



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
First Session

Standing Committee
on
Public Accounts

Edmonton Public Schools
Calgary Roman Catholic Separate School District

Tuesday, October 7, 2008
9 a.m.

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Standing Committee on Public Accounts

MacDonald, Hugh, Edmonton-Gold Bar (L), Chair
Griffiths, Doug, Battle River-Wainwright (PC), Deputy Chair

Benito, Carl, Edmonton-Mill Woods (PC)
Bhardwaj, Naresh, Edmonton-Ellerslie (PC)
Chase, Harry B., Calgary-Varsity (L)
Dallas, Cal, Red Deer-South (PC)
Denis, Jonathan, Calgary-Egmont (PC)
Drysdale, Wayne, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (PC)
Fawcett, Kyle, Calgary-North Hill (PC)
Jacobs, Broyce, Cardston-Taber-Warner (PC)
Johnson, Jeff, Athabasca-Redwater (PC)
Kang, Darshan S., Calgary-McCall (L)
Mason, Brian, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (NDP)
Quest, Dave, Strathcona (PC)
Sandhu, Peter, Edmonton-Manning (PC)
Vandermeer, Tony, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (PC)
Woo-Paw, Teresa, Calgary-Mackay (PC)

Auditor General's Office Participants

Fred Dunn	Auditor General
Al Neid	Principal
Merwan Saher	Assistant Auditor General

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Rachel Stein	Research Officer
Liz Sim	Managing Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

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Jenise Bidulock	Assistant Superintendent
Gloria Chalmers	Director, Programs
Bev Esslinger	Board Chair
Sue Huff	Trustee
John Nicoll	Managing Director, Facilities Services
Dean Power	Assistant Superintendent, Treasurer
Edgar Schmidt	Superintendent of Schools

Calgary Roman Catholic Separate School District Participants

Michael Barbero	Superintendent, Rocky View Area Schools/Facilities/Transportation
Marge Belcourt	Chair, Board of Trustees
John Deausy	Superintendent, Finance and Business, Secretary-Treasurer
Judy MacKay	Superintendent, Instructional Services
Lucy Miller	Chief Superintendent
Gary Strother	Superintendent, SE Schools Information Technology

9 a.m.

Tuesday, October 7, 2008

[Mr. MacDonald in the chair]

The Chair: Good morning, everyone. I would like to please call this meeting of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts to order. If we could quickly go around the table, starting with the vice-chair, and introduce ourselves, I would appreciate it.

Mr. Griffiths: Doug Griffiths, MLA for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Good morning. Naresh Bhardwaj, MLA, Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Jacobs: Bryce Jacobs, Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Denis: Jonathan Denis, Calgary-Egmont.

Mr. Saher: Merwan Saher, office of the Auditor General.

Mr. Dunn: Fred Dunn, Auditor General.

Mr. Neid: Al Neid, office of the Auditor General.

Mr. Dallas: Cal Dallas, Red Deer-South.

Mr. Quest: Dave Quest, Strathcona.

Mr. Massolin: Good morning. Philip Massolin, committee research co-ordinator, Legislative Assembly Office.

Mr. Vandermeer: Tony Vandermeer, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Sandhu: Good morning. Peter Sandhu, MLA, Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Woo-Paw: Teresa Woo-Paw, Calgary-Mackay.

Mr. Drysdale: Wayne Drysdale, Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Johnson: Jeff Johnson, Athabasca-Redwater.

Mr. Mason: Brian Mason, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Ms Rempel: Jody Rempel, committee clerk, Legislative Assembly Office.

Mrs. Dacyshyn: Corinne Dacyshyn, committee clerk, Legislative Assembly Office.

The Chair: Hugh MacDonald, Edmonton-Gold Bar.

I would like to note for the hon. members that Jody Rempel and Corinne Dacyshyn will both be attending our meeting today. I am sad to say that Corinne Dacyshyn will be taking up other duties at the Legislative Assembly following, I think, over 19 years as Alberta Public Accounts clerk. She has done very, very, very good work on behalf of this committee. One only has to go to the national Public Accounts conference to recognize and realize the contribution she has made to Public Accounts Committees not only here in this province but across the country.

We wish you the very best. [applause]

Mrs. Dacyshyn: Thank you.

The Chair: Jody Rempel will be taking over as the clerk of the committee.

Now, if I could please have approval of the agenda, item 2. All members, I would like to note, received the link to the agenda and the materials on September 29, and updates were added.

Mr. Griffiths: Agreed.

The Chair: Approval of the agenda by Mr. Griffiths. All those in favour? None opposed. Thank you very much.

I would like to advise that the ministry annual reports and the report of the Auditor General, October 2008, were all released last week, and members all received paper copies with this excellent binding.

Over the summer the government of Alberta's response to the numbered recommendations contained in the Auditor General's April 2008 report were also received by members. All documents were also linked to the committee's internal website.

Is it possible, please, at this time to note the research work that has been done for these meetings over the summer by Philip Massolin and his research team. This has been provided to us, and I have been reading it. He did this work after the subcommittee met. I again would like to express publicly our gratitude for you and your team's work. Thank you.

Mr. Massolin: Thank you, Mr. Chair. On behalf of the research staff thank you very much.

The Chair: If we could now please go to item 3 of the agenda, the approval of the committee's budget estimates for 2009-2010. Approval of the committee's upcoming budget is required by October 14 for submission to the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services.

I would like to note that pay to the members is no longer included in the individual committee budgets. This reflects the decision by the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services adopting a different mechanism for remuneration to members appointed to the legislative committees. Pay to members is now reflected in a separate portion of the overall committee's budget envelope.

Other budget items reflect actual use and are based on the directed 5 per cent increases.

There's a \$52,000 amount budgeted for the Legislative Assembly Office's hosting of the Canadian Council of Public Accounts Committees conference in September 2009. The deputy chair and I had the privilege of attending this conference hosted by the federal PAC in Whitehorse, Yukon.

We also were invited to attend the Canadian Comprehensive Auditing Foundation's western Canadian symposium on improved public performance reporting in western Canada in Vancouver immediately following the Whitehorse conference. Our reports on attendance will be included in the committee's 2008 report to the Assembly.

We will require a motion to approve this budget estimate to send to the Speaker for consideration by the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services in the overall Assembly budget process.

Are there any questions about the budget that was circulated? Seeing none, may I please have a motion that we proceed with this budget? Moved by Mr. Mason that

the committee approve the 2009-2010 budget proposal for the Standing Committee on Public Accounts in the amount of \$73,000 and that the budget proposal be transmitted to the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services.

All those in favour? Opposed? Seeing none, thank you.

Now we come to our next item on the agenda, which is our briefing meeting with the Auditor General, Mr. Fred Dunn, and the committee research co-ordinator, Dr. Philip Massolin. As the rest of this hour is to be an internal briefing from our Auditor General and research co-ordinator, I'd like to call for a motion, please, to move in camera. Moved by Mr. Quest that the meeting move in camera. All those in favour? Opposed? None. Thank you very much.

[The committee met in camera from 9:07 a.m. to 10 a.m.]

The Chair: I would like to call this portion of the Public Accounts Committee to order, please. I would like on behalf of all members of the committee to welcome officials from Edmonton public schools. We look forward to discussing your 2006-07 financial statements and other documents. We really appreciate you getting this material to us over the summer, and I would like to express my gratitude to you formally for that.

Before we proceed any further, I think we should quickly go around the table and introduce ourselves, starting with the vice-chair.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you. Doug Griffiths, MLA for Battle River-Wainwright.

Dr. Massolin: Good morning. I'm Philip Massolin. I'm the committee research co-ordinator, Legislative Assembly Office.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Good morning. Naresh Bhardwaj, MLA, Edmonton-Ellerslie, and also still under contract with Edmonton public schools on extended leave.

Mr. Jacobs: Broyce Jacobs, Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Vandermeer: Tony Vandermeer, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Mason: Brian Mason, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Chase: Harry Chase, Calgary-Varsity, welcoming you to my colleague Laurie Blakeman's beautiful Edmonton-Centre constituency.

Mr. Dallas: Good morning. Cal Dallas, Red Deer-South.

Mr. Benito: Good morning. Carl Benito, Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mr. Sandhu: Good morning. Peter Sandhu, MLA, Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Chalmers: Good morning. Gloria Chalmers, Edmonton public schools.

Mr. Power: Good morning. Dean Power, Edmonton public schools.

Mr. Schmidt: Good morning. Edgar Schmidt, Edmonton public schools.

Mrs. Esslinger: Bev Esslinger, chair, board of trustees, Edmonton public schools.

Ms Bidulock: Jenise Bidulock, Edmonton public schools.

Mr. Nicoll: John Nicoll, Edmonton public schools.

Mr. Saher: Merwan Saher, office of the Auditor General.

Mr. Dunn: Fred Dunn, Auditor General.

Mr. Quest: Dave Quest, MLA, Strathcona.

Mr. Drysdale: Wayne Drysdale, MLA, Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you for coming. Kyle Fawcett, MLA for Calgary-North Hill.

Ms Woo-Paw: Good morning. MLA Teresa Woo-Paw from Calgary-Mackay.

Mr. Denis: Jonathan Denis, MLA for beautiful Calgary-Egmont.

Ms Rempel: Jody Rempel, committee clerk with the Legislative Assembly Office.

Mrs. Dacyshyn: Corinne Dacyshyn, committee clerk.

The Chair: Hugh MacDonald, Edmonton-Gold Bar.

I would like to note to all present here that two of our committee members, before they were elected to the Legislative Assembly, were school trustees, Mr. Fawcett and Ms Woo-Paw.

Please note also that you do not have to touch the microphones. Our *Hansard* staff will turn them on and off for you. Also, members, please do not leave your BlackBerrys on top of the committee table as they interfere with *Hansard's* equipment. I would also like to advise that legislative committee meetings are now being audiostreamed for listening on the Internet.

I believe that Edmonton public school board has a brief opening statement for us. After their statement I would also request that if Mr. Dunn has anything to say or any advice for us, we would appreciate it.

Please proceed.

Edmonton Public Schools

Mrs. Esslinger: Chairman MacDonald, committee members, ladies and gentlemen, good morning. Edmonton public schools is honoured that we have been invited to speak with you today.

Before we begin, I would like to take this moment to introduce those who are with me at the table: our superintendent of schools, Mr. Edgar Schmidt; to my left our treasurer and assistant superintendent, Mr. Dean Power; another of our assistant superintendents, Ms Jenise Bidulock; our managing director of facilities and services, Mr. John Nicoll; and our director of programs, Ms Gloria Chalmers.

I also want to take this opportunity to acknowledge a number of individuals sitting in the gallery. Trustees Colburn, Huff, Rice, Ripley, and Shipka are with us today, and trustees Gibson, Fleming, and Gibeault have sent their regrets. Assistant superintendents Barrett, Coggles, MacNeil, Parker, and Tams are also with us as well as a number of our senior staff members. I'd also like to welcome Mr. Jim Walker, who is our external auditor and an associate partner in the firm KPMG.

Our board of trustees has the privilege of governing Alberta's second-largest school district. We are charged with setting the necessary priorities and policies to guide the work of our district to allocate the resources required for the district to deliver the best possible education to each of our students. We take our responsibilities for financial oversight very seriously and have high expectations of our superintendent regarding his accountability to the board for the financial operations of Edmonton public schools.

I have asked our superintendent to provide you with a brief overview of our district's operations, our financial information as of August 31, 2007, and our outcomes for the 2006-2007 school year. I'll ask him to begin now.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Board Chair Esslinger. Edmonton public schools has been an educational pioneer in our province since forming Alberta's first public school district more than a century ago. Over the years we have grown in size and scope as well as in the sophistication of our educational practice. We continue to implement innovative strategies to serve the needs of our increasingly diverse population of over 78,000 students; that's for the 2006-2007 school year. Our district has taken a distinctly novel approach to fulfilling our mandate, which enables us to deliver an outstanding education to students. It is our intent that this unique approach will help each of our students be successful and realize the brightest possible future.

Our district's organizational structure supports this approach. We've established a site-based decision-making model which provides those at the school level with a great deal of authority to make local educational decisions. These local decisions are made within the parameters of the district priorities established by the board of trustees. This model is based on the belief that those in the school community who are closest to the situation are in the best position to make most decisions. The board and administration have also implemented comprehensive oversight mechanisms to review school budgets and results so that we are able to monitor and support local decision-making.

Another key element of our school district's operations is our open boundaries approach. Having open boundaries means students can attend virtually any school in the district so long as the school has room, offers appropriate programming, and the student meets an applicable entrance criteria if applicable. Our district also believes in providing students and their families with the widest possible educational choice under the umbrella of public education. Along with our outstanding community school regular programs, we offer over 30 alternative programs. In short, every school is a school of choice. This range of programming allows students to select the educational program that corresponds to their personal interests and best enables them to achieve success in school and in life.

With regard to financial information our district is committed to fiscal responsibility and to delivering balanced budgets on a consistent basis. Through our site-based model we minimize our administrative costs and maximize the dollars that directly support teaching and learning in the classroom. These efforts have placed our district in a very good financial position. As you know, Alberta Education expects that school jurisdictions maintain at least 2.5 per cent of their annual revenue as an operating accumulated surplus, and as of August 31, 2007, our district had established a \$36 million surplus, representing 5 per cent of our operating revenue.

Our individual schools and some central departments carry forward any surplus or deficit each year. They must pay off any deficits over a reasonable period, and they are permitted to spend their surpluses as required. In order to fund school and central department surpluses \$22.7 million was placed in an operating reserve. The remaining funds were used to provide additional allocations to schools and central departments.

The district was also in a strong cash position of \$82.7 million as of August 31, 2007. This positive position was due to the following factors: \$29 million in capital projects funding, \$22.7 million in operating reserve, and an \$8 million increase in our accumulated surplus compared to the previous school year, 2005-2006. The

district met all of the reporting requirements for Alberta Education, which includes the annual budget, October fiscal update, financial statements, and the annual education results report. We also improved our financial monitoring as well as the reports we provided to our board of trustees. The administration continues to provide quarterly information to update trustees on the projected and final financial results for the district. Our external auditor has expressed confidence in our financial controls and processes both to our board's audit committee and our administration.

10:10

In relation to our funding, the board of trustees is committed to improving student achievement and high school completion, and our administration has aligned the district's resources to support these efforts. We appreciate Alberta Education's ongoing support, particularly the flexible funding provided to our district. The funding is granted in such a way that our district and individual schools are able to maximize the value of each dollar to best support student learning.

In relation to our outcomes we are pleased that our district was successful in meeting most of the accountability pillar outcomes for the 2006-2007 school year, which outline Alberta Education's expectations of our school district. The accountability pillar serves to guide the work of our district from our mission and priorities to the strategies we use in the classroom. Our positive survey results from staff, parents, and the community indicate that we are on the right track.

I would like to point out a few highlights from the accountability pillar outcomes for you this morning. In terms of high school completion we saw an increase in the percentage of students completing high school within three, four, and five years. We improved significantly in terms of our three-year completion. Our high school students did well in two international education programs known as advanced placement and international baccalaureate, where district averages were higher than world averages for many of those courses. We also worked to help students in all programs graduate with higher levels of achievement.

Another area of focus for our district was on creating smoother transitions for students not only as they enter high school but also as they finish high school and move into postsecondary studies and the world of work. In addition, our character education efforts helped ensure that students completed high school with the necessary citizenship skills to become contributing members of society.

Looking at diploma exams, our district had higher participation rates than the province for six of the 10 exams, and we improved significantly in the percentage of students who wrote four or more exams. We continued to do well compared to the province at the standard of excellence and focused on doing better at the acceptable standard.

In terms of the provincial achievement tests, those tests for grades 3, 6, and 9 students, district results exceeded provincial results in seven of the 12 tests at the acceptable standard and in 11 of the 12 tests at the standard of excellence. Our prior level of achievement data showed that the longer students are with Edmonton public schools, the better they do in terms of their achievement.

One area of concern for us was the significant decline in the percentage of district students meeting the acceptable standard compared to the previous three-year average. Our district took a number of steps to improve these student achievement results, including a comprehensive framework of intervention strategies and additional supports for specific groups of students. The board established the Trustee Aboriginal Education Task Force, which sought input from aboriginal communities throughout Edmonton.

The work of the task force led to the creation of a board policy and administrative regulation along with additional support to improve educational outcomes for aboriginal students.

In addition, the board approved a holistic health and wellness policy for both students and staff, knowing that healthy students and staff are better able to engage in and benefit from the work of teaching and learning.

With regard to the Alberta initiative for school improvement, AISI as it is known in the province, the AISI funding provided by Alberta Education has made an important contribution to support the work of teaching and learning in our district. Our AISI projects involved all district schools and central departments working together to conduct action research and have empowered teachers and enhanced the educational experience for our students.

