Fir: Hello. Tanya Fir, MLA for Calgary-Peigan.

The Chair: MLA Gotfried.

Mr. Gotfried: Good afternoon. MLA Richard Gotfried for Calgary-Fish Creek.

The Chair: I'd like to note the following substitutions for the record. Member Loyola is substituting as deputy chair for hon. Ms

Sigurdson. The hon. Mr. Hunter is substituting for the hon. Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk.

A few housekeeping items to address before we turn to the business at hand. Please note the microphones are operated by *Hansard* staff. Committee proceedings are live streamed on the Internet and broadcast on Alberta Assembly TV. The audio and visual stream and transcripts of meetings can be accessed via the Legislative Assembly website. Members participating remotely are encouraged to turn your camera on while speaking and mute your microphone when not speaking. Remote participants who wish to be placed on the speakers list are asked to e-mail or message the committee clerk, and members in the room should signal to the chair. Please set your cellphones and other devices to silent during the duration of the meeting.

Now, with regard to speaking rotation and time limits, hon. members, the standing orders set out the process for consideration of the main estimates. 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 remind everyone that the speaking rotation for these meetings is provided for under Standing Order 59.01(6). We are now at the point in the rotation where speaking times are limited to a maximum of five minutes for both the members and the ministry. These speaking times may be combined 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's. One final note: please remember that discussion should flow through the chair at all times regardless of whether or not speaking times are combined. If members have any questions regarding speaking times or the rotation, please feel free to send an e-mail or a message to 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 break? Okay. We will have a break, then.

When we adjourned this morning, we were five minutes into the exchange between the hon. Mr. Yaseen and the minister. I'll now invite the hon. Mr. Yaseen or another member from the government side to complete the remaining time in this rotation. You have five minutes.

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you. Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, Minister. We were talking earlier today about inflation and about other things that impact our communities and how our children are impacted by that. I was getting close to my last question, and that is about building new schools. Building a new school typically means a growing population, which means our province is a place where people from other provinces and around the world want to come and live.

Under outcome 4 in the Education business plan, page 37, it says that \$2.3 billion over three years will be spent on capital investment in educational infrastructure. So, Minister, I have three or four questions on that. First of all, can you please indicate how many schools are being built for that money? Out of that number, how many are based in Calgary, and how many are based in Edmonton? How many student spaces have been created in both cities since 2019? Finally, how many projects have you invested in since 2019, Minister?

Member LaGrange: Thank you for those questions. Yes, you are absolutely right. That over \$2 billion that we're spending to secure

Alberta's future by investing in new and modernized spaces will provide our young learners with an optimal learning experience. You're absolutely right. This is historic. Again, Budget 2023 advances 58 priority school projects across the province, including 33 for design and construction. So these school projects will provide new and improved student spaces, create jobs, and revitalize Alberta communities. Of the 33 projects in the capital plan 10 are new schools, 16 are replacement schools, and seven are modernizations. Again, these are all schools that have been put as priorities for the school authorities that put them forward.

Of the 58 priority school projects 11 projects are for the Calgary metro boards, including two fully funded projects, one design-funded project, two planning approvals, and six preplanning. All of these will move forward because now we have a very open, transparent pipeline where you can see all of the projects as they're moving along. These 11 projects include construction funding for the Nolan Hill school and the modernization of John G. Diefenbaker high school. These two projects alone will create approximately 2,500 new and upgraded spaces in Calgary schools. Calgary boards will receive approximately \$51 million for construction and design. Calgary will receive an additional \$500,000 of the \$4 million allocated for planning, and Calgary will receive \$400,000 of the \$1 million allocated for preplanning.

The Edmonton metro boards received approvals for nine projects of the 58 projects, including two fully funded projects, two design projects, three planning approvals, and two preplanning approvals. These nine projects include construction funding for a new K to 9 school in Edgemont and the solution project for l'école Michaëlle-Jean and l'école Gabrielle-Roy. I should also add that a solution project is an amalgamation of two old schools into one space, new and improved. Edmonton boards will receive approximately \$32 million for construction and design projects. Edmonton will receive \$750,000 of the \$4 million for allocated planning, and Edmonton will receive \$200,000 of the \$1 million for preplanning.

In addition, this will create 25,000 spaces across the whole province. This is compared to only 17,300 new spaces and 16,600 modernized spaces which were put together between 2015 and 2019. In fact, we're doubling the amount of spaces that the previous government had allocated to over 62,000 spaces. In addition to the 58 projects included in Budget 2023, 48 projects were approved between 2019 and 2022 for a total of 106 critical school infrastructure projects, again compared to the members opposite at 47 projects. I'm very proud of what we were able to accomplish, and I look forward to these schools opening in the near future and students streaming into those schools.

When we look at this massive investment, we know that schools can't be built overnight. It takes time, and that's why we've added the preplanning and the planning. They're not additional stages. They are part of the process that often took place when you were allocated design or construction funding, and that would cause delays because often during that time period you would have to go back and look at the ground, et cetera.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Now we will go over to the NDP Official Opposition.

Ms Hoffman: Thanks, Madam Chair. We'll definitely spend some more time on capital again later, but at this point I want to touch on, within the estimates, page 72, line item other revenue. It's down considerably this year between budget and forecast, so I was wondering if we can get some more details on why that was, that it was down, possibly. When I'm looking through this, I'm trying to figure out where the pieces within the budget align with revenue that we generate when other jurisdictions use our resources.

Knowing that Northwest Territories and Nunavut have pulled out of using Alberta's curriculum this year – and I know that there's talk of many international schools also pulling out of using Alberta's curriculum – I'm hoping for clarification about where that is reflected in the budget on the revenue side, because it certainly would have an impact.

3:40

Of course, revenue isn't the only reason why we care about having good curriculum. We care about having a great curriculum because we want to make sure that every Alberta student gets off to a great start and has a very bright future that sets them up for success locally and globally. There has been a considerable amount of concern raised publicly and in other ways, including through surveys that the minister received over the last three years, with significant concerns as it relates to curriculum and specifically the pace, the lack of scaffolding, and, quite frankly, some of the content and its inappropriateness in terms of correctness, local context, as well as age appropriateness.

It's clear that when other jurisdictions that have had 40-year relationships with the province of Alberta have pulled out, there is a significant concern. Of course, the concern was raised by many local leaders, including many Indigenous leaders, including those who were asked to be part of the development and to be validators for the government when they rolled it out. Of course, it could not be validated because there were so many significant concerns. So one question around the revenue side as it relates to what I'm assuming is page 72, other revenue, with regard to the budget.

The other piece is that we've just finished or are in the process of finishing teachers' convention circuit, and it is always an exciting time of year. I will say, having trained as a teacher, having served as a trustee, and having been the kid of teachers, that teachers' convention was always a very exciting time. Mr. Smith will acknowledge that, too. One of the things that my parents always did is that they went to in-services on what was new, what was coming out in curriculum for the upcoming school year. There would be textbook publishers there, and there would be other people demonstrating: these are what some of the new learner outcomes are going to be, and these are different ways that you can offer those.

It was virtually crickets this year in terms of the rollout for curriculum changes for the upcoming school year and, I imagine, for very good reason. It seems like the current Premier wants to change the channel and have people not pay a lot of attention to what's happened on curriculum over the last three years, and I get why. It has been a disaster, and it has been broadly discredited.

All of that being said, teachers need to have time to get ready. And what we did to them – well, what the current government did, through you, Madam Chair, over the last year was incredibly disrespectful and stressful for teachers. When they find out in June what the curriculum is going to be that they're expected to teach in September, that is not setting anyone up for success. That's when it was actually finalized this last year. I think that children deserve better, and teachers deserve better, and they deserve more opportunity to know what the current government has in mind for curriculum rollout next year. Yes, we are on the eve of an election, and who knows if they will have a mandate to be able to implement whatever their plans are, but just like we're considering budget estimates for this fiscal year, that begins just a month before the election, we also deserve to know what the plan is as it relates to implementing that curriculum.

I did note that there were some changes to FTEs in the department. I would like to know if those are specifically tied to curriculum, because there have been a lot of divisions that have

really stepped up and tried to do a lot in terms of supporting their teachers with scope and sequence for the div 1 rollout that happened this last year, but that's not fair, to always dump that additional work on local school authorities to figure out how best to introduce a new curriculum and to try to do it in a way that causes the least amount of harm. I'm hoping that the current minister has found a path to cause greater transparency and clarity when it comes to curriculum.

So what exactly is the plan for rollout of curriculum in the budget we're considering this year? What grades and what subject areas does the minister intend to move forward with if she has a mandate to do so after the next election, and where is that aligned with this budget that we're considering here today?

The Chair: All right. Now over to the minister.

Member LaGrange: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. The members opposite, unfortunately, continue to put out unfactual information. I heard so many inaccuracies in the last five minutes that I need to spend a little time correcting it. First of all, on the other revenue: other revenue is, in fact, the school jurisdictions' revenue items such as sales and services, including lunchroom supervision, after school care, property capital gains, and rental of school facilities. Increased enrolment and inflation will lead to increased school fees. Therefore, perhaps the number has gone down because of the fact that we anticipate school authorities actually not needing to charge as much for these particular line items. While the pandemic was going on, all of the additional revenue was affected. We have seen it come back, but again it hasn't come back to the full area that it had come to earlier. I'll just leave that one there.

I just want to go back to a question that the member opposite had earlier in the day on CTS, that they're seeing declines in CTS credits. In fact, I have data in front of me that shows that in 2018-2019 the successfully completed credits were 837,359 and that in '21-22 the actually completed credits were 867,931. We are seeing a gain of over 30,000 credits, so that bodes well for our young people, that they are moving in the right direction. Happy to share that information with you.

Another inaccuracy that I just heard was around the Northwest Territories and then again about international schools. In fact, I'm proud to let the member opposite know that we recently opened a new international school in Singapore. That happened just before Christmas, I believe, and I'm very happy to see that students are learning from an Alberta curriculum, which is highly regarded right across the world. On the Northwest Territories, we understand that the Northwest Territories made a significant shift in its education system as part of efforts to improve student outcomes. After years of declining outcomes here in Alberta, we are doing the same thing through our curriculum renewal process. Unfortunately, the Northwest Territories' final decision was made prior to the finalization of our draft K to 6 curriculum.

It is really a failure of Alberta to not have brought forward curriculum sooner. I know that when I was a school board trustee – I started in 2007 – in 2008 we started revamping the curriculum. We talked about bringing in new curriculum. Between 2008 and 2022, when we actually brought forward new curriculum this past September, we spent over \$56 million as a province to bring in new curriculum, and no minister was able to put it in front of students.

I'm proud of the fact that we were able to get curriculum in front of our students. We have been successfully implementing kindergarten to grade 3 mathematics and kindergarten to grade 3 English language arts and literature as well as kindergarten to grade 6 this past year. I've spoken to teachers; I've actually spoken to a

teacher just last Friday. I was speaking to a grade 5 teacher who on her own went above and beyond and has been implementing the grades 4 to 6 curriculum. She's using the grade 5 English language arts and mathematics, and she is thrilled with what she is seeing in terms of student learning. She has gone that extra mile because she said that her children deserve that, so she is very excited about that.

This current year we have been piloting the science and the two French language programs, and we have had over 20,000 students piloting and over 1,000 teachers piloting. I can say that 100 per cent of the outcomes are being piloted in the draft K to 6 science and the K to 6 science French, K to 6 French first language and literature, and K to 6 French immersion language arts and literature curriculum. Full subject areas are being piloted by many of the participating teachers: the English schoolteachers, 61 per cent of participating teachers; science French, 5 per cent of participating teachers; French first language and literature, 29 per cent of participating teachers. French authorities, all four francophone school authorities, are piloting . . .

The Chair: Thank you so much, Minister.

Now we'll go to our independent member. Please proceed.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Madam Chair. First of all, to Minister LaGrange and your entire staff, thank you very much for all the work you do for Cypress-Medicine Hat and Alberta. It's appreciated.

Minister, can we go back and forth?

Member LaGrange: I'd prefer to go block if you don't mind, please.

3:50

Mr. Barnes: Okay. Let's go block. Thank you.

I want to start my questions about performance metrics and where Alberta students are at compared to past years and compared to other jurisdictions. In your ministry business plan, page 36, it tells us that in the year 2022-23 74 per cent of the students on PATs achieved an acceptable standard in language arts while only 60 per cent of students met the math threshold. Of course, math is a key component of fiscal responsibility, economics, and a basis for strong learning, so when I see 60 per cent, I'm surprised and disappointed, and I wonder which key objectives your department will have to ensure that this performance improves.

When we dug a little bit deeper, for the students who achieved acceptable standards on provincial achievement tests, the performance measure for Budget 2022-23 was 81 per cent in language arts and 67 per cent in math. I went back to your last year's estimates on page 32, where you highlight for 2022-23: language arts almost 81 per cent and math almost 68 per cent. Then for some reason this year language arts is down to 74, and math is down to 60. Minister, I'm a bit shocked. Your department is spending half a billion more, and it looks like we've settled. We put a target, a goal, in for not having as good outcomes as we used to strive for.

So I wonder a couple of things. Of course, we went through a couple of years of COVID and the education policies there. Is that part of what set us back? Have we reviewed how that was handled and the effectiveness or the ineffectiveness of what happened there? Secondly, I'm very, very grateful to have represented Cypress-Medicine Hat for almost 12 years, but 10, 11, 12 years ago I used to continually hear how Alberta had the best education system in Canada and that we were only second in the world to Finland. I don't know where we're at, Minister, but I know I don't hear that anymore. So I'd appreciate your thoughts on that and where we're at and what we can do to better compete, to better service our students in terms of a full, wholesome, rounded life.

