



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 31st Legislature
First Session

Standing Committee
on
Public Accounts

Education

Tuesday, April 16, 2024
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Standing Committee on Public Accounts

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Standing Committee on Public Accounts

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Meghann Eagle, Assistant Deputy Minister, System Excellence

Emily Ma, Executive Director, K-12 Fiscal Oversight

Lora Pillipow, Deputy Minister

Jeff Willan, Assistant Deputy Minister, Financial Services and Capital Planning

8 a.m. Tuesday, April 16, 2024

[Mr. Sabir in the chair]

The Chair: I would like to call this meeting of the Public Accounts Committee to order and welcome everyone in attendance.

My name is Irfan Sabir, the MLA for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall and chair of the committee. As we begin this morning, I would like to invite members, guests, and LAO staff at the table to introduce themselves, starting on my right.

Mr. Rowswell: Garth Rowswell, MLA, Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Jackie Armstrong-Homeniuk, MLA, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Mr. Lundy: Good morning, everyone. Brandon Lundy, MLA, Leduc-Beaumont.

Ms de Jonge: Good morning. Chantelle de Jonge, Chestermere-Strathmore.

Mr. McDougall: Good morning. Myles McDougall, Calgary-Fish Creek.

Ms Lovely: Good morning, everyone. MLA Jackie Lovely from the Camrose constituency.

Ms Cassidy: Good morning. Jennifer Cassidy, assistant deputy minister, curriculum division.

Ms Eagle: Good morning. Meghann Eagle, assistant deputy minister, system excellence division.

Ms Pillipow: Good morning. Lora Pillipow, deputy minister, Education.

Mr. Willan: Good morning. Jeff Willan, assistant deputy minister, financial services and capital planning.

Ms Ma: Good morning, everyone. Emily Ma, executive director of K to 12 fiscal oversight.

Mr. Wylie: Good morning. Doug Wylie, Auditor General.

Mr. Driesen: Good morning. Rob Driesen, Assistant Auditor General.

Mr. Haji: Good morning. Sharif Haji, MLA for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Schmidt: Marlin Schmidt, Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Ms Renaud: Marie Renaud, St. Albert.

Ms Robert: Good morning. Nancy Robert, clerk of *Journals* and committees.

Mr. Huffman: Good morning. Warren Huffman, committee clerk.

The Chair: Thank you.

We don't have anyone joining us online, and everybody is present, so we'll start with a few housekeeping items to address before we turn to the business at hand. Microphones are operated by *Hansard* staff. Committee proceedings are live streamed on the Internet and broadcast on Alberta Assembly TV. The audio- and videostream and transcripts of meetings can be accessed via the Assembly website. Those participating by videoconference – there

is no one, so I can skip that one. We do not have anyone participating virtually. I would request that you please set your cellphones and other devices to silent for the duration of the meeting, and comments should flow through the chair at all times.

Moving on to the agenda. Are there any changes in relation to the agenda? If not, can some member move that the Standing Committee on Public Accounts approve the proposed agenda as distributed for the Tuesday, April 16, 2024, meeting? Any discussion on the motion? Seeing none. All in favour? Anyone opposed? That motion is carried.

We have minutes for the Tuesday, April 9, 2024, meeting for the review of this committee. Are there any errors or omissions to note? Seeing none. Can a member move that the Standing Committee on Public Accounts approve the minutes as distributed of its meeting held on Tuesday, April 9, 2024? Member Schmidt moved. Any discussion on the motion? Seeing none. All in favour? Any opposed? Thank you. That motion is carried.

We have the Ministry of Education here with us today, so I would like to welcome them. They are here to address the ministry's annual report, 2022-23, and the Auditor General's outstanding recommendations. I would invite the ministry officials to provide opening remarks not exceeding 10 minutes.

Ms Pillipow: Good morning. It's a pleasure to be here. My team and I have introduced ourselves. We've worked really hard to prepare for this meeting, and we look forward to your questions today. I'll provide a brief overview of Education's '22-23 annual report and give you an update on outstanding Auditor General recommendations. Afterwards we'd be happy to take any questions you may have.

Alberta Education's '22-23 annual report details the department's work to ensure Alberta students receive high-quality education. The past few years have been challenging for all Albertans, including our students and educators. What we see in the '22-23 annual report are investments that are aimed at addressing the challenges faced during the pandemic while at the same time working to steer the system towards the future. This work includes welcoming more students and addressing cost pressures faced by school authorities. It addresses student well-being and supports student success, including choice in education, and it recognizes the accountability and responsibility of school authorities to provide safe, inclusive, and welcoming environments for students to learn, grow, and succeed.

I'll start with a few financial highlights. In '22-23 the consolidated expenses for the school boards and the Department of Education before interministry consolidation adjustments were \$8.9 billion. This is an increase of \$436.4 million, or 5.1 per cent higher than the previous fiscal year. Capital investments included \$851 million across six categories: capital projects, new schools, modernizations, and replacements; modular programs; capital grants; charter and collegiate school expansion; capital maintenance and renewal; and school authority self-directed capital projects.

Turning specifically to highlights from our annual report, in the '22-23 school year more than 740,000 children and students were registered in early childhood services to grade 12 in education across Alberta. Enrolment was projected to increase by 2 per cent, or an addition of almost 14,500 students, compared to the previous year. However, enrolment increased by 3.3 per cent, or more than 23,600 students, in the 2022 school year.

To help with the significant growth in enrolment, Alberta Education provided school authorities with an additional \$21 million through a new supplementary enrolment growth grant. This grant provided additional per-student funding for school authority

growth of more than 2 per cent at \$1,500 per student and, if they grew at more than 5 per cent, at \$3,000 per student.

Alberta Education also supported approximately 4,000 students from Ukraine to continue with their studies. This included providing more than \$15.2 million in additional funding for language, social, and educational support.

The department continued to address the impact of learning disruptions that many students experienced over the last few years. A total of \$33 million was spent in '22-23 on student well-being initiatives. These supports help students that are experiencing academic challenges and helped create school environments that promote student well-being and positive mental health. This funding included \$20 million to support grades 1 to 4 students experiencing learning disruption; \$2.3 million to help students access specialized assessments by qualified professionals; initial payments of \$10.7 million towards the mental health pilots, which was part of a \$50 million commitment over two years for 80 mental health pilots.

We also worked to address the cost pressures faced by school authorities by addressing and reintroducing the fuel price contingency program. This provided more than \$20 million in additional funding to help school authorities and families with rising fuel costs during the fiscal year. Transportation funding also increased by \$90 million for increasing insurance premiums and parts and supplies. Alberta Education also provided just over \$39 million to support the cost of teacher salary increases related to the teacher salary settlement.

The safety and well-being of students while at school remains a priority for the department. In '22-23 Alberta Education continued to improve the teaching profession and enhance student safety by establishing the teaching commission, establishing the College of Alberta School Superintendents as a legislated professional organization, launching an online teacher and teacher leader registry, introducing a single code of professional conduct, which applies to all teachers and teacher leaders in Alberta.

Alberta Education also continued to move forward with a new provincial K to 6 curriculum to ensure Alberta students have the opportunity to learn essential knowledge and skills for the future. In '22-23 the ministry implemented new kindergarten to grade 6 physical education and wellness and kindergarten to grade 3 English language arts and literature and mathematics curricula in classrooms across the province. New grades 4 to 6 English language arts and literature and mathematics curricula were provided for optional implementation in September 2022. The department also released for piloting updated draft kindergarten to grade 6 science, French first language and literature, and French immersion language arts and literature curricula, which was followed by the release of the final curriculum in these subjects.

In 2022-23 Alberta Education continued to promote educational choice for students by supporting partnerships with postsecondary institutions and industry partners to offer more opportunities for career-oriented programming. The Career Education Task Force was established to review career education, and its final report and recommendations will help guide future career education programming. The ministry also worked to establish additional collegiate programs focused on science, technology, engineering, and math.

8:10

Throughout '22-23 the ministry continued to collaborate with Alberta's Indigenous communities to further reconciliation and foster relationships between schools, First Nations, and Métis parents, caregivers, students, and communities. This work included

enhancing framework agreements and targeted funding to strengthen educational outcomes for Indigenous students.

Alberta Education continued to work on four main outcomes related to achieving its mandate. Our first outcome is: Alberta's students are successful. Student success was achieved through several key initiatives, including the implementation of new province-wide curriculum to grade 6: English language arts and literature, math, physical education, and wellness. In '22-23 \$48 million was invested in renewing the K to 12 curriculum. This funding was used to support a wealth of new resources on the bilingual online platform, new LearnAlberta, for teachers, parents, students, and other education partners.

Student success was also achieved through support for financial literacy programming, student mobility programs and international language and cultural programs, and the ongoing support for French language education. We also worked to support student success by increasing opportunities for hands-on learning through collegiate high school. For early grades the department also worked to implement mandatory literacy and numeracy screening assessments for grades 1 through 3 to ensure young students are building a solid foundation for academic success.

The department's second outcome is: First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students are successful. This was achieved by strengthening education programs, policies, and initiatives; supporting the development of educational service agreements to enhance outcomes for First Nations students by establishing agreement standards; and working with the federal government to streamline how First Nations people access key services such as education. We also worked with school authorities to share Indigenous education data, respond to updated legislative requirements, and enhance grant accountability.

Alberta Education's third outcome is: Alberta has excellent teachers, school leaders, and school authority leaders. We worked to achieve this outcome through several initiatives, including funding of \$16.6 million to support the development or procurement of learning and teaching resources and \$14.6 million to support learning opportunities for teachers implementing the new curriculum, bolstering the teacher workforce in high-demand regions and high-need areas. This included support for the northern teacher bursary program, bridge to certification program, rural practicum program, among other grants and programs.