Our projects include differentiated instruction, using technologies, effective assessment practices, deepening literacy, and, finally, meaningful community involvement. AISI work has resulted in increased collaboration within and amongst schools, effective use of data to inform instruction, and it has broadened the leadership capacity of district staff to meet the learning needs of an increasingly diverse and complex student population.

With regard to challenges, over the past year the district has built upon the good work undertaken in the 2006-2007 school year; however, we continue to face a number of challenges.

Student diversity. We are committed to helping each of our students experience success but also know that our student population is undergoing a significant transformation. We are now serving an extremely diverse group of students, and our analysis of the data has demonstrated that we need to adapt our system to serve our students in the most effective manner. We are in the process of adapting our system, which is enabling us to respond to current community needs and anticipate future requirements.

Effectively transporting students to and from school is another challenge we face. Our community has high expectations for our district to provide comprehensive transportation options for students, including those who attend programs of choice. The funding provided by the province is not intended to cover this expanded level of service, which means that the district and individual families must pay the additional costs required to provide these transportation levels.

In terms of class size our district has succeeded in reaching all of the class size targets for grades 4 through 12. We will continue to work through the staffing and infrastructure challenges that have prevented us from meeting the targets for kindergarten through grade 3. The primary barrier to reaching the K to 3 class size targets is insufficient staffing at that level. We appreciate the class size funding provided by the government, which has enabled us to meet the class size targets for grades 4 through 12; however, we would need over \$10 million of ongoing funding to hire the teachers required to meet the K to 3 class size target. To a lesser extent a lack of classroom space in high-growth areas has also been a challenge, and we anticipate that the new schools opening in these areas will assist us in reaching the K to 3 class size targets in those particular areas.

Like other school districts we have experienced increased turnover in teaching staff. While this presents a challenge, it also offers an opportunity to enhance the capacity of new teachers to address the needs of our diverse student population. We also have an ongoing human resource issue in terms of nonteaching staff. To some extent this is because the necessary expertise has been in short supply, but we have also lost experienced staff to a very competitive labour market.

Infrastructure concerns present us with additional challenges. The

average age of our schools is 48 years, and the district has 85 facilities that are 50 years of age or older. Not unlike other levels of government and the public sector we have significant issues with our aging inventory of schools. Alberta Infrastructure reports indicate that there is approximately \$241 million of immediate repairs required, which represents the district's accumulated infrastructure deficit. We appreciate the annual funding we receive for infrastructure renewal. At the present rate of funding it will be 20 years before we have addressed our current needs, and this time frame does not include the additional maintenance that will be required to address future deterioration of our infrastructure. The longer these renovations are delayed, the more costly they become.

In addition to the \$241 million in deferred maintenance it will cost approximately \$62 million to remove the asbestos that is still in our schools. The continued presence of asbestos requires us to exercise constant vigilance and ongoing training for staff to ensure that the asbestos is not disturbed. As these schools age, they require more and more maintenance, and the presence of asbestos makes the work much more challenging. Of course, we would prefer to be rid of this unfortunate legacy from the past and reduce our future liabilities associated with asbestos.

10:20

We constantly monitor the condition of our schools and address high-needs areas to ensure that they remain safe for students and staff. We are challenged in replacing deteriorating and inefficient windows as well as maintaining schools with obsolete steam boilers. Steam boilers require daily supervision by a class 4 or class 5 steam engineer, and we are having difficulty recruiting and training staff to this level of expertise. If we replaced these obsolete boilers with modern heating plants, we could use existing staff who have lower qualifications to meet the operating needs of this equipment. The modern heating plants would also improve air quality in classrooms and other significant energy savings.

To sum up, we are committed to creating bright futures for each of our students and are focused on improving their educational outcomes. We have taken a number of steps to enhance our support for student learning, particularly for those groups of students who have not been experiencing success in our schools. We also continue to work in partnership with Alberta Education to address our various challenges.

That concludes our presentation. Thank you for providing us with an opportunity to share some of the innovative work our district is doing in supporting student learning. We would be pleased to answer any questions that the committee members might have.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Schmidt.

Mr. Dunn, please.

Mr. Dunn: Mr. Saher will read in our brief opening comments.

Mr. Saher: Mr. Chairman, there are three matters in the Auditor General's public reporting relevant to the committee's meetings with schools jurisdictions. The first is school board budgeting. Volume 2 of our 2006 annual report contained an examination of school board budgeting processes. We made several recommendations to the Department of Education for improving budgeting and interim financial reporting. These recommendations will assist school boards in strengthening governance and accountability processes related to the jurisdiction's financial affairs.

The second is assessing and prioritizing Alberta's infrastructure needs, capital planning. Volume 1 of our 2007 annual report

contained an examination of assessing and prioritizing Alberta's infrastructure needs. This material is relevant to school boards, particularly in the area of identifying, prioritizing, and remediating deferred maintenance.

In our April 2008 report at page 215 we have a summary of the management letter points that school board auditors have made to individual school jurisdictions. These recommendations fell into the following three categories: financial reporting and governance, internal control weaknesses, and information and technology management.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will now proceed with members' questions. If you have any interest in questions, please indicate to the chair. Before we get to that, as chair I would like to also welcome another Edmonton public school trustee who has joined us this morning, Mr. Ken Shipka. Welcome to Public Accounts, sir.

Now we will start with Mr. Chase's first question, please, followed by Mr. Denis.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. When you were referring to your deferred maintenance figures, I noted \$241 million plus \$62 million in asbestos removal costs, a whole series of boiler problems that are more likely to result in school closures than retrofits. You estimated that at the current rate of funding you had received from the province, this would take another 20 years as the deferred maintenance built up. When you bring these details and recommendations to the province, what response have you received from the Education ministry in terms of dealing with these needed infrastructure repairs?

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you for the question. Mr. Chair, I will begin, and then I will refer to our managing director for facilities to provide supplementary information.

In terms of the work that we do as a district to examine the physical needs of our facilities, it's comprehensive. We examine not only the short-term but also the long-term aspects of these buildings and the value that they have not only for programming for our students but in the broader context of our school district. Within the whole area of retrofits we examine the needs related to student and staff safety first, as the primary priority. These reports are brought forward to the board. We have extensive discussions, and they are then approved.

I'd like to defer to Mr. Nicoll, if I might, to provide additional information.

Mr. Nicoll: Thank you, Mr. Schmidt. Mr. Chairman, we have a good working relationship with Alberta Infrastructure, Transportation, and Education. Our needs are not a lot different from other public-sector organizations. We do appreciate the funding support they have provided, certainly, in the last several years. In this particular year that we're looking at, under examination, there was an increase in the infrastructure maintenance and renewal money from approximately \$7 million to \$14.6 million.

The additional funding certainly helps. The \$15 million a year has been reasonably consistent for the past several years with the one positive exception where in 2007 the government increased it substantially, a one-time increase, to deal with issues. The maintenance backlog or infrastructure gap, not unlike the problem we face with roads in the cities, is growing, and the ability to deal with that is of course connected to the amount of funding that's provided. We appreciate the funding that the government has been able to support us with, and we do appreciate the support that the departments have

provided to us to be able to meet our critical needs. We have a working relationship in which we understand the technicalities with the staff, and we are able to deal with the most pressing issues.

The asbestos backlog I think is an issue that all public-sector operations need to start addressing. That liability is there until the building is removed from the site. The irony is that we're required to remove asbestos from a building before we demolish it under the present occupational health and safety code. The final irony is that when a school is finally finished, the last thing you have to do is remove the asbestos, that you might not have been able to do during the course of the school's life.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Chase, please.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. My second question is: what is the effect on the teaching, learning, and to that I'll add because of the asbestos and other concerns the safety climate for students given the fact that the average age of schools is 48 years?

Mrs. Esslinger: Thank you very much. We're going to ask that Mr. Nicoll respond.

Mr. Nicoll: Thank you. Mr. Chairman, we absolutely ensure that our schools are safe places for our students to attend and to work in. We deal immediately with issues that would present a safety challenge, which does give us challenges in dealing with the infrastructure things that are not a safety issue. Asbestos concerns as the highest priorities are dealt with. The asbestos we have is behind containment and is maintained. What it does give us a challenge in doing is to ensure a long-term process for roof and window replacement.

We put a high priority on the fire code and student safety and make sure as much as we can that we've got temperature comfort in the classrooms and the lighting conditions. Those high-priority items come first, and we deal with them on a critical basis.

We are challenged with our heating plants because many of them are 50 years old. Twenty-five per cent of our heating plants are classified as in poor condition. We are doing our best to stay on top of those, but we have critical replacements every year to ensure occupant comfort in our schools.

The Chair: Thank you.

Before we proceed, I would like to remind or encourage the officials from the Edmonton public school board that if there are others in your delegation that would like to supplement an answer, they're free to do so at your request. There's a microphone provided. Okay? Thank you.

Mr. Denis, please, followed by Mr. Mason.

10:30

Mr. Denis: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. My question also deals with deferred maintenance and may require an answer at a later date. I'd like to know how your school board's deferred maintenance relates on a per-student basis vis-à-vis other school boards in the province.

Mrs. Esslinger: Thank you. I'll ask Mr. Nicoll.

Mr. Nicoll: Mr. Chairman, I can provide more details specifically at a later date because I don't have that, but I do know that our experience is very similar. We communicate quite frequently with the Calgary board of education and Calgary separate schools and Edmonton separate schools, and our experiences are quite similar.

Our experiences with deferred maintenance are also similar to other school jurisdictions in North America. We share common issues. No surprise. A lot of our buildings were built in the boom times of the '50s and the '60s, and those schools are all coming to 50 years of age, and many of their systems are approaching the end of their economic life cycle. But we can certainly provide a detailed reference to the deferred maintenance.

Mr. Denis: Thank you.

The Chair: Is that it?

Mr. Mason, please, followed by Mr. Griffiths.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. Chair Esslinger and Superintendent Schmidt and all the staff and trustees, welcome to the committee. I have some questions today essentially about process, and these questions arose in the minds of many members of the public during the boards' deliberations on school closures in the last year or two.

The first question I have has to do with the process the board uses to make decisions in a general sense. There are, in my understanding, two separate meetings each time the board meets. The first meeting is, I believe, called a conference meeting, which is closed to the public, followed by a public meeting on the same day, I believe. I would like to understand the relationship between those two meetings and what decisions are made in the conference meeting and whether or not those decisions are then revisited in the public meeting or if independent decisions are actually made in the closed meetings.

Mrs. Esslinger: Thank you very much, Mr. Mason. I could speak to the conference meeting as our in camera meeting, and typically we deal with land, labour, and legal issues. All matters from a conference meeting are then reported at a subsequent public board meeting, not typically always the same date. We have some conference meetings we would do prior to a public meeting, but we also have a standing one once a month, on the first Tuesday of the month, to deal with those issues. Then the public meeting will talk about what happened at the conference meeting so that it's in the public arena. If it's private details, legal matters, they are not detailed in public, but it does come forward.

I believe Ms Bidulock also wanted to supplement that.

Ms Bidulock: Mr. Chair, to supplement that answer, all decisions regarding school closures are made in the public board.

Mr. Mason: All right. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

The follow-up question, I guess, has to do with whether or not these matters would be informally discussed first in a conference meeting. I guess the question fundamentally is a matter of public openness and accountability for an elected body. In the early 1990s the Municipal Government Act was amended, which made private meetings, similar to what I understand these conference meetings to be like, essentially illegal and required council to vote to go in camera on very specific issues, with a very specific and tight list of things that council was permitted to discuss in camera, like labour relations, like third-party contracts and legal advice. I'm wondering if you feel that the system that is employed by the board meets the modern test of openness and accountability for elected bodies.

Mrs. Esslinger: Thank you very much, Mr. Mason. The board meets in conference under very strict guidelines, and at the beginning of every conference meeting all members are asked to approve

the agenda. So if anyone felt it was inappropriate to have that matter in a closed meeting, it could be referred directly to public board. Because we look at land, labour, and legal – those are the guidelines that we use to have an in camera meeting, which I believe are similar throughout the province with boards – those are very specific items that are chosen to go there.

The other item that you referred to was the idea of school closure. School closure decisions are made only at the public meeting. There's no discussion prior because as board members it is our responsibility to be open to all information presented at each and every meeting until our decision is made, and we do not indicate our decision until it comes to the public board meeting. Neither do we debate it. We only gather information through a process of time through public meetings and then our public board meeting, when the decision is made.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Griffiths, please, followed by Mr. Chase.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Chair. I have many questions, but I only get two this time. Your summary of financial statements indicates that your cash and temporary investments are over \$82 million, which is well over 10 per cent of your annual budget. I'm wondering what management processes and controls you have to ensure that the money is properly invested. I'm sure you don't have any asset-backed commercial paper – hopefully you don't have any asset-backed commercial paper – but what kind of protocols does the board have in place to ensure that that money is properly managed, and what's the goal of holding it?

Mrs. Esslinger: Thank you very much. I'll ask Mr. Power to answer.

Mr. Power: Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, Mr. Chair. The \$82 million is made up of \$29 million that we received as advances for capital projects as well as an operating reserve that we've put aside for our surpluses for our schools and a few other things. We have an investment policy. That investment policy is governed very strictly. We take very little risk these days, thank goodness, and we receive a modest return on our investments. We use an investment counselling firm if we believe we need some outside assistance, and we have been quite successful in protecting the district's money as well as receiving a good return on it.

Mr. Griffiths: Okay. Thank you.

My second question. I understand that the board has a policy of open schools, open choice, so that students can flow around the school jurisdictions. Given the fact that there are dramatic increases in building schools, the capital costs and construction and everything, does the board have any plans – I believe you said that the student space is far larger than the number of students that you have in your school jurisdiction – for finding ways to utilize the school space that you have available so that we don't have to build as many schools or your school jurisdiction doesn't?

Mrs. Esslinger: Thank you very much. Mr. Chairman, that is the challenge that school boards face on an ongoing basis. We have space in all the wrong places. Currently we have 25 per cent of our students travelling on a school bus to other schools at any time. Some of that is choice; some of that is the fact that many of our growth areas have not had new schools in over a decade. The arrival

of the new schools that will be opening in 2010 would help to address some of those pressures on the new growth areas.

We on an ongoing basis try to utilize our school buildings for other community purposes when we have a little bit of space or a lot of space in them that will supplement what happens in schools. Many of our schools that have space also have before and after school care programs, Head Start programs, and other community groups that really reinforce the work of the school. On a regular basis we do look at using those spaces for other areas, and the superintendent would certainly have that information. Oh, perhaps Ms Bidulock will have that data for you.

Ms Bidulock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Fully 1 in 4 students in our jurisdiction does not have a neighbourhood school. This means that they are being transported to other schools in the district. We try to keep our transportation times down, within 60 minutes. I know that the committee members can appreciate that that is a very long ride time. If we were to transport those same students from the suburbs to the centre of the city, where we do have school space, they would be on a bus ride equivalent to roughly 90 minutes' time, and we find this unacceptable. So it's a matter of having schools close enough to where students live so that they are attending either a neighbourhood school or are able to be on a shorter bus ride.

10:40

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Griffiths' first question is from financial information that's available on page 158 of the annual report for Alberta Education for 2007-08.

Mr. Chase, please, followed by Mr. Fawcett.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I taught for 34 years, and dramatic change occurred from 1994 onwards. My observation is that since 1994 more schools have been closed than opened. You referred to the difficulties you have in your inner-city circumstance. How will the government's new initiative towards P3 financing impact the district's 10-year facilities plan and the three-year capital plan?

Mrs. Esslinger: Thank you. I will begin, and I'm sure my colleagues will supplement that. Having the new P3 schools, of which we have six scheduled for 2010 and three in 2012, I believe, will impact allowing us to have schools where students live, which I understand is the Premier's directive through Alberta Education. It takes numbers 1 through 9 off our list. We do our capital plans every year and submit them. We have for many years completed plans and have not been able to see those come off. Adding new schools will allow us to see some of those really desperate growth areas addressed. It will also allow us to then look at our system and what is left and where else we need to go.

It's something that we visit on an annual basis. We look at every school annually to see where the enrolment is and where the trends are so that we can be proactive to meet the needs of our students. I think it will just allow us to meet some of those needs and look at the rest of the district as a whole.

Mr. Chase: For my second question on schools. For example, in Calgary there are 40 districts without schools. You're going to be receiving six, and your schools are eight years older on average than the schools in Calgary. You've knocked six off the list. I'm just wondering how extensive is the needs list and what authority, autonomy you have within the P3 decision-making process.

Mrs. Esslinger: Perhaps I could have some clarification. I'm not

sure what you mean by "what authority" we have within the P3: as far as location or as far as the design of the school?

Mr. Chase: The design, I know, is predone; it's a prefab circumstance. But in terms of the decisions with regard to the operating of your school, for example preschool and after school programs, what say do you have in the actual operation of the school once it's built and you receive it?

