



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
Fourth Session

Standing Committee
on
Families and Communities

Ministry of Education
Consideration of Main Estimates

Wednesday, April 18, 2018
3:30 p.m.

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Fourth Session**

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP), Chair
Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (UCP), Deputy Chair

Drever, Deborah, Calgary-Bow (NDP)
Ellis, Mike, Calgary-West (UCP)
Hinkley, Bruce, Wetaskiwin-Camrose (NDP)
Horne, Trevor A.R., Spruce Grove-St. Albert (NDP)
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Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (NDP)**
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* substitution for Marie Renaud

** substitution for Barb Miller

Also in Attendance

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Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Participants

Ministry of Education

Hon. David Eggen, Minister

Curtis Clarke, Deputy Minister

Brad J. Smith, Executive Director, Strategic Financial Services

3:30 p.m.

Wednesday, April 18, 2018

[Ms Goehring in the chair]

Ministry of Education
Consideration of Main Estimates

The Chair: Good afternoon. I would like to call the meeting to order and welcome everyone. The committee has under consideration the estimates of the Ministry of Education for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2019.

I'd ask that we go around the table and have all MLAs introduce themselves for the record. Minister, please introduce the officials that are joining you at the table. I'm Nicole Goehring, MLA for Edmonton-Castle Downs and chair of this committee. We'll start to my right.

Mr. M. Smith: Mark Smith, MLA for Drayton Valley-Devon, vice-chair.

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

Mr. Orr: Good afternoon. Ron Orr, Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Ellis: Mike Ellis, Calgary-West.

Mr. Eggen: David Eggen, minister. To my left is Wendy Boje. She's my assistant deputy minister, strategic services. To my immediate right is Curtis Clarke, our deputy minister, and next to him is Brad Smith, executive director for strategic financial services.

Ms McKittrick: Annie McKittrick, MLA, Sherwood Park.

Dr. Turner: Bob Turner, Edmonton-Whitemud.

Mr. Hinkley: Good afternoon. Bruce Hinkley, MLA, Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Drever: Good afternoon. Deborah Drever, MLA for Calgary-Bow.

Ms Luff: Robyn Luff, MLA for Calgary-East.

Mr. Horne: Good afternoon. Trevor Horne, Spruce Grove-St. Albert.

Mr. Shepherd: Good afternoon. David Shepherd, Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Westhead: Cameron Westhead, MLA for Banff-Cochrane. I'm substituting for MLA Barb Miller.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'd like to note an additional substitute for the record: Dr. Turner for Ms Renaud.

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

Hon. members, the standing orders set out the process for consideration of the main estimates, including the speaking rotation. As provided for in Standing Order 59.01(6), the rotation is as follows. The minister or the member of Executive Council acting on the minister's behalf may make opening comments not to exceed 10 minutes. For the hour that follows, members of the Official Opposition and the minister may speak. For the next 20 minutes

members of the third party, if any, and the minister may speak. For the next 20 minutes members of any other party represented in the Assembly or any independent members and the minister may speak. For the next 20 minutes private members of the government caucus and the minister may speak. For the time remaining, we will follow the same rotation just outlined to the extent possible; however, the speaking times are reduced to five minutes, as set out in Standing Order 59.02(1)(c).

Members wishing to participate must be present during the appropriate portion of the meeting. Members may speak more than once; however, speaking times for the first rotation are limited to 10 minutes at any one time. A minister and a member may combine their time for a total of 20 minutes. For the rotations that follow, with speaking times of up to five minutes, a minister and a member may combine their speaking time for a total of 10 minutes.

Discussion should flow through the chair at all times regardless of whether or not the speaking time has been combined. Members are asked to advise the chair at the beginning of their rotation if they wish to combine their time with the minister's time.

A total of three hours has been scheduled to consider the estimates of the Ministry of Education. With the concurrence of the committee I will call a five-minute break near the midpoint of the meeting; however, the three-hour clock will continue to run. Does anyone oppose having this break? Thank you.

Committee members, ministers, and other members who are not committee members may participate; however, only a committee member or an official substitute may introduce an amendment during a committee's review of the estimates.

Ministry officials may be present and at the direction of the minister may address the committee. Ministry officials seated in the gallery, if called upon, have access to a microphone in the gallery area. Ministry officials are reminded to introduce themselves prior to answering a question or questions. Pages are available to deliver notes or other materials between the gallery and the table. Attendees in the gallery should not approach the table. Members' staff may be present and seated along the committee room wall. Space permitting, opposition caucus staff may sit at the table to assist their members; however, members have priority to sit at the table at all times.

If debate is exhausted prior to the three hours, the ministry's estimates are deemed to have been considered for the time allotted in the schedule and the committee will adjourn. The scheduled end time of today's meeting is 6:30 p.m.

Points of order will be dealt with as they arise, and the clock will continue to run.

Any written material provided in response to questions raised during the main estimates should be tabled by the minister in the Assembly for the benefit of all members.

The vote on the estimates and any amendments is deferred until consideration of all ministry estimates has concluded and will occur in Committee of Supply on April 19, 2018.

Amendments must be in writing and approved by Parliamentary Counsel prior to the meeting at which they are to be moved. The original amendment is to be deposited with the committee clerk, and 20 copies of the amendment must be provided at the meeting for committee members and staff.

I would now like to invite the Minister of Education to begin with his opening remarks. You have 10 minutes.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you so much, Chair. I'm very pleased to join you here today to discuss Education's 2018 budget and main estimates. Besides my officials at the table, I have some representatives behind me to hopefully help me to answer any of

the questions you might have. I'm looking forward to this conversation here this afternoon.

Before I take questions, I just want to give you a brief overview of the commitments our government has presented to ensure that all students have access to high-quality education here in the province of Alberta. Through Budget 2018 our government has again taken steps to both protect and strengthen education here, and what you will see in our budget is stability for education, which we know is a huge priority for all affected parties in education: students, parents, teachers, support staff, and the general public.

Just like in our last four budgets, we are fully funding enrolment growth here in the province of Alberta, which we are projecting this year to be about 2.2 per cent, which would be about 15,000 new students in our schools. In fact, Alberta's overall enrolment is projected to reach over 700,000 students this year. To support thousands of students in reaching their potential, our budget provides \$7.4 billion to school boards to support their operations. We estimate that our commitment to fund enrolment will mean up to 663 certified teachers and 366 support staff could be hired for this coming school year.

Our commitment to supporting the education system also extends to ensuring that students across the province have spaces to learn to meet their needs. Total capital investment this year is \$742 million. This funding will be directed towards infrastructure, maintenance and renewal, and modulars as well, and as you would expect, the majority of this funding goes to ongoing school projects.

As I am sure most of you know, in a move to clarify accountability and responsibility, the capital budget for implementing school projects has been transferred from Alberta Education to Alberta Infrastructure, so \$425 million of that \$742 million I just mentioned will be managed by Infrastructure. The change allows Education to focus on doing more and better planning at the beginning of school projects. It also produces more accountability and transparency in regard to the process. Infrastructure takes responsibility for oversight and reporting the entire construction life cycle of a school project no matter who is managing it. This change aligns with recommendations given to us by the Auditor General in 2016.

Without question, we are working to build the best school-building system possible, and I'm very pleased to say that this year's capital plan included funding for 20 new school projects starting this year. We announced the new school projects the day after the budget. These projects are a mix of new schools in fast-growing urban and suburban areas, replacement schools to revitalize communities and to provide updated infrastructure, and modernizations to keep students in spaces that meet their learning needs. The new projects are spread across every corner of this province and meet a number of distinct needs in our different communities.

Seven brand new schools help to address the swelling enrolment in fast-growing urban centres like Edmonton, Calgary, and Lethbridge, while the seven replacement schools provide updates in some rural areas, including Delia, Provost, and Tilley. Three modernizations will also provide an opportunity to support community renewal and enhance the functionality of existing schools so that they can continue to serve as excellent learning environments and as community hubs. The modernizations are located in Edmonton, Sherwood Park, and Lacombe. We are also happy to have one addition being approved as part of this year's plans, which will be in Beaumont, as well as two new school projects that have been approved for design funding to reflect the strong population growth we continue to see in Calgary. As a government our aim is to have these schools built quickly, built on budget, and built to meet the needs of the students, families, and communities that will use them for many decades into the future.

3:40

We took school authorities' most pressing infrastructure priorities into account before selecting these projects. We also know that there are far more schools needed in our province than we can possibly fund in any given year. But we must maintain our momentum and continue to build schools for the growing student population here in the province of Alberta.

Our government is focused on the priorities of our population, making life more affordable for Albertans, and that is why we reduced the burden of school fees by eliminating basic instructional fees and bus fees for thousands of parents. Of course, we have not forgotten our education partners. Our government is providing school authorities with \$60 million to cover the cost of reducing the burden of school fees on families.

In Budget 2018 we will continue as well our commitment for a targeted school nutrition program for students in our province. So \$15.5 million will be allocated to the school nutrition program for the 2018-2019 school year, an increase of \$5.5 million over the previous year. Thanks to this funding increase, we estimate that 30,000 students will receive daily nutritious meals next year. This is an increase from 8,000, to 20,000, to 22,000 last year, now up to 30,000.

While planning for innovation, sustainability, and capacity building, school authorities will use this funding to support more students with the greatest needs. We believe that every child in Alberta deserves an education that will prepare them for success, and that's why we have been focusing on improving classroom education for all students, including those with special and complex needs. Budget 2018 provides \$461 million for inclusive education. This is an increase of \$8.4 million, or 1.9 per cent.

Once again in the budget we prioritized putting stable and predictable funding into Alberta classrooms for all new and existing students. We will be spending \$39 million in operational funding per day to ensure our students receive the quality education that Albertans have come to know and expect. I hope that you will take some strong indication from the funding that we are providing of how committed we are to K to 12 education and to our students and their families.

There are some critics that might be advocating for substantial cuts to education. We believe that that is the wrong way to go. I don't agree with that thinking, and I'm proud to be part of a government that stands up for what we do believe and that continues to support public services even as we work through an economic struggle not seen in decades.

In summary, through Budget 2018 our government has once again taken steps to protect and improve education funding here in the province of Alberta through our increased funding for enrolment, new schools and modernization projects, and initiatives such as our school fee reduction program and school nutrition program as well. We're taking immediate steps to act on each of these things, and I'm very proud of all of the work that I've done.

I must say as well, just on a personal note, that I've been able to do this and deliver these very good-news budgets for Education over the last four budgets with the strong support of our caucus, of our cabinet, and of the Premier as well. We know that this is a foundational investment for a stronger society. It's an investment for the opportunity for any student regardless of their status, their gender, their geographical location to have an even chance of success. Education represents not just a chance for better economic success in the future, but it also represents an enrichment of one's life, the capacity to learn and to know, to learn throughout their lives, not just during the 12 or 13 years of education that they spend in Alberta classrooms.

With that, I am very happy to take your questions. If my opening remarks answered all of your questions, then we pretty much are done.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

For the hour that follows, members of the Official Opposition and the minister may speak. Mr. Smith, are you wanting the clock set at 20-minute intervals so that you're aware of time, or would you rather it flow without interruption?

Mr. M. Smith: Let's go with 20-minute intervals.

The Chair: Perfect.

Members are asked to advise the chair at the beginning of their rotation if they wish to combine their time with the minister's time. Just a reminder that discussion should flow through the chair at all times regardless of whether or not speaking time is combined.

Mr. Smith, are you wanting to combine your time?

Mr. M. Smith: Yes, please, if that's okay with the minister.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. Absolutely.

The Chair: Thank you. Go ahead.

Mr. M. Smith: Okay. Thank you. Minister Eggen, just on a personal note, I want to start this off on the right foot just by saying that I've enjoyed over the last three years getting to know you as an individual. I find you to be a compassionate and very competent individual. As a former teacher I know that you bring a passion to your file, as I do, and I wanted to just say that in many ways, even though we may disagree on certain things and we may have some questions today, I know that both of us are focused on making sure that our students and our children in this province have educational success or an opportunity for educational success. That's paramount between both of us. I know that you have a very hard-working staff, as evidenced today, and I want to thank you for being here and for helping to work towards providing our students with, I think, one of the best educations you can get anywhere in the world. So thank you for being here.

As one note coming out of your remarks here, I just noticed that you said that there are going to be 20 new schools, yet when you broke them down, you said that there were seven new schools, seven replacement schools, and three modernizations. Unless the new math has taken over here, that's 17, not 20.

Mr. Eggen: Okay. Yeah. I'll check on that. I mean, we count all new school projects in our budget. When you do a modernization, it's pretty much like you're getting a new school, right? I mean, you've seen them around the province. You'll maybe see one in Drayton Valley; they're just tearing that one down.

Mr. M. Smith: Having lived through that in my 30 years of teaching high school, I do understand.

Mr. Eggen: I know. It's not an easy thing.

Mr. M. Smith: Anyhow, I just thought I'd drop that.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. We'll check that.

Mr. M. Smith: Okay. A couple of questions that I just wanted to start off on. There's been a campaign on, mounted by various groups across the province that have wanted to have one public school system and to eliminate some of the choices that we have in Alberta. Just for the record can you say again that you're committed to defending school choice as it currently stands in Alberta?

Mr. Eggen: Absolutely. I can recognize and appreciate why some people might need that reassurance, just from third-party comments that we see from time to time, but from the beginning we have invested quite significantly in education generally and in school choice specifically. Of course, our school choices available to us here in the province of Alberta include public education, Catholic education, which is public education as well. We have charter schools, we have private schools, we have home-schooling, and we have the francophone boards. Each of those choices is helpful. We have invested quite significantly equally into each of those in proportion to their enrolment growth.

I mean, I think that by having these different options available, we probably increase the probability of people going to school and staying in school. I think that a little competition is useful as well in some places to help to have the sharpest education possible, so we have done so.

As you can look through in our estimates, I believe that private school investments, for example, increased around 2.2 per cent, and we met that target, of course, with Catholic education, charter schools, and the like.

Thank you for asking that. You know, we certainly want to make sure that we are offering different chances for people.

In regard to that first question, we have a total of seven new, three modernizations, seven replacements, one addition, and two of the designed schools in Calgary. You know, we had that out-of-cycle announcement as well with the high school and so forth in Edmonton. I like this idea of design because it demonstrates and telegraphs direction, and indeed with the designed school that I put forward last year in Lethbridge, now away they go. They have the blueprints, and they're starting construction. So people, if they're in that design sort of category, can rest assured that those projects will move ahead because they were starting to draw the blueprints, and away they go.

3:50

Mr. M. Smith: Okay. Thank you.

We're going to start by looking at just assessment questions coming out of the budget, and I would turn to the business plan, page 52, outcome 1: "Alberta's students are successful."

