



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 31st Legislature  
Second Session

Standing Committee  
on  
Public Accounts

Education and Childcare

Tuesday, March 31, 2026  
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**Legislative Assembly of Alberta  
The 31st Legislature  
Second Session**

**Standing Committee on Public Accounts**

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Lunty, Brandon G., Leduc-Beaumont (UC), Deputy Chair

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## **Standing Committee on Public Accounts**

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Ministry of Education and Childcare

Zoe Cooper, Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategic Services and Governance

Meghann Eagle, Assistant Deputy Minister, System Excellence

Tanis Liebreich, Assistant Deputy Minister, Child Care Strategy and Policy

Lora Pillipow, Deputy Minister

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



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Tuesday, March 31, 2026

[Mr. Sabir in the chair]

**The Chair:** Good morning, everyone. 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 invite members, guests, and LAO staff at the table to introduce themselves. We will begin to my right.

**Mr. Cyr:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Scott Cyr, MLA for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul.

**Mrs. Sawyer:** Tara Sawyer, MLA for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

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

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

**Mr. van Dijken:** Glenn Van Dijken, the MLA for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock.

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

**Ms Cooper:** Good morning. Zoe Cooper, assistant deputy minister of strategic services and governance, Education and Childcare.

**Ms Liebreich:** Good morning. Tanis Liebreich, assistant deputy minister, child care strategy and policy.

**Ms Pillipow:** Good morning. Lora Pillipow, deputy minister, Education and Childcare.

**Mr. Willan:** Good morning. Jeff Willan, ADM, financial services and capital planning.

**Ms Eagle:** Good morning. I'm Meghann Eagle, ADM of system excellence.

**Mr. Driesen:** Morning. Rob Driesen, Assistant Auditor General.

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

**Ms Renaud:** Marie Renaud, St. Albert.

**Member Eremenko:** Good morning. Janet Eremenko, MLA, Calgary-Currie.

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

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

**The Chair:** Thank you. We'll start with the purpose statement for the committee. The Standing Committee on Public Accounts is mandated to review the public accounts of the government of Alberta and reports of the Auditor General. The committee examines the administration of government policy, not the merits of it, with the objective of enhancing transparency and accountability in government spending of public funds. The committee operates best when it maintains a nonpartisan approach in carrying out its responsibilities on behalf of all Albertans

A few housekeeping items. Please note that the microphones are operated by *Hansard* staff. Committee proceedings are live

streamed on the Internet and broadcast on Assembly TV. The audio- and videostream and transcripts of the meeting can be accessed via the Legislative Assembly website. Those participating by videoconference, which there are none, are encouraged to turn on your camera. Members, please set your cellphones and other devices to silent for the duration of the meeting. Comments should flow through the chair at all times.

Approval of the agenda. Members, are there any changes or additions to the agenda? Seeing none, would a member like to move that the Standing Committee on Public Accounts approve the proposed agenda as distributed for its March 31, 2026, meeting? Moved by MLA Sawyer. Any discussion on the motion? Seeing none, all in favour? Any opposed? Thank you. The motion is carried.

We have minutes from the March 24, 2026, meeting of the committee. Do members have any errors or omissions to note? Seeing none, would a member like to move that the Standing Committee on Public Accounts approve the minutes as distributed of its meeting held on March 24, 2026? Member Eremenko. Any discussion on the motion? Seeing none, all in favour? Any opposed? The motion is carried.

I would now like to welcome our guests from the Ministry of Education and Childcare and the Office of the Auditor General, who are here to address the ministry's annual report 2024-2025, responsibilities under their purview during that reporting period, and relevant reports and outstanding recommendations of the Auditor General.

I invite officials from the ministry to provide opening remarks not exceeding 10 minutes. The floor is yours.

**Ms Phillipow:** Thank you. Good morning. Thank you for the opportunity to be here today. I am joined by several leaders of our team today, and they have introduced themselves. We also have members in the gallery. Today I'll highlight the key achievements and results from the Ministry of Education's '24-25 annual report. Before we begin, I would also like to note that Education did not assume responsibility for child care until the '25-26 fiscal year. However, we have the delegated authority for child care, and now we are the Ministry of Education and Childcare. I will also provide an overview of key child care results achieved in '24-25 when the responsibility for that portfolio rested with the Ministry of Jobs, Economy and Trade. I am happy to answer your questions afterwards, and I will begin with education.

Our work is guided by the four outcomes in the '24-27 education business plan. These outcomes focus on student success, high-quality learning opportunities, and a well-managed education system. At the heart of this work is a clear goal: ensuring every Alberta student can succeed.

In '24-25 Alberta continued to see strong enrolment growth. Student enrolment exceeded 794,000, an increase of 3.1 per cent from the previous year. To support this growth the province continued major investments in school infrastructure. This included \$2.8 billion over three years for 99 school construction projects. The province also launched a historic schools now initiative to speed up the delivery of new and modernized schools across Alberta.

Operating funding increased in '24-25 to \$9.3 billion, which was invested in the K to 12 system to support classroom, staffing, and student services. Student learning remained a priority. An updated ministerial order on student learning strengthened expectations around foundational knowledge and career readiness. The guiding framework for curriculum development was updated to reflect these priorities. Curriculum renewal continued in key subject areas, including science and French programs. The kindergarten to grade

6 social studies curriculum was also piloted in school authorities across the province.

Early literacy and numeracy were strengthened through enhanced screening and assessments for kindergarten to grade 5. A consistent provincial approach was introduced to support early identification and timely intervention. To support this work, \$17.5 million helps school authorities deliver targeted literacy and numeracy supports. Classroom supports were expanded through the classroom complexity grant. This provided \$44 million to help schools respond to increasingly diverse student needs.

Workforce initiatives supported recruitment and retention. These included programs to grow the educational assistants workforce and support skilled trades professions entering teaching roles.

Student well-being remained a focus. New standards for personal mobile devices and social media helped reduce distractions in schools. Alberta was a leader in the country with these rules. The province also invested \$20 million in the mental health schools pilot. Partnerships with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities were strengthened through targeted funding and community-driven initiatives. Career-focused learning also expanded through dual credit programs, collegiate schools, and postsecondary pathways. Legislative amendments clarified expectations around student learning and supported continuity during public health emergencies. Transportation investments improved affordability and reduced ride times for families.

Together, these actions supported progress across all four ministry outcomes. They demonstrated meaningful progress while reinforcing our commitment to continuous improvement.

I'll turn to child care now. As demand continued to grow in '24-25, Alberta focused on ensuring families had access to affordable, high-quality child care while enjoying the benefits of a strong economy. Child care fees were reduced to \$15 a day for children up to kindergarten age, making care more affordable for families across the province. At the same time, access expanded significantly. Alberta's child care capacity increased to about 142,600 spaces across approximately 2,700 programs.

To support this growth, continued investment in quality care helped add 3,000 early childhood educators to the workforce, bringing the total to 28,500 certified staff. Through a bilateral funding agreement with the government of Canada, Alberta provided \$797 million in affordability grants, lowering fees for 129,000 children to an average of \$15 a day. This saved families about \$750 per month, or \$9,000 a year. An additional \$197 million supported income-based subsidies for families of 67,500 children, further reducing costs.

#### 9:10

Families of approximately 13,000 school-aged children who are not covered by the federal funding agreement also received \$56 million in provincial subsidies for out of school care. Alberta added 14,300 net new spaces in '24-25, supported in part by \$31.8 million through the space creation grant program. Oversight was strengthened through amendments to the Early Learning and Child Care Act, enhancing system accountability and enabling swift action when standards are not met. Inclusion remained a priority, with \$8.5 million supporting the inclusive child care program grant and \$5.1 million awarded through the inclusive spaces program to improve accessibility for 105 programs.

I'll conclude with updates on the Auditor General recommendations. In March 2005 the office of the Auditor General concluded that the department of education had established clear annual reporting requirements, communicated those requirements to school authorities, and put tools in place to assess compliance. The Auditor General found that the department, however, did not

consistently detect instances of noncompliance and did not complete all elements in its assessment tool in every case. As a result, the Auditor General issued two recommendations, both focused on strengthening execution. The first was to improve the execution of the annual report assessment process. The second was to improve execution of the annual report correction process. In response, actions taken during the '24-25 year were developed in alignment with the field services implementation plan.

This plan provided the framework for how the department is addressing the Auditor General's recommendations in a systemic and sustainable way, our actions strengthened by monitoring process and by enhancing consistency, improving detection of noncompliance, and streamlining the documentation of continuous school authority improvement. Based on the changes implemented, we are confident that new processes, controls, and oversight mechanisms have fully addressed both recommendations. As a result, we anticipate being ready for a follow-up audit in summer 2026.

Now for child care. In July 2025 the Auditor General released the child care subsidy and grants program performance audit. The audit recommended that the department strengthen processes to verify the accuracy of operator claims and confirm that funding is used as intended to reduce parent fees and support educator wage top-ups. In response, an implementation plan was submitted to the Auditor General in January 2026, and the department has begun implementing it. This includes enhancing technological controls and developing new processes to reduce the risk of error and improve claim verification.

The implementation plan reflects a commitment to stronger oversight, improved data accuracy, and the responsible use of public funds in Alberta's education – pardon me, child care – system. Too many systems. It is also important to note that many improvements were already under way after the audit period and prior to the release of the report. These include second-level reviews for claim adjustments, a more robust fee review process, and improved tracking of recoveries. Additional controls have also most notably been introduced through the launch of the child care participation number and the claims submission service in 2025. Further controls are in progress, and the early childhood educator portal funding statement and the child care family portal statements continue to strengthen accountability.

In closing, the '24-25 fiscal year reflects strong progress across education, child care, supporting students, families, educators, and communities across Alberta. Thank you, and we're happy to take questions.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Deputy Minister.

I will now turn it over to the Assistant Auditor General. You will have five minutes.

**Mr. Driesen:** Thank you and good morning again, everyone. Thanks for the opportunity to provide you with an overview of the work of the office of the Auditor General, including our four outstanding recommendations to this department.