Mrs. Esslinger: Thank you very much. I think Mr. Nicoll is going to be able to address that. He's been involved in the entire design process from the beginning.

Mr. Nicoll: Thank you, Chair. We've been involved in the entire design process, the site location process for the schools. The locations are as per our requirements. We defined where the sites were. We're quite comfortable with the design process. We sat in on the committees and developed the prototype schools. The four metro boards did. Those schools are as good as if we had designed them ourselves. We're quite comfortable with that.

With respect to the leasing of space, in the first round of the P3 schools the use of the schools is limited to school activities and typical joint-use activities that we currently use our existing schools for. There are restrictions on leasing to other organizations because of the structure of the P3 proposal as it is put out. We have been told that in the second round of the P3s greater opportunities will be provided for leasing to other functions that are supportive of the community and connected to the schools. We will operate these schools exactly as whatever schools we would have built. The only difference will be that we will not be doing the maintenance on them. The schools will be available for use of the gymnasiums after school hours in the space as we presently use all of our other schools, so as far as a classroom environment and the community environment for after-hours use, they will look just like all the others.

Mr. Chase: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you. We will proceed to Mr. Fawcett, but before we do, Mr. Nicoll, could you clarify: in those contractual obligations that you're talking about, janitorial services would not be included in the P3 O and M contract, would it?

Mr. Nicoll: No. I'm sorry, Mr. Chairman. The custodial cleaning of the school will be done by the district. The maintenance, the nuts and the bolts, will be done by the P3 contractor.

The Chair: Thank you. I appreciate that.

Mr. Fawcett, please, followed by Mr. Mason.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Again, thank you for taking the time to appear before our committee. It's very much appreciated.

In your mission I notice that it says that Edmonton Public Schools is an advocate of choice. I'm curious: how much money do you spend annually on communications and advertising? I know that in your presentation you indicated that you wanted to create a community of such, of choice, within the public system. How much money do you spend annually on communications and advertising for those various programs of choice?

Mrs. Esslinger: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Ms Austin, director of communications, will respond.

Ms Austin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. In the reporting year our advertising budget at the district level was approximately \$130,000. Of that amount about \$57,000 was used specifically to advertise programs. It's important for the committee to understand, however, that schools all have responsibility for their own marketing budgets and so can purchase marketing and advertising services from communications or from any other provider to do that work at the school level as well.

Mrs. Esslinger: Thank you.

Mr. Fawcett: My supplemental, then, would be: do you track how much money those individual schools spend on that per year?

Mrs. Esslinger: Thank you. Mr. Power.

Mr. Power: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yes, our financial information system would track that. Unfortunately, I don't have that information with me today, but, yes, that is one of the categories that they would report on.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Power. If you could provide that information in writing to us through the committee clerk to all members, we would be very grateful. Thank you.

Mr. Mason, please, followed by Ms Woo-Paw.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. One of my colleagues raised just a moment ago the whole question of the open boundaries policy, and the superintendent, in his presentation, indicated that every school is a school of choice. But my question really has to do with perhaps the downsides of this issue. The chair said that we have space in all the wrong places. Ms Bidulock has said that 1 in 4 students do not have a neighbourhood school, and we've talked about issues like higher transportation costs as the district and parents transport students. In my view, there is a significant increase in underutilization with the attendant costs, and then the schools are spending money competing with one another for students, which, in my view, is not a good use of public dollars. The question I have is: what really are the costs, and have you accounted for the additional costs to the system of the open boundary system?

Mrs. Esslinger: Thank you very much. I will address open boundaries, and then I'll have Ms Bidulock supplement.

It's important to note that when parents are choosing different schools, they choose schools based on programs. They choose schools based on location. They choose a school because it's near their work. They choose a school because it's where their babysitter lives. So though we have open boundaries, you have to understand that the parents are making choices for a variety of reasons, not just for specific programs. It's about location. I'll ask Ms Bidulock for further details.

10:50

Ms Bidulock: Thank you. Mr. Chairman, approximately 50 per cent of our students attend their neighbourhood school. Closed or open boundaries would not cause a reduction in the number of possible school closures, for example, because the number of student spaces does exceed the number of students. This imbalance is particularly true in mature areas of the city, so for example if the open boundary system were to be abolished and all students asked to return to their local schools, many schools would still be candidates for closure because there are not enough students living in the local attendance area.

In addition, it's important to note that our jurisdiction, because of

its open boundaries and alternative programs of choice, has retained a very high enrolment level in an urban area compared to other urban centres in Alberta. This is because the alternative programs have been absorbed into Edmonton public schools from the private and charter school system. So we continue to have the vast majority of the market share, if you will, in Edmonton public. This is bringing more revenue into our jurisdiction so that we can provide a higher quality education for all of our students.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much for that answer. Mr. Chairman, my supplementary question has to do with neighbourhood schools that are unable to retain enough students to stay open because of the open boundary system. The example that I will use is the Newton school, which the board closed last year. The numbers that were presented at the public meetings indicated that if all the students in the catchment area of that school had attended the school, it would not have hit the trigger for closure, but it had no programs, so parents who had options, parents who had resources, were taking their children and putting them in other schools, leaving that school with very low attendance and resulting in its closure. I guess the question to you, Madam Chair, or the superintendent is: is this not a case of the policy of open boundaries as it has been applied failing schools in older neighbourhoods and lower income neighbourhoods?

Mrs. Esslinger: Thank you very much for that question. I'll begin, and I'm sure the superintendent will supplement. One of the interesting things that we've observed: our schools were built about every six blocks apart in the '50s and '60s; our new model is to build them in a larger catchment area so that there will be a school in that larger area in the future. That has created some challenges with how many students are in a very immediate area. We do have other options in an area. They could go to a separate system. They can go to a public system.

At this point if they all lived and attended that catchment area, it's not reasonable that they would all attend their local school. Some of the programs that we do have are for the needs of students, whether they have a special need or they have some other program requirement. It's not as black and white as every student would attend their local school, because we do have schools that have specific programs that meet targeted needs of students, whether it's for autism or other needs. I know Ms Bidulock will have that kind of data for you.

Ms Bidulock: Thank you. Mr. Chairman, the issue comes back, basically, to too much school space and not enough students to populate that space. Even if we were to have an alternative program in every single school in the district, we would still be forced to deal with the issue that one-quarter of our space is not populated. When we have mature areas of the city, if we were to put in an alternative program or close a boundary, we would simply be taking students from one place to another, and the space problem would simply move from one school to a different school.

In our view, it's an issue that we need to deal with in terms of whole neighbourhoods or whole sections of the city, not in a school-by-school nature, so our current way of reviewing schools is to look at whole areas of the city and what's best for the education of students in that area, knowing that if one school in that given area starts to become more popular and students go to that school, it's only going to be taking students from a school nearby unless space is actually reduced as part of that process.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms Woo-Paw, please, followed by Mr. Chase.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you. My question is on the high school completion rates. The school jurisdictions measure by the three-year rate; however, Alberta Education uses the five-year rate as part of their business plan. My question is: why are two measures used, and what kind of impact does that have on your school jurisdiction?

Mrs. Esslinger: Thank you very much. I'll ask our superintendent to begin that discussion.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The information about high school completion is tracked over multiple years. For some of our students it does take longer to complete high school, but it does in fact lead to successful completion, so we have data for three, four, and five years from when a student enters grade 10. We view that as very helpful information in terms of what are the number of students that are actually successfully completing in the three years of the program that we would anticipate, but also we provide as a resource to our students fourth- and fifth-year options in one of our schools, for example Centre High, or in outreach programs so that students can challenge their courses and achieve the diploma. The data, in fact, is very useful to us because we can track more students over that period of time.

Ms Woo-Paw: In the Edmonton public school district your high school completion rate is significantly lower than the provincial average. Could you provide some explanation to that?

Mr. Schmidt: I think if I could ask Ms Chalmers to respond.

Mrs. Esslinger: We'll invite Ms Chalmers.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you.

Ms Chalmers: We are aware of that and have been working at improving that over time. It goes back in part to the changing demographics in our city. We have increasing numbers of immigrants and refugees, and we are poised to have the highest aboriginal population in the country by 2015. The issue is not so much that these young people cannot be successful in our system – we believe they can be – but with respect to our immigrants and refugees they are coming to us at junior and high school age and have insufficient time to complete a high school diploma. Currently with our aboriginal population there is a great deal of movement still between the city and the reserve. We have started working with the reserve to try to work more collaboratively to enable more students to graduate, and we think that in the next five to 10 years we will see significant changes in that.

Those are some of the explanations. That having been said, we are not satisfied with our rate, and we are concentrating on our grade 10 courses. We have seen an increase in participation in grade 10 course completion, and that has been a trend upward now for the last three years. We believe we'll start seeing that in our three-, four-, and five-year rate.

I hope that helps.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you.

Mrs. Esslinger: Further to that, I would have to say that the board is very aware and concerned about our high school completion rate and that we have been directing administration to come up with a number of strategies in order to address that need. Ms Bidulock has additional information in that regard.

Ms Bidulock: Mr. Chairman, I should point out that our high school

completion rates vis-à-vis the provincial rates continue to exceed the provincial rates, so we are growing relative to '06-07. This particular calendar year we have in fact succeeded in increasing our high school completion approximately 10 per cent, and this compares to, I think, 2 per cent for the province. We are making gains, and it's because we're committed to making sure that all of our students complete their courses of study.

11:00

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Chase, please, followed by Mr. Jacobs.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. You've indicated that a quarter of your kids are on buses: some out of choice, most out of necessity. You've also indicated that you're trying to keep the maximum ride time to an hour. I note in Calgary that on a daily basis students travel 100,000 kilometres. I'd like to know what the costs of busing are in terms of dollars and if you could project wasted time for students.

Mrs. Esslinger: Thank you very much. I would ask Ms Bidulock to begin.

Ms Bidulock: Mr. Chair, the question around dollars: could I get a little more information on the question?

Mr. Chase: I'm just wondering how much money you're spending on busing, the idea being if that money were turned into infrastructure.

Mrs. Esslinger: Thank you. Then we'll ask Mr. Power for the money answers.

Mr. Power: Thank you, Madam Chair. If I could get the committee members, please, to turn to page 3 of 5 in the unaudited schedules, on that schedule we have broken out the transportation costs as well as the revenue that we receive from Transportation. The second half, Mr. Chairman, shows the expenditures that we make for transportation. You will notice that since we contract out our services to contractors, the major expenditure in there, under Services, Contracts & Supplies, is to our contractors.

Mr. Chairman, I trust that gives an oversight of the revenue and expenditures that we have with our transportation.

Mr. Chase: If you could potentially comment on the second half. I was a teacher. I know that when kids have travelled long distances on buses, they're certainly more tired. They're more stressed. The effect of busing such a large number of students: you know, it's just sort of observational.

Mrs. Esslinger: Thank you. We'll go back to Ms Bidulock.

Ms Bidulock: Mr. Chairman, our district is committed to providing one-way ride times underneath one hour for our students going to schools of choice or going to other schools that they need to attend because they don't have a school in their neighbourhood area. We also have a number of our special needs students on buses, and these students are travelling to designated sites across the district. We've done a lot of work over the past few years to make sure that those students, who are our most vulnerable students, are travelling as short as possible a time on the buses to get there by making sure that we have programs across the city so that they can get to the programs within a very reasonable ride time.

It continues to be a challenge for us, especially due to the facts

that we have a driver shortage right now, and it's pretty hard to get all the routes down underneath that time period at this time of year. But we do pay attention to our most vulnerable students and to shortening their ride times on our buses.

The Chair: Thank you.

Before we proceed to Mr. Jacobs, Mr. Power, on page 3 of 5, schedule A, is the committee to conclude that your total transportation budget is \$25.7 million?

Mr. Power: Mr. Chairman, those would be the expenditures that we made last year for transportation. It's not the budget, but it's the actual expenditures that were made.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Jacobs, please, followed by Mr. Mason.

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Madam Chairman, I have a question relating to the financial statements. My question has already in part been referred to by Mr. Griffiths. I'm on page 158 in the Education 2007-08 annual report. Mr. Griffiths noted your cash and temporary investments at \$82 million plus, and I also note that your accumulated surplus is \$36 million. As I look at the other jurisdictions that are being compared to in this report, I notice that your district is quite high in comparison to other school divisions and jurisdictions. I just wondered if you could comment on your philosophy and policy as to how you've been able to achieve this and why you want these numbers to be so high.

Mrs. Esslinger: Thank you very much. I will ask Mr. Power to review that.

Mr. Power: Thank you. After our operating budget was approved by our board of trustees and went to Alberta Education, we received approximately \$39 million that was not budgeted for. We appreciate every dollar that we receive from the provincial government, but when we receive those funds, Mr. Chairman, it takes awhile for our schools and central services to revise their plans to determine what's the best way of utilizing those funds in our classrooms and in our central services.

Those plans were revised and implemented, but unfortunately on many occasions they did not have the opportunity to spend the funds on those plans. Therefore, the unspent funds were carried forward to the next year, thus creating our surplus. If our schools have not spent the funds at the end of the year, they are allowed to carry those funds forward, and they utilize them in the following year. So, Mr. Chair, it's mostly the funds we received from the province that we were not able to plan for and fully implement before the end of that school year.

Mr. Jacobs: As a supplementary follow-up, Mr. Chairman, I then note also that I believe you referred today to a fairly large maintenance deficit. I guess the obvious question to me is: why don't you use some of these funds to take care of part of your maintenance deficit?

Mrs. Esslinger: Thank you. Mr. Power.

Mr. Power: Thank you. Mr. Chairman, maintenance is a very important consideration for us. We provide allocations to our schools based upon the type of students, and our schools have the opportunity to utilize those funds in the best way that they think is necessary. Our schools are responsible for the maintenance, and

they can utilize those funds to the extent that they believe is necessary. It's up to our schools to decide how they're going to best provide those funds for their students.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Nicoll: Mr. Chairman, supplementary to that, when schools choose to undertake maintenance projects for the enhancement of their schools, those projects by their very nature often take longer than one fiscal accounting year to complete the expenditures. For schools which have money or that have surpluses, it allows them to judiciously allocate money to maintenance projects for the benefit of the school that could take more than two years at the end of the fiscal year into the next year. The ability to carry that surplus forward is a real plus as far as projects that cross over fiscal years.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Jacobs: Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Mr. Mason, please, followed by Mr. Benito.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I want to ask a couple of questions with respect to the process that is used by the board when considering school closures. There was, I think you would agree, a great deal of frustration on the part of parents during that process with respect to the closure of schools and the process that was used. Parents felt very much that the process was in some way predetermined, not specifically the school that would be chosen but the fact that schools would be closed, and felt, I think in many cases, that that fact was not disclosed. They went through a great deal of work to try and put forward proposals to save the school and felt that that was not time well spent. I wonder if you could comment on the process that was used and whether or not you are satisfied with it, whether or not you feel that changes need to be made.

11:10

Mrs. Esslinger: Certainly. I will begin, and Ms Bidulock, I'm sure, will supplement.

[Mr. Griffiths in the chair]

The school closure process is the end of a process for us when we deal with school space. Annually every school looks at and develops a school profile based on a number of questions, and Ms Bidulock, I'm sure, will have that for me. There is a section on every school profile to talk about size and programs and enrolment. It also has a place in there for community impact. So we're gathering that information, and then every school is looked at in a long-term plan: in years 1 to 3 what schools are most at risk that we need to address and look at?

Once that plan is developed, it is brought to the board of trustees, and the board of trustees then votes on whether to initiate a sustainability plan and review of specific schools. At that point the board can say, "Yes, we'll go with this," or "No, we'll take this one but not that one." We're able to make those decisions at a board level. At that point we begin to work with communities, and we try to develop options for communities on programs, things that might be able to increase the enrolment. Our ultimate goal is to ensure that every student gets the best education possible.

We work with the parents and the community at large in those processes. That information is gathered once we've been working

with the community. Then it comes back to the board with some recommendations, and the board votes on whether to consider and initiate some of those schools for school closures. In each case we have many schools. We start a sustainability review of some, and then typically it could be fewer that initiate a school closure process. Throughout the school closure process, again, at any point we are able to say, "No, we don't feel this school should be closed." In each case there have been opportunities where we've said: "No, not at this time. This one should be looked at longer."

Saying that, it is also a very fluid process that we review annually and look at how we're doing because we want to meet and work with our communities in those specific areas. So it's an ongoing, fluid process that we continue to work on.

Ms Bidulock, I'm sure, will supplement that.

Ms Bidulock: Thank you. Mr. Chairman, as a district we have a responsibility to meet the needs of students living in all quarters of the city. We do recognize that there's a cost associated with operating and maintaining each square metre of district space whether it's used or not. The school reviews are part of the district's overall work to address our student accommodation issues and manage our school buildings effectively and efficiently. The board considers a number of factors during the review process: total school enrolment, total program enrolment, number of students living in the attendance area, and the cost to operate that space.