Mr. Eggen: You betcha.

Mr. M. Smith: Now, Minister, to be able to qualify the statement made in outcome 1, that Alberta's students are successful, you clearly need to assess students.

Mr. Eggen: Of course.

Mr. M. Smith: Being able to demonstrate an age-appropriate grasp of literacy and numeracy is a foundational element of assessing student success. With the new curriculum being rolled out, there needs to be a strong emphasis – and I know you're aware of that – on assessment . . .

Mr. Eggen: Yes.

Mr. M. Smith: . . . especially if we're going to ensure that any issues moving forward in the curriculum can be addressed. I guess one of the questions about assessment that I would ask is: will you be reinstating grade 3 provincial achievement tests as a part of this process of assessment and moving forward with the curriculum rewrite?

Mr. Eggen: Thank you for the question. Yes, of course, having a new curriculum would imply that we need to have a new assessment. We can't use the old assessment, necessarily, to apply

to a new curriculum. I see the two development tracks to be in parallel.

I believe that rigorous assessment is essential for public assurance. It's essential for parents and for teachers to take, you know, a point in time where a student might happen to be. It helps us to evaluate and to place funding in appropriate places where we might see areas of need, right? For example, with the grade 6 PATs last year I instated a no-calculator portion of the exam. I kind of knew what was going to happen, and sure enough we saw an area for improvement from that move. The assessment data that I gathered from that was helpful for us to help to strengthen, you know, funding and resources to mathematics.

Now, in regard to the grade 3 assessment, I mean, the thing is that there are, well, many kinds of assessments, but we have to distinguish between formative and summative assessments, right? The idea of assessing students at the beginning of the year to look for ways by which you might be able to build a program for those students I think is important and useful.

What I also believe very strongly as a teacher is that you must ensure that you enshrine the professional judgment and discretion of teachers in the classroom around these issues of assessment. I mean, we chose to let teachers make a choice around whether they're going to use the SLA as a formative assessment tool at the beginning of the year, and many of them did – I think that it was a very interesting process, that we learned a lot from – and I think some teachers chose to use some other tool and so forth.

So as we move forward – this is a five- or six-year process, really, building both curriculum and assessment that would be in keeping with that new curriculum. We'll see how it goes. I found it to be very interesting to see how, you know, the sky didn't fall when we made it a choice of the teachers and to reflect the professional integrity of teachers to make that choice, and we are studying the effects of that as we speak.

Rather than giving you a simple yes-or-no answer, I'm certainly looking at both ways to have different kinds of assessment available to us for all of those responsibilities that we have, of course the first responsibility being to the child and to the family.

You know, with that level of assessment or that age group of assessment, there's such wide variation in where students are basically just coming into the system, right? I mean, some kids have been exposed to a great deal of reading – right? – and extra help from their parents and so forth, and other kids are at a different developmental level in that area. Like, there are just some basic cognitive points of development at that age, right? Using the bathroom is not always something that happens at seven years old. We just have to be really conscious of and child focused whenever we make these kinds of decisions.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. I would just ask that you try and keep your answers a little bit more concise.

Mr. Eggen: Does that mean longer or shorter?

The Chair: A little bit shorter.

Mr. Eggen: Shorter. Okay.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. M. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Minister. I think that most of us that have been in the education field understand a formative and summative evaluation and assessment. I guess I'm not telling you anything you probably haven't heard already, but there is some concern in the educational community that waiting until grade 6 to have a summative assessment is a very serious thing and that

eliminating the grade 3 PATs means that we don't have the valuable information that we need until grade 6. That's halfway through a child's education. We know that the SLAs have been made optional because they were not rolling out effectively and efficiently, so I guess I would highly recommend that that be revisited within the ministry.

But let's move on to something that's similar but is down the page a little bit, again referring to outcome 1, Madam Chair. Are you concerned about the steady decline of the performance of Alberta students on the trends in international math and science study, the TIMSS test? I realize this trend was well under way under previous governments, so I'm not attempting to assign blame here or anything like that. I would like to know if there is a concern. There is a trend on this international standardized test for a steady decline in performance by Alberta students. Is this a concern for you?

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Absolutely. We know that we have a very useful opportunity here, with building curriculum, to redouble our efforts around mathematics. The international data that we see around the TIMSS testing and the OECD is reflective of – it's not uncommon in other countries in a similar state of development as Canada. I mean, I think we've done really well on a lot of those other measurements, on PISA and other international testing.

I was just at a conference the last two days with five or six other countries, and, you know, they, again, reiterated just how effective we are. But, you know, you're only as good as the next thing you do, right? I want to make sure that we're investing in, for example, more conversations around teacher training, especially for division 1 teachers, to make sure that they have the skills and the abilities to teach mathematics and that they have the right focus on that as well. Further to that, last year I announced bursaries of up to \$2,000 per teacher to cover postsecondary courses to strengthen their knowledge, skill, and confidence in teaching mathematics. You know, that's, I think, a good sign of direction.

We also, as I said before, put that noncalculator portion in the grade 6 PAT exam, and that gave us a real, you know, interesting glimpse into how students will do mathematics without a calculator, and it can give us areas for improvement as well. I also am looking at the grade 9 exam, to have a noncalculator portion.

Starting in this year, we also are integrating and having a written portion to the math 30-1 and 30-2 diploma exams to show their work. I like that idea as well.

You know, we've engaged with math teachers and experts around the province, and we expect rigour and vigour for basic skills in mathematics to be emphasized in the curriculum and to be reinforced through the skills that our teachers and assistants have to deliver that expectation to our students.

Mr. M. Smith: Okay. Thank you, Minister.

You talked about a grade 9 noncalculator portion. You've talked about the grade 6 exam, bursaries, 30-1 and 30-2 written portions, and teacher training in division 1 for math. A very short answer: have you considered co-operating with the Minister of Advanced Education and addressing the teacher training so that teachers, as they are coming out of university, have that specialization in both English language training and in, you know, numeracy and literacy?

4:00

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Thank you for that, again, very constructive criticism. We have been working with the University of Alberta, the University of Calgary, the Werklund institute, the University of Lethbridge as well as Concordia to look for ways by which we can strengthen teacher training in our target areas for both division 1

and division 2 students. We have an active chair and interaction with my deputy minister and – he wrote something. He clearly doesn't know how to write.

What is that?

Dr. Clarke: Deans.

Mr. Eggen: Deans. Yes. The deans of the 10 different teacher training colleges we have. We do have a working group with postsecondary. Yeah. I mean, you can't really do any of these things if you don't have the professional development for student teachers and then teachers in the field. You know, you can just talk . . .

Mr. M. Smith: If I've understood you correctly, you are working with Advanced Education to start working towards specialization of elementary teachers in the areas of . . .

Mr. Eggen: Absolutely. Yes, we are. You got it.

Mr. M. Smith: Okay. Thank you very much.

Okay. How much money has been spent to date on SLAs, are you committing further funding to them this year, and where would we find that in the budget?

Mr. Eggen: We're going to just find that for you right now. Our total budget for assessments is \$19.2 million. How we bust out SLAs: I can get back to you on that to see where that – oh, here we go. There it is right there. There's \$1.7 million for developing the assessments in French only. The totality of the investment in SLAs specifically: I can get that for you.

Mr. M. Smith: Okay. So there's a further monetary commitment to SLAs. Is there a chance that you're going to eventually come back with a plan to make them mandatory?

Mr. Eggen: Again, in keeping with the new curriculum, I will assess that. I mean, I will take that into consideration. Thank you for . . .

Mr. M. Smith: So that's a part of the discussion that you're having on the curriculum?

Mr. Eggen: Yes.

Mr. M. Smith: Okay. Have you had any internal discussions with the curriculum people about switching back to the grade 3 PATs given the failure of the SLAs, or is this just full speed ahead on trying to fix the problem with the SLAs?

Mr. Eggen: No. Honestly, I mean, having teachers make a choice around the SLAs wasn't a product of them not being functional so much as just, you know, trying something different with that level of assessment. Once again, I know you know the difference, but SLAs are a way by which to help set a program for education for kids and to find out where they are at at the beginning of the year, right? Then PATs are something that happens at the end of the year, right? I think teachers find it a useful tool, the investment we made in the SLAs over the last number of years. As you can see, I've made adjustments in other forms of standardized testing here. Hopefully, you can see the spirit of innovation with the other choices that I made. I'm open to whatever is best for kids.

Mr. M. Smith: Okay. Thank you.

I'd like to go to page 52 again but to key strategy 1.2.

Mr. Eggen: Okay. Give me a sec here.

Mr. M. Smith: Key strategy 1.2 mentions the development and the implementation of "online assessments to improve responsiveness to students' needs."

Mr. Eggen: Just give me a sec here.

Mr. M. Smith: Yeah. No problem.

Mr. Eggen: Okay: 1.2, yeah.

Mr. M. Smith: Okay. We're good?

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. I've got it.

Mr. M. Smith: Okay. Could you elaborate on what these online assessments are, and could you provide a dollar figure for the development and the implementation of these assessments?

Mr. Eggen: Sure. We're looking for ways by which students and teachers as well can access different resources that can be available to them. Certainly, like, just as a point of reference, we're developing the whole curriculum, the new curriculum, as an online option tool – right? – in both official languages simultaneously. It's sort of a direction that we're moving all of our resources and so forth to. The curriculum development application I think is what we're looking at with that, and it's in keeping with our overall investment in developing new curriculum. I don't know, Brad, if you have a number on that one, but I can get that to you straightaway, okay?

Mr. M. Smith: Okay. Thank you.

I guess the question that I had was this. I'm not sure if I really understand what you mean by curriculum development application and how that applies to assessment. If 1.2 – and it clearly says this – is designed to develop and "to improve responsiveness to students' needs," is this because you've assessed or you've come to the conclusion that students are not being assessed early enough? What metrics led you to decide that this was an issue which needed improving upon?

Mr. Eggen: Well, again, I think it speaks to the fluidity and how we're developing curriculum and assessment together and how we want things to be accessible and shared as much as possible as well. Digital application of our digital availability of any information through this ministry I think is very important. I mean, it doesn't preclude the choice of access, you know, using regular paper. The other way that I sort of envisioned both assessment and curriculum development is that it can be interactive, so we can have teachers being able to use these new platforms to help to add best practices and interact online with the curriculum and with different assessments so that people can share that way.

Mr. M. Smith: Through the chair, if I'm understanding you correctly, key strategy 1.2 is really talking about formative assessment rather than summative assessment.

Mr. Eggen: No. It could be both. Yeah, it could be both. Absolutely.

Mr. M. Smith: Okay. Now, Mr. Minister, I met with a lady by the name of Kathy Crothers. I don't know if you've ever met Kathy before, but she's involved in a group called the early childhood development coalitions in Alberta, and they do assessments that provide information on early childhood development to support local planning and action. What they've done is that they've helped

to assess kids coming into kindergarten, and they did the EC mapping, okay?

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Right.

Mr. M. Smith: Right now I believe all but six school divisions in the province are accessing this program and are evaluating kids coming into kindergarten to see just where their local communities are at and where they need to put their funding. I guess the question I've got is: are you planning on providing somewhere in your budget help for these individuals and for this program? I think it's a valuable program. Would you be willing to meet with and to discuss the potential collaboration and funding, moving forward, for this organization?

Mr. Eggen: Okay. Sure. Yeah, that sounds really interesting and, you know, again, a constructive point. I can say that as we're developing new curriculum, we are working closely with both Health and Children's Services because, of course, Children's Services has programming on expanding child care, and we want to ensure that there's curriculum associated with these programs. Obviously, because you're asking me this question, I know you recognize the inherent value of strengthening early childhood education, right? I would be happy to, yeah. Give me more information. So you're suggesting that this group that you just mentioned has some interactions with at least, it sounds like, 55 or more of our school boards?

Mr. M. Smith: Yeah. There are only six that I'm aware of that are not.

Mr. Eggen: Oh, there are six that do it?

Mr. M. Smith: No. Six that are not doing it.

Mr. Eggen: Oh, six that are not. Yeah. Okay. Good. That's strong.

Mr. M. Smith: There is some concern over the funding. I think that in a lot of ways this is sort of like SLAs for kindergarten kids. You know, it tells us: where are they at, where are their communities at, and then how we can best meet their needs?

Mr. Eggen: Sure. I'd be glad to. That sounds really interesting. I mean, apparently, according to this piece of paper that just came my way, EDI is being jointly funded by several ministries, and our department is engaged in conversation about this important program. You know, if you can help to guide that along, that would be great.

Mr. M. Smith: I would be happy to bring them together with you.

Mr. Eggen: Okay. It sounds great.

4:10

Mr. M. Smith: Thank you.

I'd like to move on to pages 52 and 53, performance measures 1(a) and 1(b).

Mr. Eggen: Could you say that again, please?

Mr. M. Smith: Performance measures 1(a) and 1(b) on pages 52 and 53.

Mr. Eggen: Okay. Roger. Got it.

Mr. M. Smith: Performance measure 1(a) indicates success on the grade 6 and the grade 9 PATs.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah.

Mr. M. Smith: Is there any indication from your department or your school boards and the teachers that serve our students as to why the performance on the social studies and the math PATs is lagging significantly behind the language arts and the science?

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. I mean, we've seen some interesting trends over time with these PATs. It shows the utility of this information, for sure. I think that a number of school boards have been focusing on communication. It's been school-wide and school-board-wide initiatives that we've seen anecdotally focusing on written communication, so that could be a reflection of it.

We certainly know that over time the math results have shown some troubling trends. You know, I can say that this last year is quite specifically around my choice to add that no-calculator portion. That's the part where the kids really went down. I mean, I kind of knew that would happen. You've got to be brave to use this kind of information and look for not just where you can celebrate success but where you need to focus resources.

In regard to the social studies numbers, they don't show as dramatic a change, but certainly I can provide further analysis of that if you would want.

Mr. M. Smith: If you could, please.

Mr. Eggen: I would be happy to do so.

Mr. M. Smith: Sure. Thank you very much.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you for pointing out the social studies one. I mean, I knew. You know, it was kind of holding steady – right? – room for improvement. It's something I always watch because I taught English and social studies. I really will redouble our efforts to improve language arts, both written and verbal communication, because I know that's one of the basic skills that will serve our kids for the rest of their lives.

Mr. M. Smith: When I take a look – and I mentioned it earlier – you know, the first time we are actually using the standardized tests for summative evaluation is in grade 6 and then in grade 9. How are you identifying the deficiencies in student performance in core subjects before grade 6?

Mr. Eggen: Well, we gather, you know, quite a lot of information . . .

Mr. M. Smith: What kind?