I'll begin with our financial statement audit work for fiscal 2025. We audited select financial transactions at the department of education as part of our work on the province's consolidated financial statements. In addition, we conducted separate financial audits of the Alberta school foundation fund and the Alberta teachers' retirement fund board. We issued clean opinions for each of these audits.

In addition to our financial statement audit work we released three performance audits over the past 18 months, the first being the child care subsidy and grants program in July 2025, where we made

two recommendations. We found claim discrepancies in over half of the child care operators we examined, which was consistent with the findings in a separate examination by the department's internal audit group.

The department did not consistently ensure claims from operators were supported and only included eligible child care and educator hours and did not consistently ensure operators passed on funding from the subsidies and grants to reduce parent fees and pay educators. This matters as there's a risk that public funds may not be used as intended, leading to parents overpaying for child care and educators being undercompensated. We recommended that the department implement processes to verify the accuracy of child care operator claims for the child care subsidy and grant program and verify that child care operators use the funding as required to reduce parent fees and pay educators their wage top-up funding.

Implementing the two recommendations will also improve the accuracy of program reporting. While the department has measures to report program outcomes and analyze results, where underlying claims and payments are inaccurate, the results being measured will not accurately reflect outcomes. The department has recently provided us with a recommendation implementation plan, and we are currently in the process of providing high-level feedback to the department on the elements of their plan.

In March 2025 we released our performance audit on school authority compliance with annual reporting requirements. As indicated by the deputy minister, we found that the department set reporting requirements, communicated them to school authorities, and used tools to assess compliance by all school authorities.

However, they did not consistently detect reporting noncompliance or complete all areas of the assessment tools, always ensure noncompliance was corrected or consistently document how it ensured corrections were made. This matters because if school authorities don't comply with annual reporting requirements, results information will be incomplete and inaccurate, opportunities for improvement or learnings will be missed, and parents, the community, and the department won't be able to hold school authorities accountable for their current performance and determine where future operational changes are needed.

We made two recommendations; that the department improve the execution of its annual report compliance assessment process and annual report noncompliance correction process. We recently provided high-level feedback to the department on their recommendation implementation plan. If this plan is executed, it appears it includes the elements needed to deal with both recommendations.

In November 2024 we released a report titled *An Analysis of Annual Performance Reporting by School Authorities*. This report examined a sample of 101 school authority annual reports from fiscal 2022 to assess whether the reporting reflected all seven characteristics of effective performance reporting. Meaningful annual performance reporting is a critical accountability tool for demonstrating whether outcomes are being achieved effectively. While we did not make recommendations to individual school authorities, we highlighted trends where their annual reports can be improved. We encourage authorities to clearly show in their public performance reports what results they are delivering in all critical areas to the authority, how those results are measured, and the cost of achieving them.

Thank you to the management group here today for their time, co-operation, and assistance during our audits. That concludes my opening comments, Mr. Chair.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We will now hear questions from the committee members, and we will begin with the Official Opposition caucus. You have 15 minutes in this rotation, Member Eremenko.

**Member Eremenko:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, everybody, for being here this morning. I'd like to start on page 12 of the annual report where the department highlights the expansion of the enhanced literacy and screening assessments for students in kindergarten to grade 5. The department highlights the \$10 million and the \$7.5 million to support skill development and school-level interventions that spur off as a result of the screening assessments, but did the department fund any of the resources or supports required to actually complete the assessments in class?

9:20

**Ms Pillipow:** Thank you for that question, Chair. The \$10 million and then the \$7.5 million would have been allocated directly to the school authorities, and they would allocate the funds for the interventions in the classroom.

**Member Eremenko:** That's funding in response to the screening assessments. I'm curious about whether the department had any involvement in the actual supports provided to teachers to complete the assessments.

**Ms Pillipow:** Are you referring to the actual screeners that were developed?

**Member Eremenko:** Well, no. Sorry. Not in the development of the screener; in the provision of the screener. Every teacher needs to sit down with every student to go through this screener multiple times in a year. Was there any funding provided to the teachers to enable that process?

**Ms Pillipow:** Well, authorities have the flexibility to be able to use the funding that was provided for additional teacher support, if they needed to pull out students in classroom, or to be able to have any additional supports they needed in the classroom.

Meghann Eagle, did you want to add anything specific, Chair, to the screening process or the support?

**Ms Eagle:** Sure, I can add. Thank you, Deputy. As you noted, the government offers government-provided screeners, which are free of charge to the school authorities, or they have the ability to choose an approved screener for use in the school. If they choose an approved screener, then that would be at the cost of the school authority for those screeners.

In order to administer the screeners, as the deputy mentioned, we leave that to the flexibility of the school authorities to determine if they would like to have teachers rotate and do it, if they would like the teachers to do it within their class. Some bring in substitute teachers, and others bring in sort of those from central office to do it, and they do that within their existing funding.

**Member Eremenko:** When we're talking about screeners, are we talking about the person who completes the screening assessment, or is it the physical documents?

**Ms Pillipow:** Thank you for the question, Chair. I think when we refer to screeners, we refer to the physical screener that the teacher is using.

**Member Eremenko:** How much time does the screening assessment typically take? What's the average?

**Ms Pillipow:** Our understanding, when we've done the assessment, is about 10 to 15 minutes.

**Member Eremenko:** On page 20 we talk about the students that are evaluated in September and then again in January. For those identified as needing additional supports, they're actually screened a third time. Just to clarify: this is for every student across the province?

**Ms Pillipow:** Thank you for the question, Chair. The duration that you're referring to, September to January, was for students from K to 3, and then added to K to 5.

Meghann, can you clarify please, Chair?

**Ms Eagle:** Sure. Thank you for the question. The screeners currently in the '24-25 year: in September grades 1 to 3 are screened, in January grades 1 to 3 are screened again. Kindergarten was screened in January – that's the first time for kindergarten – and then those identified as requiring additional supports get screened again in June. If a child or a student was identified as not requiring additional supports, they do not have a further screening in June.

**Member Eremenko:** Through the chair, I thank you for your answer. It kind of identifies exactly my concern here around the screening assessments, that for those children that are identified as requiring additional supports, like: so what, now what? We've identified those individuals. What investment, what consideration has the department made in terms of actually then providing the assistance that is identified? Certainly, I can understand the value of early identification around the potential for learning challenges, but we're seeing those challenges increase both in depth and breadth. Has the department invested in the additional supports to, in fact, respond to those needs once they've actually been identified?

**Ms Pillipow:** Thank you for the question, Chair. I think for the reporting period when these literacy and numeracy assessments first started, we invested the initial \$10 million in the first fiscal year, and then identified an additional \$7.5 million because we recognized that we needed additional supports for students and teachers in the classroom. Then I think, Chair, I'd like to have ADM Meghann Eagle talk about the results that we were seeing from the transition between assessing students in September to January. We did see a significant improvement in some students, which also helped us in the next reporting year to identify the need for any additional supports.

**Ms Eagle:** Thank you, Deputy. We have seen some promising results with the screeners. We looked at fall of '24 compared to fall of '25, because we wanted to make sure we were comparing the same screener in the same time period for these students. On average, in grades 1 to 3, we saw a decrease of 2 to 5 per cent of students requiring additional supports. So we are seeing a decline of the students requiring additional supports sort of year over year, and what that tells us is that the interventions are working. As the deputy mentioned, we invested \$17.5 million in '24-25, and that went to school authorities to use for interventions specifically.

**Member Eremenko:** So just to clarify: September '24 to September '25 for the same student?

**Ms Pillipow:** To answer the question, through the chair, the reporting period that we're referring to is September '24 to the end of fiscal year '25.

**Member Eremenko:** Correct. But the ADM had just mentioned that there was a comparison between September '24 and September '25, so I'm just going off of what was being said here.

On page 20 we did see that, in fact, the identified level of need for children requiring additional support was 10 per cent greater in January versus September in the reporting year for numeracy, and then in literacy it was 9 per cent higher. Respectfully, I think that the comparison between September '24 and September '25 is out of scope of what we're looking at here, but what is in scope is the September to January comparisons, where, in fact, the percentage of children identified as requiring additional supports both went up, by 9 and 10 per cent.

**Ms Pillipow:** Thank you for the question, Chair. That was exactly why Minister Nicolaides asked us to start doing mandatory literacy and numeracy testing, so we could understand the needs of those children from September to January. And that's why we invested the funding that year.

Thank you.

**Member Eremenko:** Can the results of the screening assessments be made public? Are they available?

**Ms Pillipow:** Those screening assessments are with each school authority. I'm just going to check, Chair, through the ADM if that's something that is made public. We do look at privacy impact assessments when we release information.

Can you confirm, please?

**Ms Eagle:** I can, certainly. Those screening results are made public through the school authority's annual education results reports. They're required to report them in their AERRs every November. We list in the funding manual the requirements that they have to report on, and we also encourage them to share the results with parents so they can use them to discuss with parents.

**Member Eremenko:** Doesn't the department require the school authorities – or do they do it internally, where they compare the screening assessments to, say, report cards? Significant effort and time is being invested into the screening assessments, and I think that the feedback from teachers thus far is that the value is really questionable when they have an entire year to get to know students and report on their successes throughout the year. Has the department determined whether or not the screening assessments are providing anything new or different than what the more conventional kind of report card process provides?

**Ms Pillipow:** Thank you for the question. It's an important question, and it's why we started this process, as I mentioned, in September '24. Outside of this reporting year the department will be looking at additional provisions to be able to increase reporting requirements and public transparency.

**Member Eremenko:** Okay. I'll take that as a no.

On page 62 the ministry discusses the enhanced specialized assessment grant that was provided to Mandel & Associates, a group of psychologists, from October '22 to April 2024. They supported the assessment of 3,227 children across Alberta. What was the size of the grant, please?