Then I wondered. Another performance measure, on page 37 of your ministerial business plan, performance measure 3(b), shows that “agreement that teachers are prepared for teaching” – that target, teachers being prepared for teaching, only sits at 74.2 per cent. My goodness, I am having a really hard time understanding why only three-quarters of teachers are adequately prepared and why that is an acceptable target. Am I missing something? You know, my goodness. I mean, I know so many hard-working, capable teachers. What is the metric? What is the standard? If that is accurate, my goodness, we have to do a tremendous amount of work to get that number to 100 per cent. Our kids deserve that.

Okay. Something that happened fairly recently: the Alberta Teaching Profession Commission, the new disciplinary body. Of course, there was some controversy about who was the best to adequately help our children, protect our children, and help those that needed some improvement. I’m wondering – of course, this is your outcome 3, key objective 3.3, on page 36 of your business plan – how you’re making out with this program. What is it costing the taxpayer of Alberta per year for this Teaching Profession Commission? Has it had any chance to get under way and make things happen?

Okay. Then back to, in the 30 seconds left, your operating expenses. They are up 5.2 per cent. Again, I think that is slightly past population growth. I heard you earlier this morning answering some questions. When school boards had overestimated the number of students entering the system, I wonder how accurate that is, and when I hear about 59 full-time equivalents being added, again I’m wondering: why?

The Chair: Thank you so much, hon. member.

Now we’ll go over to the minister for her response.

Member LaGrange: Thank you. Great questions. Happy to answer them. The last few years posed significant challenges to our society and the daily lives of Alberta students. The decline can be attributed to multiple factors, including prolonged school year disruptions. The resulting challenges for students relate to learning gaps and mental health issues and changes to the regular administration of student assessments.

I’ll remind everyone that school assessments were only valued at 10 per cent last year; diploma exams were 10 per cent. The previous year they didn’t even write the exams due to COVID. This year they’re back up to 20 per cent. That isn’t still the full 30 per cent, but we’re moving in the right direction. School authorities have been able to access provincial literacy and numeracy screening assessments to identify grades 1 to 3 struggling, to impact the recent learning disruptions. So we’re focusing on assessing those students.

What we did when we heard from school authorities that there was significant learning loss in the early years is that we assessed all students, and then we targeted, provided targeted funding, that \$45 million, to address those specific areas in English language arts and mathematics, because – you’re absolutely right – they’re foundational skills. We know that if we do not provide that early intervention, those children will go on to struggle, for the most part, for the rest of their educational journey.

So we did provide that \$45 million. As a result, school authorities used those dollars, and they targeted supports directly to the students, whether it was through small groups or individualized learning. We found that after they were reassessed, approximately 80 per cent of the students came back up to grade level. Some even surpassed grade level, which is great news. But that means there was still 20 per cent. Therefore, we allocated another \$20 million this year to target grades 1 to 4 to bring them up to grade level.

We’ve also put strategies in place to increase educational assistants and specialized learning supports. It’s also why my overall budget is going up 10 per cent in the learning supports for our most vulnerable students, from \$1.4 billion to \$1.5 billion. We’ve also continued to develop and maintain comprehensive provincial assessments to assess progress and to identify early learning challenges, to monitor student success, including implementing online assessment capabilities, and to expand mandatory literacy and numeracy screening assessments. Because of what we’re seeing overall as a downward trend, we definitely want to make sure that we are assessing in those early years, and then also that will filter up into the higher years.

We have allocated an additional \$42 million in ’23-24 to identify and implement strategies that help address complexities in the classroom, and we are seeing more complexities. It’s why we’ve added the additional mental health and wellness funding, that \$50 million over two years, for 80 mental health and wellness projects, because we are seeing higher mental health and wellness issues, particularly in our middle and high school year students. All of these investments are to support student well-being and their mental health, but also that has, as you well know, an impact in the classroom and on their learning.

When I go to your next question, on the teacher readiness, that is actually a new measure that we’ve put in there, so we’ve been very conservative.

Going back to your other metric, I won’t rest until all our students are at 100 per cent. While we’ve seen a slight decline, I think, mostly due to the pandemic, I won’t rest till it’s 100 per cent for every single student. This is the first year of a full PAT administration since the pandemic as well.

Then as far as that teacher readiness, that is a new measure that is in there. I am sure that our teachers are much higher along that spectrum, but we wanted to be conservative in that number.

Also, when we look at the Teaching Profession Act, the reforming teacher profession discipline act, which I was also proud to bring forward, when I first became Minister of Education, it was probably the most traumatic, most disheartening part of my position to see the cases that crossed my desk and what I perceived to be a very light tap on the wrist for some very serious, serious situations.

The Chair: Thank you so much, Minister.

Just a reminder, everyone, that we’re having a very polite dialogue, a very good exchange back and forth, but if you could please funnel the conversation through the chair, that would be very much appreciated.

We’re going to go over to the government side, please.

4:00

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Smith: Oh. Are you going?

Mr. Yaseen: I think the minister was just about done with the last part of my question. If that is the case, I am very happy to share my time with you, MLA Smith.

Mr. Smith: Okay. Thank you.

Through the chair, I just want to say thank you for all the hard work that the minister and her staff in the ministry do on behalf of the children and the teachers of our province. Having been a teacher for 30 years, I know how hard a job it is to ensure that learning is occurring in the classroom. It does take a village, so to speak, to raise a child and to educate a child, and the ministry and the

Minister of Education play a very big role in that. So I want to thank you for all the efforts that you put into our students and into our teachers and into our education system.

I want to spend a little bit of time in my first – oh, I guess I better ask first, though: did you want to do block, or did you want to go back and forth, Minister?

Member LaGrange: I can go back and forth.

Mr. Smith: Okay.

Member LaGrange: Thank you.

Mr. Smith: Whatever you'd like.

I want to start on page 106 of the capital plan, and it discusses charter and collegiate schools. I can remember when I was the critic for Education, and we would be bringing up questions on charter schools. One of the real values, I believe, of the Alberta education system is that we have so much diversity in how we present education to our students and to our parents. One of those options for parents to have in the province of Alberta is a charter school. I've heard you talk this morning about the charter school system and that they are under the umbrella of the public education system, and you're absolutely correct about that.

I remember as the critic going across Alberta and touring many of the charter schools. I know that I have two of them in my constituency, and they are very unique schools in and of themselves. One is a First Nations charter school, Mother Earth, and it's really meeting the needs of a group of children in my constituency and the parents that are there. The charter schools really have a distinct way of presenting education, so it's important that we continue, I believe, to support parental choice in education because, at the end of the day, it is all about the student and about the parent and the quality of education that they are receiving.

In my riding, Drayton Valley-Devon, we have a new charter school. I can remember meeting with this group of parents three or four years ago. It's a small rural school – it's called New Humble school – and it was a school, like many rural schools, that was struggling to stay open, to have enough kids. I can remember sitting down with the parents and saying: you know, well, maybe you should be looking at a charter school.

I guess the question I've got for you today is: can you tell us a little bit more about New Humble and what they offer and touch again on the importance of varying educational choices that can lead to different opportunities for our students?

Member LaGrange: I'm happy to, and, through you, Madam Chair, while we're talking about charter schools, I wanted to share a message my office received this afternoon from Bill, who's a parent of children who attend New Humble charter school, which I had the pleasure of approving just a little while ago, as MLA Smith mentioned. New Humble Community School is structured on a belief that not all classrooms have four walls and not all students learn in the same way. They are a public charter school, located in rural Leduc county, currently offering ECS to grade 6. They offer a unique learning experience through the use of agriculture, environment, and stewardship as an instrument for experiential, hands-on learning. They're committed to fostering the growth of each individual student and recognize and celebrate the importance of agricultural literacy and getting kids outside to learn and grow.

Bill shared his appreciation of the information we are sharing today regarding funding in education. He said, quote: I am so proud of how far we have come as a charter school and the direction, excitement around it; as parents my wife and I couldn't be happier with the education our youngest two are receiving; the negative

comments towards charter schools are so misleading, and it's nice to see the right info out there. End of quote. I want to thank Bill for reaching out to our office, and I have to say that it's exactly what I hear as I go around the province.

I want to remind everyone that I went right across this whole province and met with every single school authority prior to Christmas. You know, what I hear from parents, particularly those parents in charter schools, is that while there are only roughly about 10,000 students in charter schools right now, there are over 20,000 on waiting lists, and they're limited because they lack space. So we have committed to ensure that we support the choices that parents are making to put their children in a unique charter school. While they are 1.5 per cent of the entire student population, they are getting 1.5 per cent of the budget, which seems equitable and fair. Again, when I look at public, separate, and francophone schools, they make up 91.8 per cent of students. While we respect that choice, they are getting 94.2 per cent of the funding, and we really support that because they are doing a fantastic job as well. So all of us are supporting choice.

I wanted to let you know about some of the other charter schools that exist and what they do. There's Almadina language charter school, to provide educational programming for kindergarten through grade 9 students who are English language learners. Aurora Academic: to provide an orderly and structured environment with properly sequenced teacher-directed instruction and strong home-school partnerships where children can excel in an academically orientated program. There's Boyle Street Education Centre, another charter school, whose mandate is to engage youth experiencing limited success in schools using trauma-informed practices and wraparound supports. There's Calgary Arts Academy, that provides instruction that is delivered through arts immersion: art forms serve as a foundation of learning as curriculum concepts are taught and learned. Basically, they infuse art throughout the whole school day.

Alberta classical academy: explicit instruction focusing on traditional liberal arts and character of education. Calgary Girls' School: to provide an environment and teaching school designed to optimize girls' learning and to prepare girls for lives of leadership, citizenship, and commitment. Centre for Academic and Personal Excellence: to provide a personalized, integrated program of kindergarten to grade 9 students who are intellectually capable underachievers. STEM Innovation Academy: to provide intentional and knowledge-based STEM curriculum and programming, ensuring that students benefit from exposure to the latest advancements in science and technology. The Thrive charter is a new charter that will be opening in September. It's to provide programming with wraparound supports in a small school environment specifically for students from low social economic backgrounds. And I could go on and on.

Actually, I guess I have a few more minutes, so I'll read a few more. Valhalla Community School: to provide a focus on rural leadership and character development through direct instruction and structured teaching practices, leading to a mastery of learning outcomes. Westmount charter school: to provide differentiated educational programming for kindergarten to grade 12 gifted students in a congregated, safe, caring, and supportive environment.

Again, those are all our charter schools, and they make up 1.5 per cent of the overall student population. I want to remind everyone that that's 10,000 students out of over 730,000 students, and we're spending an extraordinary amount of time talking about that.

The Chair: Thank you so much, Minister.

Now we'll go back for the remaining minute and 27 seconds to the government caucus.

Mr. Smith: Thank you. You know, I think I would just remind everybody that when we were in the opposition, it seemed really difficult to be able to get a new charter school going, so I really want to say thank you. I know that there are kids in schools in my constituency that are benefiting from our willingness to look at charter schools, and I would just bring one example. I'm not sure you're aware of this, but at New Humble school they were in conversations with the West-Central Forage Association and have partnered with them to do breeding gardens that the kids work with as part of a combined effort. That's the kind of thing that a charter school does. It brings the community into the school to help their education.

I want to spend a little bit of time looking at key objective 3.1, and that is: "provide supports for professional learning to enable implementation of new curriculum." We may have to take this on at another period of time here, but as an MLA and as a former teacher it's important for me that our schools maintain a long-term, high-quality education service. And I see on page 33 of the ministry business plan that your department is committed to sharing knowledge and best practices to ensure . . .

4:10

The Chair: Thank you so much, Member. Thank you so much.

Now we will move over to the independent member. [interjections] Sorry. The NDP side first.

Ms Hoffman: Yeah. Thank you, Madam Chair. I just want to say that the question was specifically around CTS credits per student: what are the average number of credits, not just CTS, we're expecting individual students to get? Of course, the number of total credits in the province is going up because we've never had more kids in high school than we have now, so of course the total number of credits for the province generally will be way up because we've never had this many kids in high school. The specific question was around projections for individual students: how many credits will they complete? That was asked in the morning, that we're still looking for a response on. If there isn't one, so be it, but we're asking for per-pupil.

I'm going to take a couple of minutes to go through some of the performance metrics that are outlined. Specifically, I'll start with 4(a), which is around safe, caring, healthy learning environments. Right now about 1 in 6 kids, according to the government's own data presented here, doesn't feel that they are in an environment that's safe, and that includes surveying school board members around their satisfaction that schools provide safe, caring, and healthy learning environments. The government's objective is to only increase that by .5 per cent over three years. Safety is something that I think we all know – you know, anyone who is trained in education knows Maslow's hierarchy, and if kids don't feel safe, they can't focus on what they're actually there to learn. So I would hope that we would see something more aspirational in that objective and that the government would be doing something to actually achieve that outcome.

The next performance metric, 4(b), as it aligns with engaged in learning at school – this again is a survey question – 78 per cent of high school students and parents agreed that students are engaged in their learning at school. The goal is to only get that up to 79.5 after three years. Again, 1 in 5 kids not feeling engaged in their learning. This is why I asked the question around credits and offerings in high school, and I think that there's been a detrimental impact of the funding formula and the way high schools are funded that is impacting our ability to deliver that large scale of opportunities and choices in a reasonable learning environment. That is the other part, too. Many classes in high school, particularly

in the areas that we were focusing on this morning – growing divisions have large class sizes, over 40 in high school, and it makes it harder to feel a connection to the person who is instructing you, of course, in that environment.

Then, of course, satisfaction around having a broad program of studies: that's 4(c). Again, the target is 82 per cent. I just have to say that I don't think that we are holding ourselves to an appropriate standard if we think it's okay, again, for 18 per cent of kids to feel disconnected from the program of studies and what they're learning. This goes back again to curriculum. The question that I asked in the last exchange, that I'm still hoping that somebody will answer, is: where are the actual increased supports for delivering the curriculum housed in the budget?

Then the other question, of course, is around the fact that we haven't been given clear timelines and content areas for the current government's plans around implementing curriculum moving forward. We know that the current curriculum is awful, that it's being forced on teachers, and it certainly isn't leading to the kind of improved outcomes that I think all of us who are part of Inspiring Education, inspiring action – I, too, was around those tables in 2008 with the now minister, and I have to say that the lion's share of that money that was invested in developing new curriculum was done under PC governments and NDP governments, and the current government campaigned on throwing it through the shredder.