Participating in a review does not mean that a school is marked for closure. The review is a prereview prior to any recommendation being taken to the board for closing a school. If the review shows that the school is not viable in the long term, then the superintendent may take that school forward to the board for review of the school closure, and then the school closure process, which is a legislated process, kicks in.

I want to point out that in the '06-07 review process not every school that was reviewed was closed. Some of those schools remained open and continue to remain open today.

Mr. Mason: Thank you. A supplementary. I see that Trustee Huff has come to the microphone. I didn't know if she wanted to respond to the question.

Ms Huff: Yes, I would like to.

The Deputy Chair: Proceed.

Ms Huff: Thank you. Just a supplemental to that. We have initiated a review process of the entire school closure review. That work is ongoing. There is an ad hoc committee that has been formed. Trustee Rice and myself are the co-chairs on that committee, and we have engaged in a number of initiatives as part of that work. We have done an extensive consultation with a number of focus groups, including parents, community members, and staff, to get their feedback on the process. As the board chair mentioned, it is a fluid process, and we do continue to look at it. That work is being assimilated and processed, and there will be more surveys to come. We're also doing a district-wide, city-wide survey to understand how the community sees community school space and what value they place upon schools, and this will help us in our future direction setting.

Thank you.

Mr. Mason: Thank you. I appreciate that.

I'll take that as my supplementary.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. Sure. Thank you.

Mr. Benito, followed by Mr. Chase.

[Mr. MacDonald in the chair]

Mr. Benito: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I also would like to thank the Edmonton public schools for taking the time to come here. Your time is appreciated. My question is about the asbestos in schools. I've been in the real estate market for more than 22 years, and if we sell a house on the market, the bank will not even touch the mortgage application. If the buyer will still pursue buying the property, we have to disclose that in writing. I'm just wondering: when it comes to asbestos in schools, has there been a study of the asbestos issue if it is not disturbed? Has there been an approved study that this will not affect the students and people in that school? Are we giving disclosure also to the parents and students about the presence of this asbestos in the school?

Mrs. Esslinger: Thank you very much. I'll ask Mr. Nicoll to respond.

Mr. Nicoll: Mr. Chairman, in 1999 we conducted a comprehensive survey of all of our schools and rated the asbestos in those schools according to a six-point rating as to the severity of the issue and the priority. We have dealt with all of the very high-priority ones where it was an issue recommended to us.

That information as to the asbestos in schools is made available and is provided to the principal in those schools and the custodians and the maintenance workers as part of our asbestos management plan. As to whether we've made a specific point of advising each and every parent council, we haven't done that, but that information is available from the principal.

Considering that approximately 80 per cent of our buildings and 80 per cent of other public-sector buildings of the same age contain asbestos and considering that the criteria for including due diligence on asbestos has dropped – it used to be less than 1 per cent; it's now any content of asbestos. One of our exposures is ceiling tile and floor tile, which are all documented. What we call our school-by-school hazardous material management plan is available in all the schools from the principal. It can be made available on request. We're also taking steps to improve the accessibility of that information by putting it online on the district's Internet, so any staff member can access that to find out the degree, where it exists, and under what conditions.

All of our occupants are safe from the asbestos, but as you, sir, are aware, if it's in guarded situations or encapsulated, it's still there, and you quite rightly identified that we have a liability upon the demolition of the building to remove that.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Benito: Thank you very much. My supplementary question is about the quality of air with reference to the old boiler or old furnace in the old schools we have. Is there a difference in the quality of air if the furnace is new compared to the old furnace system?

Mrs. Esslinger: Thank you very much. The health and safety of our students is paramount, and I will ask Mr. Nicoll to give the specifics.

Mr. Nicoll: Thank you. Mr. Chairman, there is a difference in the design between the old schools that operate on steam boilers compared to what we build now. New schools are built with hot

water heating units, a fresh air supply, pressurized supply air into all classrooms. The new ones even supply it at close to ground level, called displacement ventilation. The older schools are challenged because of the opportunity to introduce the frequency of air changes, and the standards have also increased in requiring more air changes.

The schools where we have the older ones are challenged. The 50-year old steam heating units are temperamental. The reason they do work and the reason we're able to maintain the air quality in our schools is that we have a staff of dedicated custodians who monitor the heating plant. But that's also one of our challenges. We also require the constant monitoring by our custodians who operate the boilers to ensure that we've got the right temperature. Some of these plants are old and difficult, and there is some temperature variation.

11:20

We also monitor carbon dioxide as a condition of the air quality in the classrooms. We find that that's a metaphor for other contaminant levels in schools. Our goal is to have every classroom operating at less than a thousand parts per million of carbon dioxide, and we take corrective action to make sure that the equipment's working to get it at that. We do monitor it on a regular basis. Class size has an impact.

One of the other things that we find that perhaps has changed over the years is the number of foreign materials that students bring into classrooms. Backpacks that are made out of plastics give off volatile organic compounds. The more we can improve the air circulation, we can also remove the effects of some of the things we didn't have 50 years ago in the way of contaminants in the classrooms. Sometimes the biggest source of the contaminants is the students themselves bringing in books and plastics and highlighters and things like that. So airflow is important.

Mr. Benito: Thank you very much, sir.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Nicoll.

Mr. Chase, please, followed by Mr. Griffiths.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. My two questions have to do with class size. Not that long ago with AISI funding the Edmonton public board was able to dramatically reduce class size in a number of inner-city schools. They found that within that one-year pilot project the students made great strides in academic achievement, and their self-esteem rose accordingly. I'm wondering if you could briefly comment on the results of that project and if you've tracked the students in following years based on that sort of head start they received.

That, Mr. Chair, is just my first question.

Mrs. Esslinger: Thank you very much. Ms Chalmers has that data for you.

Ms Chalmers: Mr. Chair, Mr. Chase, it's my pleasure to comment on that. Yes, we have been tracking the students in our full-day kindergarten – they were part of a small class size following into grade 1 – for seven years now. What we learned is that full-day kindergarten followed by reasonable class sizes and changes in teaching practice all had an impact.

It's hard to determine exactly what the class size effect was compared to changes in practice, the introduction of full-day K, and the introduction of reading recovery, of balanced literacy, of partnerships with community. I think what we are finding is that achieving student success for children who come to us suffering deprivation due to poverty takes a number of initiatives working in

co-ordination. We do know that the full-day K and the introduction of other strategies have resulted in our students being at par with students in our more affluent parts of the city up until grade 3, the majority of them up until grade 5.

Our board of trustees continues to support the full-day kindergarten and has extended the use of reading recovery broader than that. We continue to monitor that on an ongoing basis with an external evaluator, Dr. Joe da Costa from the University of Alberta.

Mrs. Esslinger: I'd like to supplement that just for your information. Full-day kindergarten is not funded. We currently provide 25 sites for at-risk students, those who are most vulnerable, as Ms Chalmers indicated, but that is not funded, and that would come out of general dollars.

The Chair: Mr. Chase, please.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. That leads into my second question. We have over 64,000 children in Alberta living below the poverty line. As you indicated, by 2015 Edmonton will have the largest number of First Nations children. Unfortunately, the way life has gone for First Nations, they frequently fall into that poverty cycle.

You mentioned that your class size objectives have been met in grades 4 to 12, and you also mentioned that you're funding basically out of pocket 25 schools with full-day kindergartens. So my question is: have you had any success in lobbying the government for subsidizing optional full-day kindergarten programs and half-day junior kindergartens?

Mrs. Esslinger: We've had continuing lobbying efforts, I would say, advocating for full-day kindergarten on an ongoing basis. I know that there has been research. All four major metro school boards use full-day kindergarten because we know that it makes a difference in the lives of the most vulnerable students. So it's very important for us to continually advocate for that, and I know that's something that we've done together and we do individually at any opportunity that we have.

Our aboriginal students are very important to us. We've just completed an aboriginal task force where we went and met with our communities. Many of the policies and subsequent regulations have changed our practices, and we continually try to work with our communities so that they can have maximum success for every student.

Mr. Chase: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Griffiths, please, followed by Mr. Mason.

Mr. Griffiths: Performance measures are very important in order for us to see whether or not everyone is doing a good job. Now, there are three types of performance measures. There are satisfaction surveys, and those are valuable for seeing how your clients feel about the job you're doing, but really it's just perceived satisfaction. There is output to see, for instance, how many students are graduating, and there is outcome to see if we're getting quality in what we're spending money on. I'm wondering what you are doing to improve performance measures. For instance, on page 16 of the Edmonton Public Schools' Annual Education Results Report 2006-07 there are satisfaction surveys on schools providing a safe and caring environment for students. That's a satisfaction survey. Have you considered that perhaps you'd like to measure the instance of bullying or violence in the school to see if it's actually going down,

or have you measured whether or not the money you're spending on providing a safe and caring environment for students is actually reducing it so that we're getting value for money?

Mrs. Esslinger: Certainly. First of all, I'd like to talk about how we do some of our measures, and then we can talk about some of the other aspects. Every school develops their school plan in consultation with their staff and community and their subsequent budget related to that. Twice a year trustees go into every school in groups of two, and we meet with the parents, staff, and communities and begin to look at their results and hold them accountable for their specific results outcomes for those things that we can measure. We talk about the surveys, we talk about their achievement results, and we talk about their plan. Then every plan is aligned with our priorities, and our priorities indicate safe and caring schools. So we ask them: "What are you doing? What are you doing about citizenship?" We ask for specific plans so that we are able as a board to say that we know what they're doing and we're holding them accountable.

The same in the spring. We go back and look at their budgets: how do they plan their budget, and why are they doing this? It's so that we have an idea when we approve the whole district budget that every school is accountable to meet their targets and, if they're not, how to hold them accountable. We don't have specific incidences of bullying targets, but we do have every school developing measures and holding them accountable for specific areas.

I see our superintendent wants to add to that.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The oversight by the board in these two rounds of results, reviews, and budget reviews plays a critical role for our schools in terms of being fully aware of the priorities that the board places on student conduct, safety, high school completion, and student achievement. In relation to other data that we collect, we do gather information around suspension rates. Each school reports on levels of suspension. We do note that in some instances where schools are more successful with citizenship-type programs and student contact work, suspension rates may decline as an indicator that there are improvements. It is important in a large district that we rely on our survey measures as a proxy for levels of satisfaction, but we do in addition collect information related to numbers of expulsions from a school to another school, again as a way of measuring the effectiveness of the work that we're doing, Mr. Chairman.

11:30

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you. I wish that was in your public report so that the public could see it, too.

My second question. Not only are public performance measures important, but value for money spent is incredibly important to the public so that we can evaluate whether or not we're getting value for our money. I see some of the statistics – and they're from a letter from Minister Hancock dated September 24, 2008 – that show satisfaction surveys amongst teachers for the money spent on professional development. I'm wondering if you considered performance measures to show if the competency of teachers has actually improved from professional development and how much, and then we could measure the value for money we're actually getting. What's the board doing to make sure that systematically all across the board we're getting value for money for what's going into the public education system and Edmonton public?

Mrs. Esslinger: Thank you very much. I believe Ms Bidulock would like to begin.

Ms Bidulock: Mr. Chairman, I'd like to address the question around professional development for teachers and value for money. The current district AISI projects are all centred around different aspects of teacher development so that they can do a better job with students in the classroom. What we do when we report our AISI results to the province: we report very rigorously what impact those particular projects have had on student achievement. We use a variety of measures, including survey measures but also student achievement measures, and our AISI projects are reporting that we are getting good value for our money in teacher staff development. So that's just the slice on staff development.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Mason, please, followed by Mr. Johnson.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I wanted to ask a question with respect to students with severe disabilities. There was recently a report done by Alberta Education that indicated that across the system in Alberta, not specifically the Edmonton public school district but across the province, 44.2 per cent of files on students did not conform to the provincial standards. It says: the review results suggest that there is an inconsistent application of special education severe disabilities coding criteria across the province, which raises questions about the interpretation and application of mild and moderate coding; given the magnitude of these concerns, the results of the [severe] disabilities profile review are a catalyst for thorough examination of the overall special education framework. My question is with reference to the public board. How is the public board performing relative to students with severe disabilities, and how are you addressing the deficiency in conforming to the standards?

Mrs. Esslinger: Thank you very much for the question. I'll invite our superintendent to begin.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you. Mr. Chair, this is a very important question to us as these are some of our most vulnerable students. Working on the assessments and ensuring that there is, in fact, adequate and excellent programming available for these students is very important. On a regular basis we have in the past worked with Alberta Education, who have reviewed our files and examined our levels of compliance with provincial standards in relation to individual program plans and the like, and at every opportunity we have viewed that as a learning experience to improve and enhance the level of reporting and the level of programming that we do provide.

One of the challenges that we do face is because these children are, in fact, individuals. They come with unique needs, and we work at the school level to provide the best possible programming to achieve their unique needs. For example, if a student presents with autism spectrum challenges, that can be a wide range of behaviours and a wide range of supports required for each one. We have to judge that and work with health care professionals, with educational professionals who are experts in the field to support the programming at the school level. We would see and expect, in fact, variable types of service to these individual students because of the unique needs that they present.

Having said that, Mr. Chairman, with the issues around coding criteria, the variable nature of that, it's indeed not surprising from a provincial level that that might be the experience. We experience it within our own district, depending on perhaps, for example, a medical professional who may have given a diagnosis with a range of expectations and recommendations to parents that might in fact be

quite different from a different health professional that provides us with recommendations for very similar types of challenges that a child may have. That creates some significant contextual issues for us. Again, having said that, we work continually in our special education department. We provide a high level of support and guidelines to our principals and to our teaching staff. We provide templates for them in terms of supports to ensure that they are indeed meeting those requirements, and we also provide some ongoing monitoring in support of the schools.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

I believe another member of your staff wants to supplement that. If you could identify yourself for the record, please.

Dr. Barrett: Thank you. Donna Barrett. I'm an assistant superintendent, and I have responsibility for special ed programming.

I would just like to supplement by indicating that when the severe disabilities review was undertaken, our district was very diligent about submitting our documentation, and while we were disappointed that we didn't receive individual jurisdiction feedback about the work that we had submitted, we are very supportive of the work that the province is undertaking now looking at a broader range of review of programming supports for students with severe disabilities. I think the issues and the challenges that these students face and that districts face in terms of meeting their needs are far beyond issues around coding, so we're very supportive and looking forward to involvement in that area.

Mr. Mason: Thank you for that answer.

Mr. Chairman, my supplemental. It's my understanding that each student who has severe disability is supposed to have a plan, which then is supposed to be implemented by the school. I wonder if you can tell me what percentage of the student plans have been complied with completely and whether or not you feel that teachers in the classroom have adequate training in terms of making sure that these plans are properly implemented, whether you have the resources, the people, and so on to make sure that every student's plan is thoroughly and completely implemented.

Mrs. Esslinger: Thank you. I'll have Dr. Barrett respond.

Dr. Barrett: Thank you. The responsibility for the development and oversight of those plans rests with the school principal, and as part of our review process as assistant superintendents we visit schools. The school principal has the direct line of responsibility working with classroom teachers and parents, who have the opportunity to contribute to and sign off on those plans.

Percentagewise I am sorry; I couldn't give you a number. But there is a review process, so there's ongoing documentation for each student's program in terms of how successful they were in terms of completing the goals of their program. That information is available and has been monitored by the province on an ongoing basis through sampling.

11:40

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Johnson, please.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Chair. Thank you all for being here today and taking your time to be with us and answer these questions. I'd like to get elaboration, maybe clarification on two of the things you've touched on already. One is on the age of schools, and the other is around the transportation issue.

Maybe I'll start with the age of the schools. I think, Mr. Schmidt, you said that your average age was 48 years. Maybe you can clarify that. How does that compare to other school divisions in the province or other jurisdictions across Canada? I'm more interested in what the life expectancy of a school is as opposed to how old they are and how you compare with other school divisions or how Alberta compares with other jurisdictions.

Mrs. Esslinger: Thank you very much. I think we'll have Mr. Nicoll deal with some of those questions. We do have some that are over a hundred years old and still function, and we're very proud of those. Historical landmarks, I believe.

Mr. Nicoll: Yes.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I don't have specific details as to how our age compares with other districts other than that from my own anecdotal knowledge we're pretty much all in the same ballpark, certainly with the metros when we compare with the metros. One thing I can say is that I think our building demographics do not compare with some of the rural districts because I think their schools have been built in the '50s as opposed to some of ours which were built back when the cities were young.

Fully about 50 per cent of our schools are over 50 years old, and those are sometimes the architectural marvels, and they are wonderful historic buildings. Having said that, they're challenges because, one, they're solid structures. They're key parts of the neighbourhoods. They're part of our heritage. But they have stairs through all levels. They're very difficult to accommodate students with special needs in. They haven't been built to accommodate some of the IT infrastructure or some of the modern heating plants.