We also strengthened the kindergarten to grade 12 education system through the College of Alberta School Superintendents Act, which was proclaimed and in force in '22-23, and strengthening the teacher professions disciplinary process. In '22-23 Alberta Education introduced a new united code for professional conduct for teachers, and the same rules apply across the province.

Finally, I'd like to speak to the ministry's fourth outcome, Alberta's education system is well governed and managed. Our department worked to achieve this outcome through the following actions: targeted funding of \$110 million over three years to support student well-being and positive mental health; additional funding of \$126 million over three years to address classroom complexity; support for mental health and school pilot program, with nearly \$50 million for 80 mental health pilots; and developing strategies and plans for maintaining and assessing the need for school capital projects, at \$2 billion over three years.

Overall, while the results are strong, we work to be able to know that there is room for improvement in some areas, and we will continue to work with our students and educators. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

I will now turn it over to the Auditor General for his comments. Mr. Wylie, you have five minutes.

Mr. Wylie: Thank you, Chair. We had three outstanding recommendations relating to this ministry. The first was that the – pardon me; there were actually two recommendations to Northland school division and one directly related to the department.

Let me speak to the two related to the Northland school division first. Our first recommendation was that it develop an operational plan with short-term and long-term targets to improve student attendance, and the second one was that it would improve guidance and procedures to schools to consistently record and monitor student attendance, benchmark acceptable attendance levels, and follow up on nonattendance.

We also issued one recommendation, as I'd mentioned, to the department, and that was to exercise oversight of the division to develop and execute that operational plan and ensure that the plan identified resources needed and how those results would be measured, reported, and analyzed. We made those recommendations, Chair and committee members, because at the time there were chronic attendance issues at the Northland school division.

The timeline for those recommendations: they were originally made in 2015, we did a progress report in 2018, and the department has indicated in your briefing materials that those recommendations are ready for us to do our follow-up work. They are asserting that they have implemented the recommendations, so we're hoping to start that work this summer, Chair.

I'd like to just spend a couple of minutes and draw the committee's attention to page 61 of our December 2023 report. In there we report that there are 90 recommendations that were made by the individual school jurisdiction auditors, and that's of 76 school jurisdictions, there were 90 recommendations made. Those recommendations, really, are grouped into three areas: areas for improvement in IT, financial reporting, and internal controls. Within our mandate, Chair, we are required to report to the Legislative Assembly on the results, a summary of the results of the individual audits of the school jurisdictions. It is worth noting that the 90 recommendations were made to 32 of the 76 school jurisdictions, so that's 44 that did not receive any recommendations.

On that note, I will close and turn my time back to the committee. Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now proceed to questions from committee members, and we will begin with the Official Opposition. You will have 15 minutes.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Before I get to my questions, I just want to follow up on something the deputy minister said. You mentioned a \$33 million investment into student well-being, and then you mentioned specialized assessment. How much did you say was directed to specialized assessment?

Ms Pillipow: That was in the opening notes?

Ms Renaud: And while you're looking for that, I was just looking for: on average, like, what does that translate to, the number of assessments or tests done for students?

Ms Pillipow: Well, the school authorities would determine the way that that money is implemented and distributed across the system. I'm just checking with my team for the exact breakdown. That's in the specialized learning support grant stream. That money can be used as the school authority would deem appropriate if that student, for example, needed a learning assessment. Then with respect to student well-being, that related to the mental health supports pilots that we're conducting, so that was over the two-year period. That's where that particular stream of funding was.

Ms Renaud: Maybe you can help me with this. I know that we get – well, I get a lot of calls from families who suspect that their son or daughter might have some learning challenges or perhaps a disability but need an assessment to have that identified, and very often they're told the resources are used up for that year. I'm just wondering if you can clarify: was this addition of money into specialized assessment meant to help that? I'm assuming there's a bit of a backlog.

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question, Chair. Just so I'm clear, are you referring to a particular section in just the specialized assessments?

Ms Renaud: Just specialized assessments. You referenced \$33 million.

Ms Pillipow: Yeah. One of the things I just wanted to note with respect to the specialized assessments is that it's also related to the funding that was looking at addressing learning loss. During this reporting year we would have had an additional amount of money of \$10 million to support that increased access to specialized assessments, and the enhanced access to that specialized assessments grant would have been over two fiscal years. For the particular reporting period for this annual report, it is \$1.7 million in the 2022 fiscal year. I think that maybe the question that you're asking is with respect to how that money is translated on the ground. This was additional money, over and above their base grant, that they would receive in the school authorities, so the school authorities have the ability to be able to distribute that funding within their authority how they see fit.

8:20

Ms Renaud: Maybe just a point for clarification, and maybe the question that I'm asking is too simple. I guess I'm just looking for anything in this report that would answer the question that parents and guardians often have, that, you know, they're waiting for an assessment; they cannot afford their own. Is there anything in the investments that you talked about that would specifically increase the number of assessments available to schools?

Ms Pillipow: Thank you, Chair, for the question. I'll give a breakdown of the answer. One of the things that we did in looking at the specialized assessments needs was also looking at getting a specific grant in place with Mandel & Associates for a referral process for school authorities. So in addition to the funding that I mentioned in the previous answer and the funding that school authorities can use from their base operating, we also referred 3,320 referrals for specialized assistance that were requested by public, separate, francophone, and public charter school authorities.

I'll just break down what that was used for.

Ms Renaud: Actually, that would be okay. I'm sorry. I don't mean to cut you off, but I don't have that much time.

Ms Pillipow: Okay.

Ms Renaud: The overall number is good. So you're saying that 3,320 is the overall number of referrals for assessment.

Ms Pillipow: For that specific amount of grant, Chair, that was referred to in addition to the overall funding that's available. I do think, though, that students and parents would want to know that they were also able to have access to speech-language pathology, occupational therapy, and additional assessments outside of their learning needs.

Thank you.

Ms Renaud: I have a couple of questions around accessibility. The ministry identifies students, parents, and teachers as important partners in education, naturally, and the ministry highlighted engagement by three bodies. Of the ministry's youth council, which is made up, I understand, of 40 students, are you able to tell us how many were appointed who are able to speak on disability, accessibility, inclusion issues because of lived experience?

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question. That's a really important question, Chair. The members of the Minister's Youth Council serve their term for one year. I'm just looking to the table to see if we have names of any of the members that were able to be represented. I know that the minister meets with them on a quarterly basis and that they do fill their agendas based on the needs of the students.

Ms Renaud: So of those 40 students . . .

Ms Pillipow: If I don't have the specific names in the representation, I can provide that to you.

Ms Renaud: I don't actually need their names. I'm just asking if – you know, sometimes it's about intention, right? So if you're looking to set up an advisory committee, then you're going to set out to bring in students that have lived experience with disability. I was just looking for an answer around that. I certainly don't need all of their names.

On page 21 the ministry discusses collegiate high schools, apprenticeship programs, skilled trades, vocational education, and a related task force. The acronym is CETF. The ministry selected five recommendations to move forward with partners in crossministry work. One of those recommendations reads: "Review dual credit programming to remove financial, accessibility and awareness barriers." As you know, Alberta remains one of the only Canadian jurisdictions without accessibility legislation, so it's rare that we actually see any metrics around access. What investments have been made to improve accessibility, and which collaborative partners will assist with that accessibility?

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question, Chair. If I'm understanding correctly, you're referring to the recommendations out of the Career Education Task Force. The funding for the dual credit program would have been \$4 million for that particular school year, and then we work with our postsecondary partners on what programs they have available for accessibility. Jennifer Cassidy, my assistant deputy minister of curriculum, was with the task force, and I'm just wondering: Jennifer, could you speak a little bit more about accessibility and those recommendations that came up? I know that's a really important component.

Thank you.

Ms Cassidy: Thank you for the question. The accessibility recommendation related to the task force and dual credit in the context of the CETF recommendations: accessibility really is speaking to the availability of programming across the province and for different jurisdictions to be able to access programming. Because school authorities have local autonomy and flexibility to design and deliver programming relevant to their jurisdictions, there are various levels of accessibility of programming across school authorities. The task force really looked at that and thought very carefully about a recommendation that would support future investments and a review of dual credit to ensure that students, say, in metro areas versus rural areas across the province, north and south, east and west, have reasonable accessibility to opportunities.

Thank you.

Ms Renaud: Just in broad terms around these recommendations and the work that will obviously come out of these recommendations, I understand accessibility can mean a lot of things. I'm asking about accessibility specifically for people with disabilities. I'm wondering if in these recommendations the word "accessibility" applies to them and how that applies to them.

Ms Pillipow: Jennifer, did you have anything?

Thank you for the question, Chair. I don't know if we have anything additionally to add on how the recommendations came out in the report.

Thank you.

Ms Renaud: I'll just move on. We know that students with disabilities paid a heavy price during COVID, as all students did, in terms of mental health and wellness and skill acquisition. On page 17 of the annual report the ministry discusses investments, as you mentioned in your opening comments, a \$50 million investment into 80 mental health pilots. I don't expect them to be read out, but I'm wondering: can you point to where we might be able to get that list? That is one thing.

Out of these pilots – and, again, I don't need you to specifically point to it – can you tell the committee or explain to the committee, as you made decisions on what pilots would proceed, how you were encouraging accessibility and inclusion for disabled students through these 80 mental health pilots? Were there specifically any kind of decisions made around investing money in these pilots that would address specifically the needs of disabled students?

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question, Chair. I'm just going to talk a little bit about the process. When the application went out for the mental health pilots, we would have considered the applications from the school authorities themselves, and the consideration of what we get from those applications is how we would assess the framework for how those mental health pilots were awarded.