Mr. Eggen: . . . or we see, you know, interaction with boards and so forth. I mean, again, we don't have a PAT in grade 3, but for the different reasons that I described previously, we're in the state where we're at, right? Don't forget that provincial assessments are meant to complement, not necessarily to replace, day-to-day teachers' observations and classroom assessments. I respect the integrity of teachers' evaluations of kids at all grade levels, so the absence of a standardized test in grade 3, let's say, for example, doesn't preclude us from being able to reach in and gather information that we need, to see where there's room for improvement.

Mr. M. Smith: I would agree with you that, obviously, the teachers that we have in this province are well educated, well trained, and do a great service for our students, but we also know that standardized testing across the province provides a great indicator of student success and measuring that student success. Otherwise, we wouldn't be doing them, would we?

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. That's true.

Mr. M. Smith: The question I guess I would highly recommend is that – I think that many parents and, I know, at least this former educator are quite concerned about the fact that the first time we get any real metrics, any real data is in grade 6, and I would highly recommend that the minister consider going back to a grade 3 PAT.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. I mean, you know, fair enough. It's interesting because I just spent a couple of days with some people from around the world, actually, and there are different ways to approach this, to get samples and so forth, to gather valid data.

Mr. M. Smith: Have you got some examples of that?

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. I mean, I know that, you know, in some jurisdictions – I think it was Australia where they do sampling, right? They don't necessarily hit all the kids, but they gather data that is valid through . . .

Mr. M. Smith: Are you considering moving on to some of the things that you heard there?

Mr. Eggen: I mean, I'm open. I'm also a student of these things. You know, we make sure that we always try and look at different frameworks, right? I know that there's strong advocacy towards sampling, right? I'm open to whatever is best for the kids.

Mr. M. Smith: So in the parlance of your English language training and as a former language teacher, are you foreshadowing where we're going to be going?

Mr. Eggen: Well, again, this is really important – and I'll reiterate it probably every week here forever – that I'm not writing the curriculum, and I'm not writing the assessment. I rely on expertise to help guide us along. I have certain standards of what I expect in terms of rigour and the expectation that we improve our mathematics and language arts skills, basic skills that kids will carry with them for the rest of their lives, critical thinking skills, building citizenship. I mean, these are the things that I demand – right? – to have engaged, intelligent thinkers, independent thinkers that have the skills to solve the problems that come their way.

So there are lots of different things. Wendy just pointed out to me that we do participate in the TIMSS international math and science sampling in the grade 4 level, so we get some data off that and stuff like that.

Mr. M. Smith: Okay. Good point.

I'm going to performance measure 1(b), which indicates success in the grade 12 diploma exams. You just talked about rigour and setting standards. Of course, these exams are part of the ministry's own official communication of sort of the expected standards that we would want to have our students to have by the time they exit our public school system or our systems. I know you track the difference between school-awarded marks and the diploma exam mark.

Mr. Eggen: Yes.

Mr. M. Smith: My understanding is that there are starting to be some serious discrepancies between the school-awarded marks and the diploma exam marks. I realize that this is anecdotal. Trust me, as a former diploma exam teacher I wouldn't want you to take any one year or any one school or any one thing as the definitive answer to this, but I know that there is at least one school where in their math 30-1 marks 33 out of the 34 students assessed scored lower on

the diploma exams than the school-awarded mark, anywhere from between 8 per cent and 53 per cent.

Now, I know that on a diploma exam – when I was teaching diploma exams, for 30 years, for me, personally, I had a 5 per cent plus or minus. I wanted my mark to be within plus or minus 5 of what the students achieved on the diploma exam, and then I knew I was achieving that standard, that rigour. The school board said: well, if you can do it within 10 per cent, you're fitting within the margins. So I guess the question I've got: are you concerned about this, and do you see a trend across the province where we're starting to see a discrepancy between the teacher-awarded mark and the marks that they're receiving on the diploma exams?

Mr. Eggen: I also taught diploma exams. You know, you try to make sure that the kids do well on them, right? It's very important.

I guess I have two things to say about that. First of all, it's really important to not let the exam set the curriculum. If you teach just for the exam, then it's like the exam or the assessment is driving the learning. At the end of the day, you know you need to do as well as you can for your kids on the diploma, but when we have 70 per cent of the total mark being taken from classroom activity and then 30 per cent from the exam, that just is what it is. Again, if you get a big discrepancy like you pointed out anecdotally with school A, that's an interesting thing that you can use to help with a deeper dive into what's going on. Do we see that as a province-wide trend? No.

Mr. M. Smith: So your department has not been studying to see if there's a trend that way or a potential grade inflation?

Mr. Eggen: We watch closely, you know, to ensure that diploma exams are an important milestone. They're still worth 30 per cent, right? I mean, that student classroom work is different from the exam. There are all kinds of things that can be factored in. You have classroom work that involves projects. You have classroom work that involves oral work. You have classroom work that measures assessment over a long period of time.

4:20

Actually, this is another thing that I tried with the diploma exams. I made it an option for kids to take more time because, again, that point-in-time examination can have a negative reaction for some people, for a lot of people, actually. You know, they get super nervous and so forth. So we're trying this thing where kids can take extra time. Before, you had to get a doctor's note or whatever, and now if you want to take the extra time, go for it, right? Most kids are not doing it in the first incarnation of this, but they know that they have it in their back pocket. It makes them feel more relaxed. We'll see. It didn't necessarily have a big effect or change on the marks, but I'm just looking for different ways to do that. My point is that the classroom over the course of the year is measuring one thing, and the diploma exam is measuring something else.

Mr. M. Smith: Okay. Well, thank you very much. I guess I would just suggest to the department that I'm beginning to hear and speak with various stakeholders that are bringing data to me that is saying that there is significant grade inflation beginning to occur between the teacher mark and the diploma exam mark. The worry that I have about that is that there will come a time when universities will make the decision, if that trend continues, to start putting their weight on the standardized testing, which is the same for every student in the province. If they start to just take a look at the diploma exam mark, then that mark now is 100 per cent diploma exam. That's not fair to the kids, as we would both agree. So it's going to be very important, and I would encourage the ministry to really start taking a look into

those things. I believe it's in the best interest of our students to make sure that that grade inflation doesn't continue and occur.

Mr. Eggen: Sure. Again, due diligence is important, right? I can say that the introduction of standards that we have done in the last few weeks around, you know, standards for teachers, administrators, and superintendents can help to buttress the profession. We have to on one hand make sure we respect the professional integrity of the profession, but we always have to keep investing in it, too – those two things work together – and work with our postsecondaries.

You know, it's interesting. For example, when I had to cancel the diplomas in Fort McMurray when the fire happened – I became the most popular guy – we used the classroom mark, and universities recognized that. Again, it's about having always open channels and conversations between postsecondaries and our school system. But you're right. Constructively we always have to keep a vigilant eye.

Mr. M. Smith: Thank you, Minister.

Again referring to outcome 1 and the fact that you've been able to assess students to measure their success – we've talked about it; we just finished talking about standards – have you considered introducing a standardized grade system for each level of education across Alberta to ensure the consistency and clarity for parents? I'm sure you've heard – I mean, if I'm hearing it, you're hearing it – that parents are not very happy, especially in the elementary grades, with meeting, not meeting, surpassing expectations, the scale of 1 to 4. I can speak to this and high school students. Sometimes with kids coming out of the junior highs, if they did not have a percentage grade, there were some serious problems in thinking about where the kid thought they were and where they were coming into high school, the judgment. I guess my question, then, is simply: have you considered introducing a standardized grade system of percentages or ABCs for each level of education?

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. I mean, I've been watching this closely. School boards are making different decisions around these things. You have to always be conscious of the autonomy of school boards as a level of government, too. You know, they are responsible for education in each of their respective jurisdictions. Of course, I am forwarding them, those 61 school boards, the funding and the backstopping and so forth. Yeah, I've been watching it closely. I mean, I think that school boards are making these decisions with careful consideration of what's best for the kids at their age grouping. I know as a parent and as a teacher as well that I want to make sure I have accurate information that's age appropriate. I mean, we've been kind of watching it. I've not, obviously, imposed a province-wide grading system for report cards, but I've been looking at it.

Mr. M. Smith: That's not something that you could foreshadow for us as a part of the curriculum, that you've asked them to make sure that they've looked at that?

Mr. Eggen: Well, you know, when I make announcements, we have, like, a big comms plan and a podium and so forth. I'm not going to do that today.

Mr. M. Smith: Well, this is a great place to be off the cuff, Mr. Minister.

Mr. Eggen: I'm not going to do it here today. I don't think so.

Mr. M. Smith: I think that we could work on that.

Mr. Eggen: Well, yeah. I mean, it's something you've got to watch. The kid comes home, and you want to know how they're doing, right? You want to know how they're doing and how they've made progress. Have they made progress on specific skills, and is it appropriate for that age and the expectation of where a kid should be at that age?

Mr. M. Smith: So you recognize that there's a problem?

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. Absolutely.

Mr. M. Smith: Okay. I want to spend some time on the curriculum rewrite now if that's okay with minister. Again I'll be referring to the business plan, page 52, and we'll be looking at outcome 1, "Alberta's students are successful." Obviously, the curriculum rewrite is top of mind for most parents and educators and school board officials across this province. Obviously, what is taught in the classroom is clearly an integral factor in students' success. Just a couple of questions here. Where in the budget do we find the costs associated with the curriculum rewrite?

Mr. Eggen: Yeah, I totally agree. I mean, the curriculum is a great opportunity on a very practical level to try to meet some of our other goals. The actual budget spot: it's on page 102, and that is line 2.7.

Mr. M. Smith: This is 2.7. You spent in 2016-17 \$110 million, well, \$111 million. You're planning on spending \$109 million, \$110 million in 2018.

Mr. Eggen: Yes. That's correct.

Mr. M. Smith: Okay. Yeah. That's right. Now, how much are you putting towards the curriculum rewrite, and how much has been spent to date?

Mr. Eggen: I'll get that for you here straightaway. Or we can forward that to you if it's not coming immediately.

Mr. M. Smith: Sure. I mean, I can understand that trying to break down the budget and trying to find the numbers is difficult.

Mr. Eggen: No. That's fine. That's good. Okay. The cost over the next six fiscal years, specifically on the curriculum, is \$64 million, okay? We are one year into it now. I'm not just going to divide – last year we spent \$6,434,800 on the curriculum, and we budgeted over six years for \$64 million.

Mr. M. Smith: Okay. So you're on target with respect to costs?

Mr. Eggen: Yeah, I think so. I mean, obviously, it ramps up. Like, we built it moving up to 2021-2022, but as we move into the higher grades, it gets a little more expensive, and then we're supporting all the other – I mean, an integral part of this new curriculum is to have professional development to make sure that teachers are online and onboard with teaching this. That's really important.

Mr. M. Smith: Okay. Could you please tell me how the – I mean, we're both well aware that within the working groups that are addressing the curriculum rewrite, there are a wide range of individuals and a wide range of groups that are part of those working groups. I'm not interested in names – I know we've had that question; we've had that go-round already – but could you please tell me how the professors and the other contributors, stakeholders on the curriculum rewrite were evaluated and then selected? What was the process that you used for deciding who would be at the table?

4:30

Mr. Eggen: Right. Well, the curriculum working groups: I think there are about 400 people altogether in that, and it's divided into different subject areas. We have a partnership with the teachers, so they're supplying people. We have the consortia – right? – that's contracted to help us with the curriculum, and postsecondary groups are a part of that as well.

What I've been doing as well over these last months is building presentation groups to this. For example, this morning I met with the president of the Alberta Treasury Branches to help to build a fiscal literacy working group so that we can teach kids about money and so forth. Friday I have an agriculture group that's meeting. So it's an organic process, right? But the established tables . . .

Mr. M. Smith: Mr. Minister, I mean, if you can talk about having the Alberta Treasury Branches do fiscal literacy and that ag groups do agriculture, why can't you just let us know who the groups are at the table? This has never been about names. It's just been about: who's at the table?

Mr. Eggen: Right. Well, I mean, we certainly follow the law in terms of privacy rights. You know, I want to make sure the integrity of the working groups is intact. It's important. I mean, these people are just working on trying to build curriculum, so I just don't want to – yeah. There are privacy provisions for some members, right? It was requested. That's right. If some of the members requested to maintain the privacy of their identity, then we honoured that.

Mr. M. Smith: Why would somebody have to request that?

Mr. Eggen: You know, again, we're trying to have a polite conversation here, but I would imagine that they're afraid of being attacked.

Mr. M. Smith: By whom?

Mr. Eggen: Well, there you go. Go look online and see what happens to people who haven't done . . .

Mr. M. Smith: Well, no. As a professional teacher, as an educator, when I got involved in curriculum, there was never any fear, and all of a sudden there's a fear.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. I don't know why. That's really weird. I don't know what's going on with that. Something has changed, I guess.

Mr. M. Smith: Yeah. Something has changed here, I guess.

Mr. Eggen: I know.

Mr. M. Smith: The only thing I know that's really changed is a change of government.

Mr. Eggen: Well, I mean, if you want to play this game, we certainly can, right? I am protecting these people because your party and proxy people are attacking individuals online and otherwise, their professional integrity, and compromising that very thing. So I will not have people in that position. I'll follow the law in regard to their identity and all that kind of stuff. But I'm not going to just – you know, especially when people specifically ask that they want to be protected, then I will do that to the fullest extent of my ability to do so.

Mr. M. Smith: Okay. I guess one other question. In talking with some of the stakeholders in education, I've heard that the members

of the working groups have been requested, have been told that they have to sign a nondisclosure agreement, and they believe this is the first time that this has ever happened in the curriculum process. Did working group members have to sign a nondisclosure agreement, and if so, is this a new practice?

Mr. Eggen: I'll have to get back to you on that. I'm not sure. Yeah, I don't know. We'll get back to you on that one.

Mr. M. Smith: We would really appreciate that if you could, please.

Mr. Eggen: Sure.

Mr. M. Smith: What we'd like to know – you know, obviously, it's suggested that there were nondisclosure agreements to sign. Was that for all of the working groups? Was that for every discipline, or was it only for some? Did the working groups have to sign the nondisclosure agreements, or could they have made the decision not to? Was that one of the requirements for being a part of the working groups? If so and if this is a new practice, then could you please explain when you get back to us why you believed that this was something that needed to be introduced?

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. Sure. Sounds good.

Mr. M. Smith: Okay. I'd like to move on to key strategy 1.3, which refers specifically to mathematics. Does the minister agree that memorization and algorithms should play a primary role in the instruction of mathematics, and if so, will you ensure that these concepts play a primary role in the upcoming math curriculum?