But they are well built. Typically you can expect a building to last 50 years before you have to reinvest. The structures last 75, but your mechanical plants have to be reinvested in and replaced at approximately 30 to 40 years, electrical plants at about 30. A lot of our schools and certainly the vast number of our schools that were built in the '50s with the baby boom were built very quickly. They do not have the same structural quality of our schools that were built in the 1910s and '20s. Their mechanical plants are pretty typical of each other. The boilers are 50 years old. They're inefficient; they're aging. With the steam piping in the schools the pipes are getting thin and corroding, and we're replacing them on a constant basis. So the schools that were built in the '50s have certainly seen their best-before date come and go.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Johnson.

Mr. Johnson: Yeah. My other question. If I could just get some elaboration on the transportation. You made some comments, if I've got them right, that 25 per cent of students are travelling on buses and that a full one-quarter, I think you said, did not have a neighbourhood school. The times: you mentioned 60 minutes. Is that each way? You said: not having a neighbourhood school. How do you measure that? What's the distance? If we say that they don't have a neighbourhood school, is that strictly Edmonton public? Is that no school, period? You said that one-quarter did not have a neighbourhood school. Maybe clarification on: what's the percentage of students that are not attending their neighbourhood school?

Mrs. Esslinger: Certainly. Thank you very much for the question. I'll begin, and I'll have Ms Bidulock flesh that out. Approximately 50 per cent of our students attend a neighbourhood school, 50 per cent a school of choice. One in four does not have a neighbourhood

school that we have in their catchment area. The ride times: 60 minutes one way.

Ms Bidulock will flesh that out.

Ms Bidulock: Thank you. Mr. Chairman, we have over 40 neighbourhoods in the city – and most of these neighbourhoods are, of course, in the outlying areas of the city – that do not have a neighbourhood school. So students from those 40 neighbourhoods are being transported to a school usually a couple of neighbourhoods beyond where they actually live. Busing becomes an essential element of our district. We do try to keep our ride times down below 60 minutes. For the most part they are closer to 30 minutes, 40 minutes one way. We continue, however, to be a transportation district. So it's an important consideration for us in terms of where we build new schools and, in fact, where we put our programs for our students, as well.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Johnson: Can I get clarification on that?

The Chair: Certainly.

Mr. Johnson: The one thing I didn't hear is how you define a neighbourhood, like how far away. Do you co-operate at all with other jurisdictions on busing? Are there buses passing each other?

Ms Bidulock: Mr. Chairman, we've come to define a neighbourhood very differently in current times. Back in the 1960s, '70s when we were building schools, it was building one school per neighbourhood. Nowadays when we build schools, we're building one school for several neighbourhoods. So the most recently built schools, the schools that are being built right now, will probably service between two to three, sometimes even four actual neighbourhoods. This is because the demographics of our city are changing.

We do attempt to co-operate as much as we can on transportation with our other school jurisdiction; however, when we did an in-depth analysis of efficiencies that could be saved by doing so, we discovered that the efficiencies were minimal.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Johnson: I hate to persist, but what is a neighbourhood? For my clarification, is it two blocks? Is it 10 blocks?

The Chair: Briefly, please, because we have other members with questions.

Ms Bidulock: Mr. Chairman, a neighbourhood is defined by the municipality as being a given area called a neighbourhood structure plan. So the city of Edmonton actually defines what a neighbourhood is, defines the perimeter and the boundaries of a neighbourhood. As I mentioned, they are defining those neighborhoods as being physically larger and larger and larger as the city grows and expands.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Fawcett, please, followed by Mr. Dallas.

Mr. Fawcett: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just want some clarification around the 2007 surplus, which was almost \$36 million.

I noticed that that's roughly the amount between what was budgeted and what was actual, and the explanation was made that sometimes it's hard to just adjust your resources in time to actually spend that additional money you're getting. So there are several ways why there might've been a difference between what was budgeted and what the actual was. One is increased enrolment or increased complexity of the student profile that wasn't anticipated. One was increased funding announcements throughout the year. Do you have the breakdown of what that was?

Mrs. Esslinger: Certainly. We'll ask our treasurer, Mr. Power.

Mr. Power: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Yes, we do have the breakdown for that information. From grant announcements made after we submitted our budgets, there was a 1 per cent increase in basic construction grant. There was a 3.7 per cent increase in the transportation grant and a 4 per cent increase in the severe profile grant. You're very correct, Mr. Chair, that the impact of the September count was a total enrolment increase of 2 per cent, a growth in our ESL of 19 per cent, and a growth in our program unit funding of 10 per cent. So those are \$30 million there, by itself. In addition, we had final year-end credit enrolment units that were not budgeted for and March ESL for another \$6 million. So, Mr. Chair, that's a breakdown of the amount that I had provided to you earlier.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Fawcett: I have several questions coming from that. I know that in your presentation at the start you indicated that in the K to 3 category as of 2007 you had not met the ACOL target for class size. Is that additional money, the \$35 million – you mentioned that you would need an additional \$10 million to hire the staff to meet those class sizes. Have you accomplished that, or are there still any resources that are needed to meet that number?

I guess a further question about that class size initiative. If that was educationally important, would you be making some different decisions about how to allocate resources to actually meet that class size target?

11:50

Mrs. Esslinger: Thank you very much. We'll let our superintendent begin because he did indicate some of those challenges.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. A very good question. The way that the surpluses that were indicated in our presentation – primarily those surpluses are distributed among all of the schools. Because the schools had those funds and were not able to expend them in that particular year, they were able to carry them forward. What we've been able to do as a district is provide some guidance to our principals around what the district-wide needs are and what the expectation, again, is from the board in terms of student achievement and high school completion. We know that making improvements in class size is a priority.

One of the key roles that a principal plays also is working with their communities, working with the parents and with their staff in establishing the programs and the classroom structures in the particular school. In working with communities, there are challenges that present. For example, if there is an issue around perhaps combining classrooms, which may in fact create smaller classrooms, parents may voice and express a real concern about those combined classrooms and if they had a choice would rather have slightly larger classrooms to avoid the combining, for example. So it just provides . . .

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Schmidt: Yes. Thank you.

The Chair: I appreciate that. We still have a lot of members with questions.

Mr. Dallas, please, followed by Mr. Sandhu.

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you very much to all of our guests who have attended this morning. I want to return quickly to the discussion Ms Woo-Paw and Ms Chalmers were having regarding high school completion. Now, I realize that while we ask our school boards to measure high school completion, there are many complex factors around effecting those results. Certainly, communities need to take ownership of the results as well.

However, having heard some of the discussion today about the utilization of your facilities, about the choice structure of transporting and expending significant funds to mobilize students around the district, and comparing some statistics very specific to the school board around high school completion, I wonder if you could comment on this observation. The provincial average in terms of student per certificate teacher and in terms of total staff per student appears to be somewhat lower than or maybe significantly lower than those that have been established by Edmonton public schools, and when compared to those school districts that have significantly higher achievement rates for high school completion, there's a very substantial difference. I wonder if you could comment or speculate on the potential impact of the kinds of decisions that you're making around school utilization choice and transportation, whether it's possible that they might be impacting your results in this area.

Mrs. Esslinger: I think the biggest challenge that impacts our results is the diversity of our student population, and what we've done in many of our initiatives is to try to address the needs of students, whether they're being transported because they need a specific program. We have schools now that have specific programs for refugee students. We're using our resources to maximize the success of every student and recognizing that our population is very unique in the province. If you had taken a suburban school district where they're, you know, fairly affluent, the results would be significantly different. What we need to do is to help each of our students be successful. That's what's important to us. These are some of those ways we've organized in order to do that.

Ms Chalmers will supplement that.

Ms Chalmers: Mr. Chair, a very good question. I just want to clarify that we transport relatively few students to programs of choice. Although there is some of that, we try to have multiple programs located in different parts of the city to increase accessibility for all families in our district.

Programs of choice are also one of the motivator factors that enable us to keep kids in school and to help them be successful; for example, our sports program at junior and senior high. We have many families telling us that it is because of those programs they are able to keep their kids coming to us. While we have them there, we can teach them math and language arts. We know that by having programs of choice such as Amiskwaciy, we're keeping some of our aboriginal students in school that would not be in our schools otherwise.

It is always a trade-off. Our programs are established based on community need and community demand. If the parents do not choose the program or the students do not enrol in them, we, in fact, discontinue the programs or reduce the number of sites. It is a

responsive approach. It is one of the motivator factors that we use to enable students to be successful.

The Chair: Thank you.

Before we continue with Mr. Dallas's second question, in light of the time – you have a \$700 million-plus budget, and we've had two hours of a very interesting discussion on it. After Mr. Dallas's second question, there are several members with questions that we're going to have to read into the record. If you could provide a written response through the clerk to all members, we would be very grateful. That's how we will proceed after you answer Mr. Dallas's second question.

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll try to be brief. With respect to coded students, who are working with an individual development plan, you mentioned earlier that you were clustering those students to some degree to optimize the resources that you can gather to support those students. You also mentioned that you are very careful about the distances that you're transporting those students. I guess my question is: you know, I realize that there's a balance or a compromise that's made here, but is it possible that the instructional supports and capacity that are provided to those students are compromised by constraints on where you're clustering those support resources?

Mrs. Esslinger: Thank you. I'll let our superintendent.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. There are constant dialogue and discussion around: are the programs in the right places? We work with our schools and clusters of schools and also examine emerging demand, so we may in fact create a clustered or congregated program in a particular area, knowing that in several years from now we might have to close that particular program to reopen it in another place. In fact, that's one of the ways that we create some fluidity in being responsive to our neighbourhoods. When a program is established, it doesn't mean that the program is established forever, but rather it's in response to the actual population. Ultimately it is about reducing the ride times for these particular students and trying to bring these programs closer to where they live.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Sandhu, if you could read your questions into the record, please, we would be very grateful. Thank you. Mr. Benito after Mr. Sandhu.

Mr. Sandhu: Thank you, Chairman. Thank you to Edmonton public school board members, all the trustees, and public members. The question I was thinking to ask you on the performance measure was already asked by three colleagues, Teresa Woo-Paw, Doug Griffiths, and Cal Dallas.

The second question I wanted to ask you is about new school designs. Is there any possibility we can allow daycare space in new school designs? I talked to the hon. Mr. Hancock a couple of times. What do you think on that?

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Sandhu.

Mr. Benito, please, followed by Mr. Griffiths.

Mr. Benito: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Foreign workers' children. You know, the Alberta economy: we can only sustain this with a number of the workforce coming from foreign workers. For the next decade we will need about 110,000 foreign workers in this province. Right now Alberta has the third-largest number of foreign

workers in all of Canada. My question is about the children of foreign workers, who will be enrolling in the public school system in Alberta. How are we treating the children of foreign workers in our Edmonton public schools? That's my question.

12:00

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Griffiths, please, followed by Ms Woo-Paw.

Mr. Griffiths: I wasn't terribly satisfied with one of the answers that I got. The purpose of Public Accounts is to ensure that the public is getting value for the money that is spent. I'm not challenging professional development and its use – I was a teacher myself – but I just picked on professional development, I guess.

I've seen multiple other jurisdictions that have six, eight, 11, 12 different types of performance measures to evaluate the effectiveness of the professional development in their school jurisdiction, yet only one – and it doesn't even have comparative studies from year to year – from your school jurisdiction. I know you said that you report vigorously on professional development and its impacts, but to where, and where could we see it? We have to be responsible for the public's money as it's being spent.

My second question. I was a little confused. I know it was explained that this jurisdiction has very challenging changing demographics and a high aboriginal population, which affects its completion rates. But we have comparative information that compares other school jurisdictions, and one of them, in fact, has the same challenging demographics and even a stronger aboriginal population, yet its five-year completion rate is 12 per cent higher than Edmonton public schools. I'm wondering if you've evaluated if it's perhaps the certified teacher-to-pupil ratio or other factors and if you have performance measures and value-for-money audits that would indicate whether or not it's something else than just changing demographics and aboriginal populations?

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms Woo-Paw, please, followed by Mr. Quest.

Ms Woo-Paw: How many questions can I read to them?

The Chair: You've got a couple there. We've got three. We're going past 12, and you have recognize that they have other commitments this afternoon.

Ms Woo-Paw: Okay. Down to two. In one of your reports, the performance measure in terms of teachers', parents', and students' satisfaction with access and timeliness of services for students in schools, the parents' level of satisfaction is, to me, the lowest amongst the various groups. It's just a bit more than 50 per cent, so I'd like to understand how you have interpreted that.

The other question has to do with performance measures as well. I'd like to preface by saying that my grandfather and my father were both teachers, and I have a great deal of respect for teachers. I know that people in the system are working very hard every day to improve the learning needs of our children and youth. From reading the reports and listening to you, I take it that you do a little tracking and monitoring of your students at risk. So I'm operating from the assumption that you are tracking the students who are dropping out and who are not completing high school.

Yet I'm just frustrated that I don't see very specific performance measures used by the system to measure the progress and the improvement of some of these students, whether it's students in poverty or aboriginal or some of the ESL students, because I think that when the performance measure is so general, combined with the

site-based decision-making, I'm not feeling that we are very effective in holding anybody accountable so that we can see substantial improvement in some of these areas.

I'd just like to say: why is it that we cannot use more specific performance measures? As far as I'm concerned, what gets measured gets done. Otherwise, it's constant awareness-raising and dabbling and people making the best of their efforts, but sometimes teachers make their best effort without adequate system support. Sometimes the system gives good direction, but maybe people don't have the competency. All we can do is to hold somebody accountable for these kids and their public dollars, and I'm not feeling that we're being very effective in holding people accountable.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Quest, followed by the ever-patient Harry Chase.

Mr. Quest: Mr. Power, just going back to some of the budget increases you were referring to a few minutes ago, did I hear correctly that in transportation the year-over-year increase was 3.7 per cent?

Mr. Power: Mr. Chair, that was the increase that was announced after the budget speech.

Mr. Quest: Okay. I'm just kind of wondering, if that's the case, looking at the cost of fuel and equipment and labour, how that could possibly cover the real increase in cost of transportation.

Mr. Power: Mr. Chair, we also received a grant from Alberta Education that once the fuel price reaches a certain level, they will fund us above that level. So fuel price increases, I believe, are being taken care of by a grant from Alberta Education.

Mr. Quest: On the labour side, the reason this is a concern for me now: Elk Island is the board in my constituency area, and I know they've had situations. My son is 11 years old. I believe he's on his fifth bus driver this year. There are certainly problems in Elk Island – I'm sure they exist in Edmonton also – with buses simply not showing up and other drivers having to pick up the routes and so on. I guess my question is: is transportation really being adequately funded to ensure that our kids safely and reliably arrive at school?

The Chair: Thank you. If you could respond in writing, Mr. Power, we would be grateful.

To conclude, Mr. Chase.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. My questions have to do with school supplies and school fees. Number one, has the type and quantity of basic school supplies that the students are expected to provide increased in the last 10 years? And if there is no longer sufficient funding given schools to purchase adequate basic supplies, where and how are you scraping up the funds for basics such as paper, textbooks, computer and software upgrades?

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Chase.

That concludes this portion of our meeting with officials from the Edmonton public school board. I would like on behalf of all members of the committee to thank you, Madam Chair, and your excellent staff for your time and your attention this morning. We appreciate your attendance before the committee, and we found it very interesting. It's a huge public expenditure, your budget, and I would just like to say on behalf of the committee that we're very grateful for your time. Thank you.

Mrs. Esslinger: Thank you very much. On behalf of the board and our staff thank you for the opportunity.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

The meeting of the Public Accounts Committee will adjourn until 1 p.m. in this room, when we meet with Calgary Roman Catholic separate school board.

Thank you.

[The committee adjourned from 12:08 p.m. to 1 p.m.]

The Chair: Good afternoon, everyone. I would like to call this portion of our Standing Committee on Public Accounts meeting to order, please. On behalf of the committee I would like to welcome officials from the Calgary Roman Catholic separate school division to our meeting this afternoon. We certainly look forward to discussing your financial statements and appreciate the material you have provided in advance.

Please note that you do not need to touch the microphones. Our *Hansard* staff will turn them on and off for you. I'd also like to advise that the Legislative committee meetings are now being audiostreamed for listening on the Internet.

If there are any additional members of your delegation who are not seated around this table who would like to supplement a question from one of the hon. members, they're free to do so. They just have to go to the microphone that's provided behind you.

Before we go any further, perhaps we should quickly go around the table and introduce ourselves, starting with the vice-chair.

Mr. Griffiths: Doug Griffiths, MLA for Battle River-Wainwright constituency.