I'm hearing, Chair, that you want a specific answer around accessibility and what was considered. I know, from what my team has given me, that we had a couple of things that we considered with looking at some of the needs in our First Nations communities. In addition to the 79 pilot projects, that had just over \$46 million, we also provided funding for Alexander First Nation. In addition, we also had individual pilot projects, that could be ranging anywhere from \$8,000 to just over \$2 million . . .

Ms Renaud: Sorry. Again, I'm running out of time, and I need to get through these questions. I'm sorry.

Ms Pillipow: Okay. Sure. No problem.

Ms Renaud: I appreciate that, and I don't expect you to list them all. I guess what I'm trying to ask – and I'm not doing a good job of asking – is that, you know, as you make these financial decisions about where to invest, you're likely looking at: how can we invest to ensure Indigenous students have what they need or students that are refugees from the Ukraine? I'm looking for something similar for students with disabilities. I'm getting the sense that that wasn't sort of one of the criteria, and if it was, I'm happy to be corrected.

I'm going to move on to curriculum. On pages 18 and 19 the ministry notes that \$96 million was spent on developing and implementing curriculum. Would the ministry provide a detailed breakdown of how those funds, those \$96 million, were spent?

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question, Chair. Just to put the answer on the list, you can find those pilots online, if you would like to look at those, on alberta.ca.

The transparency of the reporting of our curriculum funding is important. We have a distribution of that funding between what goes to the school authorities and what is distributed between the department.

I'm just going to ask my ADM of curriculum to break down the funding between the two streams. If you wouldn't mind, Jennifer.

Ms Cassidy: Thank you for the question. In the '22-23 year curriculum implementation funding was supported with investments of \$48 million overall. There were grants of \$14 million directly to school authorities, at a rate of \$800 per teacher who was implementing curriculum, to support professional learning opportunities. There were also grants paid directly to school authorities in the amount of \$16.6 million to support learning and teaching resources. That was paid at a rate of \$45 per student to support over 369,000 students participating in the implementation of new curriculum. The department also invested over \$10 million in learning and teaching resource supports that were made available provincially. We procured and licensed resources, made that information available so that all school authorities had opportunity to engage with those resources.

Classroom piloting was also taking place during the '22-23 school year for K to 6 science, French first language arts and literature, and French immersion language arts and literature. The piloting teachers that participated in that process were also supported with nearly \$600,000 in funding to provide release time to participate in professional learning opportunities as well.

8:30

Ms Renaud: What are the ministry targets and expected outcomes for the new curriculum?

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question, Chair. When we look at the targets, we also look at how we assess children coming out of the curriculum. One of the things that we look at for curriculum – and, Jennifer, if you'd like to step in, please let me know. I would just like to talk about the way that the supports are outlined in supporting both the resource side and then how the teachers teach the particular areas during the pilot process.

Ms Renaud: Sorry. These are related to the targets and outcomes of the new curriculum?

Ms Pillipow: Jennifer, did you want to speak to the targets and outcomes on the curriculum in general?

The Chair: Members, make it kind of relevant to the report.

Ms Pillipow: I apologize.

Ms Renaud: Yup. Pages 18 and 19. What my question is: I'm asking about the ministry targets and expected outcomes specifically for the new curriculum.

Ms Pillipow: Chair, I'm just going to refer that to my ADM of curriculum, please. Thank you.

Ms Cassidy: Thank you for the question. Related to the implementation of new curriculum, there was a substantive focus on ensuring that curriculum had a strong knowledge base that focused on numeracy and literacy outcomes. As new curriculum is implemented, we would wholly expect to see, as Deputy Minister Pillipow mentioned, improvements in our assessment outcomes related to new curriculum. As new curriculum is implemented, it does take a number of years as well, then, for students to both move through the learning of new curriculum and to be assessed

appropriately against it. The implementation component parts for numeracy and literacy in the K to 6 spaces are really about building strong foundations for students.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now proceed to questions from the government side. You also have 15 minutes.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Chair, through you to the deputy minister, I want to start off by thanking the department for being here today. The work of Alberta Education is essential to ensuring the success of Alberta students, who represent the next generation of Alberta's workforce and society. Under key objective 1.2, page 21, of the annual report it mentions that collaboration that took place between Education and the Ministry of Advanced Education, postsecondary institutions, and industry associations to facilitate student learning opportunities in apprenticeship, skilled trades, and vocational education. Can you please explain in greater detail what this collaboration looked like?

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question, Chair. Education supported the establishment of collegiate schools by hosting information webinars for school authorities and postsecondary institutions. We also provided \$550,000 to support the completion of 11 business case applications for collegiate schools. Just for information, collegiate schools can be public, separate, francophone, charter, or independent private schools. The partnership with postsecondary institutions, collegiate schools, and those specific bodies will offer that specific type of programming in a particular subject or field. Collegiate schools also bring students together.

The application process that began in the '22-23 fiscal year resulted in 11 collegiate schools approved, supporting approximately 18,000 students over the next three years. We will see 12 of those schools opened over the next two fiscal years after this reporting period. There will be 12 schools that are looking at 30 different pathways into postsecondary education. Some of those partners include Northern Lakes College, Olds College, SAIT, Bow Valley, Lethbridge, Red Deer Polytechnic. We also supported the option of CTF programming for grades 5 to 9 students, which provides flexible interdisciplinary learning and allows students to explore interest, passions, and career possibilities.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you.

Chair, through you to the deputy minister, can the department explain the criteria that must be met to receive the funding and why this funding is necessary?

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question, Chair. The criteria that is used for the assessment of – sorry. The inaugural intake was a two-step application process. This one was done by applicants submitting what we call an initial proof of concept. That had to be done by a deadline in January, and if they were successful, then they went to a second process with a business case. Applicants were eligible to receive a \$50,000 conditional grant if their initial proof of concept was successful, and then those funds were used to incur the cost of the business case and then allowed those school authorities to be able to hire subject matter experts.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you.

Chair, through you, I'd like to ask another question. I'd like to direct the department's attention to page 20 of the annual report. In fall of 2022 the ministry provided \$12.3 million in additional funding to support school authorities to offer language, social, and educational supports to help Ukrainian students acclimate to Alberta's education system. Of course, as the parliamentary

secretary for settlement services and Ukrainian evacuees I was pleased to join the Premier and Minister LaGrange at the announcement. Page 20 mentions that

school authorities also have access to a supplemental enrolment growth grant to support schools that have Ukrainian students enrolled

and that

additional funding of \$2.9 million was provided to school authorities in March 2023 to support students who enrolled in the education system in the middle of the school year for total support of \$15.2 million

in the 2022-2023 fiscal year. How are these funds used to support Ukrainian students, particularly with challenges around ELL, and were there any metrics tracking the performance and acclimation of new Ukrainian students in Alberta in 2022-2023?

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question, Chair. Alberta's government and Education were very proud to continue supporting education evacuees who had fled from Ukraine. It was also important that they felt welcomed in our schools. A rate, similar to the refugee grant, of \$5,500 was allocated for Ukrainian students, and those students were provided with additional language, social, and additional supports within their educational supports within their school learning environment. We also contributed \$12.3 million in additional supports for those students.

In addition, I'll just give you a little bit of data on how many students were funded. There were just over 2,232 students that were funded and coded. Then, additionally, we had another tranche, unfortunately, of evacuees that came to Alberta, so we had just over another 1,000 students arriving after October. We do encourage school authorities to work with their community partners and then report in their annual reporting on their accountability and responsibility on how those funds are used.

Thank you for the question.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you.

Just another question through you, Chair. This government has demonstrated its commitment to ensuring that students are in the best positions possible to succeed academically. One part of this is working to ensure that no student goes hungry. I am glad to see on page 59 of the report under key objective 4.1 that a total of \$17 million was allocated to the school nutrition program for the 2022-2023 school year, which enabled more than 45,000 students across Alberta to receive a delicious daily nutritious meal. Can the department please share how this funding was distributed across the province and how eligibility and needs were determined for this program?

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question, Chair. The funds are distributed across Alberta depending on the weighted moving average enrolment of each school authority and by the socioeconomic status categories determined by each area using the 2016 federal census data. The SES, as we affectionately call it in Education, is calculated using the StatsCan data that looks at the parents' education, lone parent if they're a lone-parent household, if they have home ownership, average income, and then as well looking at postsecondary education options. I can provide more detail on the breakdown. I think that you would see a range of about \$150,000 to \$50,000 coming across to each of the school authorities to support them with this important program for school nutrition.

Thank you for the question.

8:40

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you very much.

Chair, I'd like to cede my time to my colleague MLA Lovely.

Ms Lovely: Thank you so much, hon. member.

Mr. Chair, through you to the ministry. One of the important initiatives undertaken by the ministry is the development and implementation of the provincial kindergarten to grade 12 curriculum, which provides the foundation for all students to achieve provincial student learning outcomes. On page 18 it mentions that \$48 million was invested in renewing the K to 12 curriculum in 2022-23. Can the department expand on what renewing the K to 12 curriculum entails and what this process looks like in 2022-23?

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question, Chair. Curriculum renewal involves numerous phases. We would start with research and drafting on all subjects throughout the year. We have a very experienced curriculum team. Then, of course, an important part of the process is stakeholder engagement and review. That involves piloting or validation of the new draft curriculum and then implementation of the finalized curriculum.