**Ms Pillipow:** Thank you for the question, Chair. I'm just having my team check the size of the grant. For the '23-24 fiscal year before this period, which would have been reported in the annual report, it was just over \$5.9 million for the contract for Mandel & Associates. That represented psychological assessments. Over

2,500 assessments were done under that contract: speech-language pathology, 450; occupational therapy, almost 160; and then other assessments to support children's learning.

Thank you.

**Member Eremenko:** So that was just for '23-24. Do you have a number for the full '22-24 period in which they were providing the service?

**Ms Pillipow:** I'm just checking with my team, Chair. Thank you. The total cost of the grant through '22-23 and '23-24 was \$8.2 million.

**Member Eremenko:** Does the department have any information about children that are currently waiting for psychoeducational assessments and have not had one completed?

9:30

**Ms Pillipow:** Thank you for the question, Chair. The school authorities will collect the information on children who are waiting for assessments as they're doing the delivery.

I'll just check and see if anyone at the table has any additional information. No, we do not.

**Member Eremenko:** None of that rolls up into the department?

**Ms Pillipow:** It does not.

**Member Eremenko:** Okay.

I'll move on to workforce, in that case, starting with the northern student teacher bursary on page 58. Can the ministry say how many of the student teachers fulfill their commitment to teach in the north and for how long? Is there a minimum requirement, through the chair, that participating teachers are required to stay in the north?

**Ms Pillipow:** Thank you for the question, Chair. The northern student bursary is a really important bursary to have students be able to learn in situ. It does attract students to the north. I'm just pulling the information for the answer to the question. For the reporting year through the program students received \$18,000 to cover their postsecondary expenses in '24-25. The bursary was awarded to 37 recipients, 21 school divisions, including public, separate, and francophone divisions.

**Member Eremenko:** I apologize. I don't – go ahead.

**Ms Pillipow:** Oh, I was just – I apologize – trying to look at the number to answer the rest of your question, Chair, if that's possible.

**Member Eremenko:** Those numbers are in the annual report. My question was around whether or not there's a minimum period of time where we're expecting teachers to stay in the north.

**Ms Pillipow:** Chair, thank you very much. The second part of the question: with respect to return of service we had a partnership with our colleagues in jobs, economy, and trade. They monitored the return of service, which we estimated to be between two and three years.

**Member Eremenko:** Okay. Thank you.

In 2009, when the program started, 59 bursaries were distributed, but in the fiscal year in question there were only 37. Can you tell me about why there was such a significant reduction from the beginning of the program? Has that followed trend lines over the years?

**Ms Pillipow:** Thank you for the question, Chair. I don't have any background on the trend lines for tracking the student participation. We did have \$8.1 million that was in the program.

I'm just going to ask Meghann Eagle if she has any additional background.

**Ms Eagle:** I need to pull up my numbers here.

**Member Eremenko:** I've just got two minutes to go, so I'd like to use that, if I may, to focus on the surveys in the latter half of the annual report, where I think, you know, it paints a pretty grim picture, frankly, for education and for the educational profession when it comes to the overall satisfaction rates that have been on a pretty steady decline since the reporting years included in the report around the fiscal year 2021. Maybe we'll focus on the perceived preparedness of teachers versus the perception of school board trustees. Of all the groups to be surveyed on teacher preparedness in the classroom, why school board trustees, not principals, as in some of the other surveys? I'm just curious about the choice of the department to survey school board trustees to speak to the preparedness of teachers when the responsibility of trustees is largely fiduciary and concerning governance.

**Ms Pillipow:** Thank you for the question, Chair. School board trustees are the elected bodies that govern the school system. They're one of 10 inputs to the survey.

Zoe Cooper, ADM, did you want to add anything with respect to how the survey is developed?

**Ms Cooper:** Thank you very much for the question. Thank you, Deputy. I would just say that there are 10 respondent groups. They are asked a wide variety of questions. We continue to take the breadth of input provided by those respondent groups to inform the provincial satisfaction survey.

**Member Eremenko:** Okay. The gap between the trustees and the teachers, as far as school classroom preparedness goes, is 23.5 per cent. That is a massive delta, I think, in terms of being able to equip teachers and actually address their needs. In reality, almost half, 46 per cent, of all teachers feel they are not well prepared and supported through professional development opportunities and others to be effective in their roles. This isn't just about curriculum. This is about their ability to manage the class. What's the department doing to address, one, the gap and that very high level of dissatisfaction around preparedness?

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We will now hear questions from the government caucus. MLA Sawyer, you have 15 minutes in this rotation.

**Mrs. Sawyer:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and through you to the department, thank you so much for being here today. Really appreciate the depth of your explanation and the hard work that you guys have been doing, you know, to improve things in our classrooms and get those students their supports.

I'm going to start with a little bit on Indigenous education. The annual report '24-25 identifies Indigenous student success as a central priority under outcome 2 beginning on page 36. It recognizes that First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students represent a significant and growing portion of Alberta's student population. We do know that improving those outcomes requires sustained system leadership and targeted funding with collaboration with Indigenous partners.

The annual report presents the work in a broader context with reconciliation, equity, and closing long-standing achievement gaps

across the system. I have a two-part question. The first, putting that around that context: could the deputy minister, through the chair, walk the committee through how Education and Childcare supported First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students during the '24-25 school year and how that work is reflected in the annual report?

**Ms Pillipow:** Thank you for the question, Chair. In the '24-25 year the ministry continued Alberta's commitment to improving outcomes for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children through targeted and culturally responsive supports. This was led by Alberta Education and Childcare's dedicated First Nations, Métis, and Inuit division, which provides leadership and strategic direction to support the education system to improve outcomes for students.

We also work to improve educational outcomes through the following initiatives. The First Nations, Métis, and Inuit grant: Alberta Education and Childcare provided annual funding through the funding manual to school authorities to assist them to provide system program and instructional supports to support student success. Approximately \$88.3 million was provided to school authorities in the '24-25 school year, and this funding supports educational outcomes for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students.

We also had framework agreements with Kee Tas Kee Now Tribal Council, KTCEA, and the Maskwacis commission. The multiyear framework agreements enabled the creation of consolidated educational authorities overseeing education in multiple First Nations areas, delivering services comparable to a provincial school authority.

The ministry also provides annual funding that enhances but does not replace funding on-reserve. I'll just give you a bit of an overview on what that is. They address educational gaps and support local priorities such as language, culture, and teacher professional development. Almost \$3.9 million in enhanced funding was provided to MESC in the reporting period and \$1.8 million to KTCEA.

We also had literacy funding provided to support Indigenous students in '24-25 at \$950,000 to United for Literacy to plan and co-ordinate and deliver literacy programs as well as the Rupertsland Institute grant of \$500,000 per year, which supports education and training under the Métis Nation of Alberta to support 35,500 educators.

Thank you.

**Mrs. Sawyer:** Thank you very much for that, through the chair. Continuing on, under outcome 2 on page 37 to 39 of the report it emphasizes that relationship building between Indigenous communities and schools is foundational to reconciliation and student success. Could the deputy minister describe how Education and Childcare supported that relationship building between the Indigenous communities and schools during the year and how that's outlined in the report?

**Ms Pillipow:** Thank you for the question, Chair. Enhancing relationship building between Indigenous communities and schools through community-based supports is one of the key objectives in the '24-27 ministry business plan. This is largely done through three initiatives.

Bridging classrooms to communities grant. In July '23 the government announced an investment of \$10.5 million over three years to this program to help Indigenous communities and school authorities build relationships to support student success and advance reconciliation.

The community reconciliation grant. This pilot program was launched in October '23 to promote community healing and reconciliation by fostering engagement between Indigenous

organizations and schools to support students through a holistic approach. Through an investment of \$700,000 the program supports Indigenous organizations to provide services and supports to children and youth ages three to 19.

Lastly, the strengthening relationships pilot grant, launched in March '23, fosters meaningful relationships between provincial schools and Indigenous communities. Six First Nations and one Métis settlement each received \$140,000, totalling \$980,000 in funding. The pilot concluded in August '24. Reporting the outcomes included increasing engagement of teachers and school leaders with Indigenous communities, increased cultural awareness and integration of educational practices, and improved student attendance and learning engagement.

Thank you.

**9:40**

**Mrs. Sawyer:** Thank you very much, through the chair.

Can we move to specialized learning supports with student mental health? In the annual report '24-25 it outlines that student mental health and well-being is an integral contributor to student success, which we're all aware of. Under outcome 1, pages 20 and 21, it describes how learning outcomes are closely tied to students' social, emotional, and mental well-being and highlights the role of education and child care in working with school authorities and partner ministries in order to support prevention-focused and responsive mental health services in school communities, obviously the most important little piece when you talk about being able to support students in some of their needs. Through the chair, could the deputy minister explain how student mental health and specialized learning supports were provided in '24-25 and how the school authorities across the province were able to access these supports?

**Ms Pillipow:** Thank you for the question, Chair. The ministry continued to implement programs and services to support student mental health in '24-25. We collaborated with Mental Health and Addiction to enhance the integration of child and youth recovery-oriented addiction and mental health supports in the schools and communities. We did this through the mental health in schools pilot. In the reporting year the ministry provided \$20 million to support 79 two-year pilot projects in school authorities across the province. This included funding to extend 59 of those mental health in school pilots, that were initially set to end in December '24, to continue until June '25.

We also supported the CASA Mental Health classrooms, a great program through Mental Health and Addiction. The CASA Mental Health classrooms were a joint initiative between that department and education. In these highly specialized classrooms students receive individual therapy, group therapy, and psychiatric care to support their recovery.

Additionally, the integrated school support program. We partnered, again, with Mental Health and Addiction and the Calgary Police Youth Foundation to expand the integrated school support program, which provides school-based prevention and early intervention wraparound supports in elementary schools consisting of meal offerings and after school care, structured physical education, and a positive police response and access to mental health professionals.

Lastly, specialized learning support services for First Nations. The First Nations education school authorities were also able to access funding for mental health supports through the specialized learning supports grant, where a portion of the funding could be allocated for mental health supports in community.

Thank you.

**Mrs. Sawyer:** Thank you very much to the deputy minister, through the chair.

If I could, I'd like to cede the rest of my time to my colleague MLA Cyr.