So there's a new curriculum that is being implemented in many areas that has been broadly discredited, again, evidence that many of our partners are pulling out, including the Northwest Territories and Nunavut, after more than 40 years of being in partnership and delivering Alberta education content to their students. They're not doing that anymore. I've got some quotes here from folks who've been responding to surveys publicly: a curriculum that's relevant and age appropriate would be my goal; that includes learning from the past to better understand the future, basic literacy, numeracy, life skills, respect and acceptance for all. They identify themselves as being a concerned citizen. Somebody else said: I envision a curriculum based on input from educational experts, teachers, community-led knowledge, racialized communities – they say "ethnic" – queer community, disability community; racism, sexism, ableism, homophobia all need to be addressed as well as Eurocentrism; colonialism should never be the foundation of our classrooms. And then many are talking about the age appropriateness and the fact that many of the areas of content that have been implemented so far just aren't up to standard.

But my question, again, is: what is the plan for this upcoming year? Where is it in the budget? What are the grade levels and subject areas that the minister intends to implement? How is that reflected in the budget we're being asked to approve?

The Chair: Thank you so much, hon. member.

Now over to the minister.

Member LaGrange: Great. I'm happy to answer your questions, and I'll start with your last question. Where is it in the budget this year? It is \$47 million. It is not in the framework because it is above and beyond the framework. This is additional dollars that we've allocated. We allocated \$211 million over three years. Last year it was \$59 million to provide professional development supports and resources to teachers. We are supporting them right through the implementation phase of the curriculum, and this year it is anticipated that it'll be \$47 million. We are looking at, as we've indicated last year, that there is grades 4 to 6 mathematics, grades 4 to 6 English language arts that will be implemented. That was stated last year. That was the timeline that we gave.

So we are supporting teachers with implementation of new curriculum with professional learning supports and learning and teaching resources in the '22-23 school year to support language arts, math, and physical education, wellness. Over 150 virtual and in-person sessions have been made available.

Nearly 22,000 teachers and system leaders have participated. Hundreds of new learning and teaching resources have been made available on new learnalberta.ca. I would encourage everyone to have a look at that site because what I'm hearing from teachers is that it is a really great way for them to look at the curriculum. It's in one location. They can scroll through. They can look at outcomes. They can connect to resources. They can connect to the different items. It's almost like a Pinterest for teachers, and they're really, really enjoying it. I also understand that it is available for parents and students to be able to access.

When we look at the curriculum, why was there a need for new curriculum? The science curriculum alone was last updated in 1996. That is a travesty. You know how much has happened and occurred since that particular time period. Sorry; 1986. That's even worse. My apologies. I had said 1996 when, in fact, it's 1986. There have been so many developments since 1986, including coding, now in the new curriculum, robotics.

I had a science lead teacher from one of the rural school divisions in Alberta who actually originally said that he really wasn't supportive of the new science curriculum until he had a closer look at it. He said that it makes a lot of sense. It's sequential. It gives students the ability to go back and learn and dig in to the different strategies that are being promoted there.

So again, this is something that we have needed for a long, long time. I can tell you that I went across the whole province and met with every single school division, and not one raised curriculum or curriculum implementation as an area of concern. And this was prior to Christmas. This was very recently.

What they did raise as areas of concern were transportation, mental health and wellness, and capital infrastructure. And I'm happy to say that through Budget 2023 we have addressed all of these three areas in a very significant and meaningful way because, as I've said many times before, I don't like throwing money at a problem. Oftentimes you end up with a more expensive problem. I'd rather get down to the root causes of the problem, and let's really solve some of the issues.

On the transportation side, we had the transportation task force, who actually dug in and gave us really good feedback, which we've incorporated into the new transportation model.

4:20

On curriculum, we had the Curriculum Advisory Panel, that has actually given us a lot of great advice on how we should roll out the curriculum: what grade levels, at what time period. We are sharing that as we move forward.

We've had many organizations, including my student advisory council, who have been active in looking at the curriculum and giving us really good feedback from their perspective as students who have gone through the system. They've told us where it could improve in certain areas, and uniformly every one of them is saying that CALM needs to be revamped. I'm happy to say as we move forward . . .

The Chair: Thank you so much, Minister.

Now we will move over to our independent member. Please proceed.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thanks again, Minister. I just kind of want to go back to where I started last time with

performance metrics and the change, the downgrade in our targets. I'm looking at the targets that your department has set on the top of page 37. Just two years ago we were at language arts at 81 per cent, and math at 67 per cent was the target. Of course, now, this '23-24, it's language arts at 74.2 and math at 60.4. Then you only increased both of them by two-tenths of 1 per cent for your estimated target for the next two years, which, to me, seems to be underachieving. You know, like, in all honesty, at only two-tenths of 1 per cent improvement per year it's going to take 33 years to get back where you wanted to be two years ago. Are those targets realistic? Are we not challenging the system, we're not challenging our very capable students enough? Minister, you mentioned twice, I thought I heard, \$27 million and \$45 million. You mentioned lots of money going into this. Why such a low improvement target, 33 years to get back to where we were two years ago?

Secondly, the Alberta Teaching Profession Commission: the buzzer went at the end, but you mentioned that you were alarmed and shocked about what you encountered when you first were placed in your role four years ago. I guess I'm mostly concerned about the outcomes. Are the outcomes going to be better for everyone involved in the system? In particular, with the government more hands-on are the outcomes going to be better for our kids? That's my biggest concern.

Performance measures. Again, teachers: only 74.2 per cent of our teachers prepared for teaching. You suggested that maybe, because it was the first year, the measurement standards were too high. I would hate to see just a reduction of the measurement standards. I'd like to hear you talk for a little bit as to the 25.8 per cent of teachers that weren't ready, that weren't deemed ready, what kind of support we need to get them to be ready. You know, I know teaching is a very, very tough profession, and you've got so many things going on, but why did we fall 25 per cent short?

Those are the three kind of follow-ups from what I had before.

Then I want to go to some new stuff. Outcome 4, key objective 4.2, states, "Support choice for students and parents" on page 37 of the business plan. I'm wondering how much money and which line item reflect this objective. What are we doing to increase enhanced choice and support? Minister, I'm a huge believer in choice for education, more parental involvement. I'm a huge believer in all kinds of choice, and from what I know about charter and private, it seems to be working well although I confess to not knowing a whole bunch.

But I want to talk about home-schooling for a second. The home-schoolers I talk to are wonderful. They're so grateful for the chance to home-school their children that that's generally about all they want to talk about. But I do hear from time to time about a fee of something like two-thirds of the money to one of the boards or a board that just takes the money out of the children's education. Are we getting value for that? Do you know – again, it's not something that I hear them asking for, but I want the focus on our kids, and I wonder if the oversight is proper. I wonder if they're getting value. I wonder if that could be better supported.

Okay. The Alberta Education funding model. It changed since the UCP formed government, going from a student population count to a weighted moving average, I think, over three years. I'm wondering: have you conducted any performance measures or tests? And it looks like again we've slipped. You've reduced your targets as to how this is compared. Again, I saw you this morning in answering some questions from MLA Hoffman about how school boards had estimated 730,000 children in the public system and it ended up being 702,000 and then the second year it wasn't as far off. Has this weighted average reduced accountability? Has it caused a situation where, you know, the numbers are drilled down, we're not able to match taxpayer resources as well with the

outcomes we need? It seems to me that if it is to lead to better planning, if that's at the cost of accountability, I hope somebody is measuring that.

So thank you again, Madam Minister. If you'll answer those questions, I'd appreciate it.

The Chair: Thank you so much, Member.

Now over to the minister.

Member LaGrange: Absolutely. Happy to answer those questions. I'm going to start in a little different order so that I can turn it over on the measurement pieces to the department. Because you're asking very specific questions, I want to make sure you get specific answers to them.

On the home-schooling side, in 2019 there were approximately 13,000 students that were home-schooled, and through the pandemic that number actually increased to over 25,000. We saw a slight reduction, down to about 20,000, last year. And what you are talking about in terms of the funding is that they get funding – it's gone up in the '23 budget, where they will actually see an additional bump up. They had an additional bump up in the previous budget as well. Their overall funding will be just shy of \$2,000, of which 50 per cent goes to the school authority that is overseeing them and 50 per cent remains with the parent. The bump up that they're receiving this year is equivalent to what all the other school authorities are getting, a 6 per cent bump up in that.

We've also included kindergarten as a pilot, too, because we did hear that there were home-schoolers that wanted to offer kindergarten for their children, and we do have that option for every other child in Alberta, so we want to make sure that that was equitable as well for the home-schoolers.

On that shared responsibility, or the sharing of the dollars with the school authority that's overseeing them, what that individual child gets and that parent gets is the help and support to monitor and help them through any difficulties they may have. It helps them to get resources and linked in with the other areas that they need to be linked in with. They also provide oversight twice a year so that we can ensure that those students are getting a quality education, as well, as per how the parent wants them to be received.

I have to say that we're one of the few provinces in all of Canada that actually does fund home education. I'm very proud of that. It is one of our foundational choices that has been around for a very, very long time, and we are supporting it. I meet numerous times with the association that oversees home-school parents and know many home-school parents that are doing a wonderful job of educating their children in this manner.

The funding model on the weighted moving average, on the accountability piece: in fact, we have great oversight and accountability. What happened during that time period – and the model would have corrected it – was that schools overprojected, but unfortunately it aligned perfectly with COVID, so we felt very much that we needed to ensure that everyone had the dollars they needed to just weather the storm of COVID. So while they had projected 730,000 students and we were funding 730,000 students, we determined that there were 705,000 and then, the subsequent year, 716,000. But the way the accountability works is that they are able to then – in subsequent years it catches up, so there is that accountability.

I'm going to turn it over to Christine, if I can, to really explain how the ability for the accountability on the weighted moving average works.

Ms Sewell: Yeah. Thank you, Minister. So, as the minister said, we calculate the weighted moving average based on the school

authority's projections. We then go through the process of doing the actual count as the year unfolds so we have the actuals, and the model has a mechanism in it which allows a true up in the following year. We don't do any in-year adjustments to manage the predictability and the stability, so the funding that the school authorities – the commitment that they receive in the spring for the upcoming school year is their funding for that year. Then the following school year they'll know that they either were overprojected or underprojected, and we do have a mechanism to true up, so we apply that mechanism in the following year. Now, as the minister has indicated, in the years where the enrolment projections were lower than we had anticipated, there was an offsetting amount which was calculated, and that funding was allocated as mitigation for the impacts to the funding that were as a result of the unanticipated changes in the enrolment.

4:30

Member LaGrange: We could go to your last question, on the metrics, but it will take more than the seven seconds we have left, so we will do it in the next one.

Mr. Barnes: That's fine. Thank you.

Member LaGrange: Thank you.

The Chair: All right. Now over to the government side.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Chair, through you to the minister. In this morning's estimates the members across the table asked a question on the weighted moving average and how it's not applicable for communities who are experiencing exponential enrolment growth. The member opposite suggested that it provides some cushion for regions that are experiencing stagnant or declining enrolment growth. Since I've been out of education for eight years, this weighted moving average is new to me as well, and I'm not all that familiar with the weighted moving average model. On page 37 of the business plan it states that Education's operating budget is \$8.8 billion in 2023-2024. Can you please outline how the weighted moving average process will relate to that, and how is that different from the previous funding allocations process commonly referred to as per-pupil funding?

Member LaGrange: Happy to do that. A new funding model for education was introduced in 2020. Following a yearlong consultation process with the education system, Budget 2020 introduced a new funding model designed to drive more dollars to the classroom. Under this new model we aimed to deliver more efficient and sustainable funding to the kindergarten to grade 12 system to ensure all schools in Alberta have adequate resources to deliver programs in an equitable way. Under the provision model funding was dramatically outpacing enrolment, so when we had the per-pupil funding, it was dramatically outpacing enrolment growth and inflation in a way that was unsustainable in the long term.

The model reduces red tape and administrative costs by reducing the number of funding envelopes, also known as grants, while all the dollars still remain within the Education budget while maintaining the overall funding level and giving school authorities more autonomy and flexibility to invest in classrooms based on their student needs. This predictable funding model will also allow school authorities to do better long-term planning by making more informed budget decisions well ahead of the start of a school year.

The first time ever that school authorities were provided funding commitment letters was in the spring of 2020 and in subsequent budgets for the upcoming school year to support effective planning of the service delivery to our students. Under the previous per-

student model authorities would not know their final allocations until the end of September each school year. So when they were looking to do their hiring in the spring, they couldn't do it effectively because they didn't know fully what they would be getting until the end of September of that particular year.

Funding in this model is allocated on a weighted moving average system. One of the key improvements of using the weighted moving average system is that it ensures funding will be more predictable for both school authorities and the government. School authorities will no longer have to wait until they have a final confirmed number of students, usually at the end of September, when the school year is well under way, to determine how much money they will receive for that particular school year. This will reduce the need for school authorities to dedicate time and resources to estimating their funds for each coming year, thereby allowing more money to be allocated to the classroom and more efficient planning for the next school year. This predictability will also ensure the government can allocate the funding available within the education system in a way that will keep us on track to meet the province's fiscal goals.

Under the weighted moving average system enrolment funding is now based on three years of enrolment: the previous year's actual enrolment, an estimate for the current year, and a projection for the next year. The projection enrolment is the most heavily weighted element in the formula, at 50 per cent, followed by the current year at 30 per cent of actuals and the previous year's enrolment at 20 per cent of actuals. As you can see, every student is allocated and accounted for. Not all grants are based on the weighted moving average, but generally we have used the weighted moving average to calculate the funding allocated by the grants that have a per-student component.