In September 2022 school authorities implemented the kindergarten to grade 6 physical education and wellness and kindergarten to grade 3 English language arts and literature and mathematics curriculum. As part of that process we also had school authorities having the option to pilot some new curriculum in the subjects of science, French first language and literature. We saw 36 school authorities and 519 teachers, which touched upon approximately just over 7,700 students, that participated in some of that new curriculum piloting. Then we take the feedback from that piloting process through engagement with our teacher partners and our partners in the school authorities, and then following that feedback, the finalized curriculum is then released in March of the year to be able to fully implement in the next school year.

Thank you for the question.

Ms Lovely: Thank you so much.

Through the chair, page 19 of the annual report states that "in 2022-23, \$48 million was invested in teacher professional learning and learning and teaching resources and an additional \$47 million will be invested in 2023-24." How is this \$48 million used to support teachers in implementing the new curriculum in '22-23 as outlined under key objective 3.1 listed on page 41 of the report, which is to "identify potential supports, such as professional learning as well as learning and teaching resources, that may be needed, and options for providing these supports to school authorities, to successfully implement new curriculum"?

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question, Chair. I'll just give a breakdown of that funding. Fourteen point six million was allocated to support professional learning opportunities for teachers implementing new curriculum. That was based on a rate of \$800 per teacher for over 18,300 teachers. Sixteen point six million was allocated to purchase learning and teacher resources for the new curriculum. That was based on a rate of \$45 per student, with over 369,000 students. Sixteen point eight million was retained by the department for a range of other implementation supports. This includes learning and teaching resources that are aligned with the curriculum.

To support teachers in implementing the new curriculum, we looked at bridging resources to assist with transitioning from the current curriculum to the new, videos and support documents with an overview and orientation to the new curriculum, and then, of course, the new functionality in new.LearnAlberta.ca, the online digital platform to support teacher planning and learning. This particular platform gives teachers, parents, and students access to customized implementation and supports. There are over 14,000

digitized resources available in both French and English to support the launch of this curriculum, and we continue to renew the resources throughout the year.

Thank you for the question, Chair.

Ms Lovely: Thank you so much for the answer.

Through the chair to you, a key priority of this government is reducing unnecessary red tape. Pages 62 and 63 of the annual report highlight the work done in 2022-23 to achieve key objective 4.4. Can the ministry expand further on what was done in the past fiscal year to “reduce red tape and increase assurance for parents, schools, and operators by streamlining financial and governance practices for private schools and private early [learning school] operators”?

In '22-23 the ministry reduced 757 regulatory requirements. How did the ministry ensure that cutting this much red tape didn't have a negative impact on the quality of the education system?

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question, Chair. I'll just give a breakdown first on what was done on the red tape. In the fiscal year for '22-23 the Education Act was amended to enable the regulatory changes for the early childhood services and accredited funding for private schools. This enhanced accountability, increased transparency, and reduced red tape. The enhanced regulations also gave clear accountabilities such as the requirement for information disclosure, reporting of public funding, and compensation limits for senior management. These regulations reduce the amount of time that was previously spent analyzing financial information and providing greater accountability for public funds.

The reporting requirements were also simplified for early childhood operators. If they received \$250,000 or less in grants, they were exempt from the requirements for financial governance matters, compensation information, and records and compliance. Financial templates were amended to eliminate reporting that's not required and also to simplify some of the consolidated reporting that's required, and the regulations set standards for financial and governance policies of privately funded schools and private ECS operators, that also avoided some costly time-consuming investigations.

With respect to the second question, Chair, we reduced 757 regulatory requirements. We focused on efficiency. We didn't compromise on the education system quality. These reductions, which were lauded by our school authorities, relied on efficiency, looking at strategic areas. We looked at continuous monitoring by the branch teams, safeguarding against any unintended consequences, and maintaining system integrity. The reduction strategy primarily targeted duplication and process simplifications. That ensured the essential information flow from stakeholders remained robust without duplication and that we were able to provide a more agile reporting system.

Thank you for the question, Chair.

Ms Lovely: Through the chair, I see on page 42 of the report that Alberta Education continues to support the growth and development of the teaching workforce through several teacher certificate and bursary programs as well as agreements with education partners. One of the programs listed is the northern student bursary program. Can you tell us about that?

Ms Pillipow: I'd be happy to. Thank you for the question, Chair. In 2009, to support the attraction and retention of certificated teachers in northern Alberta, we developed the northern student teacher bursary program. We partnered with the Northern Alberta Development Council under Jobs, Economy and Trade.

Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Deputy Minister.

We will now proceed to questions from the Official Opposition. In this rotation you have 10 minutes.

Mr. Haji: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you for the preparatory work that has gone into this. I appreciate it. In the opening remarks the ministry projected a 2 per cent enrolment increase but ended up having a 3.3 increase, which kind of necessitated a \$21 million investment in the new supplemental enrolment growth during the reporting period. My question, through the chair, is that you must have used a method to come up with the \$21 million that was to support an anticipated almost close to 10,000 students. Can the ministry help this committee with the methodology that informed this \$21 million? What method have you used to come up with the amount of money needed for the growth?

Ms Pillipow: Sure. Thank you for the question, Chair. There are two processes when we prepare for our budget in the spring. We seek feedback from our school authorities using their projected forecasts for enrolment, and those numbers inform based on using data on population growth and forecasted enrolments. We also work – and specifically to the question on how the calculation was done for the supplementary enrolment growth, I was really glad you asked that question because that's the purpose of that grant. We get the frozen count of students from our school authorities by the end of September, so once those students have joined in our school system, and that . . .

Mr. Haji: Is it basically per capita for the most part?

Ms Pillipow: I'm sorry, Chair, I was – if I would just finish my answer, I can help you.

The frozen count is on the actual students that were funded for this in the supplementary enrolment growth, and that grant provides additional per-student funding for that school authority growth that is greater than the set thresholds, and that . . .

Mr. Haji: Yeah. Chair, I want a specific answer, just to make use of the time, whether it is per capita or in a granting format. I wanted to understand that.

Ms Pillipow: It's per capita, Chair. Thank you.

8:50

Mr. Haji: Thank you.

If it's in the form of per capita – the ministry also supported more than 4,000 students from Ukraine with about \$15.2 million additional funding. This includes for language, social, and educational support. With your help what I'm seeking is to understand why we have allocated \$5 million for almost 10,000 students and why we have allocated more than \$15 million for 4,000 students. I want to understand the method behind it. If it is per capita, why this disparity?

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question, Chair. Just for clarification, are you referring to the funding that was specifically for the Ukrainian evacuees?

Mr. Haji: Yeah.

Ms Pillipow: Thank you.

Chair, I'm just wondering if my SFO, Jeff Willan, can respond to that question. Thank you.

Mr. Willan: Sure. Thank you for the question. To understand the question, you're asking if there's a different rate between supplemental

enrolment growth funding that was provided for unexpected student enrolment growth and the general population. That was funded through the supplemental enrolment growth, which was roughly \$20 million in the '22-23 year.

With respect to the 4,000 Ukrainian evacuees we used a rate that was similar to what we provide for refugee students, which is \$5,500 per student, so that equates to more additional dollars for those types of students that came in under that situation. As we know, those students required additional services such as EAL, other social programs with respect to adapting to a new country, coming from a situation that obviously was very traumatic for those individuals that were forced to evacuate their country. Again, in summary, we provided \$5,500 per student from the Ukraine for up to the 4,000 students, and the supplemental enrolment grant funding was based on growth over a threshold, which was either funded at \$1,500 per student or at \$3,000.

Mr. Haji: Yeah. Thank you.

So you have used some complexity factors that were incorporated with that. That makes the difference.

Mr. Willan: Correct.

Mr. Haji: Okay. Thank you.

In the 2020-2021 school year the ministry initiated a new literacy and numeracy program, K to 3, as you alluded to in your opening remarks, that focused on learning gaps among early learners. Participating school authorities administered a screening test to help identify students that could benefit from additional support. My question is that the annual report notes that these assessments provide information to teachers, to parents, to school authorities, and the department. So how many schools or students in the 2020-2021 school year participated in this assessment?

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question, Chair. I'm just going to get the data here if you don't mind. The funding for the '21-22 school year was \$45 million, that was provided to school authorities for that targeted programming. That supported 72,000 students from grades 1 to 3 and 2 to 3. This is specific to learning disruption.

Just so I'm clear, Chair, you're asking about the number of students that were participating in the assessments?

Mr. Haji: Whatever unit you have. If you have a number of students or schools or authorities.

Ms Pillipow: Okay. I'm just checking with the table, Chair, for one second on the number of student assessments.

Mr. Haji: I just couldn't find it in the report, so that's why I'm asking.

Ms Pillipow: So 72,000 students from grades 1 to 3 and grades 2 to 3 and 73 public school authorities and 46 private school authorities, with a per-student allocation of \$490, participated.

Mr. Haji: The follow-up question I have. This is an important metric which will help in terms of decision-making. I'm wondering why this metric is not used in your performance metrics in the report.

Ms Pillipow: With respect to the metrics that we form for our business plan and our annual report?

Mr. Haji: Both. Yeah.

Ms Pillipow: These particular metrics are used to assess the learning disruption during a particular point in time, during COVID for the learning disruption. And then we do assessments, of which we introduced new learning assessments during this year.

I'm just wondering. Meghann Eagle, who's responsible for assessments: do you want to talk a little bit about the performance metrics related to the assessments?

Mr. Haji: We have used \$45 million, about 72,000 students participated. It's an assessment tool that I expect will inform in terms of decision-making, whether it is quality of education or any other decisions, but it's not shared with Albertans through either the business plan or the annual report as a metric.

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question, Chair. I'm just going to have to consult with my team here on that particular one because I don't know if we have a metric that we can refer to. Is there anything that you want to add, to the table?

Chair, is it okay if my ADM starts?

The Chair: Yes.