**The Chair:** MLA Cyr.

**Mr. Cyr:** Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you for attending this meeting. I do appreciate it. I'm finding what you're having to say, especially – it's so important, making sure that we get our next generation fully educated and ready for life, if you will. I will commend your office when it comes to CASA classroom. This was a big impact for my area up in Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul. That was a program that was brought forward by the public system, but it worked in tandem with the other four school systems. This shows the level of co-operation and the flexibility that your team allowed, and I'm going to say that that helps the children going through mental health in my area. I'm very thankful for that.

I'd like to move on to curriculum implementation if you would, the classroom pilot. Curriculum renewal and implementation are key components of outcome 1 in the education annual report '24-25, with classroom piloting discussed in detail on page 15 to 19. The report notes that piloting allows educators to work directly with draft curriculum in real classroom environments, providing feedback that supports refinement, professional readiness, and a smoother system-wide implementation, particularly for those in kindergarten and grade 6 social studies curriculum. The question I have to you, Deputy Minister, through the chair, of course: how does the classroom piloting process work in practice, including how participation was structured across different types of school authorities?

**Ms Pillipow:** Thank you for the question, Chair. This is a really important part of the curriculum development process. Prior to implementing new curriculum, school authorities have the option of participating in classroom piloting. It's one of the many ways that teachers and school authorities can provide feedback on the curriculum and help ensure that the content in each subject for each grade is developmentally appropriate.

During the piloting process, the teachers can plan and deliver lessons with the draft curriculum in their classrooms. As I mentioned, this is a critical phase in the renewal process because it gives teachers time to become familiar with the curriculum and provide feedback about the content and resources that are needed to support student learning. Feedback from piloting teachers helps us to also refine the draft curriculum and identify resources to support new curriculum implementation across the province.

We also provided classroom funding for the piloting. That was an honorarium, or release of time, for teachers to attend learning sessions and our feedback meetings so that they can work with the department and give us feedback directly. Piloting teachers can also prepare and plan sessions of their own with their teachers in their school, or collectively as organized by school authorities. Teachers also have access to professional learning sessions offered by the Alberta Professional Learning Consortia.

In terms of breakdown by school authority type, just for the committee's information: in '24-25, the school authorities participating in the classroom pilot had included 31 public, nine separate, two charter, 17 independent, two francophone, and one First Nation school.

Thank you for the question.

**Mr. Cyr:** Well, thank you for that very informative response there. For page 16 to 18 of the education annual report from '24-25, can you please describe how the career and life management curriculum

was enacted? We've heard that during these engagements, there has been some feedback that is informing the ministry on ongoing curriculum work. Can the deputy minister please, through the Chair, of course, give a two-minute and 30-second response on that please?

**Ms Pillipow:** Thank you for the question, Chair. Minister Nicolaides was really interested in looking at the career and life management program because it's one of those programs that, if anyone has a student in high school, they tend to take it in summer school. He wanted it to be a meaningful part of a student's graduation experience. We also heard from stakeholders and students that they need earlier exposure to career education, so many suggested that more dedicated content, such as a stand-alone course, could be introduced before high school. We also heard that Albertans wanted more opportunities for students to build financial literacy and make informed decisions about their finances.

In response we began the development of a new course for career education and financial literacy in junior high. This course builds on the foundation established in the K to 6 physical education and wellness program. It also expands on content already included in grades 7 to 9. This new course will focus on self-awareness, goal setting, and career planning to help students transition smoothly to high school and life after school.

The draft curriculum for grades 7 to 9 in career education and financial literacy is currently in the field testing stage in advance of the piloting for '26-27 school year. We are also currently engaging on a draft curriculum for grade 10 career education and financial literacy. As you can see, the goal is increasing students' acumen for financial literacy and being able to better plan their career paths when they leave school.

Thank you.

**Mr. Cyr:** Well, thank you for that response. You know, preparing our kids earlier for life is something that I think we all would hope has nonpartisan support on that. I'll say that when they were looking at, I guess, where they want to go and how they want to get there, it's a topic that you just assume happens to come up through their lives. By forcing that through and saying, "Let's have these discussions earlier," this is an actual helpful pathway, and it focuses those children for the courses they'll need going into the future, especially with the collegiate school models that we're pushing through right now. That's quite remarkable for my area. I know that my region is actually put forward for a collegiate model for trades, and I look forward to seeing something for the STEM, as well, someday to be put forward.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Member.

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

**Mr. Schmidt:** Thank you very much. I'm going to ask some clarifying questions about the capital strategies. It's discussed on page 65. It just wasn't clear to me in the report what was actually achieved here. Page 65 says that the department advanced 31 school projects, prioritized 15 school projects in Calgary metro and 11 in Edmonton metro, and built 12 schools in 11 new communities. How many schools were actually completed in '24-25? Is that 12?

9:50

**Ms Pillipow:** Yes. Thank you for the question, Chair. Twelve school projects were completed in '24-25.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Thank you very much. According to the annual report, the school capital budget for '24-25 was underspent by \$120 million. Can the department tell the committee which projects were delayed in this fiscal year?

**Ms Pillipow:** Thank you for the question, Chair. The '24-25 Budget for capital can be addressed by SFO Jeff Willan.

Thank you, Jeff.

**Mr. Willan:** Yeah. Thanks through the chair. With respect to the underspend, that would be related to the timing of the projects moving through the phases of planning, design, and construction. The delivery of school building projects is done through Infrastructure. So we would look to Infrastructure to be able to provide a list, if you wanted, from a project-by-project basis. But overall the whole program was underspent by, as you said, a hundred and some million dollars. That just related to the timing as projects moved through the planning, design, and construction phases. Yeah.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Right. So how many schools did the department target to be built in '24-25? We completed the construction of 12 schools, underspent \$120 million. How many schools at the beginning of '24-25 did the department think would be built by the end of the fiscal year?

**Ms Pillipow:** Thank you for the question, Chair. Jeff Willan, SFO, will respond to the capital questions.

Thank you.

**Mr. Willan:** At the beginning of the '24-25 year, we had I think it was 99 projects that would become in-flight. I don't have an answer for what was planned for; we did complete 12 projects in '24-25.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Sorry. You don't know how many were planned for, or there was no plan?

**Mr. Willan:** We had 99 in the plan.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Right. Part of the confusion here is that we continually hear that schools are being built, you know, which we understand to be bricks and mortar, students in classrooms, but what the department often means is plans. I'm looking for bricks and mortar – like, how many bricks and mortar schools were intended to be delivered in '24-25?

**Ms Pillipow:** Thank you for the question, Chair. In '24-25 we approved 32 major capital projects. There were 31 new priority projects for funding through Budget '24. Calgary Catholic's Bishop McNally high school modernized – an additional project was approved in-year. Budget '24 announcements reported 43 capital funding approvals. Twelve of those approvals were related to projects that were previously approved in earlier budgets and are not new capital projects. The capital process goes through a process of planning, design, and construction as we are accountable to the taxpayer dollars and an approved process that was recommended by the Auditor General.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Thank you very much. Again, the department can see my problem. I'm asking for the number of schools that it wanted to build, and we get a general number about capital projects that have been in some stage of approval.

The department says that the 12 capital projects completed in '24-25 created 11,000 new and updated spaces. We see this phrase "new and updated spaces" all the time in the capital plan. Can the

department break that down into how many new spaces and how many updated spaces were provided?

**Ms Pillipow:** Thank you for the question, Chair. In the schools that were completed in the '24-25 fiscal year, there were seven new schools with over 7,300 new student spaces, and then we had five modular and replacements with over 8,800 student spaces. Those are in the communities of Blackfalds, Camrose, Edmonton, Fort Vermilion, Grande Prairie, Langdon, Leduc, Manning, Milk River, Red Deer, and Sherwood Park.

Thank you.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Man, it gets more confusing every time. The department said that they created 11,000 new and updated spaces. Now I have 7,300 new spaces and 8,800 updated spaces, which is 16,100 spaces. Reconcile that for me. When you say that you created 11,000 new and updated spaces, and then you say that new plus updated spaces is 16,100 spaces, what are we talking about here?

**Ms Pillipow:** Thank you for the question, Chair. I was referring to new construction in the previous answer. I'm just going to have Jeff Willan talk a little bit more in detail about some of the projects.

**Mr. Willan:** Maybe the member could repeat the question with respect to the details of what you're looking for with respect to the plan. As we started the '24-25 fiscal year, through Budget '24 we had 99 in-flight projects.

**Mr. Schmidt:** This is really the blind leading the blind because I don't think the department is even clear on the answers, and I'm not clear on the questions. I want to move on to the school accelerator program, which is targeting 200,000 new and updated spaces. Does the department have targets for new spaces and updated spaces separately?

**Ms Pillipow:** Thank you for the question, Chair. As the member noted, we did announce the school accelerator program, schools now, in September '24 to have \$8.6 billion dedicated to 200,000 new and renovated spaces. I've broken down the projects that were identified in the capital plan for '24-25 where we had 32 major capital projects and 31 new priority projects that were provided for funding for Budget '24. I'm just going to ask Jeff if he can talk about the projects that were accelerated. The program allows for . . .

**Mr. Schmidt:** Sorry. I just want to be clear. The targets for schools now: 200,000 new and updated spaces. What is the breakdown? How many new spaces will schools now build, and how many updated spaces will schools now build?

**Ms Pillipow:** Eight point six billion dollars will deliver more than 200,000 new and renovated student spaces by 2031-32, and more than 100 new and renovated student spaces. I can break those down. If I can, Chair, have those broken down by Jeff Willan, SFO.

**Mr. Willan:** Through the Chair, when we look at the original plan from '24-25 as we moved into Budget '25, as the deputy minister alluded to, the 200,000 spaces: we were going with existing projects that were in the pipeline as well as new announcements to come over the next three years. It was going to provide between 100,000 and 150,000 new and updated spaces for the system, as well as modular classroom spaces of up to 20,000.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Sorry.