Mr. Eggen: Absolutely.

Mr. M. Smith: Wow. Thank you.

Okay. Is discovery math a fundamental part of the updated K to 4 math curriculum?

Mr. Eggen: I think probably some portions of it, for sure. I mean, we use the systems that are best for kids for learning mathematics. We want to make sure, you know, that kids can both have basic skills that are rigorous and vigorous and can apply them to solving problems. I imagine people use different strategies to ensure that students have basic skills but that they also can apply them in a critical manner. I'm not a math teacher.

Mr. M. Smith: Amen. Mr. Minister, you and I will be on the same page on that one. Okay.

Now, we know that the first stage of the rewrite has gone through. We know that we've got the scope and sequence documents.

Mr. Eggen: Scope and sequence. That's right.

Mr. M. Smith: And we know that by this coming December you want to have had the programs of studies signed off on.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah.

Mr. M. Smith: Okay. The question I've got right now. We're at the stage right now, I believe, where four school boards are piloting the K through 4 programs of studies. Is that correct?

Mr. Eggen: Well, not till they're done.

Mr. M. Smith: Could you tell us who these four boards are, and what other feedback have you received with regard to that?

Mr. Eggen: I mean, no one is doing it now because we're not done, right?

Which school boards are doing it? I don't know. I can find out for you, yeah. I mean, at this point, you know, the validation process is in the planning stage – right? – so targeted actions for validation. There are specialist reviews. There are stakeholder focus groups. There are teacher and educator groups.

Which school boards are actually going to pilot it? I can get back to you on that. I don't know.

Mr. M. Smith: So you've got specialist groups that are going to be reviewing?

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. Oh, for sure. Absolutely. And teacher groups as well.

Mr. M. Smith: Which teacher groups? Which specialist groups, please?

Mr. Eggen: I don't know. Crossdisciplines. Lots of different ones, I guess.

Mr. M. Smith: Well, if you could send us that information, that would be great.

Mr. Eggen: Absolutely.

Mr. M. Smith: I understand that you probably don't have them off the top of your head, Mr. Minister.

Mr. Eggen: No, no, no. I don't. You know, honestly, it's a process. I mean, you set a direction. You see the need for new curriculum, and then you move it off to people to do it, right?

Mr. M. Smith: Yeah.

Mr. Eggen: I mean, you know, the Energy minister is not running a fractionating column to make gasoline – right? – but she does recognize the importance of upgrading oil. So that's kind of the way it works.

Mr. M. Smith: Yeah. But if you could send us a list of some of the specialist groups that are going to be involved, that would be great.

Mr. Eggen: Absolutely.

Mr. M. Smith: Still referring to outcome 1, I'd like to ask a few questions on the internal workings of the Department of Education and their input into the curriculum. Now, the program of studies portion of your ministry and the assessment portion are inextricably linked.

Mr. Eggen: Absolutely.

Mr. M. Smith: You can't have one without the other. Can you tell me how these different areas within your ministry are working together to ensure clarity of assessment for the new curriculum? Let me just explain why I particularly want to make sure that this is being done properly.

Mr. Eggen: Sure.

Mr. M. Smith: I can attest, after many years of having my students write diploma exams, that there was a huge disconnect between what my students believed the language of the exam was written at versus the language of the textbooks and the resources that would be used in the classroom, you know, officially the resources of the

program. So there was a difference in the grade level language between the assessment pieces and the resource pieces.

Secondly, when they rolled out the curriculum here, when I was teaching social studies, I can remember having a conversation with the assessment managers and asking them: "Okay. When I take a look at the program of studies, I see that it says, for instance, that the students will have an understanding of the parliamentary process, parliamentary government." Then I would ask them: "Well, in what depth? How deeply do I have to do that in order to be able to prepare my kids for the assessment pieces at the end of grade 12?" The answer that I received from the assessment branch was: "Well, for those of you that have been teaching grade 12 for a while, you'll know the depth that you need to go into." I thought: "Yeah. That helps that first-year teacher who wants to make sure their kids have success on the diploma exam."

My question. I'd like you to talk about, for a brief period of time, if you could, how your ministry is ensuring that the assessment pieces and the program of studies pieces are going to mesh and that things like that are being addressed.

4:40

Mr. Eggen: Sure. Sounds great. Well, we do have two divisions, assessment and curriculum. You know, we have been working together, never closer, because of this new curriculum piece. They do have department working groups, working teams that are meeting together – right? – executively to plan, collaborate, and inform each other in their efforts. For example, the math curriculum people and the PAT people have to work in close concert with each other. Like I said from the outset, you can't have a new curriculum with old assessments, right? So this is a good chance for us to give assessment a good shake as well to ensure that we can see where kids are at at any given time, and it helps to provide constructive information for teachers and for parents and for students on where they're at.

Mr. M. Smith: So you're saying that you're going to give it a good shakeup?

Mr. Eggen: Well, yeah.

Mr. M. Smith: Like, I know that when I was leaving the classroom, we were talking about going just straight online, not having a paper exam in front of you.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. I mean, certainly, we need to have both. There's room for improvement with some of the connections that people have to the Internet in different parts of our province. My point is that you need to re-examine each element of assessment to make sure that it's aligned to the curriculum. Your anecdote about government and the depth to which you must understand that for a grade 12 student is a case in point. You can't just imply that and then have a surprise at exam time, right?

Again, this is interesting because we were just having this discussion at a conference here yesterday. You know, I think it compels both assessment and curriculum to work together more closely than they ever have. We have the assessment department at some of the working group tables as well in building curriculum, so it's like they're integrated completely into what's going on.

Thank you for that reminder. I'm sure people behind me and elsewhere have just been reminded as well.

Mr. M. Smith: Okay. We're going to spend whatever time we have left here, until it moves on, on the carbon tax and transportation costs, okay?

Mr. Eggen: Okay.

Mr. M. Smith: We're going to be looking at government estimates on page 102, line items 2.3 and 2.4.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. Okay. Great.

Mr. M. Smith: Referring to line items 2.3 and 2.4 on page 102 of the government estimates for '18-19, both encapsulate a portion of the funding which is indirectly returned to the government through the carbon tax.

Mr. Eggen: Yes.

Mr. M. Smith: I'd like to talk about the impact that the carbon tax is having on schools and school boards across the province. A May 2016 briefing note you received from your department, accessed through FOIP, indicates that the expected cost for school boards in the 2017 calendar year would be between \$8 million and \$12 million.

Mr. Eggen: That's right. Yeah.

Mr. M. Smith: Was that number accurate?

Mr. Eggen: I think so. I mean, we had some – there's wide variation in how schools use energy. You know, in some of our northern school boards or rural school boards and elsewhere they burn a lot of transportation energy. But it's fairly reflective of what we've seen around the province, right? For example, we see the Calgary board of education suggesting that they have about a million-dollar carbon levy expense.

Mr. M. Smith: Do you have a breakdown of what each school board will pay in carbon tax, and would you be willing to table it as information in the House?

Mr. Eggen: No. I don't have those.

Mr. M. Smith: So you have not got access to information within your department as to how it breaks down by school division?

Mr. Eggen: No. Individual school boards have been telling us, you know, where they have been. Yeah. That's it. School boards report to us financially, so that hasn't been something that they've been compelled to give back to us. I mean, we're hearing about it for sure – right? – so that's useful.

Mr. M. Smith: It's been reported that Rocky View school division has been forced . . .

The Chair: Thank you.

For the next 20 minutes I would like to invite Mr. Fraser and the minister to speak. Mr. Fraser, are you wanting to combine your time with the minister?

Mr. Fraser: Yes, please, Madam Chair. Thank you.

The Chair: Minister?

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. Sure. Whatever he wants to do.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Fraser: Minister, how are you today?

Mr. Eggen: I'm good. Yeah. Thanks. How about you?

Mr. Fraser: Very good.

I appreciate all the work that you do. I mean, if there's anything that we should be investing in in this province, it's education because it will definitely have a huge impact on our economy in the future, our health care, our climate, and all things related to, I think, the quality of life of Albertans. So it's deeply important. It's deeply important to my constituents. I do thank your staff because it's a hard job, and education is something that's always growing and moving. I also want to give you some kudos. You've always taken the time to stop and chat with me in the hallway about my constituents and some of the issues there.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. Well, you have, like, the most kids of the whole province in that particular corner of Calgary. I don't know what they're doing down there, but they're producing a lot of kids.

Mr. Fraser: Yeah. Well, we have lots of fun. Let me put it that way.

Minister, I've got some questions about the capital plan, and I'm sure you're not surprised about this.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah.

Mr. Fraser: I notice some discrepancies between the CBE's capital priorities and the capital plan coming out of this budget. Can you provide the rationale for not following the Calgary board of education's recommendation on their capital priorities?

Mr. Eggen: Well, I think we did. You know, they actually made a late submission, moving some of their top priorities around, right? So the last incarnation of the Calgary board of education's capital priority I think pretty much reflected the choices that we made on the top end, right? I mean, we did make an adjustment in the last few weeks before budget to reflect where they wanted to go. So I made the appropriate changes to it as well, to mine.

I make decisions on capital based on, you know, geography and imminent need. Sometimes there are health and safety issues, you know, and then legal things as well in terms of francophone schools, enrolment pressure, and so forth. I don't have the list right in front me of the Calgary projects and so forth.

Mr. Fraser: Right. If you look at their capital plan from last year, it was the exact same capital plan from last year versus this year.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. You know, Member, they made some changes in the last, like, few weeks before they submitted it, and we reflected that. We actually did some switching. We did do that. For example, the north high school in Coventry I think it's called – right? – is a reflection of a change they made towards the end to want that on their list, so we did it.

Mr. Fraser: Right. So does your ministry maintain its own kind of capital priority list in addition to the ones that are provided by the school boards?

Mr. Eggen: We have an unfunded list – right? – the larger unfunded list that, again, is fluid based on developing issues around, like I said, health and safety. You know, like, they have a school in Delia that was going to fall down, and it moved up really fast when we heard that. Or in Drayton Valley – oh, he's gone – suddenly we found out that there were really imminent problems. We have a funded/unfunded list that's available, and it's pretty fluid. We allow, I think, the school boards to submit to us now twice a year – right? – and then even in between if they want to do that.

We're just digging through paper here. This is the Calgary modernization and new lists. This is the most up-to-date one. Right now for new schools they've got Auburn Bay at the top of

their list, Buffalo Rubbing Stone school, Calgary new elementary school, and then Coventry Hills, right? They're complete: design, design, design. Yeah. We've hit 'em pretty good, even quite deep into their Calgary list. We either have them on design or being built.

4:50

Mr. Fraser: The 2019-2022 capital plan identified the Auburn Bay middle school as their second priority this year; however, the 2018 provincial budget provided build/design funding. What's the government's rationale for providing build funding for those schools over other high-priority projects in Calgary?

Mr. Eggen: Well, I was working with a Treasury Board direction to then – you know, we were building quite a lot – as the economy starts to recover, bring down my building a little bit, right? I've thought of a clever way to keep people understanding that something is going to happen, which is to provide money for design. You can judge me on my actions. I did it last year with a Lethbridge school, and it is now on its way to being built. The design money should be a clear direction of the intent to build that building, you know, that we're going to do it. The same with the north high school Coventry one. It's very expensive to build high schools, but you can take that to the bank that we will build it.

Mr. Fraser: Right.

Can you give me an approximate timeline of when you'll fund the whole thing for the Auburn Bay middle school?

Mr. Eggen: Again, I'm not going to do out-of-cycle budget announcements at this particular table, but it would go through the normal . . .

Mr. Fraser: Would it be fair to say, based on past precedents, that . . .

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. Submission on April 1 of the fiscal year. They can update in September, I mean, unless maybe the board takes it off the list, but I don't think they would. You have such enormous pressure. CBE gave us their '19 list on April Fool's Day, so there it is. I think it's looking pretty good. Plus Auburn Bay is super high priority because of the tremendous growth down there.

Mr. Fraser: Well, just based on past practice, would it be fair to say that that school will likely receive full funding in the next cycle? You mentioned the Lethbridge school.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. Exactly. Based on the instructions I've given my team and the history of my decision-making based on design and then build, yes.

Mr. Fraser: To reiterate, you're right that there is a ton of pressure. The schools that were announced even when we were the government and some that you've announced are basically at capacity now. Parents are having to go into a lottery system, which you can imagine is not very fun.

Mr. Eggen: No. It's not great.

Mr. Fraser: That Auburn Bay middle school would definitely relieve a lot of that pressure. It's very important.

Mr. Eggen: I'm so aware of it. You know, I've even been down there a couple of times with you, right? It's quite jaw-dropping to see. I mean, families are looking for affordable single-family homes, and that's where they can still get one. Good for them. We have to reflect the choices that young families are making.

Mr. Fraser: Okay. Thank you, Minister.

My colleague from Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill has also expressed some concerns about how the capital plan is being applied. In the community of Evanston they're in desperate need of a new middle school as well, but it doesn't appear that they'll be getting one. How is your ministry and the CBE working to gather feedback from communities like Evanston and all communities, really, about their pressures? How do you gauge the need?

Mr. Eggen: Well, I rely on each school board. They have the best information. You know, they give us submissions, and we have ongoing discussions with them. I have a capital division – there's someone here today – and they have individual conversations with CBE. Based on that question that you just gave me, we can certainly take a look and see where CBE is in regard to that school in Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Mr. Fraser: Great. Thank you.

Mr. Eggen: No problem.

Mr. Fraser: Just kind of shifting gears now to health in schools. After reviewing your business plan, I only found one reference to health in education, a reference to your school nutrition plan. I think that this is a huge missed opportunity because the physical and mental health of all students and teachers as well has a significant impact on educational performance. Your business plan talks about making sure students have access to education, and poor health can be a significant barrier to that access.

I'd like to start on the subject of mental health. Does your department work with Health and the school authorities to institute mental health supports for students?

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Sometimes these things are not immediately obvious. Our mental health budgeting and so forth is through the inclusive education line item that we have in our business plan. I mean, I can give you the exact line here in a second.

You know, in regard to us working in co-operation with Health and so forth, we have the regional collaborative service delivery system, and we're working with Children's Services there again as well. It's called regional collaborative service delivery because we pick sort of a hub school board to help quarterback it, and then it moves out from there, right? So the budget of RCDSD this year is \$65 million, almost \$66 million, which is about a 1 per cent thing. They work with kids with complex needs, including, like, speech language therapy; OT, occupational therapy; physical therapy; and mental health supports.