Ms Pillipow: Thank you.

Ms Eagle: Thank you for the question. Thank you, Deputy. In terms of the learning disruption funding we respect the autonomy of school authorities to determine the needs that their students require. We've provided this funding to support 70,000 students in '22-23, and the school authorities determine the best use of those funds to support those students in need. They have indicated to us that some of those supports are one-on-one supports. They've brought in some programming in literacy and numeracy.

Mr. Haji: My question is on the metric. My question is on assessment tools that have been used and the finding of those assessments and why that metric is not used.

Ms Pillipow: Chair, thank you for the question. Just a little bit of information that I wanted to add on the type of measurements that we look at for students. The student outcome measures that we use: we use four different measures. We look at the high school completion rate – that would also help us understand how the numbers that I used on those assessments and those kids are interacting with the completion rate – the transition rate for high school students, the diploma examination participation rate, and then, as well, the dropout rate. Then we use our results from our provincial achievement tests, which help us understand how those students who are participating in that assessment process . . .

Mr. Haji: Yeah. I get that and that you have that in your report. I'm not asking that. What I'm asking is that the K to 3 assessment tools that have been introduced and that you have applied to 72,000 students: that is not available in your reports as a metric in terms of what we are finding out about those assessments.

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question, Chair. We report on the outcome of our provincial achievement tests as well as the diploma exams, which all lead into those types of assessments that those kids undertake during that process. So that is the end of the result, if you will, of those assessments, and those results are in the acronym AERRs, which is outside this particular fiscal period for the reporting that you are referring to in this particular annual report year.

Thank you for the question, Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Deputy Minister.

We will now move over to the government side for 10 minutes. MLA Chantelle de Jonge.

Ms de Jonge: Thank you, Chair. Appreciate it. Thank you to the department for being here today. Just a few questions here on Alberta's choice in education model. We have a very successful history here in the province of strengthening choice in our education system. It's the reason why a lot of people do come to Alberta, and we've seen this especially under this UCP government. School choice is, you know, part of what makes our education system strong and allows parents to select the path that they feel will best help their child succeed and reach their full potential.

I see on page 60 of the annual report that in 2022-23 Alberta Education allocated \$25 million for operating funds and \$47 million in capital investment over three years to support charter school expansion and collegiate programs. Can the department please provide a detailed update on what was achieved through this funding and what results Albertans would have seen last year?

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question, Chair. As the government continues to invest in choice in education, the funding from these particular areas the question refers to went towards leases to support new schools and the expansion of the charter campus concept. As part of Budget '22 the Alberta at work initiative \$25 million in operating support and \$47 million in capital investment were provided to support the collegiate programs and charter school expansions over the 2022-23 fiscal years, ending in the '24-25 fiscal years, over three years. For collegiate schools close to \$41.5 million was provided in capital investment, and almost \$7 million in operating support will be used to support 12 collegiate schools approved to operate across the province, located in both urban and rural areas. Five of those schools will be opening outside of this reporting year, and seven will also be opening outside of this reporting year.

9:00

For charter schools, operating funding is used to support leases and facility improvements so existing charter schools can grow and new charter schools have the spaces they need to deliver educational services to students. The capital funding is being used to support charter school expansions and for items like: furniture, equipment and leasehold improvements, windows, flooring, et cetera. That makes it the best spaces in learning for those children.

Thank you for the question, Chair.

Ms de Jonge: Thank you. Sounds like this funding was really supporting the opportunity for more career-oriented programming, so if there's anything else you wanted to add on how this funding is supporting those opportunities, you can.

Also, on page 14 of the annual report, it states that in 2022-23 the ministry "established the Career Education Task Force (CETF) to review career education in Alberta." Can the department provide an overview of the recommendations and the provincial framework that was presented by that task force?

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question, Chair. Alberta Education did convene the Career Education Task Force in September of 2022 to review career education in Alberta and provide recommendations and a provincial framework to guide future career education programming. The recommendations from the task force included – we moved forward – increase ease of access to off-campus education for all students regardless of where they attend school; review dual-credit programming to remove financial, accessibility

and awareness barriers; develop and fund teacher training opportunities for career and technology studies and the career and technology foundations programs; develop and promote career education scholarships for students; enhance how career education programming is measured and evaluated.

In addition, Alberta Education continues to collaborate with Advanced Education and the postsecondary institutions within that system as well as industry associations, and we work to facilitate student learning opportunities in apprenticeship, skilled trades, and vocational education. The results of this work can be seen in some of the collegiate schools that were produced.

Thank you for the question, Chair.

Ms de Jonge: Through the chair, thank you.

Switching now to modular classrooms. Certainly, these offer many schools in the province a short-term solution to ease enrolment pressures. I see on page 61 that the report states in the 2022 capital plan that there was "\$118 million over . . . three years for the Modular Classroom Program, which provides modular classrooms to address student capacity requirements." Can the department, through the chair, please provide an update on how many modular classrooms were funded in '22-23, and how does the department determine where these modular classrooms are placed?

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question, Chair. In Budget '21 there was an additional \$59.5 million provided in Education's capital targets to supplement the \$25 million that was already identified, for a total of \$84.5 million for modulars. In addition in Budget '22 over this reporting period, due to the COVID market conditions, we had some supply chain constraints that impacted the production of units approved and made in '20-21. As such, the regular program did not occur, and the focus of the program was to continue manufacturing and delivering the large number of units that were approved in the previous budget year, Budget '21. The modular classroom program funding was then reprofiled to the capital maintenance and renewal program.

The market conditions proved to be challenging to produce new modular units in '22-23. As such, the focus for that cycle was the optimization of the current modular inventory, including the rightsizing of schools through the relocation of underutilized units and demolition of units that were past their life cycle. In summary, the program approved 19 units, relocated 52 units, and demolished 48 aging units.

With respect to the question, Chair, on how we would determine where modulars are placed, the cycle begins each fall when Education submits input from the school authorities inviting them to give us their requests and then staff analyze and provide a list of recommendations to the minister. As part of that review process we complete an in-depth analysis of each of the modular classroom submissions. We look at four categories: health and safety, enrolment growth, program requirements, and evergreening. Within those modular programs in health and safety, we're making sure that students are prioritized at the first and foremost for health and safety, and then we look at the other categories around enrolment, program requirements, and evergreening.

Thank you for the question, Chair.

Ms de Jonge: Thank you. Now, continuing on with what we were chatting about earlier with career education, key objective 1.2 on page 21 of the annual report talks about increasing "opportunities for hands-on learning experiences through collegiate high schools, apprenticeship programs and vocational education." My constituency of Chestermere-Strathmore is home to a lot of skilled tradespeople, so I'm pleased to see that the ministry has taken a

number of steps in 2022-23 to support career education initiatives in schools.

In addition to the Career Education Task Force that you referenced earlier, there are also a number of other career development programming initiatives that were supported. Can the department, through the chair, please provide an overview of CTF programs for students in grades 5 through 9 and how that programming helped address key objective 1.2?

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question, Chair. Career and technology foundations, which we affectionately refer to as CTF, is a provincially authorized optional curriculum for students in grades 5 to 9. This enables schools and teachers to design unique career development programming to meet students' interests and then also their needs while they're leveraging some of the community resources. The students have a really unique opportunity. They plan, design, create, and implement solutions for relevant, real-life problems. They engage in hands-on challenges that help develop work skills, practical knowledge, and shape their career interests and identity.

CTF is a student-focused program, and it supports interdisciplinary learning that fosters the development of literacy and numeracy skills as well as competencies like communication, collaboration, and problem solving as well as social, interpersonal, and life skills. An example of a CTF challenge is the hands-on popping of the hood, where students identify and practice vehicle care basics, which are associated with automotive service technician programs. The CTF also provides a foundation for students that are transitioning into that career and technology studies in grades 10 through 12.

Thank you for the question, Chair.

Ms de Jonge: Through the chair, thank you for the answer.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now move to the Official Opposition for another 10-minute block. MLA Sharif Haji.

Mr. Haji: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yeah. My question is under key objective 2.4; the metric 2(a) is to measure the "high school completion of self-identified First Nations, Métis and Inuit students." The target was achieved; 68 per cent was the target, which was achieved the prior year. Indigenous students continue to lag behind compared to the general public. Through the chair, I'm wondering why the department did not set a new target to measure progress if a target of 68 per cent of completion was achieved the prior year, knowing that we have 88 per cent for the general public. I am wondering why we did not set a new target that we can measure the progress on?

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for that question. I think this is a really important question, Chair. One of the things that we wanted to do in understanding the supports that are provided to First Nations students and look at that achievement gap in education: we looked at how would they also transition out of high school. We wanted to do a little bit more research with Grant MacEwan. We also wanted to work with our First Nations school authorities to really understand what that dropout rate is, so we spent some time looking at what some of the temporary interruptions might be with our school authorities for students' education and then some of the self-identified First Nations and Métis students who don't complete high school and that ECS to grade 12 system.

We also worked to understand and get a little bit more research from our First Nations school authorities on what some of those things might be preventing them from completion. We also focused on looking at some needs for some of the specialized learning

grants, which, Chair, the member asked about earlier. Those grants, to get to your question, look at facilitating the provision of specialized supports and services. That will help that student with some specialized learning supports to help get them to completion and then looking at increasing opportunities for those students to receive co-ordinated . . .

9:10

Mr. Haji: My question is simply that we had a target of 68 per cent for Indigenous students; in the general public we have a target of 88. We have already achieved the 68. Why are we not setting a new target? I understand the complexities, but what I'm saying is that if you have already achieved your target, why don't you set a new target so that you can see your progress?

The Chair: Member, you mean that there was no target in the '22-23 report?