Dr. Massolin: Good afternoon. I'm Philip Massolin. I'm the committee research co-ordinator, Legislative Assembly Office.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Good afternoon. Naresh Bhardwaj, MLA, Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Jacobs: Bryce Jacobs, Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Vandermeer: Tony Vandermeer, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Chase: Harry Chase, Calgary-Varsity.

Mr. Dallas: Good afternoon. Cal Dallas, Red Deer-South.

Mr. Benito: Good afternoon. Carl Benito, Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mr. Sandhu: Good afternoon. Peter Sandhu, MLA, Edmonton-Manning. Thank you for coming to this beautiful city.

Mr. Barbero: I'm Michael Barbero, superintendent, facilities and transportation, Calgary Catholic.

Mr. Strother: I'm Gary Strother. I'm superintendent of southeast schools and information technology.

Mrs. Belcourt: Marge Belcourt, chair of Calgary Catholic.

Dr. Miller: Lucy Miller, chief superintendent, Calgary Catholic.

Mr. Deaussy: John Deaussy, superintendent, finance and business and secretary-treasurer of Calgary Catholic.

Mr. Neid: Al Neid, office of the Auditor General.

Mr. Saher: Merwan Saher, office of the Auditor General.

Mr. Dunn: Fred Dunn, Auditor General.

Mr. Drysdale: Wayne Drysdale, MLA, Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Fawcett: Good afternoon. Kyle Fawcett, MLA, Calgary-North Hill.

Ms Woo-Paw: Good afternoon. Teresa Woo-Paw, Calgary-Mackay.

Mr. Denis: Jonathan Denis, MLA for Calgary-Egmont.

Mrs. Dacyshyn: Corinne Dacyshyn, committee clerk.

Ms Rempel: Jody Rempel, committee clerk, Legislative Assembly Office.

The Chair: Hugh MacDonald, Edmonton-Gold Bar.

I understand, Madam Chair Belcourt, you have a brief opening statement and a PowerPoint presentation for the members. If you would like, you can feel free to proceed.

Calgary Roman Catholic Separate School District

Mrs. Belcourt: Okay. To make the introductions, I will turn it over to our chief superintendent, Dr. Miller.

Dr. Miller: Thank you. You've met the people sitting at the table, but I'd like to introduce a number of people we've brought with us that are in the gallery. As you can see, they represent a variety of groups. All of our trustees but one are here. We have Serafino Scarpino, Lois Burke-Gaffney, Rosemarie Goerlitz, Mary Martin, and Linda Wellman. Also with us are Judy MacKay, superintendent of specialized program schools, instruction, religious education; Craig Foley, superintendent, human resources; Maryanne Poole-Franz, comptroller; Jody McKinnon, manager, transportation; Steve Stewart, manager, district planning; Dave Cracknell, president of Alberta Teachers' Association local 55 – David is here representing all of our employee groups since they are the largest group – Bernie Varem, supervisor, information technology and student information; Brian O'Grady, supervisor, information technology and student information; and James Rendell, director of plant operations and maintenance.

I'll turn it over to Marge, who is going to do some opening comments.

Mrs. Belcourt: Thank you, Dr. Miller. To start with, you can see that Calgary Catholic school district was established in 1885 and is the largest Catholic school district in Alberta. Calgary Catholic includes the city of Calgary as well as the cities of Cochrane, Airdrie, Chestermere, and the related municipal district of Rocky View lands. You can see that we are unique in that we face the challenges of both rural and urban boards. For example, in transportation we face the problem of long distances that the rural boards face, but we also face the traffic congestion that urban boards face, and this is complicated by the long distances between our new communities and the available space that we have in older areas and in the city core. Here we have problems that the parents are complaining about: the time that's spent on buses to get kids to their schools.

We also have the complication of dealing with different levels of government. We have to deal with the Calgary caucus; we meet with them. But we deal with the city of Calgary for some of our building and moving of portables and getting them inspected and serviced. We also have to deal with the MD of Rocky View and the cities of Cochrane, Chestermere, and Airdrie. They all have their own department of planning, so we have to set up special meetings with these area people, and we have to work with, you know, some different sets of rules. That certainly shows you the difficulties that we may face that are unique in this province.

For the statistics. We had 98 schools; it's now up to 103. We have 43,896 students and a total staff of 4,301.9 FTEs with 2,849.6 certified and 1,452.3 noncertified. Our mission statement and vision are up on the screen. Basically, we're looking at, as all boards, trying to empower our students to reach their full potential, but we certainly have another component, which is to help them journey in their faith. To us our religious, or faith, component makes us unique. There are differences, and we try to make sure that these beliefs permeate into everything that we do. This we see in our programs. Also, we have our religious components and several service projects and things where the students are involved in the community, learning how to be important people or valuable people in our community and to recognize the difference and how complex a community is and that there are so many needs out there.

Our philosophy is different. We allow all students to take the more challenging courses. We do not limit children because they are perhaps just at the borderline. We allow them to take the tougher courses that would open up more doors to them and certainly not limit their choices for the future. We counsel children to take challenging courses, and we feel that in limiting students because of their perhaps lower grade levels, we would be disadvantaging our students. I think that philosophy sometimes affects us when you look at our achievement results.

I think the last point is that we hope that our children grow up with attitudes and understandings and abilities that are appropriate to their grade level and that they will be valued contributors to our communities.

At this point I would like to turn it over back to Dr. Miller.

Dr. Miller: Thank you, Chair Belcourt.

On the screen now you have some statistical information about Calgary. As you know, Calgary is a booming city, and the extent and pace of the growth in Calgary has brought with it some unique challenges. Chair Belcourt outlined a few of them, but I wanted to comment in terms of the impact the extent of the growth and the pace of the growth has had on things like accommodations, on the increase in the ESL population that we serve – staffing challenges have been huge for us in every area in our school district – and also the diversity of the children that we serve now and the families that we serve.

One of the things that we've really noticed is that because of the changing fabric of the city of Calgary, it's ever more important now to have an integrated approach to meeting the needs of the children. The importance of working very closely with our partners has never been as important as it is now. We find that children are coming with economic needs, social needs, mental health needs: a variety of needs that require us to work closely with our partners in order to support the children that we serve.

1:10

In terms of our budget process, which is on the next slide, I want to point out our commitment to a collaborative budget process. If you look at where we start, our budget process according to this slide

commences in December and January of the previous year. But I want to point out further down that bimonthly and quarterly updates to the board are an ongoing part of our budget process. At every board meeting we have budget as a standing item on the agenda, and we speak to budget and update our stakeholders on where we are.

We start the official budget process, the more intense process, in December usually. We get input from stakeholders, and that input is critical because it helps us to determine our budget priorities. Based on that input, we develop our budget. When we develop the budget, of course, there are always assumptions. Some of the assumptions that we look at are the salaries. Fortunately, now that's not a big assumption that we have to consider anymore, which is a really good thing. But in the 2006-2007 year, which is what we're looking at, certainly salaries would be one of the assumptions that we would have been looking at. Enrolment information, grant levels, and identified priorities by the stakeholders: these would be some of the assumptions we would bring into the development of the budget.

Once the budget speech comes down, we then look at what additions have to be made, what deletions we have to make, how we are going to fine-tune in order to be within the numbers. Our budget is approved by the board, and then on a bimonthly and quarterly basis we update the board on our standing.

We have an audit committee which is made up of a committee of the whole. That was the case in 2006-2007. We've just added an external component to that. Then we have our audited financial statements, and our AFS is approved by the board after the audit committee.

With that, I'll turn it over to John. John is going to speak to the budget process a little bit more.

Mr. Deaussy: Thanks, Dr. Miller. Trustee Belcourt and Dr. Miller have talked a little bit about the context going into 2006-2007. If we go back to the budget that we did for 2006-2007, when we first looked at maintaining status co-operations from the previous year plus what we projected for new expenditures, we had an \$8.8 million shortfall when we started the process. As we went through, we ended up actually doing some cutting both to nonsalary budgets and to salaries and staff positions in that year leading up to 2006-2007. As you can see, we ended up cutting all of our central office departments. Our instructional services department was cut by staff and nonsalary, and we had a reduction in teaching positions and teaching assistant positions leading into that year.

Moving forward, if we now look at the end of 2006-2007 and what exactly transpired that year, we had total revenues of just under \$367 million, of which approximately 93 per cent were provincial grants. Now, the way we depict it in the graph is that we show the local property tax portion separate. What happens in fact, though, is that our provincial grants are just essentially reduced by the amount of the local property tax. Also in there is a small portion for capital allocations, school generated funds, and some others.

Our expenditures for that year were just under \$362.3 million, and of course primarily that's made up, 76 per cent, of salary and benefits. Then we have in there as well supplies and materials, transportation, utilities, depreciation, and debt and insurance.

The net of the year was that we ended up with about a four and a half million dollar surplus in 2006-2007. That was made up both of accumulated surplus and some operating reserves, where we had money that we had committed to spend. The actual expenditures weren't recognized until the following year. Some of the reasons for the differences were around that we had some increased enrolment in that particular year and increased grant levels from what we had assumed when we did our budget.

Part of what Dr. Miller spoke to as one of the challenges we had in that particular year was that it was difficult to fill some of our staff vacancies. It's not exactly the kind of budget windfall that you want: you've got this salary money that you can't spend because you can't hire people. Particularly in our operations and maintenance area that was the case in this particular year.

In the packages that you received, you'll note that our auditor is actually Ernst & Young, not the Auditor General. I just wanted to make that clear. In the documents that you have there is an audit opinion from Ernst & Young that is unqualified for the year, and there is also the letter of recommendations which basically said that there were no significant control issues within the district in that year. We were pleased with both of these, and this is what we strive for on an annual basis.

I'll now turn it back over to Dr. Miller to discuss the accountability pillar.

Dr. Miller: Thank you. On your screen you see that in measures and categories we have 16 measures grouped into seven categories. Each measure is evaluated on achievement against fixed provincial standards and improvement based on comparing current results with the past three-year average. The two evaluations are combined, as you know, to come up with an overall evaluation. For 2006-2007 our overall measures were: two excellent, 10 good, one acceptable, one issue, and zero concern. You have them here more graphically displayed.

The accountability pillar for us is something that we focus on with our parent community, with all of our stakeholder groups. When we put our three-year plan together, it is based on everybody working together to look at where we are and where we want to go next. The big question that we use in guiding us in moving forward with our accountability is: what would it look like if the best happened, and what do we need to do in order to get there? That's been our guiding principle as we move forward.

If you look at the next slide, we highlight some of the results. We're pleased with our accountability pillar and where we're going. We're very optimistic about the achievement of our students and about the demonstration of excellence in our board. I think that you'll see from some of the results we've highlighted that we have a focus on continued improvement, that we set high standards for ourselves and for the children in our district and for the district itself, and that we try to do whatever we need to do in order to make that happen and to demonstrate continual improvement.

With that, I'd like to turn it over to Superintendent Strother. Thank you.

Mr. Strother: Thank you, Dr. Miller. I'd like to talk a little bit about accommodations and class size. The two go hand in hand, as you'll see as we talk about this.

Calgary Catholic, as we identified in our needs last year, has an immediate need for a school in the southeast of Calgary. That's in the town of Copperfield. It currently is slated for a phase 2 P3 school that would be built in 2012. We have a school right now, St. Albert the Great, which opened two years ago, and in the two years that it's been open, it currently sits at 894 students. That was a school that was built for 800 students. It's a small core, a core of about 400, with 18 portables currently attached to it. Now, that school as it stands right now took in 154 kindergarten students this year and will only graduate 52 grade 9 students, so it's a net of 102 extra students into the school for next year. So we are currently in a real capacity issue in that school itself.

The district also requires additional modular classrooms and appropriate funding for moving these modular classrooms. Cur-

rently we have quite a substantial need to get classes moved to the appropriate places. The issues, as I mentioned, of accommodations and class size are definitely linked right now.

We have been using a core modular philosophy for some time. Since 1980 Calgary Catholic has been using modular or portable classrooms attached to small core schools. This way in the community themselves we can build a school that's necessary to build for the capacity of the community itself, and when that community gets smaller as it ages, we can pull away the portables and move them off to different areas. That's why Calgary Catholic currently runs at quite a high capacity. When we're looking at empty classroom spaces in Calgary Catholic itself, we don't have a lot of empty classroom spaces. We have the schools that fit the communities in all of the communities. This is a long-term solution that we've been using right now that has worked very successfully for us.

As we talk about the issues of accommodations and class size being linked, St. Albert the Great is a great example right now. It is a school on the outside of the city; that's where our bigger schools right now are. When we look at class sizes in those schools, they're often quite a bit higher than some of our schools in the inner city or other areas. We have very, very large schools with quite large classrooms because we're trying to keep kids in their own community.

1:20

If you move on to the next slide, it talks a bit about our accommodation and class size again, the class size averages in 2006-2007. You'll notice that we met our class size guidelines for all grade levels except for K to 3. At that time and currently our constraint is space and the locations of students. As I mentioned, with St. Albert the Great being an example, when you are on the outside of the city and we have those big schools that are being built, we have large class sizes in those, and that certainly raises our average overall. Our focus as we work through this right now is on the K to 3 class sizes, and we're looking at strategic measures in order to lower that class size in particular.

As mentioned, the schools with the largest class sizes are in the new areas. They are at or near capacity or actually over capacity, as I mentioned with St. Albert the Great. One of the measures that we're using to try to get more teachers into these classes and try to lower the class sizes is to have some team teaching situations, but there's a lot of professional development needed for that. Lots of support has to come in when you're looking at the style and flexibility of teachers working with students and with parents. There are a lot of facets to consider. It's not just about putting two people into one class to work with the class. Of course, space is an issue as well. If you do have two teachers in one classroom with, perhaps, 42 or 45 children, that is a space issue also.

When we move students to schools with space, that would increase our transportation costs, it would put a further strain on the transportation companies in Calgary, which is a huge issue right now, and it's the least desirable option for parents. Our parents have been very supportive of our efforts to date in lowering class sizes. I know they appreciate the small class size initiative, as does Calgary Catholic. It's been a great influx of teachers into our system and has drastically lowered our class sizes, so it's worked out very, very well for us.

Two hundred and twenty-eight point five of the 262.5 class teachers – that's almost 93 per cent – have been placed in the elementary classrooms, and that's where our focus has been with this. We've used a holistic model in order to distribute. We have site-based plus centrally based management looking at every single classroom in K to 9 in order to make the class size work as best as possible. We look at the numbers of children in the class, we have

our principals organize their schools, we analyze their organization, and we give them ways of hopefully reorganizing if we're seeing places that aren't working. We base it on basic numbers, the complexity of the students and their diverse needs, and parental expectations in those schools. It's very difficult to have a very small class in one division but very high classes in the other division. We're trying to work around all the hot spots as we move forward.

One of the issues with the class size for us is the idea that we do have enough teachers at the K to 3 level in order to make our class size work at 17 to 1, but again the students aren't coming to us in those types of numbers. If you were to look at Commonwealth Stadium and take all of our K to 3 students and put them on the floor of Commonwealth Stadium and all of our teachers were in the stands, if they went in and took out groups of 17, we would have enough teachers in order to make our class sizes 17 to 1. Unfortunately, they're not coming in those types of sizes, so it makes it a little more difficult.

With that, I'll pass it on to Dr. Miller.

Dr. Miller: Thank you, Gary. I would just like to wrap up by saying that we've provided you with extensive documentation, we've given you a little presentation to give you a bit of a flavour of our district, and we want to thank you for giving us an opportunity to come today and present to you. We are working very collaboratively with the ministries of Education and Infrastructure to address some of our most pressing needs, and we are very optimistic about going forward. We have excellent working relationships with all of our stakeholder groups, and we look forward to moving forward with a sense of shared responsibility.

Thank you very much. We look forward to your questions at this time.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Dr. Miller.

The chair would like to recognize Mr. Brian Mason, who has just come in to participate, hopefully, in the proceedings this afternoon.

Before we get to the members' questions, Mr. Dunn or your staff.

Mr. Dunn: Mr. Saher will read in the same questions that we had this morning, the same observations.

The Chair: Okay. I appreciate that.

Mr. Saher: Thank you. There are three matters in the Auditor General's public reporting relevant to the committee's meeting with school jurisdictions. The first is school board budgeting. Volume 2 of our 2006 annual report contained an examination of school board budgeting processes. We made several recommendations to the Department of Education for improving budgeting and interim financial reporting. These recommendations will assist school boards in strengthening governance and accountability processes related to the jurisdiction's financial affairs.

The second matter was assessing and prioritizing Alberta's infrastructure needs. Volume 1 of our 2007 annual report contained an examination of capital planning. This material is relevant to school boards, particularly in the area of identifying, prioritizing, and remediating deferred maintenance.