Some grants use a block funding approach, where appropriate, such as the rural schools sustainability grant, that supports smaller rural schools operating outside of major cities. The WMA, in particular, ensures the impact of declining enrolment is more gradual, which was positively received by rural school boards. Following the introduction of the new funding model as part of Budget 2020, Alberta Education and myself continued to take feedback on the model. Based on feedback, many adjustments were made to numerous grants to ensure everything was working as intended. These adjustments include bridge funding to each school authority to mitigate the reduction in operational funding while authorities transition to the new model.

Originally intended for one year, due to COVID it was in fact provided until this year. It was called COVID mitigation funding in Budget 2021 and in Budget 2022 to ensure school divisions did not receive less funding despite having fewer students attending.

PUF funding was adjusted several times following a stakeholder feedback process, and the PUF enrolment count was permanently moved from September 30, 2020, to December 1, 2020, to ensure accurate support of our most vulnerable young learners.

Also, public charter school equity. In Budget 2022 grant equity changes were available to ensure public schools received the same funding to support their special-needs students as other public schools. This included supports for disabilities and those who required specialized supports through the specialized learning supports grant. That happened after an audit was done of the school authorities to ensure that they did in fact have the students within their schools.

The new low-incidence supports and services grant was created in Budget 2022 to provide targeted funding to assist with the high costs associated with specialized supports and services required to meet the educational needs of learners with low-incidence disabilities. Those are ones who are visually and hearing impaired.

There was a supplemental enrolment grant, that was also included in Budget 2022, for more than \$21 million in additional funding that provided funding for those that were seeing additional growth within their school authority. So while we have the weighted moving average evening out the bumps for those that saw declines, we have the weighted moving average also now having a supplemental enrolment growth to address the higher growth in certain areas.

Francophone school authorities received . . .

The Chair: Thank you so much, Minister.

Back to the member. It's the government side. Did you have another question, Member?

Mr. Smith: I'm still getting used to this idea here. Okay. Thank you very much, Chair.

What I heard there was that the weighted moving average helps those that have more of a rural experience and are seeing maybe a decline. As well, you've added some grants to try to help the school boards that are growing in size and population.

Funding is absolutely critical to education, but so is a good curriculum. I know that when I was the critic, one of my concerns was how the NDP curriculum was going to roll out all disciplines all at once. I thought that would be a killer for teachers. I see in your business plan here that key objective 3.1 says: "provide supports for professional learning to enable implementation of new curriculum." I've been through two rollouts of new curriculum as a teacher, and I missed this one. Can you please speak a bit about the types of support you're going to talk about with regard to helping teachers roll out this new curriculum? It's critical, it was critical when I was teaching, and it's going to be critical for the teachers that are there today.

Member LaGrange: I a hundred per cent agree with that. There was a very concerted effort to make sure that when we rolled out the new curriculum, there would be the supports, not only the professional development but also the dollars that could go directly to ensuring that there were resources for every single student to the school authorities. That has been all factored into what we have rolled out.

As I said, we have committed \$211 million over three years to implement the new curriculum. This current school year we allocated \$59 million, and in the upcoming school year we have allocated \$47 million for that very purpose. So funding continues in our investment in teacher professional learning and quality teaching and student resources. Both are critical for delivering updated curriculum and preparing students for the future. Again, you need both the professional learning and you also need the resources to go along with it.

4:40

The department has been working diligently. As I said earlier, there have been numerous engagements with teachers. We've been partnering with the College of Alberta School Superintendents and the regional consortia to provide comprehensive and universally accessible professional learning opportunities, both in person and virtually, where they can be available to teachers on the new curriculum. You have to be able to look at that, dig into it. Teachers have really enjoyed that piece. Budget 2023, as I said, has \$47 million. We're providing \$800 per teacher to access additional professional learning to meet local needs, and we're also providing \$45 per student for school authorities to purchase new learning and teaching resources.

I know that when I met with my . . .

The Chair: Thank you so much, Minister.

Now we'll go back to the Official Opposition side.

Ms Hoffman: Thanks, Madam Chair. Just to rearticulate one of the outstanding questions from the last exchanges, which line item specifically? I get that there is a dollar amount that's being set around curriculum, but which line item in the estimates that we're being asked to approve relates directly to curriculum? There isn't a note, I don't believe, that relates to it. It's in the estimates somewhere. If it's a \$32 million investment, it would be good to be able to actually point to which line item. I'm on page 67 of the budget, for example, looking for that specific piece. I would say that the first round of rollout, over the last two years, has not been adequately supported in terms of teachers feeling excited and ready to introduce the curriculum the government is rolling out onto them.

Follow-up questions would be around – the minister rearticulated what's been stated publicly around math and language arts for division 2. Fair. Is the plan, then, of the minister never to update the social studies curriculum? I think Albertans were relieved when the highly discredited social studies curriculum didn't move forward for division 1. Definitely, there are still many concerns with other areas that are being advanced at this point. I would say that one of the biggest concerns around the science curriculum as it relates to the piloting for division 2 is that there is an increased emphasis on memorizing foundational knowledge at the cost of experiential opportunities.

For example, Member Gotfried will want to know this one. Many schools in grade 5 go visit the Alberta Aviation Museum in the lovely riding of Edmonton-Glenora – if you haven't visited yet, please go – and there was a direct connection between the science curriculum and aviation and the opportunity to learn hands-on in that environment. Schools that participated in that program in a high degree previously are not this year because of piloting the new curriculum, for example, and others are preparing for what they might be doing next year in terms of transitioning. It's still a great resource, and it's hard for them to be able to draw some of the particular curricular outcomes given the way that the new curriculum has unfolded. Of course, I think all of us would like to ensure that there are more opportunities for hands-on application of the knowledge that students are requiring in school to make sure that they can feel a connection between what they're being asked to in this curriculum predominantly memorize and what they're actually experiencing in the world. So the line item specifically in the actual estimates that relates to curriculum and the plan, the plan on curriculum rollout.

Is social studies never going to be updated? I will say that if that's the case under the UCP, that they're not going to touch social studies, that would probably be a relief for a lot of people, because what we saw in prior drafts was deeply concerning. Last year at estimates the minister confirmed that in the current social studies curriculum – I think it's grade 3; I might be off plus or minus one year – students have a unit specifically dedicated to learning about Ukraine. Of course, at a time where we are seeing Ukraine's sovereignty so clearly targeted by an aggressor in Russia and, specifically, Vladimir Putin, it's important that we still have opportunities for students to learn about it.

So is the plan never to update the social studies curriculum under a UCP government? If that is not the case, what year is the current minister planning and doing work in the department to implement that change? There are other areas in curriculum that we have been working with members of the community on bringing forward, enhanced curricular opportunities for more choices – we're going to talk more about choices – around, specifically, language programming. Tagalog is a specific area of the Filipino language

and culture, one of the fastest growing communities, we have heard, in the province in terms of cultural communities. When we were in government, we were working with them to try to expand on that, and they feel like they've been met with a roadblock. Why, in terms of curriculum, is there not a commitment to continuing to expand those types of additional opportunities for students to be able to engage in course content? There might be somebody jotting down an answer very quickly about locally developed courses, and CBE does have a locally developed course, but it's a language course, not language and culture, and it's only one specific school that's currently offering that program, I believe. So why aren't we expanding opportunities for students across the province in this current budget? Why isn't there a focus and an emphasis on that?

I think I'm going to keep this just focused on curriculum, this exchange, rather than getting into other areas, and hopefully we can get some answers, specifically as it relates to line items as well as timelines around the UCP's plan on implementing areas of the curriculum that were incredibly controversial and discredited. Or is the plan not to update the social studies curriculum indefinitely under the current government? So those would be my questions for this . . .

The Chair: Thank you so much, hon. member.

Now over to the minister.

Member LaGrange: Thank you for those questions. To start by answering your question, it's on page 67 of the estimates, 3.1, \$47 million, and it's also listed at outcome 3 of the business plan that there's \$47 million to address the curriculum implementation for the upcoming school year. Curriculum is something that we're very committed to. We have, you know, started the process, as I've said. It was a long time coming, putting curriculum in front of students, and I'm very proud that our government was able to do it after so, so many ministers and so many failed attempts. I was glad that we're finally getting curriculum in front of our students, and – you know what? – I'm hearing from parents that they like it. I'm hearing from teachers that they like it. I hear from administrators that they like it. They say: keep going on it.

As I indicated before, we have been piloting the social studies, the French immersion, and French as a second language this past year – over 1,000 teachers, over 20,000 students – and we are looking at finalizing those subjects and moving those subjects forward. I hope to share information very soon with that as the last year, when we brought forward the curriculum on April 13 – I think I have to correct the members opposite. They said it was in June. It was actually in April that we brought forward curriculum. We hope to be able to give an indication of what's happening much sooner.

We are still working on the fine arts and also on social studies, and with the social studies we heard loud and clear that we need to go back to the scope and sequence. So we've gone back and are looking at updating the scope and sequence, which is basically the blueprint of how the social studies curriculum will be worked on. We are continuing that good work on fine arts and social studies.

But we also heard from the system and we heard from the curriculum implementation working group that they recommended a phased approach, and given the fact that we were coming out of COVID, given the fact that this is the largest upgrade to the curriculum in a very, very long time – as I said, in science, 1986 – we needed to provide the school authorities the ability to implement this in a very staged approach, and that's exactly what we've done.

We wanted to also make sure that there were the resources and the supports available for our school authorities to be able to make it a successful implementation. And from everything that I'm hearing – because we are continually in contact with those teachers

and with those school authorities that are implementing the current curriculum as well as the ones that are piloting to get their feedback and make sure that we're rolling this out in a very methodical and well-thought-out way. So there I believe I've answered those particular pieces of the question.

When I go to choice, you're absolutely right. There's no one that likes choice more than our government, whether that's choice in the different types of education students choose or the choices that are within that education. We have provincial language curriculums in Arabic, Mandarin Chinese, German, Spanish, Ukrainian, Italian, Japanese, Latin, Punjabi. And I know that the Filipino community is also very anxious to get the their culture and their language front and centre. We have Filipino language and culture curriculum currently offered at the high school level as a locally developed course in some school districts. We know many schools are using this right across the province.

4:50

School authorities do have the flexibility to acquire locally developed courses to address particular student or community needs, but that doesn't mean we can't continue to work on this, because, of course, school authorities: while they have the ability, we can also as a province spearhead this. This is something that we know that we can move on in the future, and we will continue to work with the Filipino community to address their concerns and needs.

The one thing that is great in the curriculum that I am looking forward to, when we bring forward the social studies at a future date, is that we have the ability to have in that social studies the ability for every student to see themselves reflected in that curriculum. It didn't matter what culture or what religion you were . . .

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Now we'll go over to our independent member, and after the exchange is finished, then we'll take our five-minute coffee break.

Mr. Barnes: Okay. Thank you, Madam Chair, and thanks again to the minister and her staff. Just one new question; then I want to kind of circle back to four that I've already asked. First of all, a large surplus in this budget. In my 11 years as MLA, of course, the importance of schools and infrastructure and good infrastructure has been debated extensively for all that time, but I'm wondering. I see that you've got \$928 million in this year's budget, 2022-23, for capital investments but \$761 million for next year. Of course, the government in total is spending \$68 billion. I always feel the need to say that when I was first elected 11 years ago, the government spent \$42 billion, and we had \$27 billion of oil and gas royalties last year.

I'm wondering: is that number, the \$761 million next year, adequate for our needs? Is that adequate for our maintenance and repairs? Is that adequate for our youthful growing population?

And then, of course, I'm wondering, Madam Minister, particularly about Cypress-Medicine Hat. Is any part of that budget directed and aimed at Cypress-Medicine Hat and what our needs may be there?

Okay. I want to circle back. In my first block I asked about how you felt the Alberta education system compared to the rest of Canada, compared to other jurisdictions. Again, I heard consistently 10 or 11 years ago how good we were, and I'm just believing I'm not hearing that as much, so I'd like your opinion on that. I asked about the performance metrics, why we've settled for a low improvement goal, and I understand you're going to have your team

answer that, so I'd appreciate hearing how we are going to strengthen that and at least get back to where we wanted to be two years ago, which was 81 per cent for language arts, 67 per cent for math, instead of the 74 per cent for language arts and 60 per cent for math that we're at now.

Alberta Teaching Profession Commission. Again, you said in the first-block answer that you were shocked and dismayed with what you heard or what you encountered as to what was going on. I would appreciate an answer on the outcomes. Are the outcomes going to be better for our kids with the Alberta government doing this rather than the old system through the ATA?

Again, I'll ask one more time: 25.8 per cent of teachers were deemed not prepared for teaching. I can't imagine that 25 per cent of our students are being instructed and developed by somebody who's not fully prepared. So again, I would appreciate your answer on that as to whether you feel your measurement matrix was too tough, too stringent, in error, or, better yet, I'd rather hear what you're doing to help teachers get 100 per cent prepared.

Madam Chair, those are really all the questions I have, so I give that extra two minutes to the minister. I appreciate that. Thank you very much for your answers.

The Chair: The minister actually will just have five minutes to respond, and then it'll go back to you again.

Mr. Barnes: Okay.

Member LaGrange: Excellent. Thank you so much for those great questions. I'll start with the question that was carried over from last time. I'll turn it over to my department, to Jeff Willan to explain that particular piece.

Jeff, you could come to the microphone. There's one available here. Thank you.

Mr. Willan: Good afternoon. I'm Jeff Willan. I'm the assistant deputy minister of strategic services and governance within the Department of Education. To answer the questions around performance metrics, firstly, to reiterate, the question was around performance measurement, the percentage of students who achieve the acceptable standard on provincial achievement tests. This demonstrates the effectiveness of the education system in preparing students for high school. To reiterate, in '21-22 73.5 per cent achieved the acceptable standard in language arts, and 59.9 per cent achieved the acceptable standard in math. Then the question is with our target setting. We're looking at targets in '23-24 of 74.2 per cent and 60.4 per cent in math. Language arts was, of course, 74.2 per cent.