Now, I'd be the first one to say that we need to open this up considerably considering the anecdotal evidence of increased stress and mental health issues and an increased complexity of student needs in this regard in our schools. We know that kids are more stressed at a younger age. Quite frankly, I'm looking at both individual buttressing of counselling and so forth, looking for innovative ways by which we can perhaps provide support, like through the children's help network, you know, that provides a texting and phone thing, and then also looking at school-wide mental health initiatives to look for some of these promising things like mindfulness and peer support and things like that, sort of school-wide initiatives where they have a year-long theme, which is helping each other, mental health supports.

Mr. Fraser: I'm glad to hear that, but equally important, we need to have healthy educators, you know, to have healthy kids.

Mr. Eggen: It's true.

Mr. Fraser: Does your department collect any information on teacher morale or job satisfaction?

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. I mean, we get information from school boards, and I know that the Teachers' Association collects information on the state of the workforce and so forth. We do have, I think, a report coming out pretty soon on people satisfaction and so forth, which is helpful, too. Again, you know, it's a moving target, because we see as well younger teachers demonstrating different stresses that we perhaps haven't seen. I mean, people also vote with their feet – right? – where we see more young teachers not sticking out the career because of the pressures on the job. I'm really concerned about that, of course, because young, professional, qualified teachers not sticking it out and getting the full use of their skills after 10 years of service is not great.

Mr. Fraser: Right. Do you have a timeline on that report?

Mr. Eggen: I have, yeah. The one that I was just looking at, you know, I think that a version of it comes out – the Alberta Teachers' Association also has what they call their Malatest survey, which is available now online. You could take a look at that.

Mr. Fraser: Okay. Are you looking at any other initiatives for monitoring improving educator health?

Mr. Eggen: Well, you know, I found it promising. The classroom improvement fund that we negotiated as part of the collective agreement with the teachers the last time, you know, is perhaps showing us some positive direction in how we can consult and empower teachers to make choices to improve classroom conditions for kids but for themselves, too – right? – to make sure that they have more supports, that the pressure points of stress can be looked at. So I did include that classroom improvement line in this current budget, and we will move forward on how we can do that.

You see some other school boards showing some promise in collaborative support, and then the whole high school redesign concept is really a global way by which you can have increased supports for teachers in high schools. Again, I'm not going to suggest that we've solved the problem, by any means, but these are some areas that I'm looking at that have shown promise.

Mr. Fraser: Right. So in your curriculum review is there any discussion about including more mental health discussions in the classroom, understanding it better.

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Thank you for bringing that up. I think that it's incumbent upon us to have specific curriculum outcomes. As part of this new curriculum the reason we're doing all six subject areas in all grades is that we can look for crosscurricular competencies by which you can have something in social studies and then in science and then in English that can kind of follow a certain theme. Amongst those things can be, you know, building a strong environment for a physically and mentally healthy society, right? I mean, I think citizenship is a strong theme, a thread that we're following through curriculum, and part of citizenship is that sense of community and caring and sharing in a supportive manner both inside and outside school.

5:00

Mr. Fraser: In our office in Calgary-South East we've been getting, you know, a rising number of parents complaining about their children and their health issues, their physical health issues, diabetes being one of them. I would imagine there are other common health issues with kids with specific needs throughout the

entire system. Obviously, parents would like to see that teachers are trained to deal with these things so that these kids can have a normal education. What training is available currently for teachers to recognize chronic health conditions in students?

Mr. Eggen: Well, I'd have to get back to you on that. The one thing that I have been pursuing actively is around diabetes, working with a very excellent advocacy group for, you know, ensuring that we have training and capacity to deal with type 1 diabetes in class, in schools. If that's an example of other ways by which we can have teachers and professionals in schools trained to make observations around chronic illness, I think that . . .

Mr. Fraser: Is there a possible discussion that could happen with the ATA? I recognize that teachers already have enough on their plate, but for any teacher that has maybe some cross-training, you know, maybe there's some extra per diem for taking on that responsibility, that sort of thing.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. I'm always sensitive to adding things to teachers' expectations without being supported, but at the same time our schools are often the first point of contact with a family and a child and the services that they might need that are not just for education. That could be a health need, a children's services need, stuff like that. I think that more collaboration with Alberta Health really helps as well.

Mr. Fraser: Does your department keep statistics on certain types of diseases that kids may have, very common ones like diabetes – you'd mentioned that – and epilepsy and those sorts of things, that are becoming barriers to access education?

Mr. Eggen: Well, we have that information available to us to some degree, but Alberta Health Services could help us. We know, for example, a general idea of how many type 1 diabetes kids we have in the schools because we've been working with an advocacy group on that to try to address supports. Yeah, I mean, it's not a bad idea to work closer. Again, my first comment was that the first point of contact with the public service in general is through the schools. Perhaps we can help to work with Children's Services and Alberta Health Services to work on that.

I mean, you always have to be mindful of privacy, but at the same time, if we have a service that we can offer to kids, then we don't want to exclude them from the ability to access that.

Mr. Fraser: Great. I just want to move on to indigenous schooling. I'm happy to see that your business plan mentions that you want to achieve better educational outcomes for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students, as mentioned in outcome 2 on page 54 of the business plan. I have some concerns about how the government actually intends to accomplish that. Key strategy 2.1 talks about making sure all students, teachers, and school leaders learn about FNMI perspectives. I assume that part of that is going to be accomplished in the curriculum review, but what specifically in the budget is contributing to achieve that?

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. It's a huge undertaking, but I think it's absolutely essential to have cultural awareness training for teachers in our system. Globally we built a First Nations, Métis, and Inuit budget that's approximately \$50 million to help with programming for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students. Then we have as well an additional \$37 million for students on-reserve.

Now, in terms of the teachers' training specifically and their cultural awareness training, it's within the standards. I mean, we are moving on that now, and it's not a small – I will get you the number

that's associated with that. I don't see it coming my way right at this moment.

Mr. Fraser: Okay. Key strategy 2.3 says that you want to increase accountability for FNMI funding provided to school authorities.

Mr. Eggen: Yes.

Mr. Fraser: In what ways do you believe that school authorities are possibly not currently being held accountable in regard to that funding? Again, exactly where in your budget are you going to do that? What are you going to do to increase the accountability?

Mr. Eggen: Accountability, of course, implies that we're seeing targeted money move to where it is meant to go, right?

The Chair: I hesitate to interrupt; however, the time allotted for this portion of the meeting has expired.

As there is no independent member or other present, I will now move to the next part of the rotation, which is that for the next 20 minutes members from the government caucus and the minister may speak. Mr. Hinkley, are you wanting to combine your time with the minister's?

Mr. Hinkley: If we may, please, yes.

The Chair: Minister?

Mr. Eggen: Sure. I'm just wondering: did we say that we were having a bathroom break halfway through?

The Chair: Are you wanting to have the break at this point?

Mr. Eggen: Well, no. It's just halfway through. That's all.

The Chair: We could call it right now, absolutely.

Mr. Eggen: Well, what time is it? Just tell me when so that I know, right?

The Chair: Yeah. We can call the break right now, and we will return in five minutes.

[The committee adjourned from 5:07 p.m. to 5:12 p.m.]

The Chair: I'd like to call the meeting back to order.

I would like to invite Mr. Hinkley and the minister to speak for the next 20 minutes. You agreed on combined time, correct?

Mr. Hinkley: I hope so, yeah.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. Whatever works for you.

Mr. Hinkley: I'll be sharing my questions with MLA Luff as well.

The Chair: Thank you. Go ahead.

Mr. Hinkley: Thank you, Minister, for being here and to all of your staff. Now, you were touching on indigenous just as we left off, so I'm going to start my series of questions in that area as well.

Mr. Eggen: Okay.

Mr. Hinkley: I do have a large number of First Nations students in my riding of Wetaskiwin-Camrose. I know how important the future is for our First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students in both our economy and the province generally, so I'm glad to see that this is specifically addressed in outcome 2 of your business plan on page 54 and on line 2.8 of the estimates on page 102. Can you walk me

through what work your ministry is doing to help meet the needs of FNMI students?

Mr. Eggen: Sure. That's great. I know that you've been doing lots of good work around Maskwacis. There are interesting things going on there that really make me feel optimistic around sharing responsibility, you know, between the school boards in the immediate area and then working more closely with the federal government to try to get them to come up with comparable funding to what we do as a province. Alberta Education is using lots of different approaches to ensure that we're meeting the needs of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students. We're trying to, every step of the way, not just work with students but with teachers as well in the spirit of education and reconciliation.

Alberta Ed and the government of Alberta have made, you know, quite serious commitments to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's recommendations. These include addressing the calls to action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that pertain to education; adhering to the principles and objectives from the United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples, otherwise known as UNDRIP; ensuring that we're improving education outcomes for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students; and supporting education for reconciliation to meet the mandate of the expression of reconciliation for the legacy of the so-called residential school systems that we had in this province.

So lots of things on the go, right? I mean, enhancing the curriculum is an important part of what we're doing as well in regard to raising awareness of students and teachers around First Nations, Métis, and Inuit history, perspectives, and culture. We put out some sample lesson plans a few months ago that were really well received, working with the gentleman who was doing the graphic novel with us, and we built some lesson plans around that. It was really good.

We have the Joint Commitment to Action as well, that we signed with Alberta Ed and the Alberta Teachers' Association, the Alberta association of deans of Education, the Alberta School Boards Association, the Alberta regional professional development consortia, the College of Alberta School Superintendents, and the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, all working together to ensure that the professional learning needs of our teachers are addressed. I can say that that work has been very, very well received. It's a big task to take on, but it's important.

Mr. Hinkley: Well, thank you for that.

Mr. Eggen: No worries.

Mr. Hinkley: Now, I wanted to go a little bit further in that we know that funding under line 2.8 includes support for indigenous students but indigenous students living off-reserve. So what kind of supports are we providing for off-reserve First Nation students?

Mr. Eggen: Right. Well, we have, of course, agreements that we sign with reserves, with bands, and they're known as education service agreements. In order to try to ensure that these agreements are transparent, fair, accountable, and consistent across the province – I saw a lot of variation from north to south – we're trying to look for the standards for implementation in that regard. A good example is the Kee Tas Kee Now Tribal Council, that we are working with as a new education authority. To support the Kee Tas Kee Now authority, we have provided in-kind supports and expertise as well as a grant to try this new way of approaching education. We're hoping that we can have some version of that agreement with Maskwacis as well – right? – so that people can take more ownership of their situation.

You know, we have many school boards across the province that are in physical proximity to reserves, and we've seen a lot of innovation and interesting new programming. I know that Edmonton Catholic here in this city has been working with the Enoch reserve as a sort of bridging mechanism. I know that the Tsuut'ina, again, butting right up against the city of Calgary, have entered into some interesting relationships. The basic relationship principle that we operate from is that we want to see equal funding and opportunity for kids regardless of whether they live on- or off-reserve, right? This idea that somehow you're disadvantaged by going to a reserve school is unacceptable to us as a government and as a department, too. We're applying pressure to the federal government to step up in this regard. We know that precedents that were set by unequal funding for social services and medical services apply in principle to education as well. They should, right? If there is a discrepancy by sometimes even a half, a 50 per cent funding differential between our schools and a school that's just across that line on a reserve, I mean, that's just not acceptable, really.

So we're trying to bridge that gap but also maintain the integrity of the nation-to-nation agreement, which is what a treaty represents. You know, we're not going to step over that because that's integral to the integrity of a band and the treaties. Somewhere betwixt the two we will push forward very vigorously.

Mr. Hinkley: You mentioned Maskwacis. In particular, I know that in the past we have funded the very innovative program of the four nations working together with one school board. In this budget are there any plans or thoughts of continuing working with that group?

Mr. Eggen: Oh, absolutely. Yeah, the Maskwacis education steering committee. The direction is to build an education authority not unlike what had emerged in Kee Tas Kee Now, in northern Alberta. We do have granting on that, a conditional grant, to the Maskwacis education steering committee as well as supplying in-kind supports around this initiative. So it's definitely moving along.

You know, I think that as we see the federal government demonstrate a clearer commitment, then I think that we'll see some quick movement on formalizing the Maskwacis education authority, and it'll be very exciting.

5:20

Mr. Hinkley: Yeah. Sometime down the road could I get some of those numbers, more specific to what's happening?

Mr. Eggen: Yes, of course. I'd be glad to pass that on to you.

Mr. Hinkley: Yeah. I know you don't have them here.

Okay. In a slightly different line, then, although still pertaining to line 2.1 in the estimates, the operating support for public and separate schools, can you tell the committee if there is any work being done on a new funding formula that is based on the notion that the quality of education should be based on programs offered and not just on per capita students? That has extreme relevancy for many of the rural school boards.

Mr. Eggen: Yes, of course.

Mr. Hinkley: What's happening with that?

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. I mean, it's quite obvious that we need to review and improve some of these funding formulas to ensure accuracy and transparency and focus, right? You know, you see the evolution of funding frameworks. There's a piece here; there's a piece there. We know that we need to sharpen that in some areas. We know that you have to provide equity of education regardless of where a child might happen to live, right? So for school boards in remote

communities to be short on certain funding because of the formulas and so forth: that is a responsibility of the government to rectify. It's a big undertaking. It's necessary, and certainly we're starting to make some moves in that regard. We know that just funding for enrolment – in some of our rural areas we see a declining enrolment. Should that reduce the equity of opportunity that a student might or might not have because they live in a place with declining enrolment? These are the problems that we have to confront in a responsible but vigorous way.

Mr. Hinkley: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah.

Ms Luff: I guess, just following up on that, keeping with line 2 about operating support for public and separate schools, it's good to hear that certainly there is consideration being given to equity when we're doing the funding formula. But, I mean, we all know the most important thing is just to make sure that there are teachers in classrooms in front of kids who need them, right?

Mr. Eggen: Were you a teacher by any chance?

Ms Luff: I know. It's a thing. There are a lot of us here today. It's a party.

Mr. Eggen: I know.

Ms Luff: Anyway, I'm just curious about line 2, operating support for public and separate schools. Specifically within that line item, how are teacher and staff ratios determined using that funding? Like, is all of that funding based on the per-student amount, or are there additional considerations within that line item?

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. Through this whole budget we have, I think, demonstrated stability. It's always good to remember that, you know, we did this under difficult circumstances. I mean, we had to make sacrifices in other areas to make sure we had that funding for education. Again, like I said in my opening remarks, I could not have done this without the advocacy for education from our caucus, our cabinet, and the Premier, of course. So it's quite amazing, really, considering what all we've been through.

About 97, 98 per cent of the money moves through to school authorities to deliver education services. You know, we're spending, for example, \$39 million in operational funding every day. This coincidence wasn't lost on me, actually, when I was listening to the Premier on Sunday talking about getting that pipeline going, when she said that every day that it's not functioning, we're losing \$40 million. Well, that's exactly pretty much what we spend every day on education. That pipeline could literally just be for K to 12, a paying-for-the-kids pipeline if we look at it that way. Obviously, it's a coincidence, but it's not lost on me.