Our April 2008 report at page 215 contained a summary of management letter points that had been made to individual school jurisdictions. These recommendations fell into the following categories: financial reporting and governance, internal control weaknesses, and information technology management.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

If members have any interest in questions – Mr. Mason, thank you – we will start. The list is short now with Mr. Chase, followed by Mr. Griffiths, and then Teresa Woo-Paw, Mr. Mason, Mr. Dallas.

Mr. Chase, if you could proceed, please.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. The Auditor General did a systems audit of 13 school districts in the province. The focus of the audit was the budgeting and forecasting process. The results of the audit were mostly favourable, and the Auditor General had two specific recommendations, 25 and 26, in his 2005-2006 annual report. What has your district sought to improve in its budgeting process since the Auditor General's 2005-2006 audit and subsequent recommendations?

Dr. Miller: Thank you, Mr. Chase. Through you, Chair, we have really focused on collaboration and shared responsibility for the budget and shared responsibility for having a budget that's responsive to the needs of the people that we serve. So collaboration and shared responsibility have been a big focus for us.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. My second question: how does your district ensure that input from all stakeholders – teachers, parents, board administration, et cetera – is reflected in your budget? Obviously, from your first answer, collaboration is a large part of it, but if you'd care to expand.

Dr. Miller: We have a number of vehicles in place for our school councils to have input through district-wide sessions that we have with our school councils. All principals work with their school councils to get input, and then we meet with principals to get that input. We also do now a budget prioritizing activity where after we get all that feedback, we then take it back out to all of the stakeholder groups and say: "This is what everyone has said. Now, what do you identify as the priorities in all of these things?" That really helps us to build the capacity of all the groups in understanding what all the issues are of all the other groups, so that has served us very well.

Mr. Chase: Thank you.

Mr. Griffiths: Where do I start? The first question I have is a point of clarification. Actually, Mr. Deausy, I think it was a comment that you made during the PowerPoint presentation. You indicated that you had an \$8.8 million shortfall – I believe about \$4 million was made up from laying off some staff, some teachers and teachers' assistants – and then you made the comment on the next slide that you had a windfall on the teachers' salaries, but you couldn't find teachers to hire. I must have missed something in the presentation because that sounds wrong. Were those over two different years?

Mr. Deausy: No. When we started the 2006-2007 budget process we obviously had to make assumptions back in the January-February time frame. When we were looking at it and making assumptions on the grants, we came up with the shortfall, so we made changes from there. When the actual grants then came out and when our student enrolments came out in particular, that's when we were over what we had actually assumed, and that's where the windfall came from. On the teachers' salaries what we assumed as 3 per cent in that year was 4 per cent, so the expenditure was actually higher on that. The difficulty in hiring was more on our plant operations and maintenance side and some of our noncertificated positions. We had

positions there. We had money to expend on them. We just couldn't find bodies to go into the positions. Does that clarify?

1:30

Mr. Griffiths: Yes, that clarifies. That's excellent. Thank you.

In the Education annual report 2007-2008 on page 155 it shows Calgary Roman Catholic separate school division with cash and temporary investments of \$47 million. I'm wondering what protocols, what processes you have in place to make sure that money is properly managed and funded and that you're not buying asset-backed commercial paper, I hope. I'm just wondering what you have for a process to manage those funds.

Mr. Deausy: For sure. We have a position in our accounting area that is in charge of treasury, and any investment that we make is governed under the Trustee Act, I believe, which really reduces what we can invest money in. Anything we invest in would be a bank acceptance or would be in one of the chartered banks. Nowhere would we be in the U.S. subprime mortgage market or anything like that; it's prohibited by the Trustee Act. So everything we do is just basically grade A bank paper.

Mr. Griffiths: Okay. Excellent. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Mason, please, followed by Ms Woo-Paw.

Mr. Mason: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I'm waiting for a bit of information, so I'll take a pass and let a government member go ahead.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Ms Woo-Paw, please.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you. The instruction costs for the students increased by 4.3 per cent and 7.7 per cent from 2005 to 2007, but your maintenance cost per student increased by 13 per cent in 2005-2006 and then another 10 per cent in 2006-2007. So my question is whether you believe there is adequate funding to address the rising maintenance costs for our school systems.

Mr. Barbero: The maintenance costs that we're finding right now are not adequate to meet the demands that we have, and a lot of that is driven by our aging schools in our district. We're basically meeting basic maintenance demands, not dealing with deferred maintenance.

Ms Woo-Paw: What is your deferred maintenance budget?

Mr. Barbero: Are you asking what the deferred maintenance amount of dollars would be in our district?

Ms Woo-Paw: Yeah.

Mr. Barbero: Right now on paper with the government audit it's \$26 million. That's only for the 60 schools that have been audited. We still have 40 schools to be audited.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Chase, please.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. The Catholic board in Calgary has done magic with their modulars, and you've managed to move them around and demonstrate great flexibility. But modulars become unportable portables over a period of time, and I'm just wondering what the average age of your portables is.

Mr. Barbero: At the present time we have 604 portables, modulars, in our district. They date back to 31 years of age down to the most recent ones that we received from Alberta Infrastructure and Education, so the average age is in about the 18-year range. Thirty per cent of our students are taught in portables.

Mr. Chase: So, basically, you're living on borrowed time with the portables. They meet the immediate needs, but they're aging, and that adds to your infrastructure deficit.

I also noted that you mentioned St. Albert the Great school and the fact that it had 18 portables. It seems to me that the Chestermere school has a similar number or maybe even a number that surpasses that, so you're doing the best that you can to meet the flexible needs of your system. How has the province been able to keep up with your demand for portables? What is on your order list in order to deal with the overpopulation of schools like St. Albert the Great?

Mr. Barbero: In the current year we had requested 20 modulars, and we've been able to obtain six of the 20. There was a great demand in southern Alberta, I believe, over 400 demands for modulars from all the school jurisdictions. So our share has been six of the 20 that we requested.

Mr. Chase: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Dallas, please, followed by Mr. Griffiths.

Mr. Dallas: Thanks very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you to our guests for joining us this afternoon. My questions relate back to the independent auditor. I was delighted to hear that you had an unqualified report. Obviously that would be a good way to meet each other earlier or again soon. The role of the auditor extends well beyond the final qualification or report, and I'm wondering what contractual services or value-added the auditor has provided in terms of recommendations, whether it's process-oriented or relative in particular to the governance of your organization.

Mr. Deausy: As part of the audit they will review the controls within the district, and they will provide kind of, I guess, a management letter that will provide any major control gaps that we would have, and then they also will advise us of any more minor control gaps that we would have. In addition, in the last two years, as Lucy had mentioned in the presentation, we have the audit committee, which is a committee of the whole of the board. The auditors have been more involved with the audit committee, and in fact this is kind of an evolving process. With this year coming up, our '07-08, this is the first year that the audit committee has been involved up front, the first time that we have brought external expertise into our audit committee as well. That's from the urgings of the Auditor General in recommendations 25 and 26, that they spoke of earlier. It has been an evolving relationship with the auditors working more with the board and working more from a control perspective, which has just been an evolution of the audit profession, which really started with the Enrons of the world and those kinds of things.

Dr. Miller: If I could just add to that as well, in the last couple of years what I've really enjoyed watching is how open the auditing

firm is with the board of trustees in that committee of the whole. Trustees have really been excellent at asking every possible question and having every possible concern addressed to see if there's any need to change any of their policies. They ask very direct questions and get very direct answers from the auditor. That has been very helpful to us.

Mr. Dallas: Thank you. Just a clarification, then: a third or another chartered accountant firm with internal audit expertise is contracted by the organization to work with the audit committee?

Mr. Deaussy: No. What we've done is that we've sought volunteers in the community to provide external expertise to the audit committee. The recommendation is that it be a chartered accountant, a CGA, or a CMA, somebody who comes with financial statement experience that can, I guess, add another dimension to our board of trustees, who are also part of it. So it's not a contracted relationship; in fact, they're volunteer positions.

Mr. Dallas: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Griffiths, please, followed by Mr. Chase.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you. On the unaudited schedules to the financial statements, year ended August 31, 2007, in schedule E I noted uses of net school-generated funds, so those would be how you generate the funds within your school jurisdiction. You have a category, family literacy and other community resources, and the balance is zero. Nothing was expended. I'm wondering if that's an anomaly because we don't have any year over year comparisons or details about what it's about. It's probably pretty detailed, so if you need to get back to us, that's fine.

Mr. Deaussy: Yeah. I think we can move on, and I will seek out some more information on that and try to get back to you by the end of the meeting, if that would be okay.

Mr. Griffiths: Whenever.

The Chair: Yes. Mr. Deaussy, you can just provide the information in writing through the committee clerk to all the members, if it's not possible.

Mr. Deaussy: Certainly. Okay.

Mr. Griffiths: My second question. I did want to commend you. I really appreciated how thorough the performance measures were in reading, but there's always room for improvement. Your very first performance measure under goal 1, which measures safe and caring environments for students. I know it's a satisfaction survey, which is sometimes more of a public perception of achieving goals rather than whether or not the goals have been achieved, and I'm wondering if you've considered measuring the actual incidents of violence or bullying and reporting on those, whether it's the actual numbers or just the rate of change per student, and then if you've also considered doing value-for-money performance measures that compare whether or not the money that goes in actually produces some results, if you've considered stretching that far and if you're working on improvements in that area.

1:40

Dr. Miller: Actually, the board of trustees is looking at linking

specific indicators of success into the monitoring reports that I provide to the board. I think those kinds of suggestions would certainly be reflected in those kinds of expectations that the board puts on me. They are very good about outlining very specifically what a demonstration of compliance would look like, and this year we're in a process of looking at it to define it even further. We think that our governance model is an evolving one.

Chair Belcourt, would you like to respond or comment on that as well?

Mrs. Belcourt: Every year we do look at our policies. One discussion that we did have is that we're starting to fine-tune and say: okay, how can we measure this? So I think the pressure is, you know, to find something that works for all of us and set up some standards and see that they can be measured.

Mr. Griffiths: Excellent. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Deaussy, do you have any further information you would like to add in regard to Mr. Griffiths' first question?

Mr. Deaussy: I don't. I'll respond in writing, I think, once we can get back into the detail of it, and I'll try to go back a year for you as well so I can give you a comparison to see whether or not we even had any coded in the previous year. It may be the case that we just haven't coded it that way or the fundraising wasn't done that way. I'll get back to you with a more complete answer in writing.

Mr. Griffiths: Excellent. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Chase, please, followed by Mr. Bhardwaj.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. My question has to do with the infrastructure deficit that's unfortunately saddling all Alberta school boards. My first question is: how much is the deferred maintenance in your district, and what is the primary source of that maintenance?

Mr. Barbero: The deferred maintenance is \$26 million, as I mentioned, on 60 schools that have been audited. It would probably be another percentage higher than that with the remaining 40 schools we're auditing. The biggest cost factor for us is renovating, heating plants, and electrical. Also, roofs have taken a lot of maintenance that's required in these older buildings.

Mr. Chase: Thank you.

Then my second question is: what has been the response of the ministry in terms of eliminating the deficit? Or another way of stating it is: what fraction or percentage of the money needed have you actually received? You indicated \$20 million, which seems like, on the larger scale, a fairly small amount of money. How much of that \$20 million requested have you actually received?

Mr. Barbero: The deferred maintenance, our figure with the government's audit, is \$26 million. Again, there are monies that are dedicated to school districts to deal with the maintenance, yet once in a while we receive blips of money, as I will call them, injections. For example, very recently we received \$15 million to address some of the drastic needs that were with Calgary Catholic. Calgary public received \$30 million, I believe, to address some of the deferred projects. That is really welcome money.

As I mentioned earlier, we have aging schools, and that's where we're just putting a lot of our money into. The other drain on the money that we're receiving, though, is the new, if you will, health and safety aspects of schools that has really taken a lot of costings. We go into a building that is, say, 35 or 40 years of age. We spend an inordinate amount of money in those buildings prior to doing any renovation on asbestos removal for the health and safety of that project. Those are increased costs that we wouldn't have seen many, many years ago.

Mr. Chase: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Bhardwaj, please, followed by Mr. Mason.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My question is around diversity and high school completion. How much of a factor is the diversity really playing in terms of the high school completion rate?

Dr. Miller: It certainly impacts in our district because, as Chair Belcourt said when she did her introductory remarks, we try to provide opportunities for children to take the most challenging courses that they can. We don't want them making career-limiting choices early. We encourage children to stay in the high-level courses, the more difficult courses. The more diverse your population is and the more varied the needs are, the more varied the services and the integrated services have to be. We have really noticed that in Calgary Catholic in the last few years. It certainly impacts on high school completion, and it impacts on diploma exams and how students are achieving.

When we look at our retention rate and our comeback rate, the number of students who actually come back to our system, who stay in our system, who graduate from our system, who go on to postsecondary, it's very good. That is because we're doing a good job, I think, of meeting the diverse needs, but it's not without its challenges in a city like Calgary, with the diversity increasing.

Does that answer your question?

Mr. Bhardwaj: Somewhat. My supplementary question to that, then, would be: is anybody really keeping data or keeping track of those students, tracking them over three- to five-year periods, to know for sure that that's what's happening, that where it's a hindrance to program diversity, it's a hindrance to their success?

Dr. Miller: Well, it is tracked through our accountability measures, so we do track all of those areas. Are we looking at how much money we're putting into a program and whether or not that program is netting results? We are doing that internally for some of our programs to see if you're getting value for dollar when you put certain interventions in place.

Mr. Bhardwaj: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Mason, please, followed by Mr. Fawcett.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. Welcome. Thank you for making the time to travel to Edmonton and make your presentation.

My question has to do with the capital needs of the district, specifically new schools. I see that three schools have been approved as part of the new P3 program. Looking back a few years ago, I see that the board and the superintendent raised a number of

concerns about the P3 model. I would ask you if you still have concerns with respect to that, whether or not this is your preferred option for new schools, fully recognizing the desperate need for schools that many of our districts are under, including yours.

Dr. Miller: We have worked very closely with the government to make sure that the concerns we had about the P3 model were addressed going into the signing of the P3 agreement. You know, I think we've come a long way with designing P3s so that they meet most of our needs. Most important to us is to get schools in places where the children are, so whatever that is going to look like, we're going to work with that and make it work because we desperately need schools in our areas where we have a lot of kids and no buildings.

Mike, you've been intimately involved, really, with P3 since the beginning. If you'd like to comment further on that.

Mr. Barbero: We've had the opportunity to meet with Alberta Education and Alberta Infrastructure and had the opportunity for input into the P3 operations, the design of the schools and how they work. What was really near and dear to our hearts as a district was the fact that the district would have – and I'll use the word "control" – control of these schools 24/7, and that was guaranteed. Our biggest fear was that if we went into a P3 – and again it was in its novice stage – we would lose control of the use of these schools after hours, on weekends, et cetera. It's been guaranteed to us that they are our schools to be operated within our guidelines, as we currently do, and that was a real blessing for us.

The other interest that we had was in ensuring that our staff would be in these schools, that the caretaking staff would be our caretakers, that they would not be contracted-out services, and that was also guaranteed.

The third major issue was the materials that are used in schools – they are for a long run, 30 years – to make sure that these schools will be here 15, 25, 30 years from now in as good a shape as the ones that we have been able to build in the past.

Those major concerns for us were discussed with the various government agencies, and we were very happy in the dialogue back and forth on receiving these schools.

Dr. Miller: The issue of having the P3 schools work with providing opportunities for after school programming, like providing space for community use, before and after school clubs, and so on, has yet to be worked out. Community spaces were not built into P3s, so we need to find a way to address that issue. That's something that we still have to work out.

1:50

Mr. Mason: Okay. Thank you very much.

A supplementary. I gathered that there were some concerns, that there has been some negotiation, and that you are partly satisfied or satisfied on a number of things that were important. Would it be fair to say that given the desperate need for new schools in Calgary, the P3 schools were essentially the only option that the government was prepared to offer you?

Dr. Miller: I don't know if we can comment on that. Chair Belcourt, did you want to?

Mrs. Belcourt: Yes. The question was asked, you know: if we didn't go along with the P3s, was there an alternative? We were told no. It had to be P3s.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Fawcett, please, followed by Mr. Chase.

Mr. Fawcett: Yes. Thank you very much for coming up to Edmonton to appear before our committee. It's really appreciated.

I wanted to ask some questions around the school-generated funds. I noticed that the line item is approximately 3 and a half million dollars or just over that. Could you please tell me what that entails, if that's school fees, what other fees that includes, what the breakdown is between the various fees, and how that money is collected?

Mr. Deausy: Those are fundraising activities. That is what the school-generated funds are. There is a breakdown in the audited financial statements that we provided in schedule E, and it's broken down by field trips, school site beautification. It would be appendix E or schedule E in the AFS, and it will kind of break the amount down.

Mr. Fawcett: My supplemental, then, is: for this period what school fees were collected, and how much revenue was brought in from the various school fees?