To answer that question around performance setting, there are basically two questions embedded within that question that you're asking. The first is: what is the process for setting targets? Within the Department of Education and all ministries we follow the requirements that Treasury Board and Finance provides to all ministries. Ministries are required to include at least one performance measure with a last actual result and three-year target under each outcome. We review our performance measures annually to ensure they continue to be meaningful and support our strategic objectives.

The '23-26 Education business plan includes a variety of performance measures, including student outcome results done through measures, test measures, and survey measures. We follow systemic target-setting methods, which include setting targets higher than the last actual; basing three-year targets on an analysis of historical performance measures, which is usually based on a five years' or more than five years' trend line; and using statistical

analysis to set improvement targets, which ultimately is our trend line.

What you see, as we came out of a lot of learning disruptions, was a last actual that was lower than what we had seen prior to the pandemic. That becomes our new reset number. Then we look at the last five years of historical information that we have, and there's a trend line for improvement. We use that to then set the targets in for the following three years.

The second question, then, is – so part of that is: why are the targets what they are? Again, given the disruptions in the education system over the last two years our previous results trend line has changed. Our target setting is based on that single year, so going back to 2022 of the last actual results as a starting point for the new trend and an assumption that improvement in results will be at a similar rate to the historical movement in results. The draft targets are therefore in this case, to your point, very conservative and show a gradual increase over the next three years. As we continue to administer PATs in language arts and math, provincial results will be evaluated, and performance measure targets will be reassessed to ensure that targets indicate continuous improvements based on more robust historical results.

We know that students and teachers have been impacted by the challenges that we've all faced over the past several years, so as for the survey data regarding teachers' preparedness, one of the things that may have impacted the results was the challenge that every sector of our society faced, and Albertans also felt the repercussions. The surveying related to this measure around teacher preparedness occurred during the omicron wave of the COVID-19 pandemic and during the second year that the pandemic has impacted the education system. This may have impacted results given that a lot of us know that teachers were transitioning between in-person instruction as well as Google Classroom. In some cases they were teaching in multiple environments, where they may have been teaching to students both in class and those that may have been online, which may have also contributed to the fact that the impression that some in the system had was that they may not have been as prepared as we had seen in previous years, before the pandemic.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Minister, now we will go back to the hon. member.

Mr. Barnes: Can I share some time with the hon. minister as well?

Okay. Clearly, it seems that COVID set our children and our system back tremendously. I'd appreciate how many years you think it's set us back and how long it's going to take us to recover.

Then if you could tackle the question about better outcomes for our students on the Alberta Teaching Profession Commission, I would appreciate that.

5:00

Member LaGrange: Absolutely.

The Chair: Have you agreed to do an exchange back and forth? I thought it was block time.

Member LaGrange: Given that there's only a minute left, sure, I guess.

Again, when I look at these metrics, first of all, I want to comment: I'll never rest until those metrics are all 100 per cent. I don't think any government should rest until those metrics reach 100 per cent in every outcome. That is my focus, that's my department's focus, and we're going to keep working towards that, and we've allocated dollars and resources to that. That's why we've got record investment, \$1.8 billion over the course of the next three

years, and we want to see those outcomes, just as you were talking about.

You talked about the capital investment. Those projections change as projects come on and some projects go off, obviously, over time. In terms of Medicine Hat, in your area, we have announced a new design funding for the Medicine Hat Roman Catholic separate school division, which is the replacement of the St. Francis Xavier school, which is their number one priority. When we look at utilization rates in the school authorities, we know that Medicine Hat has a utilization rate of roughly about 82 per cent for Medicine Hat public and 70 per cent for Medicine Hat Catholic.

The Chair: That's our time.

Let's have our break. Five minutes, everyone.

[The committee adjourned from 5:01 p.m. to 5:07 p.m.]

The Chair: Thank you, everyone. Nice break.

Now back over to the UCP caucus side. Please proceed, members.

Mr. Yao: Thank you so much, Chair. Minister, I just want to thank you and your entire team for all of the hard work they do. Education is a difficult portfolio, and you guys have managed it in a phenomenal fashion. Despite a lot of the criticisms, you guys have done an exceptional job, so I want to thank you all for your hard work.

My question revolves around First Nations. In the business plan it states that the Ministry of Education "collaborates with education partners to improve education outcomes for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students." Our government's priority and my priority as an MLA is to ensure that all Albertan students have the supports and resources to succeed, and I know that Alberta Education works closely with education partners to engage and support First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people in fulfilling their vision for a kindergarten to grade 12 education system that honours Indigenous history, cultures, languages, and perspectives.

I just want to state on the record that I did some consultations up in Fort Chipewyan, where I printed off all the aspects that relate to our Indigenous peoples from your K to 6 curriculum that you provided, and the feedback was quite phenomenal, quite honestly, from the community. They actually expressed that a lot of the historical points that you put in there they were not aware of. They only had two criticisms. One was that there wasn't much in the way of languages, so they do have a desire to learn their native languages.

Secondly, what I found interesting was that they felt that grades 1 through 6 were too young an age to teach about the residential schools. Their experience was that that was too traumatic and that they actually had experiences where kids were crying and having nightmares for days and weeks afterwards, which is a huge contradiction to what the opposition was criticizing you on, that you didn't have enough on residential schools. But then I think, well, that's reflective of the way they govern, which is through fear, and I'm glad to see that you guys are considering alternatives to that.

That said, my questions. I have two. What is some of the programming that exists, and how can it be improved to support First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students?

Member LaGrange: Do you want to do the second one, too, and then I can just answer both?

Mr. Yao: Oh, sure. The second question. Certainly, a key objective in the business plan states that "\$8.8 billion in operating expense in 2023-24 under outcome 1 includes funding for First Nations, Métis

and Inuit students.” How much of it is going directly to Indigenous students?

Member LaGrange: Thank you. Great questions. Education’s guiding framework for curriculum design and development of kindergarten to grade 12 curriculum provides principles for curriculum development designed to ensure First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students see themselves in the provincial curriculum. New curriculum will include opportunities for all students to obtain knowledge and understanding of and respect for the rich diversity of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit cultures, languages, and histories.

I can say that I met with all of the First Nations as well over the course of time here recently, mostly through the summer, into the fall as well. We continue to work with the First Nations communities, as also my ADM in this area is in constant contact with their community, and we have made significant increases in Indigenous knowledge within the curriculum. We actually provided funding for First Nations to provide us their feedback so that we could then incorporate it into the curriculum. So a lot of engagement and work has been done in this area.

Education has also made available provincial Indigenous language programming in Blackfoot and in Cree. In addition, Education supports authorities with locally developed courses. These have been developed for the Dene, Nakoda, Tsuut’ina languages and also for smudging, beading, and teepee making. These are all locally developed courses that are out there, and I’ve been to many of the schools where these are actually being incorporated right into the school and into the programming. Education supports First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students with personalizing their high school experience and obtaining dual credit to build on or discover their career interests and aspirations. This includes opportunities in health care and in agriculture.

The First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Education Directorate is strengthening the requirements on reporting for the \$75 million dedicated to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit funding. The directorate is working directly with school divisions to ensure that First Nations, Métis, and Inuit education funding is being utilized in the most effective and efficient manner and with a focus on funds being used for classroom initiatives. The directorate is currently exploring the possibility of funding urban and rural Indigenous groups and communities. Education has supported the exploration and development of partnership models, including framework agreements that support the structural changes needed for First Nations education partners to provide comprehensive second-level supports, programs, and services similar to the provincial school authorities.

The agreement outlines a shared desire to develop strategies to strengthen the delivery of educational services with the express interest of improving the educational outcomes of students attending schools on-reserve. The agreement helps to enhance second-level supports and services in First Nations by providing opportunities that are comparable to supports and services available to students residing off-reserve, including increased access to co-ordinated and integrated education programs and services, greater access to specialists – language, cultural, and curriculum – professional development and shared administrative and human services, and enhanced access to early learning programs, wraparound services, and supports.

We’re committed to improving education outcomes for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students. Over 98 per cent of Education’s operating budget flows directly to school authorities, and they deliver the education services to their students. First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students are eligible for all the grants under the funding model, and local school boards continue to be responsible for

determining how they distribute those funds to meet the needs of every student.

In Budget 2023 we are providing approximately \$83 million in the ’23-24 school year under this grant to school authorities so they can provide system, program, and instructional supports that improve education outcomes for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students. We also support the implementation of Truth and Reconciliation Commission recommendations, and we allocate this grant in addition to all the other grants to support First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students.

I know that you and I were up in Fort Chipewyan when a historic MOU was signed between the two First Nations and the Métis authority, the first time ever that that has happened in Canada, where they are uniting for the benefit of their children to ensure that they can bring together and develop an educational authority which they will manage and run for themselves. We are helping them through the stages of this with funding and with supports and with the ability to use my department and the expertise that we have to set up this educational authority. We have other educational authorities in the province already in existence such as KTC and MESC, and we know that the Fort Chipewyan area wants to have their own . . .

5:15

The Chair: Thank you.

We have two minutes. Back to Member Yao.

Mr. Yao: Thank you so much, Chair, and thank you to the minister for those answers. If we go back to Fort Chipewyan, again, you have paid extra attention to a very isolated community with – you know, they’re a very successful First Nations that we have up there. The Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation as well as the Mikisew Cree have demonstrated remarkable business acumen and are continuing to move forward with some of their own initiatives. That said, I’m wondering if you’d be able to give us any updates on the physical school that is being dedicated up in that region. I know that we’ve had some delays as we were navigating the local politics of the community, but thanks to the perseverance of you and your entire team we continue to move forward on that infrastructure. I’m wondering if you can give any updates on that and, as well, if you have any understanding of the school board that you’re helping to develop up in that region, if there are examples elsewhere of that in the nation, or are we one of the first in providing such a remarkable achievement in allowing that level of self-governance with our First Nations?

Thank you.

Member LaGrange: Great questions. Yes, I can give you an update on the replacement school for the Athabasca delta community. In April of 2020 my ministry allocated funding to either modernize or replace the Athabasca delta community school in Fort Chipewyan as part of the Budget 2020 capital plan. Budget 2020 included \$24 million in funding to support the construction of a replacement or a modernization. The project is currently in the site selection phase for a replacement facility. As you are very aware, there were numerous delays through COVID, because it is a fly-in community . . .

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Now we will head over to the Official Opposition, please.

Ms Hoffman: Thanks very much. I’ll carry on a question asked earlier by Member Yaseen around the net increase to spaces in Calgary. I know that the response – that was the question that was asked, and the response that came was around new and modernized.

Reading the government's own budget documents, including the announcements from last week, 900 new spaces is the only new build for the city of Calgary. Yes, the Diefenbaker modernization is a very important project, something that we in the Official Opposition have been already committed to following through on, as well as Annie Gale school, which is number two for the division for very important replacement school projects.

But for the entire city of Calgary the answer to that question is that there's only one new school that is being committed to for actual construction money in this budget. That is a huge oversight when it comes to the largest division in our province, one of the largest in Canada, actually, and one that is continuing to grow in terms of students choosing public education. Of course, public education, the number of spaces being added by the government – there are approximately 8,000 students who have selected public and Catholic education this year more than previous, and the number of new spaces being committed to for construction is only 900, so, you know, a little over 10 per cent of the number of students who are choosing to enrol actually receiving funding in this budget.

I'm just going to go through some of the other projects for Calgary public, CBE, because they've got a very condensed list. They, in fact, only asked for four projects in year 1 and only had one funded. But they need all four. That is the truth here, through you, Madam Chair. They need Diefenbaker. They need Annie Gale. They need A.E. Cross. They need Sir John A. Macdonald. Those are all major modernizations. They are desperately needed.

In year 2 they have modernization requests as well that have been identified as well as new requests. In year 2 they have identified Saddle Ridge middle, Cornerstone high school. These are two desperately needed projects to make sure that we can keep up with the needs of high school spaces as well as Saddle Ridge being able to address that sort of middle school space, grades 5 through 9. They have asked for that as well as three other major modernizations.

Then in year 3 they had a new request for Saddle Ridge, Cornerstone, Ranchlands, Janet Johnstone, and Queen Elizabeth schools. The last three are all modernizations.

These are projects that are absolutely needed to just try to keep pace with where Calgary is at right now in terms of the number of students who are in their schools and the spaces needing to be modernized.

I had the opportunity to tour Diefenbaker not that long ago, and always when I tour schools, I ask students, when I have a chance: what's something you love about your school, and what's something you wish was different? At Diefenbaker they were consistent in saying that they love their teachers. I always love hearing that response. They thought they had really good instruction, that they had really good teachers. I said: what's something that could make your school better? They said: a window. It was built like a bunker, and many of the classrooms are interior with no access, with even the ones that are on exterior walls with no actual way to provide natural sunlight. It isn't often that you hear high school students say that they want something as basic as a window when you talk to them about their educational experience.

It plays a few ways that this would be beneficial. One is regulating temperature in the actual classroom. They have no way to get fresh air and crack a window because there is no window. Two, there is no natural sunlight, and we all know how important it is to regulate ourselves to have exposure to some natural sunlight at some point during the day. Three, we ask kids to show up to school and do their best, and when we aren't showing them our best in terms of meeting them with a good building that feels safe and comfortable, I don't think they really believe us, because we're not giving them our best. We certainly aren't giving them our best in

terms of the capital plan that's being proposed by the current government when it comes to Calgary public schools.

Calgary Catholic also has an incredibly long list, even longer than the other one, and this is the one where there's only one project funded. That's the Nolan Hill project. That's the only one that's actually going to have any funding for construction. They also have identified Chestermere, Redstone as new construction as well as Rangeview. They needed all of those in this year's capital plan to catch up to where they feel that they would be able to offer adequate education. As well, they have three that need enhancements and modernizations, including Bishop McNally, St. Bonaventure, and St. Benedict. That was just their year one needs assessment, and the government came far short only funding one school project.

Why is it that this government is bringing forward a budget that is so wrong headed when it comes to providing infrastructure for Calgary?