**Ms Pillipow:** I'm sorry, Chair. We're trying to answer the question.

**Mr. Schmidt:** I'm not sure, Mr. Chair, if I'm speaking Greek and I don't realize it. I'm asking for separate numbers. How many new spaces, and how many updated spaces? Every answer that I've heard from the department has said, "New and updated spaces," and combined that into one number. There must be a number of new spaces and a number of updated spaces. That's all I'm looking for.

**Mr. Willan:** We had 100,000 new spaces. That was one of the original plans, and so perhaps, through the Chair, as we work through the program with our school divisions, they will be providing their priorities around new and sometimes updated spaces, which can be a combination in a project where you have a new building or a modernization with additional spaces added on. You can be updating a high school, for example, that needs to be updated in Calgary, perhaps, or Edmonton or anywhere, where the existing capacity is a certain amount, and then we will be modernizing or potentially replacing that school, but also adding space. So an exact number is difficult, but the plan, to answer the question, was 100,000 new spaces as of the plan in '24-25.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Thank you very much. Now, was that target selected based on capital plans that are ready to move forward, or is it based on achieving a target class size?

**Ms Pillipow:** Thank you for the question, Chair. We receive the capital priority submissions every year from the school authorities, and those are analyzed according to our capital planning rubric, and we identify projects that are prioritized in high-growth areas and that align with the rubric. Obviously, project readiness is an important component of the schools now program, where in order to go through planning and to the next stage, projects need to be ready to move on, which also means that we need to work with municipalities on site readiness and so that projects don't sit around for months or years before they move to the next stage.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Member Schmidt. We will now move to the government caucus for 10 minutes of questions. MLA van Dijken.

**Mr. van Dijken:** Thank you, Chair, and thank you for the opportunity. I just want to bring focus to key objective 3.1 in the annual report, page 46. The objective is to "provide career education programming that enables students to explore and experience various occupations." There was a Dual Credit Review Advisory Group established in June 2024 to review several components of Alberta's dual credit programming.

**10:00**

One of the things I see in my constituency is that a big part of the success of the program is about awareness and improving awareness for students that this is an opportunity for them to actually gain postsecondary credit while learning in high school. It appears to me that school authorities implement the program and that they implement based off what would be relevant for students in their schools. I see a number of different lines: carpentry, welding, agriculture, engineering, medical and health technologies.

My question is if the deputy minister could explain how dual credit programming operated during the '24-25 school year and the types of learning opportunities that were not only available to students but the types of learning opportunities that were prevalent in the different school authorities throughout the province.

**Ms Pillipow:** Thank you for the question, Chair. The dual credit program is an important component of our career education system, and they really help students to be able to transition, as the member

mentioned, to opportunities after high school, whether that's postsecondary education or designations to our various trades. Our dual credit programming is optional for students and allows them to build on and discover career interests. They can do this while they're earning their high school credit as well as credits towards postsecondary certificates, diploma, or degree, including a journey person certificate.

Just for additional information, in the '24-25 school year we had 3,272 students that participated in a dual credit program, and our school authorities, who have the flexibility to develop these programs, utilized a few different areas. They went for two different kinds of grants, a startup grant where dual credit programming could have eligible school authorities apply for a startup of \$50,000, as well as an enhancement grant for over \$100,000.

I just want to give a few examples of the types of programs through the \$4.4 million that was invested into these two programs. We had the ministry at the time of Seniors, Community and Social Services provide additional funding to support a health care aide dual credit program to assist students pursuing a career in the health care sector. We also had 79 grants that were awarded to 59 school authorities. Those are a combination of startup grants between \$2.75 million and 22 enhancement grants for \$2.1 million. We had many opportunities that provided spans of industries, including health care, trades, agriculture, technology, and business administration. We also had carpentry, welding, apprenticeship training in agriculture, engineering, and medical and health technologies.

Thank you for the question.

**Mr. van Dijken:** And thank you for the answer.

I'm now going to turn my focus on the school accelerator program and the ability to get schools built right throughout the province and modernized throughout the province. My question is if the deputy minister could elaborate on how the schools now program was implemented during the '24-25 fiscal year and specifically how it has supported the timely advancement of school projects.

In two of my communities they had projects that had been identified for many years. In Barrhead a modernization of the high school there was on the books for quite a number of years, and then a replacement school in the hamlet of Mallaig, on the eastern side of my constituency. Those projects are both coming along nicely. I'm just curious how the program was utilized to actually get timely advancement of those types of projects.

**Ms Pillipow:** Thank you very much for the question. The Premier's announcement of the \$8.6 billion investment in the schools now program is a very unique program for Alberta. By the end of '24-25 we had 22 projects that were accelerated under the schools now program. Eleven of those projects were approved to move to the next stage in fall '24, and 11 were approved for full construction in February '25, so that demonstrates that they were in, potentially, design and then they moved to construction through the approved process. Eleven of the 22 accelerated projects were new schools approved through Budget '24. The accelerated projects supported creation or renovation of more than 21,300 student spaces with more than 6,700 new or renovated spaces created in Edmonton and more than 5,500 created in Calgary and then an additional 9,100 created for communities outside of our metro cities.

Thank you for the question.

**Mr. van Dijken:** Thank you, Chair, and I will cede the rest of my time to MLA de Jonge.

**Ms de Jonge:** Thank you. Thanks, Chair. Thank you, deputy and other officials, for being here this morning. I'm going to continue on with a line of questioning that I've heard from other committee members here and I can appreciate the interest, including from the member opposite, and seeing projects and schools completed and kids in classrooms. That's certainly a priority for me. I live in one of the fastest growing communities in the province. I represent what I believe to be the fastest growing municipality, although my colleague from Airdrie might disagree, but that is Chestermere. Our schools are at capacity, so, you know, I'm happy to see the focus from this government and this ministry on completing schools, and that's where my questions will be.

Back to the annual report, pages 65 to 67 – they were referenced earlier by the member opposite – outline the school construction and renovation projects that are under way. You know, I'm wondering: you talked a bit about the range of school projects that were in progress during the '24-25 fiscal year, but I'd like to know through the chair if, deputy, you can update the committee on how your ministry in co-ordination with Infrastructure is managing these projects to ensure that they're built, that they're updated, and ultimately delivered where they're needed most.

**Ms Pillipow:** Thank you for the question, Chair. It's an important question from the member as the Department of Education and Childcare identifies the priorities in the capital plan and works through the advancing of the projects through the various stages through our partners in Infrastructure, who ultimately manage and deliver the projects.

At the start of '24-25 we had 99 active capital projects that were under way, including 43 projects that were approved through Budget '24. Those were 31 that were new to the capital plan and 56 existing, active projects that were approved in previous years. Ninety-nine of those projects equated to approximately 76,000 new and renovated spaces, including more than 34,000 student spaces through the '24 capital plan and more than 41,000 student spaces through existing projects approved in previous years. In '24-25 twelve schools were completed, adding or renovating more than 11,000 student spaces. As I mentioned, once the projects are approved through the capital plan, our partners in Infrastructure manage the project and the delivery through the various stages.

Thank you.

**Ms de Jonge:** Excellent. I'm not sure we'll get time for the next question, but maybe I'll just preface it and continue in the next block. A big part of the capital planning process for schools also includes the modular classroom program. That's discussed in the same area of the annual report, pages 65 to 67. I've certainly seen the impact that modular classrooms have had in my community, where you're able to create more spaces and address those pressures, those really acute pressures, in a more timely manner. I'll follow up with you in the next block on this, but, you know, I'm curious to understand how they were deployed during the fiscal year.

With that I'll pause, and we can pick this up when it comes back to the government members.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Member.

We will now move back to the Official Opposition for 10 minutes.

10:10

**Mr. Schmidt:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Continuing on the discussion of the schools now program. Now, according to the department's own goal of 200,000 new and updated spaces in seven years, the department needs to add, on average, 28,000 spaces each year, and

already in year one the department is behind by 7,000 spaces. It only approved 21,000 spaces, meaning that in the '25-26 fiscal year the department would need to build 36,000 spaces to catch up. Did the department have a plan to get back on track with the goals of the schools now program?

**Ms Pillipow:** Thank you for the question, Chair. The 200,000 renovated spaces that were announced to be finished by 2031-32 were averaged out over seven years, and we had a projection on the number of spaces that were needed per year to be built in addition to the spaces that were required in high-need areas.

I'm just going to ask Jeff if you had any more details that you wanted to add, if that's okay, Chair.

**Mr. Willan:** New to the plan was 32 additional projects in Budget '24, so those projects will then, of course, go into the planning, design, and construction phase. Over the next between four and six years those projects will come online, and they'll bring their spaces into the education system to contribute to meeting the target of 200,000 spaces, whether they be new or they be updated or modernized spaces.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Yeah. I'm not getting a lot of confidence in the department's ability to deliver on 200,000 new and updated spaces when they can't even tell me what the plan is to catch up on the 7,000 spaces that it missed this year. What is the spending plan in capital? We underspent the capital plan in '24-25 by \$120 million. You know, schools now should be spending, on average, \$1.2 billion a year. Is the intent to spend \$7 billion in year seven?

**Ms Pillipow:** Thank you for the question, Chair. As I mentioned, the plan is averaged out over seven years. We estimate that you need to put about 40 new projects in our capital plan every year to meet the targets.

Through the Chair, if my SFO can just talk about the funding commitment that's required to meet that target.

**Mr. Willan:** Yeah, so the program as it evolves here through Budget '24 and then into Budget '25 and '26: what I know is that the scope involves adding those projects into the plan. The spending will be commensurate with the appropriate phase of the construction cycle of each project going forward, so the spending will be commensurate with the cost of building those spaces. Each successive budget, as in your approvals through the accelerated program, which was mentioned as part of the school's construction accelerated program: funding will be provided as schools move through the planning, design, and construction phase.