Mr. Haji: The report sounds like the target was achieved last year, and it is good. There is already 20 per cent between the general high school students and Indigenous populations.

Ms Pillipow: Thank you. Thank you, Chair, for the question. Just so I'm clear, I'm looking at the five-year end rate for students. It was 73.1 per cent in our annual report for 2017-2018. You're asking why we didn't set a new rate? So I'm clear.

Mr. Haji: Yeah.

Ms Pillipow: We look at the data over a series of this reporting period, and then we would recalculate using the formulas that we have from our Treasury Board and Finance colleagues.

I'm just going to check with my finance team. Is there any more technical advice that you would provide on the performance metric and why we wouldn't change it? Chair, I will ask SFO Jeff Willan to just give a bit more detail on the performance metric.

Thank you.

Mr. Haji: Will you be able to table that to the committee?

Mr. Willan: We can provide that in writing after if you wish.

Mr. Haji: Thank you.

Chair, I'll cede the rest of my time to the member.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you very much. I want to talk about federal funding for educational authorities. Page 86 of the budget breaks down federal revenue, stating that about \$140 million was realized from the federal government. Can the deputy minister tell the committee how this money is distributed? By that I mean: does the federal government provide that directly to the school boards, or does it give it to the province which then allocates it to the school boards?

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question, Chair. The funding that comes to the school authorities from the federal government is usually done in partnership when we look at what we call OLEP funding and funding that goes through for language. I'm just going to ask my finance team to give a little bit more detail on the distribution of that funding.

Mr. Willan: Yeah. The answer to the question, Chair, is that the majority of the dollars that come from the federal government go directly to school divisions, with the exception of the federal French dollars. Those dollars do come through the province and then are distributed out to school divisions.

Mr. Schmidt: Oh, okay. So am I right in understanding – because there is a tranche of money, and most of that money is for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students. The federal government gives that directly to the school boards. Is that correct?

Ms Pillipow: Thank you, Chair. Yes. That's correct.

Mr. Schmidt: Okay. Can you tell me how those agreements are arrived at? Like, does the school board enter into some kind of negotiation with the federal government directly? How is it determined how much each school board gets from the federal government?

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question, Chair. The First Nations School Authority would interact directly with the federal government on the funding for their school authority, and then we would work with them on any requirements under our First Nations agreements. This is called . . .

Mr. Schmidt: Right. Like, the First Nations school authorities: I understand there's a federal responsibility to fund those. For example, Edmonton public school board got about \$3 million from the federal government. Did the Edmonton public school board negotiate directly with the federal government to get that money?

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question. As an example, a school authority such as Edmonton public would work directly with the federal government on an education service agreement that does not involve the department.

Mr. Schmidt: Okay. Did the department in 2022-23 identify any problems with the way the school authorities come to those agreements with the federal government?

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question, Chair. I'm just clarifying what you mean by "identify any problems" as we're not involved in the engagement of the education service agreements.

Mr. Schmidt: Okay. So you don't supervise those in any way. Like, the department obviously reviews how the school boards do their work, broadly speaking. Some of that money is funded from the federal government, which is developed in agreements that the school boards apparently develop independently with the federal government without provincial oversight. Is there any reason for the province to suspect that there's anything wrong, untoward, disadvantageous to Alberta students going on with the arrangement that was in place in 2022-23?

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question, Chair. We do have standards that are in place to oversee the funding.

I'm just going to ask, Chair, if SFO Jeff Willan can speak in a little bit more detail about those standards. Thank you.

Mr. Willan: Sure. Yeah. Thanks for the question, Chair. Yes. There are standards that the Alberta government has addressed with school authorities when they're entering into education service agreements with First Nations. Some of those standards would be, like, to put students at the centre of the decision-making process, foster collaboration and co-ordination and a sense of shared responsibility among education partners, and set consistent minimum standards for the topics that must be addressed. There are a number of standards within the language, and we would expect that every educational service agreement that a provincial school authority enters into with a First Nation for the provision of services for First Nation students coming off a reserve to access provincial

programming must be within that. However, Alberta Education or the government of Alberta is not party to that agreement.

Mr. Schmidt: Fair enough. But when you establish standards for those agreements, do you monitor the compliance with the standards at all?

Mr. Willan: At this point we're not – I don't recall us monitoring directly. We rely on the school divisions to monitor their own results.

Mr. Schmidt: Is it fair to say, then, that there were no issues with school boards complying with the standards that the provincial government set out for getting federal funds for school boards?

Mr. Willan: The expectation is that school divisions do follow the standards that are set out, at a minimum, when they enter into those agreements and then the details of those agreements, of course, at the level between the school division and the First Nation with respect to the details. But there is an expectation that those standards are followed. Correct.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you very much.

Accountability, then. Who holds school boards accountable for how federal government money is spent? Is it the province, or is it the federal government?

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question, Chair. With respect, are you referring to the education service agreements that we have with the First Nations school authorities?

Mr. Schmidt: A general question, so federal funding for First Nations students for language instruction, all federal funding.

Ms Pillipow: The First Nations school authorities would be responsible for reporting on the outcomes of the funding that they receive through those agreements. The funding that we provide . . . [Ms Pillipow's speaking time expired]

Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Deputy Minister.

We will now move to the government members for another 10-minute block. It's MLA McDougall.

Mr. McDougall: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Since we're on the conversation of financing for First Nation, Métis, and other students, I was wondering if you could elaborate. We talked a bit about the percentage participation rate for First Nations, Métis, and others to complete high school. I'm wondering if you can elaborate a little bit on, you know: what exactly is viewed as being the specific barriers to high school success that have been identified for the First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students? What is it that we're dealing with?

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question, Chair. Sorry. Just one second. My apologies.

The requirements that we have from Treasury Board and Finance for all ministries were followed by looking at at least one performance measure with the last actual result and a three-year target under each performance outcome. When we look at the systemic target-setting methods that were followed with respect to high school completion – and this would get to the previous member's question as well – we set targets that are higher than the last actual. Then the last actual results for the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit high school completion rate: when the target of 68.5 was set, it was also set at 68.0. We use, basing on the three-year targets,

an analysis of historical performance measure results, so we use five or more years of data to assess that particular measure. Then we use statistical analysis to be able to set the improvement targets.

9:20

Mr. McDougall: The difference between the targets that we have been setting for First Nations and Métis and Inuit and the rest of the general school population: there's obviously a difference there. Specifically, you know, again, what are the issues, the barriers that we see there that we're trying to address in trying to close that gap? Can you just give for Education: what are the barriers that we're trying to address?

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question, Chair. One of the things that I was referring to in the previous answer was looking at an agreement that the Department of Education has with MacEwan University. We're doing some research on the pathways to support these students. One of the important things is that we looked at the concerns that were expressed by the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit education partners. The particular barriers that we've seen so far through this research reveal that students and their parents and their guardians have little knowledge about the academic courses or the pathways, on how that particular course could support them.

Course pathways are also decided by teachers and administration. The research is showing that it would be advantageous to have a bit more interaction between those students and the parents and guardians and that some of those students might not feel comfortable talking to their teachers, so looking at creating a more open environment. We have some recommendations from some of the research as well looking at how we can host some more in-person engagement sessions, looking more in the community, and also hiring First Nations, Métis, and Inuit liaison workers who can help support and bridge some of those conversations for those students.

I think that's what I would add for the last part of the question, Chair. Thank you.

Mr. McDougall: Given that we've identified some of these issues, I would, I guess, you know, ask if part of the reason why we're getting improvement here is because some of these actions that you've taken are leading to some success. I'm just wondering: what are those specific actions that you did in the fiscal year that might have aided in that success, and what are the metrics that you're using to measure those specific actions?

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question, Chair. I wanted to just readdress looking at the systemic education gap and looking at our Alberta Education assurance measures for the assurance framework, including the three-year and five-year high school completion rates, the dropout rates, and the transition rates. Our assurance measures from the 2010-11 school year: we've remained constant, and we think that there's a good comparison of analysis. If we look at the gap reduction that we've seen, from a three-year high school completion we've narrowed that gap by 8.2 per cent. In the five-year high school completion we've narrowed the gap by 12.3.

To address some of those barriers, we've also looked at some specific programming and dollars. The specialized learning supports grant, which I referred to earlier, really helps provide First Nations students with some provision of specialized supports by offering them a customized learning support plan that can meet the needs of those students while building the capacity of those First Nations schools to be culturally competent and create that safe space, that specialized learning environment for the First Nations students.

We also have increased opportunities for First Nations students to receive co-ordinated education supports and services that are responsive to their needs. We provided \$550,000 in funding to support the development of new framework agreements with interested First Nation school authorities, and that enables the department to share guidance and advice and provide financial support to meet local needs. Then we projected to provide \$3.5 million in planning, looking at additional funding that we can provide and consulting with communities on how we could help bridge some classrooms to communities. That's some future work that we are looking at in that reporting year. The effectiveness of all of those things does affect our high school completion rate and then looking at how we're narrowing the gap.

Thank you for the question, Chair.

Mr. McDougall: Thank you.

Page 59 in the annual report outlines the specialized learning supports that are available to students across the province. In February 2023 a \$126 million, three-year investment was announced to address classroom complexity. I've been hearing an awful lot from parents and teachers about some of the challenges of increasing costs in my community, particularly with students with greater diversity of needs that need to be met in the classroom. Can your department please elaborate on how this increasing complexity is affecting Alberta classrooms and how this funding was used in 2022-23 to help address these challenges?