The Chair: Thank you so much, Member.

Member LaGrange: I'm happy to talk about this all day long and again correct the misinformation that is being provided by the members opposite. When I look at the Calgary Catholic school division, they have received in this budget alone their top five asks for Calgary, including the design of the new high school in Rangeview, including the full build for the new K to 9 school in Nolan Hill, including the design for the new Catholic K to nine 620-capacity school in Chestermere, including the preplanning for the new elementary school in Redstone, including the preplanning for the addition of Bishop McNally high school, and including preplanning for the new west Calgary high school. Again, these are all now in the pipeline. They are top priorities for the government of Alberta, and they will get built.

The one item that the members opposite continue to not understand or perhaps are purposely not understanding is the fact that preplanning and planning are part of the process that needs to happen before you can go into full construction, and if the preplanning and planning phase is accelerated because those sites are actually able to move forward, then next year these will be able to move into design or straight into construction. So, again, five out of the six of their top priorities are all accounted for, and the estimated space that that will provide will be an additional 5,930 spots for Calgary Catholic alone.

Again I remind everybody they're at 81.9 per cent utilization. I also have to say that between 2019 and 2020 three projects were approved for Calgary, which adds an additional 2,930 new spaces. So combining those two numbers, we're at about 10,000 new spaces just in that alone. That doesn't even include the 203 modulars that were allocated since 2019 to the Calgary Catholic school division and doesn't include the additional project that was completed in '22-23, the Calgary Catholic junior high school in Cochrane, which is anticipated to be completed here and will provide an additional 825 spaces. That's just Calgary Catholic alone.

5:25

Happy now to go over to the Calgary public board of education. Their top six priorities are all funded in Budget 2023, including their modernization of the John G. Diefenbaker high school as full construction funding; planning of the modernization of Annie Gale school, which was their number two priority; the preplanning of their modernization of A.E. Cross school, which is their number three priority; the preplanning of the modernization of Sir John A. Macdonald, which was their number four school; the preplanning for a new Saddle Ridge middle school, which was their number

five. I think I've mentioned them all. Oh, I'm sorry. I missed number six, which is the planning dollars for the new high school in Cornerstone.

Again, all of these new schools are going to be fully funded; they're just in the pipeline. As we all know, it takes time to plan, and then it takes time to design, and then you go to straight build. Once we go to construction, oftentimes, if it's an elementary school, it takes approximately 18 to 24 months to build. If it's a high school, it can usually take 24 to sometimes 36 months to build. So it's very important that we get the planning, the preplanning, the design right so that we're able, when we announce that full funding, to have the shovels in the ground. These will create many new spaces for school authorities in the thousands. I'm just getting the exact numbers.

While we're doing that, I want to give you an understanding of the fact that between 2019 and 2022 there were two additional projects that provided 1,525 new spaces and also that we have seven new schools and one modernization project that have been completed recently for Calgary that are providing an additional 3,000 spaces. Again, we are looking at – let me see here. We had the Bayside school, which was new in August of 2022. We have the Evanston middle school. We have . . .

The Chair: Thank you so much, Minister.

Now we will turn over to the government members.

Mr. Long: Thank you, Minister and department and staff, for your time today. I appreciate the efforts that you're putting in.

On behalf of a couple of my colleagues who represent Northern Gateway, along with myself, I just want to thank you for the capital plan announcement around Valleyview school. It's a very long-awaited project with Northern Gateway. Although Valleyview is just outside of my riding, I wanted to bring that thank you on their behalf.

I'm actually glad that there have been so many conversations around the curriculum. Just for background my mom was a teacher for over 30 years, and like many teachers, after she retired, she went on to substitute teach for about another 10 years. With my sister being a teacher and my wife being a teacher, it's very important for me that our kids are actually being taught with something that's relevant for today.

You know, I've talked to a lot of teachers throughout the process of implementing the new curriculum. With my wife being a teacher, I will confess that I got the talking points from the union just as quick as every other teacher and then proceeded to have conversations with educators about the concerns that they raised, that were presented to them by the ATA, and simply said: let me know, when you look at the curriculum, what your concerns are, and I will bring them forward and present them to the minister for consideration. I thank you for your response and your department's response to concerns about the curriculum, the rollout, and the content.

In the last year since I've had more conversations than I can count with teachers and recently, even on Saturday evening, with teachers who expressed that they love the curriculum. They still ask that we continue to work on modifying the socials, but they're happy with the English, the math, the science, and the PE, and that's a far cry from what was presented by the union in the early days. I know that some of the talking points were atrocious.

Again, thank you for your dedication from your office and your ministry on hearing feedback and implementing something that – as the lady said on Saturday night, she loves the new curriculum. I encourage all members to continue to engage with educators and hear beyond where we were at two years ago to what is actually being said. That's why I was actually concerned earlier when the

comment was made: "Is the plan never to update the [socials] under a UCP government?" That's, quite frankly, absurd. Our children deserve to have relevant curriculum and education in front of them, and I think that for what we've already accomplished through your ministry, we are much better off.

That said, as you know, I've advocated for a number of things and communicated with your office around a number of things. One of the things that I find concerning is when, you know, the opposition says that we take funds from public education and put them towards other schools of choice like independent schools. I get a little bit confused about this. I was curious if you could actually clarify for my colleagues and I: how many students are in public authorities, Catholic, separate, and francophone schools? What percentage of the \$8.8 billion operating budget goes toward public education? Similarly, how many students actually attend an independent school? And what percentage of the \$8.8 billion budget goes toward independent schools? Obviously, this is very relevant in my riding as my riding is represented by all facets of education under all different streams. If it's okay with you, Minister, if you're able to provide some of those answers for a little bit further context, I'd appreciate it.

Member LaGrange: Thank you. First, I want to thank you for the comments on the curriculum because it was a lot of work, and it continues to be a lot of work. I give kudos to the department, who have done yeoman's labour in engaging and making sure that it has been the most transparent, open process ever. We've had online surveys. We've had engagement sessions, town halls, met with, you know, teachers, administrators, parents, students. We've gone through just such a rigorous engagement process, which we committed to and we are still committed to, ensuring that we get the absolute best curriculum. That was the only instruction that I gave to my department: I want the absolute best curriculum in front of school authorities.

When we look at the fact that we actually aligned our curriculum with high-performing jurisdictions for mathematics, it was Quebec, Singapore, and Estonia. In English language arts it was Australia and Massachusetts and Ontario.

Was that Massachusetts?

Mr. Tremblay: Yes. Yeah, you got it.

Member LaGrange: It is Massachusetts – so there you go – and Ontario.

We have done that with every single subject, made sure that we compare it to the top performing jurisdictions around the world. Kudos to my department, that continue to do that hard work of making sure that we put the best possible curriculum in front of our students.

On the other item that you were talking about in terms of funding facts on school authorities, public, separate, and francophone school authorities make up about 91.86 per cent of the overall student enrolment number, but they do only receive – sorry. They make up 91.8 per cent, but they receive 94.2 per cent of the overall funding. Public, separate, francophone make up 91.86 per cent, receive 94.2 per cent of all the funding. We're talking about operational funding. Charter schools make up 1.58 per cent of the overall student numbers, and they receive 1.56 per cent of the overall operational funding. Independent and ECS operators make up 6.56 per cent of the total student number and receive 4.25 per cent of the overall funding.

5:35

Again, we value that all school authorities contribute to the success of students across this province. We have one of the greatest

number of choices in all of Canada. I'm very proud of that. I do believe it is why we do have educational excellence in this province. It contributes to that educational excellence that we do experience as a province by having so much choice.

With that, I think I'll turn it back to you.

Mr. Long: Thank you for that, Minister and again to your department for the efforts to still provide that choice in education. As a new parent I applaud that. I believe that it should be my prerogative to find the best stream of education and even curriculum that suit the growing needs of my children. For us to hold that as an important value for our province, you know, to actually look forward as we plan how we support students and parents in that path to have choices: I certainly appreciate that.

As you know, Minister, along the same lines of that, I've actually advocated to expand the transportation supports that our government provides because, quite frankly, parent choice can be limited in education due to extra funding requirements, especially in a day like we see today of rising inflation costs that impact our family budgets. You know, parents in my constituency are actually worried about having to off-set the rising cost of transportation with insurance, fuel, driver training being passed on to Alberta families when they're struggling most to pay their bills at home. Personally, I don't think that that should be limiting the ability of parents to put their kids in other kinds of education streams. So I was glad to see one of the most significant increases . . . [Mr. Long's speaking time expired] Oh.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Now we'll head back over to the Official Opposition.

Ms Hoffman: Thanks very much, Madam Chair. We had an opportunity to discuss some of the very much-needed schools for Calgary, and now I'm going to go through some of the very much-needed schools in Edmonton as well. The government has put forward funding for one school of the Edmonton public capital list, which had eight projects needed for year 1. The piece that was said around, "Well, you have to do preplanning or design before you can do building": like, let's refocus here because we know that Edgemont, which was number two on the plan, is funded, and it was put on the list at the same time as Glenridding Heights, which was number one and which is only getting design money. If there was consistency, saying, "Oh, we're going to do these steps in this order consistently," maybe that could be a plausible argument, but that's not what's happening here because there is one project, the number two project, which is very much needed. All eight of these projects have been assessed as being needed, and number two is actually getting funded for construction. It's the only one, but, you know, Glenridding Heights, only getting design funding; Rosenthal, McConachie. Glenridding also needs a K to 6.

I should articulate again that Glenridding Heights is a specific neighbourhood in the southwest. The proposal there was for a junior-senior high, which is desperately needed. We have an existing school in that area that was opened in the time I was on the board. Lillian Osborne high school is the one that's serving that quadrant, or that section, of the city presently. They've been at lottery for years, so you could literally live within a block or two of the school and not be able to get in because there's just not enough room in that school. So building a new school in the southwest, Glenridding Heights, a junior-senior high: absolutely needed, absolutely urgent, the number one priority, and it only got design funding.

Most of the projects on this list now, after the minister's public comments in the last few years, have been focused on new builds,

but there is absolutely a significant need as well for modernizations as well as replacement schools. The offer still stands to tour those with me any time the minister is interested. In year 2 there are many projects as well.

Like, here's the other thing. All of us have local school divisions that submit these plans. If it is a three-year process, then the government should be planning – if you believe that preplanning is necessary, they should be preplanning for the year 3 asks, the year 3 needs assessments, so that when they move into year 2, then they give them design funding, so when they move into year 1, then they're getting construction funding. This gated process, again, as I said earlier this morning, is a wall.

Divisions are not being given an opportunity to see a return of good faith when it comes to all the work that goes into these capital plans. Edmonton public needs 23 projects over the next three years and got only actual funding for construction for one. Edmonton Catholic also has a number of projects. And I know that the minister will want to talk about previous budgets that were either approved by previous governments, including the NDP, or the last few years under the current government, but regardless we are seeing significant growth in Edmonton public, Catholic, and francophone schools, and we need new schools beyond what has been built already.

We need a plan for the future that includes new construction for Heritage Valley, Cavanagh, a junior-senior high, a K to 9. We need a replacement school: Rundle Heights area, St. Jerome. That was their number two. Their number three: a new school, K to 9, in Edmonton north. The neighbouring schools already exceeded capacity, and they need a school for about 950 kids, another replacement school. So they have four projects in their year 1 needs assessment, they have three in year 2, and then they have two more in year 3. And, again, they didn't have anything fully funded in this year's budget. There were only five new schools that actually saw full funding from the government: one in Airdrie, one in Calgary, one in Edmonton, one in Lethbridge, and one in Raymond for new school construction. That's it on the eve of an election. Have fun campaigning in our local ridings when the current government is only planning on putting in five new schools to fully fund.

There are some other projects, like building a gym or replacing other schools, that are important as well, but we also need to build for growth, and that means addressing the growth that we're facing in many areas of high pressure. I will have more to say about that in another exchange.

The Chair: All right. Thank you, hon. member.

Now over to the minister. Please proceed.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Madam Chair. I will note that the questions from the opposition continue to ignore the facts and/or significant investment that we are happy to be making in infrastructure. You know what? I'm happy to set the record straight, so I'm going to be reading off numbers again for Edmonton. Edmonton got their top five asks, Edmonton public school division: the number one, design funding for the Edmonton public school division is the new junior-senior high in Glenridding Heights for 950 spaces; full construction for the new K to 9 school in Edgemont; the planning for the K to 6 in Rosenthal; the new elementary school in Glenridding Heights has planning dollars; and preplanning dollars for the new junior high school in Pilot Sound and McConachie, totalling approximately 5,610 spaces.

Again, the member opposite is just trying to create fear and imply that these schools will not move forward. That is not the case. In fact, I'm glad to say that Edmonton public school division – we've had numerous conversations, both myself with the board chair and

the administration as well as my department with the administration, because in previous years they were prioritizing schools needing modernizations or replacements in communities that were not growing. In fact, they were underutilized schools and did not have health and safety issues or concerns, so they weren't actually rising to the top of the list. It is an auditor-approved, gated process, as the member opposite knows, that was approved under their government in 2018. It is determined to be best in class in all of Canada, and it depoliticizes the whole system. It is those schools that are the most in need that rise to the top of the process, and I'm glad that we're able to announce 58 projects this school year.

Moving on to projects that were approved between 2019 and 2023. Those projects will create 3,441 new spaces to address enrolment growth in Edmonton public. Those were the south east high school, which is anticipated to be completed by May 2024, and the Joey Moss school, which actually opened here in September 2022. We also have completed a project which is – no. I'm sorry. I've already mentioned that one.

5:45

Again, when you look at all of the spaces that have been provided here, we have numerous, numerous spaces for Edmonton public.

I'm going to move to Edmonton Catholic. Again, before I move to Edmonton Catholic, I want to just reiterate that Edmonton public is sitting at an 83.2 per cent utilization rate and that they received 100 modulars over the course of the last three and a half, four years.