In the end, though, the target is for \$8.6 billion of additional investment to meet those 200,000 spaces, whether it be through the modular classroom program or through new school builds, modernizations, et cetera. The funding will then be commensurate as those projects move successfully through each of the construction phases of planning, design, and construction, and will be reflected appropriately in the budget year to which they enter those phases.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Incredible. Incredible non answers from the department here. What is the deferred maintenance liabilities for Alberta schools at the end of '24-25?

**Ms Pillipow:** Thank you for the question, Chair. We'd have to look that answer up.

Thank you.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Okay. I hope that the department can respond in writing to the committee.

**Ms Pillipow:** Thank you, Chair. We'd be happy to respond in writing.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Thank you very much.

I want to move now to PATs. The target for '24-25 was not meant for language arts and not met for mathematics. The ministry doesn't provide any analysis or discussion of this result besides citing COVID-19, recent wildfires, and recent data breaches. Can the ministry say what other factors beyond COVID-19, recent wildfires, and data breaches may be contributing to missing the targets for PATs in the reporting year?

**Ms Pillipow:** Thank you very much for the question, Chair. The diploma exam results have rebounded strongly since the pandemic. We also look at diploma exams as an indicator of our PAT results.

To support students to develop their literacy and numeracy skills as early as possible, we are, as Minister Nicolaides has announced, doing the early literacy and numeracy screening through grade 3. In addition, we also provided additional funding, as the member was asking for earlier, to support literacy and numeracy funding. As we're executing new curriculum in our grade 6 curriculum from the PATs from that period of time, we also anticipated – that's one year of data that we want to be able to analyze over the term of those PATs.

Meghann Eagle, did you want to add anything else, through the chair, with respect to the PAT results?

**Ms Eagle:** Thank you, Deputy, and thank you, Chair. I think, Deputy, you covered most of it, but I would just reiterate that the math PAT was the first time that the students had written it on this curriculum. They had a couple of years of instruction before the PAT was administered, so this is the results showing from that assessment.

**Mr. Schmidt:** So is it fair to say that the curriculum may have failed in preparing the students to meet the targets for the PATs?

**Ms Pillipow:** Thank you for the question, Chair. We worked through the one year of instruction, as I mentioned earlier, on the curriculum execution. It is done through piloting and then through full implementation. We take the one year of results as results that we need to work on to support children through their K to 5 learning in the curriculum.

Did you want to add anything else, Meghann, through the chair?

**Ms Eagle:** Thank you, Chair. Thank you for the question. The PATs, as the deputy mentioned, were administered in the '24-25 year, and in the year where they were not administered, we asked school authorities to participate in field testing of the questions. Field testing of the questions is a very crucial step in developing the PATs. We had an exceptional turnout, and schools are already signing up for that. In the '23-24 year we had 30,700 field tests for English language arts and literature 6, and we had approximately 36,400 field tests for math 6, which is significantly higher than the couple of thousand that we have on a normal basis. So we were very pleased to see the interest and the uptake of participants in those exams.

**Mr. Schmidt:** I fail to see how participation in field testing is actually linked to declining grade 9 PATs. Connect those dots for me.

**Ms Pillipow:** Sorry, Chair. Is that a question?

**Mr. Schmidt:** Yeah. Enlighten me. How does the number of people who are participating in field testing of questions explain decreasing achievement results in PATs?

**Ms Pillipow:** Thank you for the question. Meghann can outline, Chair, the process for developing PAT questions, if that would serve the member's question.

**Mr. Schmidt:** No, it doesn't.

**The Chair:** I think the question is, like: can you repeat that, that the PAT results are declining and how participation in those things is linked with those declining results?

**Ms Pillipow:** Through the chair, I'll ask Meghann Eagle to answer the question.

**Ms Eagle:** Sure. Field testing, I think, is an important part of the process. It allows the students to practise the tests, to be familiar with what's coming on the tests. It does contribute to the support offered to the students, to write those tests. So that is one way that we are supporting students.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Okay. So more students participated in field testing the questions, yet they still did worse in the achievement results. Is that right?

**Ms Pillipow:** Thank you for the question. The process that we went through this year increased the amount of testing as it was the first year – are you referring, Chair, to grade 6 or grade 9, just to clarify?

**Mr. Schmidt:** I'm talking about grade 9 PATs.

**Ms Pillipow:** Grade 9. The curriculum for grade 7 to 9 has been in place for several years. That curriculum and those results: we're seeing a rebound of math results in grade 9 from previous numbers. As Meghann mentioned, we are working with teachers through the testing to make sure that we're getting the questions and improving our process to prepare students for those tests.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We will now move to the government for 10 minutes of questions.

**10:20**

**Ms de Jonge:** Thank you so much, Chair. I'm going to pick up from what I was talking about in the previous block regarding the modular classroom program. Again, just for reference this is in the education annual report '24-25, pages 65 to 67. You know, the report presents modular classrooms as a flexible and temporary solution that's used by school authorities to manage space pressures while permanent facilities are being planned and constructed. I know from experience in my own constituency that school authorities can also use modular classrooms to address different growth areas and different pressures in their area, so that grants them a flexibility in-year as well. My question through the chair to the deputy is: how were our modular classrooms deployed during the fiscal year under question to address overcrowding and enrolment pressures in schools?

**Ms Pillipow:** Thank you for the question, Chair. The modular classroom program is an important part of the schools now full implementation. For Budget '24 we included \$50 million for the modular classroom program. Additionally, \$90 million was reprofiled in-year for a total of \$140 million in '24-25 to support the program, and this was in response to strong enrolment growth.

Of the \$140 million, \$114 million was spent on new units, approximately \$8 million was spent on relocating units, and the remaining \$18 million was allocated as contingency for the program. This investment created more than 5,200 spaces, including more than 4,500 new spaces and more than 700 relocated spaces to support school jurisdictions experiencing enrolment pressures. All the modular classrooms that were approved through Budget '24, I'm happy to say, are now in operation.

Thank you.

**Ms de Jonge:** Thank you. Through the chair, that's great to hear. Before I cede to my colleague, I just want to thank you again for your work on the education file. It's certainly a big undertaking. I know my constituents appreciate the focus on this and getting schools built, so I just thank you for your work and appreciate the continued efforts on that.

I cede to my colleague.

**Ms Lovely:** Well, thank you so much. Very nice to see all of you. I just wanted to give a big shout-out and a thank you. We've got the Blessed Carlo Acutis high school now open and full, so very thankful for that school. Our community is thrilled. That's a big feather in our cap. We also have another feather in our cap. That is the Holden Rural Academy, and the enrolment has really gone up. They're serving over a hundred students. The principal has been visiting other communities and helping them get those similar schools open there. Just very grateful for the assistance that your department has provided to the folks in my community.

Now to my questions. The education annual report 2024-25 discusses enrolment growth trends in both the ministry overview and results analysis section, particularly on pages 11 to 14. The report outlines how enrolment growth affects funding allocations, staffing, and infrastructure planning and emphasizes the importance of balancing predictability with responsiveness across the system. Could the deputy minister please speak to how Education and Childcare managed enrolment growth during the '24-25 school year and supported school authorities experiencing increased demand?

**Ms Pillipow:** Thank you for the question, Chair. Alberta continues to experience strong enrolment growth, as you noted, and Budget '24 was designed to ensure the education system could respond. The enrolment increased by 3.1 per cent in the '24-25 school year, or over 24,046 students, with growth across public schools, independent schools, and early childhood service operators. This reflected a broader population growth that Alberta was experiencing.

To manage this growth, the funding framework was designed to balance predictability and responsiveness. It combined stable base funding through the weighted moving average allocation with targeted supports for jurisdictions experiencing rapid growth. In '24-25 we had the supplemental enrolment growth grant, which provided \$76 million to school authorities with enrolment growth of 2 per cent or higher, helping them to respond to immediate pressures related to staffing, space, and programming. These targeted measures were supported by a broader increase in operating funding.

Education's operating budget increased by \$393 million, or 4.4 per cent, compared to the prior year, ensuring school authorities had the flexibility to be able to manage growth pressures at the local level. At the same time, school authorities reported declining operating reserves, from \$334 million in '22-23 to \$301 million as of August 31, 2024. This reflects that available resources were being used actively to support students to access enrolment growth and respond to staffing and cost pressures rather than just being held

in reserve. This was something that the minister had asked the school authorities to do as well.

Taken together, these measures demonstrate that enrolment growth is being managed through a combination of stable base funding, targeted growth supports, and ongoing financial oversight, while ensuring that resources continue to be directed to the classroom and to student learning.

Thank you for the question.

**Ms Lovely:** Thank you for the answer.

Next, the education annual report '24-25 references several intergovernmental education initiatives on page 17 and 59. These include federal-provincial funding arrangements that support language learning, educator mobility, and student enrichment, which are designed to complement provincial programming while ensuring accountability for public funds. Could the deputy minister please explain how these intergovernmental education initiatives delivered value for public dollars while supporting students and educators across Alberta?

**Ms Pillipow:** Thank you very much for the question, Chair. In '24-25 Alberta used intergovernmental partnerships strategically to support language learning, workforce readiness, and equitable access to education, while maintaining strong oversight of public spending and maximizing federal funding. Through the official languages in education program, OLEP, Alberta invested federal funding, with \$19.8 million in '24-25, to support francophone education, French immersion, and French as a second language program across the province. This funding has been delivered through the Canada-Alberta agreement and supports both minority language and second language instruction, strengthens teacher capacity, and expands programs consistent with Alberta's French policy and legislative obligations.

Alberta also participated in the pan-Canadian language programs funded through the intergovernmental arrangements. This included 221 explore, 78 odyssey, and 34 destination clic participants. These programs provide students and educators with experiential language learning opportunities while leveraging federal investments and shared delivery models.

Additionally, through the individual teacher bursary, Alberta supported 112 French language educators by providing targeted funding of up to \$4,000 per educator for a total of over \$173,550 that enhanced teacher recruitment and retention and professional learning capacity. Collectively these initiatives, as reported through the ministry's audited financial statements, demonstrate combined stewardship and aligning federal contributions with Alberta's education priorities and reporting transparently through this committee today.

Thank you.