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question, Chair. Classroom complexity is an important issue that I think we saw coming out of the various waves of COVID in the classroom. In '22-23 we provided \$1.4 billion for those specialized learning needs, and that helps address some of the complexity. To unpack complexity within that particular grant, we look at the specialized learning support grant; program unit funding; supporting those students with English as an additional language; the refugee student grant; the First Nations, Métis, Inuit grant; the socioeconomic status and geographic grant; as well as the school nutrition grant. That helps address some of those complexities for those individual students. It also helps to recognize that every child and student develops foundational competencies differently. It also provides funding for those school authorities to be able to provide that continuum of supports and services to meet the learning needs of those students.

We also have what we call multidisciplinary supports to support multidisciplinary practice between teachers, educational assistants, and other professions. The funding that goes into supporting those additional staff in the classroom helps address some of that complexity.

Thank you for the question.

Mr. McDougall: Thank you.

A key focus of this government is to ensure that for students' training they need to better understand things like savings, budgeting, spending, investing, et cetera. I see on page 19 of the annual report that Alberta Education invested \$5 million over three years to enhance student financial knowledge through grant partnerships with Canadian companies to deliver financial literacy programming for grades 3 to 12. In 2022-23 Education invested \$3.3 million in financial literacy programming. Page 19 talks about existing grant agreements with Enriched Academy and the Canadian Foundation for Economic Education that were extended for another three years for grades 4 to 12. What benefits are Alberta students seeing from these agreements? In 30 seconds.

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question, Chair. Financial literacy is a key component of the practical skills that are required for students as they move throughout their education. Some of the financial literacy programming was an important investment for Alberta Education. To break it down, in 2022 students from kindergarten to grade 12 with that investment learned a series of skills. They had opportunities to receive knowledge, training on how to manage money, budgeting.

Thank you for the question, Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Deputy Minister.

We will now move back to the Official Opposition for another 10-minute block.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I want to ask some questions around francophone education. I want to be specific and clear: I'm talking about francophone education, not French as a second language, not French immersion. So francophone education. In 2020 the Supreme Court sided with parents in British Columbia in ruling that inadequate funding from that province violated British Columbians' Charter rights to francophone education. What work did the ministry do in '22-23 to evaluate funding in Alberta for francophone education in light of this ruling? I'm curious: how much would the operation budget for francophone schools have to increase to achieve equivalency, how much would the capital budget have to increase to achieve equivalency, and how much would the transportation budget have to increase to achieve equivalency?

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question, Chair. It's important, when you're looking at cases in other jurisdictions, how we respond in Alberta. One of the things that we have spent some time doing with our francophone school authorities is to take some time to understand their needs. Specifically, we formed a capital working group to be able to understand what their specific capital needs were and where some of those challenges were. I know that we've also worked with them to understand how we can support their operational authority. They all fall under the same funding formula that we use for WMA. We created as well, in response to looking around at, basically, the conversations we've had with our francophone school authorities, a specific French language branch that is dedicated to serving and understanding the needs of the francophone school authorities.

9:30

I would have to provide a more detailed summary for the table on the breakdown of the funding. Okay. My SFO has just provided, Chair, additional information if I can submit it. We added an additional \$5 million through a francophone equivalency grant. Just to reinforce, though, that those relationships and working with our francophone school authorities is really important to understand what their needs are.

Thank you for the question, Chair.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you very much.

You know, the 2021 census, for the first time, really highlighted how many students in Alberta would be eligible for francophone education and are currently not able to get it. I mean, I appreciate that the department is working on this. It doesn't sound like you have a firm understanding or you didn't create a firm understanding in '22-23 about how much the budgets would have to increase to achieve equivalency. Did the ministry develop a timeline at all for achieving equivalency in the 2022-23 school year?

Mr. Lundy: Chair, point of order, 23(b). The member opposite is asking a line of questioning which is well outside the scope of the committee; in this case, asking for a forward-looking policy implementation as opposed to referring specifically to actions that occurred in the annual report in the '22-23 year.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Chair. If I could clarify my question, my question was specifically around whether or not a timeline for achieving equivalency for francophone education was developed in the 2022-23 fiscal year.

The Chair: I think I'm not going to find this a point of order, but I will urge all members to tie their questions closely with the report under discussion.

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question, Chair. Two things were done within this reporting period. With respect to whether or not there was a timeline established, when we set up a working group with our francophone school authorities, we established the terms of reference, which would outline the goals that we're trying to achieve within that working group. We also then provide publicly our funding manual, which outlines where the funding is provided to those school authorities. I think it's fair to say that it's an important ongoing relationship with our francophone school authorities to address their needs. That census data was an important piece of data that we looked at in that reporting period to inform budgets going forward as well as our capital working group.

Thank you for the question, Chair.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Chair.

One final question. Page 62 of the annual report indicates that the Education department facilitated funding for two francophone schools in '22-23. Can the deputy minister explain exactly what that means? Was that infrastructure funding that came from the province for those schools, or was it from some other source and Education just moved the money from one area to another?

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question, Chair. The official term that we would use for moving the money would be flow through. We would say that it would be related to the funding that we get with the federal government. It's called OLEP funding. We would work with the francophone school authorities on their needs through that funding as well as facilitate the partnership. I'm just asking my SFO if there's anything you'd like to supplement for that.

Thank you, Chair.

Mr. Willan: Sure. Just further, that process is that we work with our four francophone authorities each year with respect to any particular capital requirements they may have with respect to upcoming school construction or projects, and through that process we work with them as well as with the federal government to then make application within the official languages in education programming dollars that the federal government holds. Typically we would have applied in that year and in previous years for that funding. That would then support additional infrastructure dollars to support additional space in relation to a school project. In this case, there would have been two that would have been approved, and then dollars would have been flowed through the federal government, through the province, and then into the infrastructure project to create whether that be additional space for daycare or community space in relation to a particular school project building.

Mr. Schmidt: Right. Thank you.

Just to clarify the process. I remember that when I was Advanced Education minister, we had similar funding proposals from the federal government. The institutions would send their priorities to the province, and then the province would prioritize those and send those on to the federal government. Is that a similar process to what Education follows in providing this OLEP funding? Oh, it is?

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question, Chair. Yes, it's a similar process. The OLEP funding that is in Advanced Education is also similar in Education.

Thank you.

Mr. Haji: Okay. Thank you. The department set a target of 87 per cent of students, teachers, parents, and members of the board feeling safe. How did the department determine this target?

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question, Chair. I'm just asking my SFO to get a bit of data on the feeling safe metric. Can you refer – I'm sorry – to the exact page that you're referring to on that one, feeling safe? I don't have that one in front of me. I apologize.

Mr. Haji: It's not in front of me as well. I have the questions developed, but . . .

Ms Pillipow: Sorry. Which page in the annual report, Chair?

Chair, I'm just going to ask my SFO, Jeff Willan, if that's okay, to answer this question.

The Chair: Sure. Did you find . . .

Ms Pillipow: Yes. We have an answer. Thank you.

Mr. Willan: Yeah. I think the question is in regard to the safe and caring and healthy learning environment under outcome 4. Is that correct?

Mr. Haji: Yeah.

Mr. Willan: In '22-23 84 per cent of students, parents, teachers, and school board members agreed that schools provide a safe, caring, and healthy learning environment. The target, I believe, for that year was 87 per cent.

Mr. Haji: Yeah. How do you come up with the target . . .

Mr. Willan: Targets follow the process that is outlined from Treasury Board and Finance, where we look at the last actual as a starting point, and then we look to have an improvement over the last actual, and then there's a look back at the previous data analysis of a minimum of at least five years to show the trend with respect to that particular measure, and then targets are set for the next three years. Going back and looking at the last actual, looking for an improvement on that, and then also factoring in a five-year trend analysis is preferred, and then that's how you get your three-year target.

Mr. Haji: So during the reporting period we did not achieve the target, correct?

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question. Just so I'm clear, Chair, you're asking why the satisfaction results were lower?

Mr. Haji: Yeah. You have a target of 87, and you have achieved 84, meaning that you're behind by 3 per cent.

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question, Chair. I can answer the question. Two components during this reporting year affected the

results of this particular metric. We changed our surveying methodology; we used to do telephone surveys, and we moved to online surveys. We usually like to see a period of time, to my SFO's comment, of five years to be able to see how that data is creating an accurate reporting. We think that we had a different type of response rate. We also would see that the surveying was taking place during the omicron wave of the pandemic. We look at the conditions that the respondents are replying to when they are looking at the state of . . .

Mr. Haji: Watching the time, change of methodology is what you've just said. But, in fact, WCB claims for violent assault against the staff almost doubled during the reporting period. Why is the department not alarmed by this?

Ms Pillipow: Are you referring to a specific section in the annual report on the WCB claims? Thank you for the question, Chair.

Mr. Haji: No. But this is – okay. The supplementary information that you provided in the report shows that students' sense of belonging has worsened, from 84 to 81. In fact, the satisfaction of the quality within the schools has gone down from 85 to 79, and satisfaction with the space and the quality of the space has also gone down.

The Chair: Thank you, Member.

We will now move to the government side for a 10-minute block of questioning. MLA Lundy will lead us off.

9:40

Mr. Lundy: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and, through you, thank you to the department officials for joining us this morning and providing some information on this important topic. I'd like to begin my questions in relation to some early assessments in math and language. This is key objective 1.3 on pages 22 and 23 of the annual report, and that's, of course, to implement grades 1 and 2 assessments in language and math to help assess progress in the critical early years. I know how important it is for students to develop literacy and numeracy skills in the early years of their education, so I'm glad to see that this direction was implemented in '22-23.

Page 23 mentions that "the assessments provide information to teachers, parents, school authorities and the department about potential student learning issues and needs and identify areas where early support may be necessary." Through the chair, is there any data that was obtained through these assessments that the department can share with this committee today?