Our student enrolment has grown by about 2.2 per cent, like I said in my opening remarks. You know, it's difficult to determine exactly how many teachers are going to be hired and exactly what the ratio will look like, but we've been compelled by the class size initiative and the line item that we have around the class size initiative. I've kept that in there because we want to sharpen our focus on that, as per the Auditor General's recommendations, to ensure transparency and focus on the class size initiative. That is a big task that we're all going to be doing here in Education over this next year. But we kept that. It was, like, \$297 million. It's a big part of our budget, and we will endeavour to fulfill all the recommendations of the Auditor General in regard to transparency and accountability for that class size initiative line item.

Ms Luff: So with the increase between last year and this year in the operational funding line item, you can't say specifically, like, how many more teachers are going to be hired? Is the growth in that line item entirely due to student growth?

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. We've made a calculation that we could see approximately 660-some teachers and maybe 360-some support staff, right? Decisions are made by school boards in this regard. You know, this is based on information submitted by them. But if you look at, let's say, the classroom improvement fund, which was negotiated this first time as part of the collective agreement, how do you achieve improving classrooms? Obviously, with lower staff-student ratios, with more expertise in the classroom. Almost all the money we spend is on human resources, which is the correct thing to do. I'm always encouraging my school boards to think of staffing first because that's the best investment you can make.

Ms Luff: For sure. The classroom improvement fund was a great thing, I think. I hear back from a lot of teachers that that's something they appreciate. Certainly, it has been used to hire more teachers in some instances. I've also heard it's for early childhood testing, for example, and for mental health supports and things like that. There have been lots of good uses, I think, of that money in the classroom.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. And it's interesting because it was negotiated, too. I mean, the one element is fine, right? Money in the classroom, hire some teachers and support staff, and away you go.

The other part that was, you know, really integral to my thought process was to show respect and to power share around making decisions on what actually does improve classroom conditions and not just have me or a superintendent or Curtis make that choice but to sit down with the board and negotiate it between the teachers and the board. And then they come up with that. I mean, when you empower people like that, it strengthens the profession in general. That's what I'm hoping for, anyway.

Ms Luff: Yeah, absolutely. Like we've discussed already today, depending on what school you're at and what board you're in, what you need to improve your classroom may vary widely.

Mr. Eggen: Which you probably know, right?

Ms Luff: It's a thing.

Mr. Eggen: Exactly.

Ms Luff: Yeah. Just a little bit of follow-up. You addressed the issue of the class size initiative and the Auditor General's report around that. It has been good to see that that money is maintained in this budget because, obviously, something that parents want is low class sizes, and teachers like that as well.

I'm just curious about a breakdown of that money between school boards. Do you do it on the basis of the total number of K to 3 students, or is it allocated based on, like, the number of classes that are over the recommended number in each school board?

Mr. Eggen: We do it globally. It's based on enrolment, I think. Right, Brad?

Mr. B. Smith: Correct.

Mr. Eggen: It's one of our enrolment-based grants, so a 2.2 per cent increase, for sure, because that's what we see projected for growth this year. You know, we have school authorities determining the

appropriate balance between teacher and staffing levels, so the school boards make the determination. But I think that we need to put a little more accountability into that because that's what the Auditor General compelled us to do. I consider that to be constructive criticism, right? It's funny how when you have initiatives with names attached to them but they exist for quite a number of years, then it just kind of gets rolled over into general funding, you know, if you don't do anything with them.

5:30

I recognize the importance of class size, lower class sizes, especially in K to 3, you know. We'll maintain that, lower class sizes, for specialty programming that has safety issues associated with it. I mean, that's a given. But I think there are other places we can go with that, too. As a high school teacher I know that you hit a certain point where, if the class is simply too big and if there are a lot of special needs that are built into that classroom composition as well, it's going to affect learning outcomes. We will work on that. It is our project, one of our many projects for the year. We demand accountability.

Ms Luff: Yeah. Well, I think that most folks were impressed – or I was, anyway – when you took the recommendations of the Auditor General with regard to school build and, like, have looked at that moving forward. I'm fairly confident that you will look at the recommendations made with regard to class size and move forward with that similarly.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. We have. I mean, I was a little bit – well, whatever. Reporters do what they do, right? You know, our projects: we have an unprecedented number. We have more than 200 school projects on the go right now, and all the ones that are delayed are these specialty ones, where you're doing modernizations in very difficult circumstances. It's less than 10 per cent of our projects. There are all these modernizations in very peculiar sorts of circumstances, so we're actually doing really, really well. It's an unprecedented build, and I think people recognize that. I appreciate the media keeping us on our toes in that regard, but the other side of it is that our capital projects are doing really well.

The Chair: Thank you. I hesitate to interrupt, Minister, but the time allotted for this portion of the meeting has expired.

I would now like to invite Mr. Smith and the minister to speak for the next 10 minutes. Are you wanting to combine your time?

Mr. M. Smith: If the minister is willing to.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. Whatever works for you.

Mr. M. Smith: Okay. That's good.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. M. Smith: I think we've enjoyed our conversation to this point today.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. It's been mostly pretty good.

Mr. M. Smith: We were talking about the carbon tax and transportation last, and I'd like to return to that if that's possible. That was line items 2.3, 2.4 in the government estimates, page 102.

Mr. Eggen: Okay. Go ahead.

Mr. M. Smith: Now, in our conversations both in and outside of the House you've repeatedly pointed to grants and solar panels and green

energy initiatives to point out that the school boards can save money on the carbon tax. Yet when I listen to people out of, for instance, the High Prairie school board, the director of transportation has said, and I quote: we are hopeful our government will recognize the added costs placed on nonprofit organizations and support them monetarily going forward. It's clear that the institutional grants through Energy Efficiency Alberta and Minister Phillip's solar panels just aren't enough. They're not covering the costs for the school boards.

Can you outline for all the school boards across Alberta how you'll be supporting them monetarily to compensate them for the additional costs that they've borne through the carbon tax? Are you tracking what the total cost savings for the green energy initiatives that you've implemented have been, and could you break this number down for us as urban-rural or however you've got the numbers?

So I'd like to know about the green energy savings and whether you are considering compensating the school boards, because they clearly are getting behind the eight ball on this.

Mr. Eggen: Sure. Thank you for the question. Certainly, we want to ensure that our school boards are adequately funded. You know, again, I take it back to the global decisions we made around funding for enrolment and other associated grants moving up as reflecting enrolment. We've put probably more than a billion dollars into the system over these last four budgets, more than the baseline of what would have happened otherwise. During a difficult economic period we managed to, I think, do quite well, right? I know that for school boards it's always tight, and I always expect them to make very careful decisions about this precious public money that we provide for them. The carbon levy is a very important part of the decisions in direction – as you know, we both sit in the Legislature every day – making sure there's the climate action strategy to build a strong and diverse economy.

I know that this is a matter of debate sometimes, but on a very practical level our ability to deliver two pipeline approvals from the federal government was contingent on our carbon levy and our climate action plan, quite frankly, right? We just wouldn't have been able to do it otherwise. You know, working through those lenses, we can work with school boards. It's an emerging situation, too. I know that a solar panel on a building in one place doesn't compensate a school board in another place for extra monies that they might be spending on energy, but as time moves on, there are different ways by which we can focus these efforts, and we'll start to see it turn around. It takes a while.

For example, the IMF funding, infrastructure maintenance and renewal – IMR funding, not the IMF. That's the International Monetary Fund. The IMR funding that we use: you know, we've targeted that this year to compel people to spend 30 per cent of it on capital-based renovation, to make sure that we're getting a good bang for the buck on that. Of course, school boards can make their own decisions about it, but what better place to make IMR funding decisions around capital than on energy efficiency, right? Go for those lights that are LED; go for the new boiler; fix the windows and so forth. You realize that from savings off that, you reduce your carbon, but I think, more importantly, really, is that you actually will just save money.

The new school that I announced in Camrose a few weeks ago with the Premier will have a \$500,000 reduced operation bill attached to it because of its efficiencies; you know, 500,000 bucks a year. The old school, Chester Ronning, is lovely and whatnot, but it's as leaky as can be, and it burns a lot of energy. I mean, that's kind of the long game that you've got to look at when you're doing this. I work very constructively with my school boards. High Prairie is a perfect example, where we have good-quality conversations

about these things and ways by which I can try to help them. They know very well that the exclusion of school boards from the carbon levy is not an option. The universality, or how widely this works, is part of the success of a carbon pricing strategy.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Eggen: With that being said, we can make investments. I mean, we can make investments over time around this that can work. We see with the Calgary board of education, for example, that their projection for the carbon pricing this year is about \$1 million. That's quite a lot of money, but they can use that as a target for ways by which they can reduce that energy bill in lots of creative ways, and I have money to back that up. I've also given them . . .

Mr. M. Smith: Mr. Minister . . .

Mr. Eggen: Okay. Go ahead. Let's have another question. Sorry about that. It's very interesting.

Mr. M. Smith: Class size initiative funding is what I would like to look at, page 102, line 2.5.

Mr. Eggen: Oh. Right. You don't have as much time. I'm sorry. I'm not trying to kill time, honestly. This is something that I'm very passionate about.

Mr. M. Smith: You're passionate about it. Okay.

The Auditor General obviously noted that the small-classroom initiative funds have pretty much just morphed into base funding. That was his conclusion, and I think it's an accurate one. I know that I asked you about this in 2015 and 2016, and both times you mentioned that you would work towards increasing the accountability around this money. I respect, you know, that you've probably tried. Two questions: why did it take the Auditor General to release a scathing report before we start to actually do something? Secondly, can you tell me what those accountability measures are going to be? He's asked for greater accountability. What kind of accountability measures are you going to take? Let's get specific about that. When will they be introduced, how will they be applied, and how are you going to monitor the success of this program?

5:40

Mr. Eggen: Thank you. Yeah, in terms of time and space it certainly was not us just getting the report and reacting to it. I mean, we're working with the Auditor General on his analysis of the class size initiative. From the beginning we knew that we had to do something about it, for sure, right? It's not like we were being laggards on it. If you try to look at it globally, Member, you can see that the larger issue is around funding and funding accountability. We've been working on that over the last year and a bit, much more specifically with the class size initiative as one of the targets for improvement; you know, looking for funding, how we fund schools. Are we targeting the money on inclusivity and on transportation? Is it moving into those places properly, right? This is a line item that is a good case in point by which we can help to focus those efforts. So we've been working on it, for sure.

Mr. M. Smith: What measures are you going to use?

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. That's my next part. Obviously, we're working on it now, right? We're looking at funding to boards, and we're looking to make sure that we honour the integrity of boards, but we also need to have transparency and accountability built into these

things. Do we have that plan ready and finished now? No, but we're certainly looking at reviewing. At this point we're reviewing class size data for all schools, and we'll make that available and inform the system once the review is completed. If you have some constructive means or suggestions on how we might be able to do this, respecting board autonomy and regional differences, I certainly would welcome that information.

Mr. M. Smith: Well, we know that there were metrics that were being used, and then they chose not to.

The Chair: Thank you. Unfortunately, the time allotted for this part of the rotation has expired.

I would now like to invite Mr. Hinkley and the minister to speak for the next 10 minutes. Are you wanting to combine your time?

Mr. Hinkley: Please.

The Chair: Minister?

Mr. Eggen: Go ahead, yeah. I'm ready to roll, man.

The Chair: Thank you. Go ahead.

Mr. Hinkley: I just want to quickly say that I'm very happy to see that our government is putting an emphasis on education. I'm looking at line 4.1 on page 102, facility infrastructure. Again, these are in your main estimates. Can you please explain how that relates to the \$393 million for school projects that you announced under Budget 2018?

Mr. Eggen: Sure. Yeah. Thanks a lot. You know, it's really important to take a look at this. I mean, we have seven new schools, seven replacements – let's make sure that this adds up, right? – three modernizations, and one addition to an existing school. These will help to address the growing population and revitalization as well. We have some schools and school boards that are looking at consolidating and building in established neighbourhoods, and I really like that, not just building in the burbs and all this. But we're also looking back inward and working together with municipalities. There is an emerging, very promising aspect to this, where we look at the 30-year plan of transportation for the city of Calgary and look for ways by which we can put schools along the new green line – what a logical thing to do – or have shared facilities with libraries and multiplexes and so forth, right? These are all value-added, but they also help to create a sense of community and so forth.

Mr. Hinkley: Well, sticking with line 4.1, capital investments in schools, there is also money allocated for schools in the Education capital plan and in the Infrastructure capital plan. Could you tell us more about these budgets and how they relate so that we can get a sense of exactly how much is being spent this year on those new schools and upgrades?

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. Sure. That's really important. I mean, it's an amazing amount of money. It's, like, \$742 million for construction, right? As well, we've got the modernizations, the modular program, the infrastructure maintenance and renewal program, and so forth.

If you break it down a bit, you can see – it's interesting. We moved that \$525 million budgeted by Infrastructure to support the school projects on an ongoing basis, and then \$111 million for the infrastructure maintenance and renewal program, which, as I've said before, we've put a provision in there that 30 per cent of that must be spent more specifically on capital – right? – which can

include, you know, making those investments to improve energy efficiency in buildings and so forth.

Of course, we also have the playground fund, right? Realizing that, you know, when building elementary schools, while we're there, it's a good investment to put some money down for a playground. I mean, the parents are going to do it anyway. People will still raise money, but it's a good starting point for getting that new playground into place with a new school all at the same time.

Mr. Hinkley: We have seen that there's been over 200 school construction projects on the go over the years. With reference to line 4.1 again, there appears to actually be less funding allocated for these types of projects in 2018-2019. Can you tell the committee why we are seeing a decrease in funding, and can you tell the committee how this will impact the students, staff, and families?

Mr. Eggen: Okay. It's a fair point. You know, back in 2015 we knew that with the economy doing what it was, we had to make some difficult decisions, right? So with the economy already taking a big blow – it's interesting that in many municipal districts around the province, I'd say the vast majority of them, really, education is actually the number one employer. You don't want to compound an economic downturn in a county like Parkland county – right? – where lots and lots of oil and gas people lost their jobs, and then suddenly the teachers lose their jobs, too. On a very practical level that's the way we were looking at it, and we extended that logic to the school projects as well.

Lots of them were overdue – right? – lots and lots of schools. I mean, we didn't suddenly have all of these kids show up. It was a past-due sort of a prospect. So building schools was not a bad way to actually create stimulation in different areas as well. Now, in 2018-19, we're looking to slow that investment in new and modernized schools compared to '17-18. You know, this is a reflection of the recommendations that we received from David Dodge in terms of capital investment and stimulation and mirroring that to the cycles of Alberta's economy.