**Ms Lovely:** All right. Switching gears a bit here. The business and industry employer survey results are summarized on pages 52 and 53 of the education annual report '24-25. The survey provides employer feedback on the skills, preparedness, and workplace readiness of recent high school graduates, offering an external perspective on system outcomes. Could the deputy minister discuss what insights employers are sharing about Alberta students and how this feedback informs education policy and programming?

**Ms Pillipow:** Thank you for the question, Chair. Employers of recent high school students indicate that Alberta's K to 12 graduates have strong technical and digital skills. Many graduates are described as tech savvy, quick learners, and effective at using technology; for example, helping customers with apps, forms, and digital tools. We also have feedback that employers say our students

have good performance when work experience exists. Those students who have participated in apprenticeships such as RAP or co-op or early work placements were viewed consistently as being more prepared, reliable, and successful. Employers also note areas of improvement in workplace readiness, soft skills, and practical life skills.

Alberta education has several initiatives under way to support our students in successfully transitioning from school to the workforce, including significant investments in career education funding to keep students engaged and focused on their future, and we will continue to work closely with our education partners to deliver programs, supports, and services that help students succeed both in the classroom and in life.

**10:30**

**Ms Lovely:** Okay. I'll cede to Member Lundy.

**Mr. Lundy:** For one second.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Member Lundy.

Now we'll move to the Official Opposition for 10 minutes.

**Ms Renaud:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think I'm going to try again with the grade 9 PATs for '24-25. The ministry was very clear that the targets weren't met for language arts and mathematics, and the ministry didn't really discuss why that was other than to point to COVID, wildfires, and a security breach, all of which occurred, it looks like, before 2024. I'm wondering if you can explain the scope of – I mean, I think we all are very clear about COVID's impact on education and children and students, but I wonder if you could explain the wildfires and security breach and why that would be, like, an impact or a factor in the declining numbers. The wildfires seemed like they weren't, sort of, all across Alberta, so it impacted a smaller geographic area. I'm wondering if you can explain that.

**Ms Phillipow:** Sure. Thank you for the question. When we work on our annual report, Chair, we look at the conditions that surround students who may have had to be excused due to wildfires. We did have some communities that evacuated in northern parts of the province. I don't have those exact numbers with me. I'm wondering, Meghann, if you do.

**Ms Eagle:** I don't. I can get them.

**Ms Phillipow:** We can get those numbers of communities that had to evacuate.

**Ms Renaud:** That would be great if you could get those to the committee, if you could get the numbers for the students that were impacted by wildfires. Also, how the data breach or the security breach – I mean it was 41 authorities, I think, out of 63 that were impacted, but if the ministry could explain, like, how many individual students were impacted by this. I think there's probably a big difference between wildfires and COVID although they're both horrible.

Are there any other reasons other than COVID, wildfires, and security breaches that the ministry has for missing these targets?

**Ms Phillipow:** Thank you for that question, Chair. As we mentioned, the math results that we are noticing that were declining: Minister Nicolaides has put in place some downstream and early intervention on literacy and numeracy rates, and we are paying attention to those rates and how they're progressing.

I do want to note, though, that Alberta does consistently perform internationally higher in math results. As you look at PISA results, which I'm sure the member is familiar with, Chair, Alberta

performed above the Canadian and international averages in math. Within Canada, Alberta students rank second in math behind only Quebec and ninth overall amongst 81 participating countries.

We are paying attention. We're looking at early intervention opportunities, and we're paying attention to how we're evaluating net large.

Thank you.

**Ms Renaud:** All right. So performance metric 3(a), career education opportunities for students, discusses creating opportunities for students to explore different career options so more will join the workforce. I note the chart 3(a), which captures the satisfaction of students, parents, teachers, and trustees, hovers around the low 70s. I note teacher satisfaction has dropped while the rest remains stable. I'm wondering if the deputy minister could speak to that.

**Ms Phillipow:** Thank you very much for the question. Just to be clear, are you asking a question about student satisfaction or career education, Chair?

**Ms Renaud:** Career education. That would be the performance measure.

**Ms Phillipow:** Thank you very much for the question. In '24-25 we did continue to strengthen our career education, and this was a concerted effort under the minister to be able to support children to be able to transition to career education opportunities. Our overall satisfaction with student opportunities to learn about careers did remain stable at 71.5, meeting our target, and a major accomplishment in our programming and our investment was the expansion of collegiate schools and the specialized pathways that connect classroom learning to real-world careers.

What the record shows is that Alberta invested \$23.7 million to support the startup and expansion of collegiate schools and adding seven new collegiate school programs in '24-25. We think with that initial investment in '24-25, we'll start to see an increase in the outcomes there.

Thank you, Chair.

**Ms Renaud:** On page 52 of the annual report, I note that the ministry measures satisfaction with the skills and knowledge of recent high school graduates to assess effectiveness of Alberta's education system. How many employers were surveyed?

**Ms Phillipow:** Thank you for the question. I'm just going to see if my ADM responsible for the survey, Zoe Cooper, has that answer.

**Ms Cooper:** I will need to get it. So I'll get that.

**Ms Phillipow:** Okay. Thank you.

**Ms Renaud:** Can you tell me how those employers were selected?

**Ms Phillipow:** Thank you for the question, Chair. Zoe Cooper, did you have any additional information on the process that we use for our annual survey to support the performance measures?

**Ms Cooper:** Provincial satisfaction surveys use a random stratified sample methodology. They're representative of the Alberta population at large. The research is conducted by a third party through general outreach to employers.

**Ms Renaud:** The government contracts with a third party to do the survey. So how does this third party select the employers to survey in Alberta and which sectors?

**Ms Cooper:** The selection is a random stratified sample size. So they would have a list of employers overall and select from that list. It's voluntary participation by those employers.

**Ms Renaud:** Is there any kind of oversight to ensure that different sectors are surveyed, so perhaps sell their – you know, aviation, construction, oil and gas? Like, is there any kind of oversight to ensure there's an appropriate sample size?

**Ms Cooper:** Again, it's a random sampling. Six hundred employers were surveyed and a random grouping of those employers.

**Ms Renaud:** When we make a statement about employers having confidence in Alberta's education system, we can't really say that it's representative of all sectors in Alberta. It's just a random sample. We don't really know.

**Ms Cooper:** Again, it's a random sample.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. Does the ministry have any mechanism to monitor the successful employment or entrance into postsecondary education of graduates of the Alberta education system that are disabled or receive additional support or are coded in any way? Any of the students that have received additional support to get through the school system... [interjections] You all want to finish up?

I'm wondering if – I'm not sure what the language is that Alberta education uses for students that are disabled, whether they disclose themselves or they receive the assessment. But they receive additional support to be in school. Do we have any mechanism to monitor any kind of successful movement beyond high school?

**Ms Pillipow:** Thank you for that question. I think I'm understanding, Chair, that you're asking a question about high school transition rates for specifically targeting students from an inclusion perspective?

**Ms Renaud:** Sure. We see in the annual report measures for – you know, we're measuring: are they moving on to postsecondary or apprenticeship positions; whatever it is? Is there any kind of data to demonstrate that we're spending a lot of money in complex classrooms on students with disabilities? Are we monitoring them after they leave in any way? Do we have any data whatsoever?

**Ms Pillipow:** I'm just going to have to check with my table, Chair, on that specific question. I don't have any of that data right in front of me.

We don't collect that specific data on high school transition rates.

**Ms Renaud:** Do we know approximately how many students that are coded or have a disability or an ISP, or whatever it is you use to describe them, are finishing high school, let's say, in this fiscal year?

**Ms Pillipow:** I can provide that information to the committee.

**Ms Renaud:** Okay. We don't have that. All right.

Performance measure 1(a) discusses high school completion. This measure includes students earning a high school diploma, certificate of achievement, or students who apprentice or enter postsecondary within five years of entering grade 10. This is obviously an important measure when examining effectiveness of Alberta's education system for all students. Would the department describe the kind of data that is collected for completion rates for disabled students? What is collected? Is there anything at all collected?

**Ms Pillipow:** Thank you for that question, Chair. I'm just going to check with my team to see if we have any of those specific numbers. That's a very specific data ask that I don't think I have at table.

**Ms Renaud:** We know that the government is about to move a bunch of people off AISH and encourage employment. We know that disabled people are not employed at the same rate as their able-bodied peers. We also know that completion of high school and then moving on is an excellent predictor of future participation in the workforce. I guess, again: what percentage of disabled students complete high school? Using this ministry's criteria, where, obviously, we see in the annual report that we're seeing measures of people completing high school, we'd like to know: what percentage of disabled students complete high school? What percentage enter postsecondary or apprenticeship within five years? The same criteria as all the other students.

10:40

**Ms Pillipow:** Thank you, Chair, for the question. Similarly to my previous answer, I don't have that specific data in front of me. I'm happy to provide additional data to the committee.

**Ms Renaud:** I think student dropout rate is considered a leading indicator of high school completion rate. Of the students who do not complete high school...

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We will now move to the government caucus for 10 minutes. MLA Lundy.

**Mr. Lundy:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Thank you, deputy and officials, for joining us here today. My colleague from Camrose was asking about intergovernmental initiatives. I'd like to maybe focus on some international education initiatives. We see this on pages 18 and 60 of the annual report. It talks a little bit about Alberta's participation in international education initiatives. Some examples are student exchanges, educator exchanges, and international agreements. The report situates this work within the broader objectives related to global learning opportunities, language acquisition, and cultural exchange. Through the chair, could the deputy minister outline how Alberta's international education initiatives supported students and teachers during the '24-25 year?

**Ms Pillipow:** Thank you for that question, Chair. In '24-25 Alberta's international education initiatives focused on providing meaningful global and teaching opportunities while ensuring responsible use of public funds through intergovernmental and international partnerships. We participated in a range of international and education initiatives, including student and educator exchanges and formal agreements or memorandums of understanding with international partners such as France, Germany, Japan, Spain, and Ukraine. An example of the memorandum of understanding was signed in June 2024, in the state of Hesse.