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question, Chair. The Alberta Education provided assessments are available free of charge to school authorities. When we look at assessing those students in the early years, it does provide that essential information about potential learning issues as well as ensure that students that are at risk early on are getting the help that they need to be successful.

When we look at the learning disruption funding, in '21-22 we provided the \$45 million for that funding. We helped about 70,000 students in grades 1 to 3, and then the following year an additional \$10 million was provided for learning loss to help another 50,000 students. Looking at the feedback from our school authorities, we looked at at-risk kids in grades 2 to 4 and then looked at an additional \$10 million to accelerate some more funding for learning loss interventions to target about 20,000 at-risk grade 1 kids, those kids that were really behind in some of those key areas of learning.

School authorities must report on the use of these funds to ensure that they were used appropriately. Those funds were used to hire

certificated and noncertificated staff; purchase materials, supplies; and for interventions. We would look at intervention supports such as one-to-one or small-group learning for students. Some of that funding was used for professional development as well.

Thank you for the question, Chair.

Mr. Lundy: Through the chair, thank you.

I'd like to turn my attention to something that the Auditor General made reference to in his opening remarks, the recommendations surrounding the Northland school division. You know, as was mentioned, there were two recommendations to the division itself, and then, of course, there was one outstanding recommendation to the department to oversee the development and implementation of a plan by the Northland school division to address their recommendations. I was pleased to hear that all these recommendations have been completed and that they're awaiting a follow-up audit, and I certainly would like to recognize and thank the department for this excellent work. I would ask, through the chair: can the department please share how Education worked with the Northland school division to oversee and ensure the development and implementation of a plan to improve student attendance?

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question, Chair. I'd be happy to talk about how hard our department has worked with the Northland school division. We developed an oversight plan which guides the department's work in providing oversight and guidance in support of Northland's efforts to improve student attendance. Northland also developed and implemented an attendance improvement operational plan that outlines numerous strategies to improve student attendance and engagement. Northland has standardized its attendance tracking process in schools across the region and the division, and they're also providing ongoing guidance and training to those schools and recording and monitoring attendance.

My staff meet monthly with the Northland director of student attendance and meet quarterly with the superintendent to provide oversight and discuss progress on Northland's attendance plan. Education also has internal attendance subcommittee reviews, and we analyze Northland's attendance results on an ongoing basis to inform oversight and feedback to the division. We also conduct annual attendance monitoring of Northland school in collaboration with the Northland director.

Thank you for the question, Chair.

Mr. Lundy: All right, then. Through the chair, thank you for that information. It's certainly exciting to learn about those plans, and hopefully we can see some improved performance.

I'm going to transition to everyone's favourite topic on schools, which is capital projects. I see on page 61 of the report that key objective 4.3 was to "develop and implement strategies and plans for maintaining and assessing the need for school capital projects." The 2022 capital plan included \$2 billion over three years on school infrastructure to support the building, replacement, and modernization of 15 schools, including new schools in Calgary, Edmonton, and Camrose. Through the chair, can the department provide an update on the progress of these projects in '22-23?

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question, Chair. A full list of the 15 projects that received new funding in Budget '22 along with their current status: I can summarize. I just wanted to note that four of the 15 projects were in design while the remaining 11 were tendered, awarded to a contractor, or already in construction. Chair, to the member: would you like me to list the projects?

Mr. Lundy: Yes. Please go ahead, through the chair.

Ms Pillipow: The Acme replacement school is in design. The Evanston middle school is tendered, Legacy K to 9 school is tendered, the new Camrose high school is in construction, the Bow Valley high school addition and modernization is in design, the St. Joseph Catholic elementary school is in construction, and the Blessed Carlo Acutis Catholic school is in construction. The Grand Trunk K to 12 school in Evansburg is in construction. The Manning Aurora composite school is in construction in Manning. In Milk River the solution for Milk River and Erle Rivers schools is in construction. In Penhold, the replacement school, the contract was awarded. In Raymond, the high school, the contract has been awarded. In Sherwood Park the solution for the Sherwood Park replacement school is in design. In Slave Lake the Saint Francis of Assisi Catholic Academy is complete. In Valleyview the solution for the replacement is currently in design.

Mr. Lundy: Great. Thank you so much.

Again through the chair, do you mind providing a little comment on what kind of oversight the ministry provides to ensure that these projects were on schedule and on budget?

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question, Chair. We work really closely with the Department of Infrastructure, who is responsible for the delivery of school capital projects, including the management of the project budget and schedule. On a monthly basis Infrastructure provides Education with a report of all active projects, which includes budget and schedule updates. In addition, biweekly meetings are held between the ministries to discuss any project-specific issues that require joint action or awareness. Detailed questions about how project budget schedules are tracked, maintained, and reported on would always be directed to Infrastructure.

Thank you for the question.

Mr. Lundy: Again, through the chair, thank you for that answer.

Just in the 90 seconds or so we have left, I'd like to switch gears again a little bit and come back to a topic that we have chatted about this morning. Of course, it's extremely important: First Nation, Métis, and Inuit education. I'd like to ask a question about a specific pilot project. On page 31 in the '22-23 report, Alberta Education provided \$940,000 for the strengthening relationships pilot grant program. This program is aimed at increasing opportunities for First Nations and Métis students, families, and communities to build and strengthen relationships with school authorities by increasing engagement opportunities that reflect local needs, including culture and language experiences. Through the chair, can you please provide an update on the status of this pilot program?

Ms Pillipow: Thank you for the question, Chair. In March '23 seven Indigenous grant recipients were awarded \$140,000, for a combined total of \$980,000. The grant recipients have completed their interim reporting as of February of this year, outside of this reporting year, and we expect final reporting this fall. Feedback received so far indicates the relationship building between the communities and school authorities is well under way, and those are looking at tailored community needs and also interest with elder participation in the process to support the inclusion of culture within the activities. We use specific metrics... [Ms Pillipow's speaking time expired]

Thank you.

9:50

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now move back to the Official Opposition for the final rotation. You have three minutes to read questions on the record.

Ms Renaud: Thank you. These are based on page 16. “Alberta school authorities have had access to \$1.2 billion in support to mitigate pandemic-related challenges,” is the wording that was used. What is the period of time school authorities have had access to this \$1.2 billion? Any criteria? Please list any criteria school authorities have to meet to access this \$1.2 billion. Where did the \$1.2 billion come from? How much of this is new money? And if you could even point to a line item and a breakdown of how and where the funds were distributed if you have that information.

The ministry outlined the purpose of the accessible \$1.2 billion on page 16, identifying mental health, wellness, and addressing learning disruptions and gaps. What evaluation matrix, targets, or metrics were put in place to evaluate outcomes of the targeted investment, and how much specifically was identified for mental health?

Next, on curriculum. How does the ministry evaluate the curriculum implementation plan, and how is the new curriculum effectiveness evaluated against student success? How does the ministry expect the new curriculum to impact high school completion? That’s a reference from page 25.

Then I also note that the partnership with Junior Achievement was renewed for three years to train teachers to provide K to 6 students with financial literacy programming. I note that the ministry anticipates this will only reach 9,000 students. What evaluation was used to support a three-year extension? How much is the total value of the three-year renewal? Why is the number of 9,000 so small?

I will turn it over to my colleague.

Mr. Haji: Yeah. Thank you.

The department set a target of 87 per cent of students, teachers, and parents feel that are schools safe but only achieved 84 per cent. My question is: why is the department not alarmed by this? In fact, WCB claims for violent assaults against staff almost doubled during the reporting period. Why is the department not alarmed by this? The satisfaction with quality of education in schools has gone down from 85 per cent to 79 per cent. Why is the department not alarmed by this? The quality of space has gone down from 81 per cent to 78 per cent. Why is the department not alarmed by this? The sense of belonging among students in schools has gone from 84 per cent to 81 per cent. Why is the department not alarmed by this? These are some of the questions that I would like some clarification on, Mr. Chair.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Member.

We will now move back to the government side for a three-minute block.

Mr. Rowswell: Okay. In 2022-23 Alberta Education provided school authorities with an additional \$21 million through a new supplemental enrolment growth grant. How did this additional funding support the education system through higher than expected growth? Was it successful, and what metrics were used to track its success?

The school nutrition pilot program was reintroduced in 2022-23, with \$3 million being allocated to it. The program provided up to \$500,000 in grant funding to nonprofit organizations to collaborate with school jurisdictions. Can the department share the results of this pilot program and how the outcomes were measured?

I see on page 42 of the report that “Alberta Education continues to support the growth and development of the teaching workforce through several teacher certificate and bursary programs as well as agreements with education partners.” One of the programs listed is the northern student teacher bursary program. The report states that “in 2022-23, the NSTB Program awarded 29 students with 45 bursaries for a total of \$324,000, generating up to 74 years of returned teaching service in northern Alberta schools.” Great news. Can you go more in depth about this program and how it has helped to address teacher shortages in northern Alberta during the 2022-23 fiscal year?

That’s it.

The Chair: Thank you.

I think that’s it for the questions. I would like to thank officials from the Ministry of Education and the office of the Auditor General for their participation and for responding to the members’ questions. We ask that any outstanding questions be responded to in writing within 30 days and forwarded to the committee clerk.

Next we have other business. Are there any items for discussion under other business? And it should be other business. Seeing none.

The date of the next meeting. The next meeting of the committee is on Tuesday, April 23, 2024, with the Ministry of Seniors, Community and Social Services.

With that, I will call for a motion to adjourn. Would a member move that the meeting be adjourned? All in favour? Any opposed? The motion is carried.

The meeting stands adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 9:55 a.m.]