As it happens, Alberta's economy is growing at the fastest rate in Canada this year and probably again next year, so our capital plan reflects the change.

Mr. Hinkley: Well, I guess a supplemental, then. If we're decreasing the funding, yet we see the economy is growing and the population is growing and the number of students is growing, is there not a need for more schools?

Mr. Eggen: Yes, of course.

Mr. Hinkley: So how are we cutting back when it's quite clear that the population is growing and we need it?

Mr. Eggen: Well, it's a question of Treasury Board and the instructions that I receive from them and from the Finance minister in regard to hitting our targets for a path to balance as well. While building schools, building capital projects is not reflected in our deficit position, it's reflected in our debt position – right? – so you have to be conscious of that as well. You know, we have a pretty strict plan for balancing the budget over the next number of years, and everybody had to contribute to that, so this is part of my contribution to that.

I mean, we're not going to leave people out in the cold, obviously. You know, the member who was here before – Auburn Bay, good grief. There are so many kids everywhere that you have to build a school, right? But at the same time we have to just be really, really thoughtful.

Mr. Hinkley: It's always amazing how people ask for more schools and then say that they want you to cut the deficit at the same time.

Mr. Eggen: Well, yeah. It's one of those contradictions. We call that irony in literature.

Mr. Hinkley: MLA Luff will now ask you some questions.

Mr. Eggen: Okay. Thank you for that.

5:50

Ms Luff: All right. I don't think we have tons of time left, so I'll just maybe follow up on some of MLA Hinkley's questions. Specifically, you did talk about playground funding, which I think is great. I'm assuming that that number, the money that's allocated for playgrounds, falls under line 4.1. So just to clarify, that was \$5 million under last year's budget and \$5 million for this year's budget, or \$5 million total?

Mr. Eggen: I believe so. I don't have that right on the tip of my tongue, but these guys will check for it straight away.

Then, you know, further to your inquiries about established neighbourhoods and playgrounds. I mean, part of what this can do – I was actually the culture minister and the Education minister, you might recall; I can barely recall it because I was so busy – is that by providing funding for playgrounds for new schools, at least in theory, it might help to free up more CFEP money for other projects, right? So it's almost like a little bump from one to the other.

I do recognize that you specifically were talking about how in some communities, you know, with modest means even getting that matching seed money is the issue. I've been thinking about that, actually. I know that that's true. When getting started, it's hard to raise money, period, but starting with nothing and then expecting matching when you have nothing is ironic as well, isn't it?

Ms Luff: Yeah.

Mr. Eggen: I mean, at least, to say that our CFEP – or I should say that our initiative over here in Education should theoretically help to free up granting potential for CFEP in other areas for more established places to perhaps build that second playground after 30 years in Penbrooke. It's all coming back to me now, right?

Ms Luff: Yeah. There you go.

Mr. Eggen: My auntie lives there. That's why I remember.

Ms Luff: I wasn't even going to go there. You just went there, so that's cool.

I was actually just going to ask specifically: do you know how many schools have built playgrounds using this funding last year and how many are projected to build them going forward in 2018-19?

Mr. Eggen: I'll have to get back to you on that. I'm sorry; I don't have that.

Ms Luff: For sure. No worries.

Mr. Eggen: Oh, here it is. So 16 school projects have received funding up to \$250,000, and then Treasury Broad approved the \$25.5 million over the next four years. You know, busting that out to \$250,000 per, that should give you 102 projects altogether. How many people have actually built the slides and everything? I will have to check on that for you.

People are usually pretty enthusiastic about this. I mean, it doesn't preclude them from raising money to build the fancier part

that shoots water and stuff like that. But, you know, it is pretty well received.

The Chair: Thank you.

For the next 10 minutes I would like to invite Mr. Smith and the minister to speak. Are you wanting to combine your time?

Mr. M. Smith: It's been working so far.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. Sure. Whatever works for you.

Mr. M. Smith: Okay. Good.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. M. Smith: Mr. Minister, through the chair, I'll just start off with: when I think you've given me the answer that I need, then I'm just going to interject politely if I could.

Mr. Eggen: I understand. I'll keep it super short, right?

Mr. M. Smith: Okay. Thank you.

Just out of the last set of questions that I had, and then we'll go on to TEBA and the contract negotiations if we could.

Mr. Eggen: Okay. Great.

Mr. M. Smith: Is the ministry tracking K through 3 size as a factor in educational performance? Out of the 2015 estimates you provided us with some research on that, but it's 10 years old. I'm just wondering: are you tracking and monitoring this in an Alberta context and on an ongoing basis, and would you be willing to share that information with us if you're doing that?

Mr. Eggen: Yes, we are, and yes, we can. How's that? Is that short enough?

Mr. M. Smith: That is wonderful. Thank you.

We're going to go on to TEBA and the contract negotiations, and it'll be part of the business plan, page 57, and it's outcome 5, Alberta's education system is well governed and managed.

Mr. Eggen: Okay.

Mr. M. Smith: Now, in April of 2017 a two-year deal between TEBA and the ATA was announced.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah.

Mr. M. Smith: And it had a me-too clause in it. I guess the first question I've got is: have any other public-sector negotiations triggered this clause?

Mr. Eggen: No.

Mr. M. Smith: No? Okay. Good. Is there any expectation that this clause will be triggered before the current deal expires in August?

Mr. Eggen: Well, I mean, I won't presuppose . . .

Mr. M. Smith: And I won't hold you. You're not . . .

Mr. Eggen: But, I mean, it's important not to presuppose outcomes of collective bargaining. So not as of yet. We've had, you know, the nurses and HSAA and a couple of others come in, and they've all followed a very similar path to what the teachers' main table negotiated, how that unfolded, right? Again, the integrity of collective bargaining is very important, but having everyone look

very carefully just at the state of our finances is really important, too. So far so good.

Mr. M. Smith: Okay. Another part of this agreement was the \$75 million classroom improvement fund.

Mr. Eggen: Yes.

Mr. M. Smith: Some boards have used this to hire teachers. I guess one of the questions that I've got is: will the teachers funded through this temporary fund lose their jobs if there's no continuation of the classroom improvement fund in the next contract?

Mr. Eggen: Well, no. I included the classroom improvement fund line in this budget, so it's carrying on, right? I mean, I recognize (a) the importance of considering hiring people to improve classroom conditions, and (b) the importance of long-term funding to enable someone to keep on working, so I built it into this budget again.

Mr. M. Smith: Okay. We've heard some concerns from some teachers – and I understand this – that the fund was used to pay for technological upgrades which they didn't really want and they didn't really need. How is the ministry ensuring that this money is being allocated based on input from those who are actually in the classroom every day? Do you have any metrics that demonstrate that this money is being well spent?

Mr. Eggen: Yeah, I'm aware of that. You know, I want it to adhere to the principle. This is all new as well, right? You want to make sure everybody is buying in. I mean, to get TEBA off the ground and to have two tables and to be able to negotiate provincially for wages was quite the achievement, really. I wasn't sure how it was going to go.

So now here we are doing something again that's not been done before. It was meant to be negotiations between the boards and the teachers or representation of the teachers to say what they wanted to do and to come to an agreement. I'm looking at each of those things now to see how they all came out in the wash. Mostly people hired people, which is great. Some people have put up professional development initiatives, which again I think is really great. I think it's Calgary that had a math initiative, which was really quite promising. Peace Wapiti had their reading initiative – right? – so good for them. But we're looking at this really carefully. I'm less interested in people buying, like, a bunch of iPads or something like that. I'm more interested in something that's really super laser focused on improving classroom conditions.

Mr. M. Smith: If you could provide us with the metrics for how you're analyzing that, that would be great. I guess I'll get the last word in on this one here, and that is just that, you know, obviously, we don't want this to become another example of the small class size initiative.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. That's actually a very good analysis.

Mr. M. Smith: We would like to be able to see, as an opposition that needs to hold the government to account, that these funds are being used in an appropriate fashion and that the metrics that you're using make sense. Okay?

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. Message received.

Mr. M. Smith: If you could pass those on, that would be great.

Mr. Eggen: Absolutely. This is it. We're running this thing. We're not passing it on to anybody. I'm the guy.

Mr. M. Smith: My understanding is that as part of the Public Education Collective Bargaining Act the ATA and TEBA negotiate provincial matters while the local issues are done at a local and a separate round of negotiations.

Mr. Eggen: That's right.

Mr. M. Smith: At the end of March there were 36 memoranda of agreement that had been signed, and there were 25 bargaining units still in negotiation. Could you provide an update on these numbers? Are they still accurate?

Mr. Eggen: I will have to get back to you. I think there are a couple of more that have signed since then. You know, it's moving a little bit slower than I had anticipated. It's new, and I have such widely – oh. Here we go. Nope. Nobody has. That's where it is right now, Member. It hasn't moved.

Mr. M. Smith: Okay. It still hasn't moved.

Mr. Eggen: It hasn't moved, no.

Mr. M. Smith: Trust me, I do understand that you can't compromise bargaining positions, but you could provide a broad overview of perhaps some of the contentious issues. For instance, I've heard that the 907-hour cap on instructional time and the 1,200-hour cap on assignable time are some contentious issues, especially in rural Alberta, that are on the table. How will these local kinds of issues be dealt with? You've already brought it up here that it's taking longer than you thought it would, and that will get to my next set of questions. But are these some of the kinds of contentious issues? Is that accurate, and how are we moving forward on those kinds of issues?

6:00

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. I mean, again, your observation on the integrity of these agreements and these local tables is correct. But, you know, some of the things that I've heard around teacher instructional time, teacher assignable time, compensatory time, existing provisions in local agreements that people have had from before: yeah, these are some of the issues that people are talking about, for sure.

Mr. M. Smith: My understanding is that four of the units have requested a government-appointed mediator.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah.

Mr. M. Smith: Two of the bargaining units have taken disputes to the Labour Relations Board.

Mr. Eggen: Right.

Mr. M. Smith: Are they settled, these issues? Where are we at on those?

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. I think that sounds similar to what I had heard. I mean, I'm really taking the position that these local issues, by law and by agreement with TEBA and so forth, are local, right? We have to make sure we respect that process. I think people are doing it in good faith, for sure. We want to help along – what I've seen is that there's been a low level of animosity and tension with both levels of negotiating, which is very refreshing. The provincial part of the collective bargaining was voted with quite a large majority,

which, again, I found very relieving. You know, we must respect the process.

Mr. M. Smith: So when do you anticipate these local deals being done? Like, will they be done before the deal expires on August 31? Would you be intervening if they're not? As you say, this is the first round through, and if the local bargaining isn't done by August 31, we now have another set of issues that we have to deal with. What are you anticipating? How are you anticipating dealing with this if we still have 25 bargaining units that are not finished by August 31?

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. Sure. I mean, the next round: we've engaged school trustees, administration, you know, four times since February.

The Chair: I hesitate to interrupt. However, the time allotted for this portion has expired.

For the next 10 minutes I would like to invite Ms Luff and the minister to speak. Are you wanting to combine your time?

Ms Luff: Yes, please.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Ms Luff: I mean, I could just talk about math for 10 minutes because, unlike the two of you, I was a math teacher.

Mr. Eggen: Good for you.

Ms Luff: Yes. We call it problem-based math.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah.

Ms Luff: Yeah. So I want to talk about that a little bit.

Mr. Eggen: Sure.

Ms Luff: You already sort of focused on key strategy 1.3, implementing "systemic actions to further support student learning and achievement in Mathematics." You talked about the bursaries, which I think are a fantastic idea, the specific focus on K to 3, the calculatorless portion of the grade 6 PATs. All that is really good stuff, and I think that's going to help going forward.

I am just curious. One of the major barriers that I found when I was teaching math was that if you were trying to do it in a different or a new way, parents didn't necessarily understand what you were doing. Instead of that being a sign that we're teaching math wrong, I think that's a sign that maybe for a long time, because people aren't comfortable with math, in the past we were not teaching math correctly. When you talk to people, a lot of people will tell you, with no shame, that that they are not very good at math . . .

Mr. Eggen: Yeah.

Ms Luff: . . . whereas no one talks to you and tells you that they can't read very well. Because parents aren't comfortable with math, it's often that you have to have more in-depth conversations about how you can help your kids at home with mathematics. So I'm just curious: with the changes to the bursaries and the focus on K to 3 education, what efforts are being made to sort of communicate any changes in mathematics to parents? I think that will help a lot.

Mr. Eggen: Okay. Good. That's a very frank way of describing it. I never thought of it that way before. You know, I already reviewed some of the things that I did for changes, and I did that, obviously, with supports.

But inherently, I mean, on a more sort of higher level, I recognize the value of having more written portions for exams. I know it's a

bit more expensive, but kids can demonstrate their competence in different ways, right? Then we did the no-calculator part with the grade 6 exam, which was fascinating, I can tell you that. We had a metric that showed how many different, unique answers there were. You'd have, like, 53 times seven, and you would have 1,200 different, unique answers or something. It's, like: holy moly. There's room for improvement, for sure.

Our own ongoing work to develop curriculum is another place that we can help to do a strong focus on numeracy, you know. I've been trying to, as I often do, straddle the two sort of extremes that would suggest that we go back to basics or that we do something else completely different. I mean, I recognize the importance of using different strategies to ensure that the students meet the expectations of the curriculum. I know that public perception is very important to buying into public education, though, too – right? – or education in general, all the different choices and forms of education we have. I try to sort of diplomatically bestride the two to make sure I have a big buy-in into the satisfaction of the public trusting us around education, right? We see some good indications around that. We've seen that really strengthen over the last couple of years, so I'm really proud of that, but you're only as good as the next thing you do, right?

Math is a flashpoint, you know. I mean, I'm demanding vigour and rigour and so-called basic skills to be revisited in mathematics, but also I recognize, from what really sort of the best quality education is, that people must be able to problem solve and conceptualize mathematics and science and logic, right? These are the highest level skills, that people really look for, not just in a job but in life, too, to really understand what's going on around you. Again, we're working through this. I need verification and people to look at every stage along the way that we're heading down the right path. We're building this scope and sequence that we have now, which is just kind of the thing we hang it all on. It's not the curriculum. Some people kind of maybe didn't realize that.

We are building lots of extra support resources – right? – to support teaching and mathematics. We have the grant, the bursary program, of course. That's another thing that we're doing as well. We're putting more focus on number facts in lower grades. You know, that calculator thing was very interesting, so we're going to do that again in the grade 9 exam this year, right? The kids are all freaking out about that already, but that's okay.