Edmonton Catholic school division in this current budget received their top three asks. Their number one was their new K to 9 school in Heritage Valley-Cavanagh, and that received planning; their number two, the solution for Rundle Heights, which received design; and their number three, the new north K to 9 school, which received preplanning. That will create 2,665 spaces. What I would say again here is that if it's slightly out of order, it's because as it went through the gated process, it was determined that more work needed to be done, whether it was in the planning or whether it was in the design stage.

Again, that is the beauty of the gated process, that it determines where those projects are on the scale. Previous projects approved for Edmonton Catholic include the Father Michael McCaffery high school, that is estimated to open in May 2024, and the new K to 9 Joan Carr Catholic elementary-junior high, which opened in June 2022. There is a new high school in Castle Downs-Dunluce, in the member opposite's colleague's area, and a new K to 9 Lewis Farms-Secord school. Those are in process right now. Those will create an additional . . .

The Chair: Thank you so much, Minister.

Now we'll move over to the other side.

Mr. Long: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Minister. It's actually refreshing to hear that there's a process in place for the building of schools. I know that there are questions around infrastructure by elected officials, by community members. One of the horror stories that happened in one of my communities is that a former minister had come out to tour one of my hospitals, and upon seeing the hospital, the comment was made: it's better than I expected for a rural hospital. I have constituents that have passed that message on to me a number of times, and again it's just nice to know that there's a process in place that does address infrastructure needs in education and in health care for when those things are required.

That said, I did want to finish off on my question from earlier, which was, you know, around some of the concerns that have been raised by my constituents, by parents around the cost of transportation and how that can be limiting to their school choice. I

obviously have advocated for transportation supports and was glad to see that one of the most significant increases in your budget this year was the transportation funding under line item 3.4, which increased from \$319 million to \$420 million. I was curious: first, how many additional students and their families will actually benefit from the increase in this provincial funding support? Also, how much money will the parents of the students who are already using bus service actually save in transportation costs?

Member LaGrange: Thank you. Great questions. I, like you, have long wanted to see something change in transportation. It is the one area, as I said, as I travelled across the province and spoke with every single school division – and particularly this past year I've done it a number of times. But this past year, prior to Christmas, when I did meet with every single school division, there were three themes that rose up: mental health and wellness, capital infrastructure, and, as I said, transportation.

It was one of the top issues and one of the top issues for a number of reasons. Besides the increased costs in insurance and fuel that we are addressing through the new funding model, there is also a shortage of drivers, so we looked to address that through the driver training and the incentives that we're using to try and get more school bus drivers across this province. It's a travesty to see that we have school authorities that have to double route or triple route school bus routes just to make it happen.

What we are investing: it's something new. It's on the recommendations of the Student Transportation Task Force as well as the audits that were done over the time period. We anticipate that there will be an additional 80,000 students who will benefit from the additional funding. I shouldn't say "additional." About 47,000 of those students currently are on a bus, but they will probably have their school fees eliminated because we will be able to catch them in there. So it is 80,000 students that will be affected by this improved service delivery model. Also, we know that it will probably eliminate or save parents approximately \$20 million in transportation fees. It is a significant investment. It is \$414 million, which will lessen or eliminate these school bus fees overall.

Again, some of the changes that are going to happen: we heard very clearly from parents and from school authorities that they didn't think, you know, little grade 1ers or grade 2ers should be having to walk 2.4 kilometres – that has been the distance for a very long time – so it will change. For kindergarten to grade 6, it will be one kilometre, and for grades 7 to 12, it will be two kilometres. We're also modernizing the way that we calculate that distance. It will no longer be as the crow flies or the fastest walking route. It will actually be driver time . . .

The Chair: Thank you so much, Minister.

Back to the member.

Mr. Long: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Minister. I'd like to cede the rest of my time to MLA Gotfried.

The Chair: Please proceed, Member.

Mr. Gotfried: Great. Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the minister again for all your time today and very informative answers. Minister, the affordability crisis in Canada has not only affected Alberta parents but, of course, also the school authorities who serve them, who are really facing significant inflationary pressures that are impacting school operations and maintenance such as increases in utilities, insurance, general supplies, and light maintenance, not to mention the continued and potentially escalating impact of a very punitive federal carbon tax. How will the new operating expense funding reflected in Budget 2023-24

ensure that we as Albertans and our students, of course, have well-protected and well-maintained schools for students across the province? Perhaps as an added question you might be able to comment on how our government's commitment to choice in education might serve to mitigate some of these funding challenges.

Member LaGrange: Excellent questions, so I'll get right to it. More than \$820 million over the next three years will be committed to hiring additional teachers and classroom support staff so school authorities can manage class sizes and the growing number of students. This also will impact, you know, the ability for school authorities to address the needs at the local level. In addition, we are providing \$126 million over three years so school authorities can add supports to complex classrooms and give students the focused time and attention they need.

School authorities will be provided an additional \$414 million over the next three years to support school busing improvements and rising costs. Again, affordability. We've included in that \$414 million a continuation of the fuel price contingency grant that we provided for school authorities, which I've heard has been very, very beneficial over the last little while. As I just indicated, we anticipate that that will save parents approximately \$20 million in school fees.

We also know that there are rising costs affecting food prices, so we are increasing the funding for the school nutrition program by 20 per cent. This will provide school authorities with \$20 million for the program plus an additional \$3 million that is allocated for the pilot programs with the NGOs, or the nongovernment agencies.

5:55

We're also providing \$80 million for the operations and maintenance grants, which is an increase of 5 per cent. This will ensure safe and well-maintained schools for students and will address the significant inflationary pressures impacting school operations such as increases in utilities, insurance, and supplies. I want to give kudos to my finance department, who have met with school authorities and actually drilled down and found out what those actual numbers are so that we are accurately reflecting in the increases what those cost pressures are and addressing them. When I met with every school authority in the last several months, they raised three priorities, as I've said – transportation, mental health and wellness, and capital infrastructure – and I'm very proud to say that we are addressing all of those.

When you are looking at the – you mentioned about the choices. With choice parents know that the choices they're making also have different categories of funding. While some choose to send their children to an independent school, roughly about 6 per cent, just over 6 per cent of the overall number, we know that they're only funded at 70 per cent of the operational funding and zero for capital, so that, in fact, saves dollars that go back into the rest of the system. On charters: they're roughly equally funded, at 1.5 per cent of the population, getting approximately 1.5 per cent of the funding. On home education students: the overall funding for home-educated students is just under \$2,000, so that is a significant difference from what other choices are being allocated in the funding model. So, again, choice.

All of the dollars stay within Education. I'm so happy to say that we are increasing the overall budget of Education from an \$8.223 billion budget, that I originally started with in 2019, to an \$8.4 billion budget this current year to an \$8.8 billion budget next year. Over \$9 billion, \$1.8 billion over the next three years just for operating, to ensure that our schools have the supports and the resources, that they're able to hire the teachers now that we are seeing enrolment growth and more people migrating to Alberta.

The Chair: Thank you so much, Minister.

Back over to the Official Opposition.

Ms Hoffman: Thanks. I'm going to stick with capital, and it's not just Edmonton and Calgary that are being ignored. There are many other communities. Again, nothing in the capital plan that's funded for construction at all for Red Deer, you know, arguably, depending on the time of year the census is done, the third- or fourth-largest city in our province and growing. That definitely is a big area that's being ignored. The families of Red Deer deserve new schools and replacement schools, too, that will actually be funded.

Again, in this year's capital plan there is nothing funded for Rocky View schools, one of the fastest growing divisions in the province and, arguably, the country. Airdrie does have one new school for FrancoSud, which is good. That is great for anyone who's choosing francophone education, but there is a need for capital for Rocky View in an actual construction phase when it comes to their other asks. Rocky View has asked for an Airdrie K to 8, a Cochrane K to 5, a Chestermere K to 9, and Airdrie high school, all on their year 1 needs assessment. Then there are also an Airdrie K to 8, Chestermere high school, a Cochrane K to 8, a Springbank K to 8 in their year 2. And in the final year that they submitted, there's Langdon, Cochrane, Crossfield, and Airdrie. Langdon's is a K to 5, and the others are K to 8.

These are their needs assessments. This is what they've gone through and identified as what would be necessary for them to keep up with the growth pressures that they're facing. I know that often trustees are very polite – and that is a nice thing – but they also can be very disappointed. I will say that Rocky View school board chair Norma Lang was quoted as saying:

I can tell you that Rocky View schools is frustrated and somewhat disappointed with the announcement that we listened to this morning.

While some places within Rocky View, like Cochrane, get on the list for funding for planning, Lang said that

capital planning projects is not enough for Rocky View Schools. We fully expected that we would have at least a few of the full capital announcements for immediate construction funding out of those 13 that were announced.

So, again, big disappointment there. In terms of the minister's comments – they're very specific in their capital plan. I've pulled up all these capital plans in preparation for estimates consideration and prior to that, too. Airdrie K to 8, the new construction: the site is already done. Cochrane K to 5, new construction: the site is already done. They are ready to go. The Springbank site, which is identified in year 2: ready to go as well. So there is a significant degree of disappointment in these and other communities.

Another piece. Again, I mentioned just a moment ago that there's only one francophone new school construction in the actual funded capital projects, full construction funding, for this budget cycle, one new school, and that's in Airdrie. There are a couple of other projects that are replacement schools or a gym project: very much needed, but if we want to actually achieve the court-mandated requirement around equivalency, we need to do far better in terms of adding new spaces for francophone students throughout the province, and this government has absolutely failed to deliver on that in this budget.

On the eve of the election they're campaigning on this, and they are only funding the actual construction of five new schools anywhere in the province in this budget. So, again, they might want to point to posturing around things, but I'll let the board chair's remarks speak for themselves when she says just how disappointed and how desperate they are for the space that is required to be able to educate students in the division of choice.

If we want to honour choice, we need to make sure that we are funding growing divisions for capital as well as for operating, and again it was identified this morning that the weighted moving average is not meeting the pressures around adequate funding, individual student funding, as a result of the weighted moving average, and for any division that's growing, it has gone down. And with the elimination of bridge funding this year, it's only going to get more difficult for those divisions that are growing.

So I have to say that for this to be the pre-election – we all know that pre-election budgets aren't usually super grounded in evidence and in fact on what governments actually plan to deliver. That this is what they're actually campaigning on, the construction of only five new schools getting funded in this year's budget, I think is a big disappointment for Albertans at large, but rest assured that should the government change in a few months, there will be a significant investment in education.

The Chair: Thank you so much, Member.

Over to the minister for response.

Member LaGrange: Thank you. Again, misinformation. You know, the member opposite continues to talk about being on the eve of an election, trying to politicize the process. The whole idea of the audited, approved gated process is so that we depoliticize it, which is what the members opposite want to do. I'll stand on our record any day of the week. From 2015 to 2019 do you know how many school project builds the NDP put into their capital plan that were outside of Edmonton and Calgary? Fourteen. During our time period 37 – 37 – more than double, almost triple, what the members opposite did during their time in office.

So if they want to talk about equity across the whole province, let's talk about equity across the whole province. Why did they neglect rural areas? Why did they not provide that equity? Again, what we have done through the gated process is really look to provide that equity.

They talk about Red Deer. Well, Red Deer over the last two budgets, capital budgets, have received their top two asks. Red Deer public is sitting at an 85 per cent utilization rate; Red Deer Catholic, 83 per cent. We do know that they need additional space, so Red Deer Catholic this year has the new Blackfalds school, which will alleviate space issues within Red Deer. Those kids that are being bused into Red Deer right now can now stay in their home community.

Red Deer public has a new northeast middle school that they've been asking for, and they have gotten the dollars to continue the work on that while they're still working on their top ask, which is the one that has been previously approved, the modernization, the huge modernization, of the high school. So Red Deer is well served. I'm glad that we were in the seat to make sure that these top priorities, that have risen to the top through the auditor-approved gated process, are in fact moving forward.

6:05

Rocky View school division actually has received their four top asks. Out of the 58 projects, they are receiving their four top schools that they have asked for, and I'm glad that they are receiving this even though their utilization rate is hovering around 80 per cent. I don't have that exactly right in front of me, but we will find it very quickly here. There it is; 86 per cent, which is down from the 2022 enrolment of 88 per cent. Needless to say, there are still high-priority projects that are moving forward through the gated process and have risen to the top, so they are amongst the 58 that we have announced. And they will happen because there is dedicated

funding to all of the different stages that they are going to go through.

The francophone school authority: I have to again correct what the member opposite was saying. In the last decade approximately 24 francophone schools have been announced. Of those 24, nine were announced under our government, four in this last budget alone by our government. The previous government announced during their time period – do you know how many? Four. Four. So please do not try and share, you know, the misinformation that we have not addressed the needs of the francophone community. In fact, we have done more for the francophone community in the last four years than has been done almost in the last decade.

Again, we are making sure that we meet the needs of all of our school authorities. We know that we have an obligation under section 23 of the Charter of Rights to ensure that francophone school authorities have the space they need. Not only that; they get additional dollars for transportation because we know that to provide service to francophone school authorities, it requires sometimes for them to go further abroad to bring those students to those schools, so that has been allocated. We also added and committed \$5 million in additional funding to francophone education through the updated francophone equivalency grant. This funding will be distributed through a base allocation, per-student allocation, and a small-schools-by-necessity allocation.

We also have the newly created French language service branch, which, I might add, the previous government got rid of. They got rid of the francophone directorate that was in place previous to their government. They actually eliminated that, and we brought back the French language service branch, that works closely with . . .

The Chair: All right. Thank you so much, Minister.

Back over to the government side.

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, Minister, for being so passionate about what you do.

Earlier in the day I think you were answering a question with respect to new spaces in Calgary. Maybe you can complete that. I don't know how many new spaces are opened up in Calgary. This morning a member opposite suggested that Calgary school boards, like the Calgary board of education and Calgary Catholic school division, did not get the projects they wanted or did not put them forward. I know there is a process that school boards have to follow in order to put capital priority projects forward.