In '24-25 93 students participated in in-person exchanges. Further, special language advisers from Germany, Japan, Spain, and Ukraine stationed in Alberta also supported instructional quality and educator professional development. These advisers support language learning, cultural exchange, and career-focused education while leveraging shared funding models and long-standing partnerships to minimize cost to the province. Alberta works collaboratively with federal and international partners to align international education activities with provincial priorities, ensuring that programs complement Alberta's curriculum, support workforce readiness, and enhance student outcomes. Alberta also

hosts many protocol visits from other countries, and we ensure accountability through formal agreements, ensuring clear eligibility and reporting requirements on international education expenditures.

Thank you.

**Mr. Lundy:** Thank you, Deputy. Through the chair, I appreciate you being able to add a little context and some examples to how Alberta is learning from and tracking with international education trends. I'd like to switch gears and chat a little bit about francophone education supports. Of course, being the MLA for Beaumont, a community with a proud francophone heritage, this is an important issue. Through the chair, I'd like to ask the deputy a couple of questions here. For reference, this is on page 17 of the annual report, including highlights, provincial funding, capital investments, and shared federal-provincial arrangements that support francophone school activities. This helps sustain francophone education across the province. Through the chair, could the deputy minister describe how Education and Childcare supported francophone students during the year through these provincial and shared funding arrangements?

Thank you.

**Ms Pillipow:** Thank you for the question, Chair. In '24-25 Alberta supported francophone students through a range of provincial operating funding, capital investments, and shared funding arrangements, with a focus on equitable instruction quality and long-term system sustainability to support the vitality of francophone communities across the province. From a provincial perspective, Alberta funded francophone education through the funding framework, supporting francophone regional authorities and programs. Alberta also supported francophone students by investing in system-level capacity, including curriculum implementation, instructional supports, and provincial co-ordination activities that promote consistency, quality, and alignment across programs. These activities are essential to ensuring that francophone students receive education that meets provincial standards while reflecting their linguistic and cultural context.

Alberta also made provincial capital investments to support francophone education infrastructure. Capital funding was used to build new francophone school facilities, helping to address enrolment growth, improve learning environments, and ensure francophone students have safe and appropriate education spaces. These capital decisions are made through Alberta's school capital planning process and are reflected in the province's capital reporting and public accounts.

In addition to provincial funding, I also want to share that Alberta leveraged federal-provincial funding, as I mentioned earlier, the OLEP program, to complement provincial investments, particularly in areas such as language instruction, educator supports, and system capacity. All expenditures related to francophone education were managed within approved ministry authorities and reported through Alberta education's audited financial statements and reported through to Public Accounts.

Thank you.

**Mr. Lundy:** Great. Thank you, Deputy, for providing some information on that.

I would like to have a little chat about performance measures. I know a couple of my colleagues have made some references today to a few of them. Not surprisingly, I would say, the annual report includes a comprehensive set of performance measures, that you can see throughout the annual report. These measures, of course, are designed to assess progress towards key outcomes, support

transparency, and provide legislators with insight into how the education system is performing over time. Just for those who might be following along online or watching from home, through the chair: could I ask the deputy to explain how these performance measures are used to assess system performance and inform policy and operational decision-making?

Thank you.

**Ms Pillipow:** Thank you for the question. I'd be happy to answer. The department is committed to monitoring the performance of our education system and to working with our partners to identify areas of strength and where we can improve. Education and Childcare's annual report from '24-25 highlights the results, activities, and accomplishments of the ministry and our educational partners in the fiscal year. The performance measures reflect the broad outcomes of the educational system. Key objectives improve and sustain longer term outcomes.

These outcomes can be assessed using a variety of measures, including supplementary performance measures, which are available both in the ministry annual report and on the ministry website. Good evaluation practice is based on a balanced approach to measurement, using both qualitative and quantitative information and data. Performance measures reported in the annual report are based on administrative and assessment results data; for example, high school completion rate, provincial achievement tests as well as survey results from respondent groups, including parents. Feedback from parents and the public is important in assessing the quality of education. Survey respondent groups also include teachers, school board trustees, high school students, and employers of recent high school graduates.

Performance targets reported in '24-25 were set in the '24-27 business plan, and those targets set considered trends over time and reflect an aspirational view of future results. Flexibility of the measurement system allows for addition, deletion, or refinement of measures to address the emerging needs and priorities of the education system.

Thank you for the question.

**Mr. Lundy:** Great. Thank you, Deputy. It's important that we get a chance to unpack what this actually looks like in some of these measures.

I might close here with an issue that gets quite a bit of attention and rightfully so. I think when you're talking about personal mobile use or cellphone use and social media in schools, this is an issue that parents are deeply engaged on and is going to become even increasingly important over time. In the time period that we're looking at today, Education and Childcare introduced provincial standards for the use of personal mobile devices and social media in schools following engagement with parents, teachers, and school authorities. These standards are framed within broader efforts described in the annual report to support focused learning environments, student well-being, and positive school culture. Through the chair, could the deputy minister explain what led to the introduction of these standards and what the ministry is observing as a result?

**Ms Pillipow:** Thank you for the question, Chair. Minister Nicolaides had heard from parents, teachers, and school authorities and looked at research that showed that if a student looks at their device, like I may have during this meeting, it takes about 20 minutes to refocus to their learning. Cellphone use and social media use also has a negative impact on students' mental health.

We did a survey. We had more than 68,000 responses. This survey told us that 90 per cent of the survey respondents had

concerns over student cellphone use at school, 85 per cent of the survey respondents believed that cellphones have a negative impact on student achievement, 81 per cent of survey respondents believed that cellphones in schools increase the number of bullying incidents, and 58 per cent of parents believed that having a cellphone negatively impacts their child's mental health. So under the . . . [Ms Pillipow's speaking time expired]

Thank you.

10:50

**The Chair:** Thank you.

For the final round members will have three minutes to read questions into the record for a written response from the department, starting with the Official Opposition.

**Member Eremenko:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. In regard to Mandel and Associates I'm curious if the grant has been renewed. Did it go to a different service provider? What has taken its place after the end of the contract in April 2024?

Question 2: does the department collect incidents of aggression and violence toward other students and staff by students? What was the number of incidents reported in the fiscal year? How do they define critical incidents?

My last question is: what were the hiring targets for fiscal year 2024-25 for educational assistants and teachers? Was the target met?

**Mr. Schmidt:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd also ask the department to update how many schools in Calgary were approved – their location, the project details, whether they were high school, junior high, or elementary schools – and what stage in the process they are: planning, design, construction.

Page 75 of the annual report shares the results of overall satisfaction concerning the quality of education. The greatest decline was among teachers. Can the department explain why teachers are so much less satisfied with the quality of education than they were in the prior years and explain any links between the perception of quality and the recent decline in provincial achievement test scores across the province?

Page 63 discusses \$42.5 million in classroom complexity grants. Money was intended for increasing staff hours, providing training, and increasing front-line staff. What were the targets for the number of staff hours to be increased? How much training was intended to be provided? How many additional front-line staff were intended to be hired? And then what outcomes were achieved with that grant? How many additional staff hours were worked? How much additional training was provided? How many additional front-line staff were hired, and which positions and which school boards were those hired in?

The ministry says that it's implementing eight actions to address the first recommendation from the Auditor General to verify the accuracy of child care operator claims, including a child care participant number, a claim submission portal, a child care family portal, new training environments, group training, one-on-one onboarding, and self-serve resource libraries, with the ministry aiming to implement all of these programs by April 2028. Can the ministry clarify exactly what the eight actions are that they're taking since they only list seven actions in the status report? Can the ministry provide a clear timeline for each of the actions it is taking? Can the ministry describe in more detail how the child care family portal will work and how it will meet the Auditor's recommendation to verify the accuracy of operators' claims to the department?

No, I'm not going to get the next question on the record, so thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Member.

We'll move to the government caucus for three minutes.

**Mr. Lundy:** Okay. Thank you very much. Mr. Chair, I have two questions I'd like to read in, one with a couple of parts. First off, I'd like to read in a question on recruitment and retention of teachers. We know that teacher recruitment and retention initiatives are discussed throughout the education annual report, including bursaries, bridging programs, and targeted supports for rural and northern communities. The annual report highlights the importance of maintaining a stable, qualified teaching workforce to support student success and system sustainability. Could the department outline the steps Education and Childcare took during the '24-25 year to support the recruitment and retention of teachers across Alberta? This is something I hear from my constituents, that sometimes it is difficult attracting and retaining teachers and other educational professionals, and this is a problem talking to my colleagues in rural communities. So what efforts were made in '24-25 to support recruitment and retention efforts for the teaching profession?

Next I'd like to read a question into the record regarding student transportation. In the annual report in '24-25 it discusses student transportation within the broader context of education system operating and funding. Transportation costs are reflected in the financial information section of the report, where transportation expenses are identified as a significant component of system spending on pages 96 and 99. The annual report situates transportation funding alongside broader efforts to manage enrolment growth, support access and equity, and ensure funding models reflect actual service delivery costs faced by school authorities across Alberta. The first question is: could the department explain how the increased student transportation funding provided through Budget 2024 is improving transportation services for Alberta students and supporting access, equity, and education choice as reflected in the education annual report '24-25 financial reporting on pages 96 and 99? As a follow-up question for the record: could the department please describe in this investment how this is improving transportation services for Alberta students?

With that, Mr. Chair, that concludes the questions that our government side would like to read in to the record. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I would like to thank the officials from the Ministry of Education and Childcare and the office of the Auditor General for their participation and responding to committee members' questions. We ask that any outstanding questions, undertakings be responded to within 30 days and forwarded to the committee clerk.

Moving on. Other business. Are there any items for discussion today? Seeing none.

The date of the next meeting is April 14, 2026, with the Ministry of Energy and Minerals.

At this point I would like for someone to move that the March 31, 2026, meeting of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts be adjourned. Moved by Member Eremenko. All in favour? Any opposed?

Thank you. The meeting is now adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 10:57 a.m.]