I mean, slowly and surely – I'm open to best practice. I may not be an expert in these things, but I am an expert in building consensus around what's best and looking for expertise along the way, so that's the way that I'm approaching this. We were able to engage parents around the curriculum. We did a couple of iterations around that in terms of the online survey, but we will reach down much deeper because, again, I need the teachers and the public to say: yeah, this is it; this is the curriculum for us, and we're really glad you did this. It's an exercise in trust every step of the way when you're delivering education.

Ms Luff: Yeah, absolutely. I think a lot of those things – certainly, the level of engagement on the curriculum with the public, I think, was really good.

Mr. Eggen: Yes. I think so, too.

Ms Luff: Yeah. And also that focus on balance, right? Like, you can't have anyone purely teaching discovery math, and I don't think that in this day and age we should have anyone purely teaching memorization of algorithms either. It has to be somewhere in the middle.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. Betwixt the two. Absolutely.

Ms Luff: I think the vast majority of educators recognize that, so I think it's important that, you know, other folks in the system recognize it as well.

Oh, I just wanted to thank you for adding the written portion back into the grade 12 PAT. Actually, I wrote a letter to the *Calgary Herald* when they took that out.

6:10

Mr. Eggen: Oh, did you?

Ms Luff: Yeah. In – I don't know – 2011 it was published.

Mr. Eggen: Oh, okay. Well, there you go. And look at your ethereal rise from there.

Ms Luff: Yeah. There you go. It all starts with a letter to the editor.

Just switching gears a little bit, in outcome 5 of the business plan you talk about ensuring that Alberta's education system is well managed and governed. This is also addressed under line 2.1, operational funding. I'm just curious if you could tell the committee about the funding allocated for governance and system administration in school boards.

Mr. Eggen: Sure. That's 2.1, right?

Ms Luff: I believe so.

Mr. Eggen: The total operating support, you know, to public, separate, francophone, and charter jurisdictions is \$7.4 billion for the '18-19 year. This is an increase of \$140 million, and that almost entirely is a reflection of our projected enrolment growth. Then the money moves, like I said, 97 per cent or so, to the school authorities, right? They are the ones that deliver the services within the structure of regulation through the ministry.

Ms Luff: So the school board, then, would decide how much of the allocated funding would be specifically for system administration versus classroom costs?

Mr. Eggen: Yeah, for sure. I see what you're getting at. I mean, they do. We have a range that we use to measure. We always monitor that, and that's something that the public watches carefully, too. In your city, you know, there's been lots of talk about this, the administration of the Calgary board of education and so forth.

I mean, just to say it once again – I have to say these things every so often, right? – the Calgary board of education does a great job educating kids. They are the biggest school board, one of the biggest school entities in Canada, and they deal with tremendous diversity, tremendous complexity of needs in classrooms. They're providing lots of choice of programming nowadays. Like, they just really are a dynamic, front-leading board, like I say, right across this whole country. That being said, we are working every step along the way to help them. We had, you know, an operational review with them, working closely in co-operation, and it turned out really well, right? It wasn't a product of animosity, nor was it a punitive measure but, rather, a point of clarity for all of us. So that's the way we move forward on it.

CBE is a leader in lots of ways. They're getting some of their administrative costs and issues cleared up, right? They'll be stuck with that lease for a while, but no one seems to be able to figure out how to solve that one. Just out of interest, more specifically . . .

The Chair: Thank you.

I would like to invite Mr. Smith and the minister to speak for the next 10 minutes. Are you wanting to still combine your time?

Mr. M. Smith: Yeah.

Mr. Eggen: Sure. Absolutely.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. M. Smith: Thank you. Let's just finish off. We were talking about TEBA and negotiations, and I guess the last question that I would have would simply be this. Obviously, there are going to be some issues created, I think, if we have two separate bargaining systems going on at the same time. You know, how are you going to ensure that we are not bargaining on two separate contracts at the same time after August 31? I mean, are you going to suspend the negotiations on the second contract between the ATA and TEBA until the local negotiations are successfully completed on the first contract? Have you given thought to what you're going to do should we get to that point where you're still negotiating on local issues but you're now into the time when you should be negotiating for the second contract?

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. I'm a glass-half-full kind of minister, so, you know, I'm expecting and hoping that the local tables will wrap up before August 31. I mean, you have to expect the best and prepare for the worst, right? We are prepared to move forward on the main table negotiations while the small tables, the local issues tables, are still cleaning up their negotiations. I mean, I've been watching it. It's hard to have an expectation because it's new – right? – but we will try to provide supports along the way for people to get the job done.

Mr. M. Smith: Okay. Minister, I'll freely admit that the questions that I want to have a conversation about right now are not directly related to a specific line item that I can see in your business plan or other documents, but I actually think it's something that we should have a conversation about.

Mr. Eggen: Okay.

Mr. M. Smith: I'd like to ask a couple of questions, and I guess you're free to be able to answer them or not. They all revolve around the issue of the legalization of cannabis. Given that the legalization is expected to be completed by this fall, in June 2017 the superintendent of Northern Gateway public schools stated that not one school board could say that they were ready for the legalization of cannabis. I think we need to have a conversation about what's going to happen with the boards to make sure that they are ready to handle this issue, because I think it's going to be a pretty critical one. I guess the question that I've got is this. How are we working with the various police forces and Alberta Justice to ensure that the policing of underage marijuana use doesn't fall into the laps of teachers? I don't think anybody wants that.

Mr. Eggen: No.

Mr. M. Smith: We're going to be in a situation where a student that's 18 years of age can legally walk into a school with cannabis on their person, in their locker, into their classrooms. I mean, some of these schools are K to 12. Are we developing any provincial guidelines in terms of banning all or some of the cannabis? It's not just good enough to say: you can't smoke it close to the school.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. It's a very relevant question. I mean, there it is. You can, you know, visualize different scenarios. We do have a government working table developing a policy framework – right? – around these things. And you're right. School boards need support for these things as well.

I mean, there are going to be federal and provincial and municipal rules as well and then school boards'. You know, the alignment of other controlled substances and cannabis I think is part of how we can make this easier, probably, in terms of tobacco, alcohol, and then cannabis. Someone could be 18 in a school, but it's still against the rules to bring alcohol in there, right?

Mr. M. Smith: That's because it's treated under the alcohol act, but cannabis is treated under the tobacco act.

Mr. Eggen: Right. I mean, you can be 18 and you still can't smoke tobacco in a school either, right?

Mr. M. Smith: No, but you can bring it in.

Mr. Eggen: Right. I mean, I think this is very helpful, actually. It's good, constructive analysis. We need to make sure that we're assisting, you know, schools. The provincial laws around cannabis as they're developed don't preclude municipalities from adding another level of law and bylaw around cannabis, right? So you see municipalities around the province taking the distance between a marijuana retail outlet . . .

Mr. M. Smith: Will school boards have the authority to be able to just say that it's banned from the school?

Mr. Eggen: We should check on that one. We can talk easier. Yeah. Sure.

Mr. M. Smith: Okay. We're talking about mental health issues. We're talking about . . .

Mr. Eggen: Right.

Mr. M. Smith: I mean, there are lots of ways that we can attack this.

Mr. Eggen: No, no, no. We have to make sure we support. Again, people have to feel confident that they're supported and that there's not something that's compromising their reason for being, which is to deliver quality education in a safe and secure environment for all children in Alberta.

Mr. M. Smith: When I send my kid to school, I'm wanting them to be in a safe place, and this could impact that.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. Sure.

Mr. M. Smith: So I guess the question is: outside of the fact that they could be carrying it into the school, will there be resources built into the upcoming high school curriculum rewrite to address the issues such as driving while drug impaired and explaining the health effects of cannabis use? Is that actively being written into the health and wellness curriculum as we move forward?

Mr. Eggen: It will be, yes.

Mr. M. Smith: Okay. Thank you.

I'm going to go back here for a couple of seconds to start talking about inclusion funding for whatever time we get.

Mr. Eggen: Okay.

Mr. M. Smith: I've heard concerns from stakeholders about the year-to-year nature of this funding.

Mr. Eggen: Yes.

Mr. M. Smith: You clearly have to have spending targets, and you have spending targets out to 2020 and 2021.

6:20

Mr. Eggen: Yeah.

Mr. M. Smith: Yet one of the things that we've realized, in my talking with school boards across the province, is that many of them are actually having to double the inclusive education funding. They get what they get from the formula that we have, and then they move forward.

Now, you've talked about changing some of the funding formulas. I think that it's pretty obvious from earlier conversations that you're looking at redoing the funding formulas. I guess the question I've got is this. As you're doing that, have you at least considered making a multiyear funding commitment to school boards for inclusion funding so they at least know what they're getting over, say, the next three, four, five years?

Mr. Eggen: Yes. It's very important. Inclusive education is an enrolment-driven grant as well. Right, Brad?

Mr. B. Smith: Yes.

Mr. Eggen: Again, I can put it on paper, but you can also judge our government on our actions that have now built four budgets that are funding for enrolment. That's a big deal, right? It's adding up to more than a billion dollars now of additional funding that wouldn't have happened if, you know, something else would have happened in the last election. We're trying to provide that surety.

Now, is the inclusive education envelope sufficient to deal with students with complex needs? Not always, right? I mean, not always. We allow for accommodation and decisions by schools and school boards to move funds for extenuating circumstances and so forth, but I think, like I said before, we're obviously telegraphing the importance of reviewing funding around inclusive education and special-needs education. Also, I mean, when we do have those conversations, I must say that we must review the accountability and transparency that go with that. These are all tremendous sums of money. For inclusive education it's \$460 million.

Mr. M. Smith: Could I make a suggestion?

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. Go ahead.

Mr. M. Smith: Okay. One of the things you brought up earlier was the RCSD funding and the idea that there needs to be collaboration. One of the things that I've heard and I've seen even in my own riding is that the RCSD funding is siloed. I've heard issues where – I mean, we have funding for mental health issues and for various inclusion issues, sometimes out of public health, sometimes out of AHS, sometimes out of Education, sometimes out of PCNs. These siloes each think they're doing a good job, but each says that there's not enough money. I think the RCSD was designed to try to bring some of that collaboration together, but I'm not sure that it is. As you're moving forward into looking at the funding formulas and how you're moving forward, I think you're going to have to look at the RCSD funding. I've heard many people say that it's driven by Health and not by Education.

Mr. Eggen: I've made observations similar to what you're suggesting, you know. And your RCSD area in your part of the province is quite high functioning, actually. I've got some that are even less so, quite frankly.

The Chair: Thank you.

For the remainder of the meeting I would like to invite Mr. Hinkley and the minister to speak, combining time.

Mr. Hinkley: Okay. Thank you for the last five minutes.

Now, I know that students are really concerned about climate change and, in fact, have pushed various school administrators and teachers from time to time for more sustainable and environmentally friendly practices. In fact, I get to participate in the Battle River watershed school environment conservation project, with literally hundreds of junior high school and high school projects for their schools to do. I get to be one of the judges judging the final one of the best 12. With that in mind, I'm happy to see that our government has programs supporting green technology for schools. On budget line 4.1, school facilities infrastructure, can you tell us more about how many schools have taken advantage of the solar technology grant and how many schools are left?

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. The solar technology initiative is really great, you know. It's not just a way to generate power and save money on your power bill; it's a learning opportunity, too. I've gone to a couple of schools where they have the real-time data available on a big screen in the school. You can even get it on an app on your phone – right? – so you can see how much electricity you're generating that way, too.

I think we have about 45 jurisdictions taking part in the initiative and 88 projects under development, including the 20 schools that we just announced here recently. We have just three of them complete so far, but we'll have lots of new ones coming up here by the fall.

Mr. Hinkley: So will all the 20 new ones have solar panels?

Mr. Eggen: They will, yeah. I mean, they're obviously just announced, right?

Mr. Hinkley: With the few minutes we have left, I want to jump over to the operational funding, line 2.1. This has to do with the dual credit program. I'm interested in finding out how much funding has been allocated for that. What impacts have you seen or are finding on the students who are in dual credit? Do you have any numbers that you can share with us about how many school boards are using that program or how many students are expected to take the program as a result of the funding that you've provided?

Mr. Eggen: Sure. That's great. It's really a great program, and, you know, I made a commitment for four years, up to 2021, of \$16 million to dual credit programming. It's quite organic and creative. We see lots of new opportunities popping up that I wouldn't have thought of for dual credit, not just with the traditional trades like pipefitting or automotive but with health studies as well, training to be an LPN or a nurse and stuff like that, right? The first intake closed here on January 31 of this year, and we have at this point 41 school authorities participating, including five First Nations

education authorities, three francophone authorities, 23 public, and 10 separate. Like I said, we see some interesting developments. There's a tourism dual credit now up in the Bow Valley. They really appreciate that. They always have a shortage of service industry workers. We have one in Cree language and culture, in aviation, and, as I said, in health care, education assistant, Education minister – oh, I didn't see that one. Holy. You can become one. Now I'm just being silly.

You know, it's a program that invites creativity and invites partnerships with postsecondary institutions. It gets the foot in the door for kids that maybe would not necessarily go to a postsecondary institution, and it allows them to see that possibility by getting credit in high school. We're seeing some of the colleges like Portage College in Lac La Biche working closely with the high school. Northern Lights: they're even interested in building a college-high school combo there, right? We have that as an example in Olds already, with the high school and the college in the same area. I really think it reaches into and will increase our postsecondary rates, which have some room for improvement here in the province of Alberta. We do recognize that. We're working with Advanced Ed as well on this. I would like as a minister to try to buttress that \$16 million commitment over the next four years, because as the new ideas roll in, it's exciting, and I don't want to dampen the enthusiasm for this.

Mr. Hinkley: Right. We may have 25 seconds left.

Mr. Eggen: Twenty-five seconds?

Mr. Hinkley: I want to go to another one.

Mr. Eggen: Sure.

Mr. Hinkley: This is 1.5 on page 52 of the business plan, about school nutrition. We all know how important it is for kids to be eating. Do you have any evidence or statistics on actually improving the school and student outcomes as a result of that nutrition program?

Mr. Eggen: Well, I mean, I think that we will certainly track that over time. It's grown exponentially over these last three years. We can use logic and our sense to suggest that it would improve student outcomes. You know, I think it probably improves attendance as well. That's another thing that we can track. It certainly is a good thing.

The Chair: I hesitate to interrupt, but I must advise the committee that the allotted time for the item of business has concluded.

I'd like to remind committee members that we are scheduled to meet next on Thursday, April 19, 2018, at 9 a.m. to consider the estimates for the Ministry of Children's Services.

Thank you, everyone. This meeting is adjourned.

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