I would like to quote the Calgary Catholic board chair from the news release the minister published on March 1 for capital infrastructure projects. Under outcome 4 of the Education business plan, page 37, it states that "\$2.3 billion over three years will be spent on capital investment in educational infrastructure." I'm going to read the quote now.

The Calgary Catholic Board of Trustees is grateful for the capital projects announced for the Calgary Catholic School District, which includes full funding for the K-9 school in Nolan Hill to serve this rapidly growing community. We anticipate receiving the full construction funding for the Rangeview high school and Chestermere K-9 school as soon as possible, after the design process is completed. These projects need urgent attention given the critical need for school infrastructure and CCSD's high utilization rate in these communities. CCSD appreciates the pre-planning commitment towards the construction of the K-9 school in Redstone, the addition/enhancement of Bishop McNally High School and the construction of a new west-end high school.

That quote was by Cathie Williams, board chair, Calgary Catholic school district.

Minister, can you please list again the completed list that Calgary Catholic received since your start as Education minister, since

2019, and how many schools of Calgary's were included in Budget 2023?

The Chair: You're ready, Minister?

Member LaGrange: Excellent. Thank you. There are so many numbers floating around; I just want to make sure I give you the accurate ones. Thank you again for asking those questions on Calgary Catholic. Yes. Calgary Catholic school division, like every other school division across the province, put together a three-year education plan, and in their three-year education plan they prioritize the schools that they need in their area. They look at their numbers; they look at the growth areas; they look at where they anticipate communities to be growing. They put forward their numbers.

I can say that on the ones that they were able to have announced here in the 2023 plan, it will create 5,930 spaces. Again, the ones that did receive funding are the new high school in Rangeview for Calgary Catholic; it received design funding. The new Catholic K to 9 school in Chestermere received design funding. I know sometimes you wonder: well, why Chestermere? Like, you have to think that those students currently are being bused into Calgary, so that's actually going to relieve some space in Calgary by having that school in Chestermere.

Calgary also has received full funding for the new K to 9 school in Nolan Hill. They have received preplanning for the new elementary school in Redstone. They have received preplanning for the addition at Bishop McNally high school and also preplanning for the new west Calgary high school. So, again, creating roughly 5,930 additional spaces.

When we look at Calgary actual enrolment numbers over the last number of years, in 2019-2020 their head count was at 57,599. They anticipate that will grow by approximately 2.8 per cent, which works out to about 1,631 students. As you can see by the spaces we're creating and also by the fact that, I think I mentioned previously, they had requested and received 203 new modular classroom units. Now, some of those were to replace older modular units, because we know that eventually those modulars get to an end-of-life cycle if they're of an age. Those are also available as spaces.

I think I mentioned and read earlier, but happy to do it again, that between 2019-2020 and the '22-23 school year there were three projects that were approved. Those were the Calgary Catholic school for St. Martin De Porres high school, that's currently being built; the Legacy K to 9 school, also in process; and the Cochrane elementary-junior high school, which opened in August 2022. Again, those Cochrane students were being bused into Calgary, so now they can stay in their home communities and create space in Calgary.

Again, school authorities are the ones that are putting their capital plans together. They develop their priorities, and the fact that Calgary Catholic now has funding for these six top-priority projects is good news. It should be celebrated because, again, we're allowing for choice in the system, and it also alleviates stress on other communities that are growing, such as Airdrie, Cochrane, Chestermere, because they have been able to receive that additional funding.

I don't think you talked about CBE, but I'm not sure if you want me to go into those numbers as well.

6:15

Mr. Yaseen: No. I think . . .

The Chair: Sorry, Member. Please direct the conversation through the chair.

Member LaGrange: My apologies, Chair.

Mr. Yaseen: Madam Chair, I think I'm good with what I've heard so far, and I would now like to pass on to MLA Hunter, please, the remainder of my time.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Chair and, through you, to the minister and her team. Again, I wanted to say personally that I've appreciated the hard work that you've done. I've watched for the last almost four years as you've struggled through lots of difficult situations and helped support the teachers during COVID especially. They've really appreciated that help and support. Parents have also said to me, Minister, that they really appreciate that extra funding that came to help them to be able to work through some of the problems that they had because of some of the learning struggles during COVID. So thank you.

Oftentimes we, you know, in my office will get questions from parents about PUF funding, program unit funding. I've heard this now for probably three and a half years, almost four years, where – I know that during question period the opposition has often asked these questions, and it seems to be a little misleading, so I want to be able to give you the opportunity here, Minister, to be able to set the record straight, to explain to Albertans about PUF funding.

I noticed on page 87 of the fiscal plan that Education is providing \$1.5 billion for learning support funding to support our most vulnerable students. Could you help us know who is eligible for that early childhood service PUF grant? Secondly, how much of the \$1.5 billion is directed towards the PUF funding? And then, third, does every school authority receive the PUF funding?

Member LaGrange: Thank you. There's a lot there, so I will try in the 44 seconds I have to answer that. The eligibility criteria for ECS prekindergarten PUF grant or the ECS prekindergarten PUF moderate language delay grant: children must be a minimum of two years, eight months as of August 31 and less than four years, eight months of age as of September 1 and have not yet accessed two years of prekindergarten programming. To be eligible for the SLS kindergarten PUF moderate language delay grant or the SLS kindergarten severe grant, children must be a minimum of four years, eight months as of August 31 and less than six years of age as of September 1 and have not yet accessed three years of ECS programming.

The Chair: Back over to the Official Opposition.

Ms Hoffman: Thanks very much, Madam Chair. Just since support for disabled students, students with special needs and varying needs, has been brought up by my colleague, I'll take a moment just to walk through some of the changes. It is true that you used to be able to get full funding for – I'm going to round – three-, four-, and five-year-olds. It's not exactly three, four, and five; there's the months component there, but that's generally what it was. There was a change made – and I will say that many people were arguing that the funding for three-, four-, and five-year-olds was much better than the funding once you turned six, and that was true. But instead of finding ways to extend the funding so that you could also get that additional support enhanced to the level that it was for PUF, the current government decided to roll it back so that you lost it a year earlier, so that it was only for those years earlier, not for five-year-olds, not for kindergarten students, essentially.

Then there was also another change made around the component of how much money you would get. It used to be that if you were coded as having specific disabilities, you'd get funding to choose the education program that you thought best met your needs. Now there's been more red tape added to require you to demonstrate how

many hours of instruction and at which site, so the money isn't following to the child in the same way that it did previously. It used to empower parents to be able to choose a program that worked for them, for their family, for their schedule, for their educational needs and get the full funding based on what their assessed need was, and then they could use that to choose whatever program they wanted. Now it's tied to a certain number of instructional hours, so many of those three- and four-year-olds also lost a portion of the funding; not the whole funding like the five-year-olds, but lost some of the funding.

Very objectively, if you look at the number of programs that offer those early years opportunities in divisions across the province, the number has gone down, the number of spaces and the number of sites, in the time that this government has been making decisions as it relates to education and governing education. Absolutely, without a doubt, we think that that is the wrong direction not just because, you know, we have good bleeding hearts and we want kids to have great educational experiences but because there's lots of objective evidence that if you don't invest in those early years, if you don't give those kids who are preschool age the opportunity to catch up to their peers and learn alongside their peers, they will cost everyone a lot more over the long run, cost everyone a lot more in terms of the learning gaps. If they start having a big gap already when they're six entering grade 1 because they didn't get that intensive early intervention, they will require more one-on-one attention and educational assistance, they will require more medication, they will require more supports throughout their educational experiences, and will be less likely to be able to have high-income jobs when they complete school. So there's lots of research and lots of evidence that investing in the early years is the right thing to do.

The timing was also really interesting because this cut happened at the same time as students were being sent home globally, and of course Alberta was no exception. And educational assistants – this is the exception – who would support those kids in the early years as well as kids throughout kindergarten to grade 12 had their positions eliminated. They were told that they were no longer needed. Parents were, of course, at home struggling, trying to figure out how to navigate working remotely, being isolated, and supporting their kids and their educational experiences. All of this has led to far fewer supports when it comes to some of the most significant needs.

At the same time this was all happening, of course, the weighted moving average component came in, too, meaning that those divisions that have the most programs, the ones that are growing, that are seeing the most diverse needs come into their schools, were getting less money per student because they had to divide that pot among more students because of the way that the government changed the funding formula. Growing districts weren't getting that September 30 head count money that we used to get. I guess it makes it easier to plan when you know how much money you're going to get before the school year starts, but it makes it harder to deliver programming if it's not enough money. You used to be able to get money based on how many kids actually showed up, and now it's based on projections as well as prior years' enrolment. It really has been a compounding impact, and it has directly impacted the number of programs, the number of supports, and it's been to the detriment of Alberta families.

That is something, again, that – you know, a couple of months from now there will be an election. Eight weeks from yesterday the election gets called if the current government follows the law, four weeks after that there should be an election, and shortly after that there should be a government. If it's a new NDP government, we will absolutely reverse the decisions that led to the significant cuts

that children who are three, four, and five have experienced as well as other students with disabilities.

The Chair: Thank you so much, Member.
Back over to the government side.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, and . . .

The Chair: Oh, sorry. No; the minister.

Member LaGrange: Oh, sorry.

The Chair: The minister for a response.

Member LaGrange: Mine for a response?

The Chair: Yes.

Member LaGrange: Okay. Thank you. First and foremost, again, I cannot believe the misinformation that continues to spew from the members opposite. There have been no cuts to Education. I started in 2019 with an \$8.223 billion budget. Budget '23-24 actually will be \$8.8 billion. There will be a \$1.8 billion, almost \$2 billion operating increase over the next three years.

The member opposite tries to indicate that we've cut funding for our special needs. As a rehab practitioner I find that offensive because I have worked very, very hard to ensure that our most vulnerable students have that early intervention as early as possible. That is so important to me. That is something that I have continually looked at over and over again and refined. In fact, I added a moderate-mild delay code that never existed before, language delay code. I can also share that independent ECS operators four years' reserve summary. From 2019 their operating reserves were \$22.6 million. Do you know what they are now in 2022? Sixty-eight point five million dollars; \$68.5 million. These are school authorities that are working with our most vulnerable children, because, of course, they are the ones that are getting the PUF funding. So if, in fact, there were restrictions or an inability to have enough funding, that alone should tell you that we are providing more funding than they are actually utilizing.

6:25

When I look at the PUF funding rates, the codes 41 to 46, which are your severe children that need additional supports, a half-day rate is \$16,500 per student. A full-day rate – and I don't make any apologies for holding our school authorities to account. A half-day rate for children two years, eight months to three years, seven months is a minimum of 300 hours; children three years, eight months to four years, seven months is a minimum of 400 hours; children four years, eight months and older is a minimum of 475 hours. That's the half-day rate. The full-day rate, with a minimum of 800 hours, is \$27,500. The code 47 children: for the half-day rate it's \$11,000, and the full-day rate is \$18,700. The moderate language delay rate, which is the new code that we added, is \$4,400 per student.

Of this time period, we know that this is teacher-directed instruction. We are also allowing for that teacher to interact with the family, to either go to the family or to provide supports to the actual parents, so up to 20 per cent of the total required hours in a half-day and full-day program for children two years, eight months to four years, seven months and up to 10 per cent of total required hours for children four years, eight months and older for parent-and-child engagement sessions such as visits to the child's home and demonstration of skills and strategies to parents and caregivers. Anywhere up to 80 hours is provided, depending on how many

hours that child is taking. I continue to work with school authorities on this.

Overall, as I said earlier, my overall budget for the most vulnerable has grown just in this year alone, going into the '23 year budget, from \$1.4 billion to \$1.5 billion. And I am not going to make any apologies for asking school divisions to be accountable for those dollars. I want to make sure that those children are getting the supports they need, whether it is specialized supports in elementary school under the SLS kindergarten funding, severe or moderate delay funding, whether it is under English as an additional language, or whether it's the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students, that those supports are going to those students or to our refugee students that require additional supports. We have to ensure that the dollars that we're spending provide us the outcomes that we're looking for, and that means that those children are getting the supports, whether it's additional resources, whether there's an additional educational assistant required. They have individualized program plans.

The Chair: Thank you so much, Minister.

With that, we have two minutes left for the government side.

Mr. Gottfried: Great. Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you again to the minister. I know that we don't have a lot of time left, so I'm just going to make this fairly quick. I know you've referenced some of the multicultural learners' issues and also some of the Francophonie and French speakers' issues, and I know that in building for the future in support of these diverse populations, your ministry is very focused on it, as are our UCP caucus colleagues. We strongly believe that in the ministry's business plan, page 1, it very insightfully states that your ministry works closely with the francophone community and, of course, other multicultural partners in this regard.

Very quickly, Minister: how is Alberta Education supporting your stated and continued commitment to specifically the French language learning in our schools? In the budget, how many francophone schools will be funded and built, and what other initiatives will you be taking to increase French language learner capacity within the system? Lastly, how many French schools has this government built since first being elected, in 2019?

Member LaGrange: Great question. I think I answered it earlier, but I'm happy to repeat it. Overall, since 2019 we have funded, have built, or are in the process of building nine schools, four of which have been announced in this current budget, 2023. In a decade, as I said earlier, francophone school authorities have received approximately 24 schools. Again, nine of those have been during our time period, and under the NDP they only received four during their time period, during their four years.

We have as a government committed to meeting the obligations for the delivery of French language education in the province. Since 2019 we have provided funding, as I said, for this new infrastructure. We've also continued to work with francophone stakeholders to help them secure federal funding for infrastructure and negotiate with the federal government for funding to support critical education projects such as teacher recruitment and retention for French language education. In the fall of 2022 we committed \$5 million in addition . . .

The Chair: Thank you so much, Minister. I apologize for the interruption, but I must advise the committee that the time allotted for consideration of the ministry's estimates has concluded. I'd like to remind committee members that we are scheduled to meet again tomorrow at 9 a.m. to consider the estimates of the Ministry of Health.

Thank you, everyone. This meeting is adjourned.

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