Mr. Deausy: The gross school-generated funds for the period – that would be fundraising activities, student fees noninstructional, donations and grants to schools, and others, which are, you know, noon hour aides for lunches, et cetera – was \$14.3 million. Again, schedule E of the AFS. Those are our sources of school-generated funds. Then down below you have the uses of the net school-generated funds, which is what is reported in the financial statements. That's, you know, a quarter of a million dollars to extracurricular activities, about \$50,000 to school trips, and just under \$900,000 to equipment. Schedule E breaks it down.

The Chair: Thank you.

Is there anything else, Mr. Fawcett, at this time?

Mr. Fawcett: No, not right now.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Chase, please, followed by Ms Woo-Paw.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I'll think I'll follow up on Mr. Fawcett's question about school fees and fundraising. I very much support Bishop Henry's stance on casinos, that the Alberta government is responsible for providing not only a basic education but an education that is going to benefit all students. I'm just wondering. Because the bishop indicated kind of a five-year weaning period, have you started to feel the effects of the limited number of opportunities for fundraising? With the casinos it's unfortunately a one-shot effort that produces a great deal of money, often necessary for basic essentials. Have you been able to come up with some creative alternatives to the one-shot casino and slots?

Mrs. Belcourt: Well, we haven't really seen that much of an impact. Some schools had, you know, a commitment for two years down the road, so the agreement with the bishop was to let those that had commitments finish those commitments. I would say that those were probably the schools that have a high need for that. But in the future we are looking at setting up a foundation that we can have because we definitely have some have-not schools that will rely on some sort of extra funding or outside funding.

Dr. Miller, have you got something to add?

Dr. Miller: Well, we are in the process of setting up a foundation, but I think Chair Belcourt said it very well. Not all of the schools use casinos as a source of fundraising, and some of the ones that were using casinos had made a commitment. Our goal and our commitment to the bishop and to the district is that by March of 2010 we will be out of the use of casinos as a source of fundraising. We hope that by that time we have a foundation established that will allow us to generate some support, but that will not certainly abdicate schools from the responsibility of doing some site-based fundraising as well.

Mr. Chase: I note that a large part of the Catholic-based religion is church support, and you've mentioned the number of immigrant children, and the Catholic Immigration Society is extremely supportive of the work of the schools. I'm just wondering: in terms of ESL funding, special-needs funding, are you able to meet the challenges that you are facing with increased immigration and the special needs that result from refugee children?

Dr. Miller: Actually, we just had a conversation about that on Monday. I know that in this province we're in the throes of re-examining how special education is funded. We have a profile as a district in terms of identification, and we're just vacillating right now, deciding whether or not we want to open that up because you run a risk when you do open it up. But, certainly, our demands right now, the demands on our special education money, far outweigh the money we're getting right now. We've had an increase of 126 students in the past month to the demands on that money. It's a challenge in the Calgary area because of the kind of families who are moving in and the kinds of services the children require. We're definitely challenged.

Mr. Chase: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms Woo-Paw, please, followed by Mr. Mason.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you. In order to achieve goal 1, high-quality learning opportunities for all, you have identified an outcome: "Children at risk have their needs addressed through effective programs and supports." One of the strategies you have identified is to employ strategies to increase the number of self-identified aboriginal learners. I'd like to better understand why the district feels that there's a need to have strategies to increase the self-identification of these students.

Dr. Miller: Well, we have students who do not identify, and if they don't identify, then the funding is not there, you know, for those children. We're trying to build that relationship with the children and with the families so that they do self-identify on an annual basis, which is what has to be done in order for the funding to be forthcoming. It's building up that relationship so that the children and the families feel comfortable in identifying. Does that answer your question?

Ms Woo-Paw: Yeah. There are people who believe that it's better that we don't make the differentiation between aboriginal students and other students. I guess I'm trying to get from an educator's perspective that actually it would be more helpful if we actually identified them.

Dr. Miller: Well, the funding is linked to the identification. In the ideal situation it would be grand if we didn't have to identify them

in order to receive the funding, but that's not the way it works. The funding is linked to the identification. Once they come into the school, they're not identified as different, but on paper, in registration and on their annual forms, the self-identification is possible because that's what links to the funding. Once they come into the school, they're not separated from the general population. You'd never know who was who. They're all integrated, and everybody works great together, but for funding purposes it's certainly helpful if they identify.

2:00

Ms Woo-Paw: How does your system report publicly on the performance of these students? You track them.

Dr. Miller: Yes, we do.

Ms Woo-Paw: So how do you report publicly on the performance of these students?

Dr. Miller: I'm going to ask Superintendent MacKay if she'd like to answer that in a little bit more depth. Superintendent MacKay is the superintendent of instructional services.

Mrs. MacKay: Actually, this is part of our First Nations, Métis, and Inuit project that we work with Alberta Education on. We actually track the performance levels, the attendance levels, the graduation rates of all of our students who are self-identified. That's tracked on an ongoing basis. We work with our school admin teams in order to then support them through the various resources we have. That includes teachers, assistants, family-school liaison workers, and psychologists.

Ms Woo-Paw: But when it's not identified as a performance measure, we the public don't get to see it.

Mrs. MacKay: Well, we do have included our number of graduates as well as the achievement test scores as well as other things that we report in our AERR, or our annual education report.

Ms Woo-Paw: It's in here?

Mrs. MacKay: Yeah.

Ms Woo-Paw: Okay. Thank you.

Dr. Miller: In our district we also report that in our monitoring reports to the board.

Ms Woo-Paw: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.
Mr. Mason, please, followed by Mr. Fawcett.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I would like to go back to some of the outstanding issues around the operation of schools built under the P3 process. I would particularly like to get the administration's and board's view with respect to the maintenance on a long-term basis of these schools and also about after-hours access for the community.

Mr. Barbero: For the maintenance there's a separate maintenance agreement that is outside of the jurisdiction. So that goes back to the contractor that builds the P3 school. They're responsible for the

maintenance of the building. The district would be responsible for the educational operation and the caretaking piece of the building.

As far as the use of the building after hours under our joint use agreements, for example with the city of Calgary, that is still available for all joint uses in the community; for example, Boy Scouts, Girl Guides, or the various sports teams that want to come in and use a facility. That is still allowed, use of a P3 school. Those operational issues there have not changed from the current practice with the exception of maintenance, which will be done by an external party.

Mr. Mason: If I could then ask what the outstanding issues are because there was some reference to issues that needed to be resolved. From your answer it would seem that everything is finalized.

Mr. Barbero: The outstanding issues would be for before-school and after-school uses by other community agencies that would come onto those P3 sites. That's the outstanding issue at the present time that still has to be ironed out.

Mr. Mason: And that's it?

Mr. Barbero: From that perspective.

Mr. Mason: Great.

The Chair: Mr. Fawcett, please, followed by Mr. Chase.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I want to follow up on the issue of school fees. Could you please let me know what school fees were charged to students in this year.

Mr. Deaussy: The noninstructional fees of just under \$5.5 million that are in schedule E of the AFS are the noninstructional fees. Those are determined at the school level. If I go back to the statement of revenues and expenses, which is back on page 5 of my document here, we have instruction resource fees of \$586,000. Those are determined at the district level. The total of the two is approximately \$6 million.

Mr. Fawcett: My supplemental would be on the noninstructional fees that are charged by schools. What is the process of charging that fee? Obviously, being on the school board, I went through some of these. One of the concerns is that school boards are allowed to charge this in a nonmandatory manner, and I'm not sure that, not just within your school jurisdiction but right across our province, that message is being conveyed to parents, that this is not a mandatory school fee. What processes are in place to ensure that parents know that this is an optional school fee?

Dr. Miller: I would say that at the school level it's through discussions with council.

To just put my little two cents' worth in, at the school level as a principal I would have that discussion with the chair and the council at my school and talk about what the fees are going to be for next year. That's not something I would decide in isolation. You know, that would be something we would talk about in terms of what we were going to charge this year.

Gary, you might want to say something on it.

Mr. Strother: Actually, the process has to be discussed with the school council, and the school council chair has to sign off on all of

the fees that are going to be charged for the following year. Now, your question is: how do we get it across to the parents that these are not mandatory fees? There are discussions with parents through school council. The discussion is there, but then any time there is an issue with any parent with the school fee, if they approach the principal, arrangements are made if they cannot pay or if they need to pay in installments or any of those things have to happen. We never make any fee mandatory. We do not force any families. We don't hold back report cards. We don't do any of those types of things. We make sure that families are aware that if there are issues and the fees cannot be paid, then we look at the issues, and then we work with the family.

The Chair: Mr. Chase, please, followed by Ms Woo-Paw.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. In the interest of my colleagues having some more questions, I'm going to just ask one at this time as opposed to two, and it's a follow-up on the P3s. Two concerns that have been brought up are the cost of, basically, the mortgage of a P3 school over 33 years – I know that isn't a major concern of the school boards because it's paid for by the government, but what has not been made clear is the fine print of the P3 contract – and the liability not only for 33 years of mortgage payment but the maintenance versus custodial duties. In the fine print of the contract the taxpayer is ultimately on the hook should the builder sue the board for failure to maintain the schools. Mr. Barbero, do you have an adequate sense of that fine print, the delineation of what is the custodial responsibility versus the maintenance responsibility? Has that been clarified or spelled out?

Mr. Barbero: Yes, that has been identified and clarified in a fairly lengthy document as to what caretaking responsibilities will be. They're also defined so that they will not impact on the maintenance of a building. As an example, dealing with any of the boiler issues that are there, there are limited procedures that a caretaker will follow to their ability, and then from there it goes over to maintenance so that they do not impact the maintenance of that particular unit. In our current operations the caretaker would do much more than in a P3 school.

Mr. Chase: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chase.

Ms Woo-Paw, please, followed by Mr. Mason.

Ms Woo-Paw: Yes. The school districts and the government have varying budget planning processes and cycles, and it was recommended by the Auditor General that Alberta Education provide guidance to school districts to better co-ordinate the budget planning process. I'm just wondering whether that has been helpful and whether, you know, any improvement came out of that process. Has that happened?

2:10

Mr. Deaussy: It has happened. Out of the recommendations that the Auditor General spoke of, which are 25 and 26, I believe, from the 2005-2006 report, in particular the area that we focused on is around board education and assisting our board in understanding financial statements. The Ministry of Education put on a program where all of our board members attended at that time, too. In the recommendation from the Auditor General audit committees were spoken of and the fact that external representation can be brought into an audit committee, which will provide external experts to the board who

understand and work with financial statements all the time. I think it's particularly important in the accounting environment we're in now, where next year, I believe, the CICA handbook changes almost wholesale and we move towards international financial standards. So those recommendations have been helpful, and we have been acting on those recommendations to assist our trustees in their fiduciary responsibility.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Mason.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Help me understand how the maintenance is going to work. Is there an agreed-upon schedule of maintenance that is conducted? Do the people who build a P3 school subcontract the maintenance to someone else? Just how do you keep on top of the maintenance of the building to make sure that it is properly maintained?

Mr. Barbero: Our understanding at the present time in the P3: once the P3 school is turned over to the district, our caretaking staff has the schedule of operations that they will do there. Any of the maintenance of the building will be done by external partners. So we submit maintenance requests to the contractor, that will then look after all the maintenance requests in the future.

Again the information that we have to this point is that there's a caretaking schedule to a certain level, and then from there it's turned over to the contractors for them to provide maintenance. Then based on the protocol that is there, we contact – and our contact is with Alberta Education and Infrastructure – to see if that maintenance has been done to our satisfaction.

Mr. Mason: So are you then required to monitor the maintenance of each of these schools and then submit that information to Alberta Education, or if you have a concern, then you go through Alberta Infrastructure and not directly to the contractor?

Mr. Barbero: Exactly. For any deficiencies from the contractor Alberta Infrastructure would be our contact if we're not satisfied with the maintenance that we're receiving and the timeliness of their repairs and/or the repair that was done to the issue.

Mr. Mason: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Chase.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Again I'll ask one question in the interest of my colleagues. Page 16 of the Annual Education Results Report 2006-07 notes that inadequate transportation funding has not been addressed and that additional government funding did not cover the \$3.1 million deficit for 2006-07. What does the board anticipate having to cut for the current and future years in order to balance this deficit? How will you make up the money?

Mr. Deaussy: There have been, I guess, a couple of things that we've done. We have looked very hard at our routes and around the scheduling, and we have found some efficiencies to reduce some of that deficit. The monies aren't enveloped anymore. So it's not specifically instruction, specifically transportation, specifically plant operations and maintenance. Really, there's no cutting per se, but we end up using monies from other envelopes, or other pots, if you

will, to supplement on the transportation side. The transportation deficit, you know, will occur because of the price of gas or various things, too. So it will also fluctuate as well.

Trustee Barbero, I think, has something to add.

Mr. Barbero: Again, when the deficit came in, we began looking at the operations of the transportation department, and we began looking at double routing, triple routing, transfer points, becoming much more efficient, changing our school start times and end times so that we can co-ordinate those services. We share transportation as a district. We are coterminous with Rocky View, so we do share our transportation with Rocky View and also with Calgary public on some of the runs, where that's possible, to reduce the costs and also the ride times that are there.

We really start to unravel and look at how we would do business differently, and we really receive a lot of support from our schools. It's starting to wear on the schools because transportation is starting to dictate what some of the school operational day looks like. Also, just the increase of traffic and infrastructure in the inner cities is another added feature. We try to streamline use and make that transportation dollar stretch to the best of our ability.

Mr. Chase: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I have a question at this time, and it would be: what is your advertising budget for your school district? We heard this morning what Edmonton public's was. I would be curious: what is your advertising budget?

Mr. Deaussy: We don't actually have a specific advertising budget. It would be in our communications area. When you say advertising, this would also include our advertising that we do for job postings, et cetera.

The Chair: I'll be specific, Mr. Deaussy. What is your advertising for programs? Am I to understand that you would be competing with Calgary public board for students, and if you are, how do you advertise to parents that they should come to your district?

Dr. Miller: We don't commit substantial amounts of funds to advertising our programs. We do school brochures, and we do a district annual results package that we provide to a wide range of mailees. But we don't do radio ads; we don't do a big publicity campaign as some districts do.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Dallas, please, followed by Mr. Quest.

Mr. Dallas: Thanks, Mr. Chair. My question relates to co-operative ventures with other entities; more specifically, potentially postsecondary institutions or public school facilities. Could you describe if such opportunities have been explored or developed in your region and, if so, what impact you've been able to measure both in terms of value to the learning experience and also taxpayer value in terms of the investment that was required?

Dr. Miller: I would like to ask Superintendent MacKay to come up and speak a little bit to that, and some of the other superintendents may wish to speak about this as well. Many of the partnerships we have embarked on are directly related to program. As I mentioned earlier, with the diversity of the children that we serve, we have found it essential to partner with a number of groups in order to

provide the best possible service for the children in our care. Superintendent MacKay co-ordinates many of these programs, so I'd ask Judy to start.

Mrs. MacKay: Absolutely. There's a huge range that is outlined in some of our monitoring reports, so I won't go through all of them. Certainly, we have a lot within public-sector organizations – Alberta mental health, Calgary health region, child and family services – where we're engaged in collaborative projects to support the students and families in our schools.

We also work very closely with groups like United Way, public charitable organizations, to put in very specific programs. For example, with United Way we have very successful aboriginal programming in a number of our schools where we are able to support pride workers who work with student populations and families. We also have a number of projects that we're working on with immigrant-serving agencies, once again, where we provide programming, but then we link the students and their families up with other organizations that will support them around settlement.

2:20

We have a federal project as well that provides in-school settlement workers that we share with CBE and Calgary Catholic, and that helps those families to address very basic needs: jobs, banking, home, how do we manage in our community to have our needs met. Of course, before they can succeed at school, the students and their families have to be comfortable in their new world. So that has been a very important project utilizing federal funds that support the hiring of those individuals. Then they work in our schools. They also work cross-jurisdiction. We have a total, I think, of 20 workers now, some of them assigned to CBE, some of them assigned to Calgary Catholic. But if we need that particular language or that particular cultural group, we can certainly take advantage of the Calgary board of education. So there are lots of those sharing opportunities. Those are some of the examples.

We have an excellent relationship with Catholic Family Service, Wood's Homes and some of the specialized populations and are able to utilize their resources. They work sometimes in our schools. We also have opportunities to have workers attached to our schools.

That's kind of a thumbnail sketch of some of those things.

Dr. Miller: We also have partnerships with all of our colleges and universities. The results of those we document in terms of where our children are going after they leave school, and that's all reported on in terms of the success of the different groups of students that are associated with either programs in the trades or with St. Mary's University College. We have a special relationship with the University of Calgary and then the colleges as well. So there is a wide range of partnerships in those areas.

Mr. Dallas: Thank you. Just a supplement. That's great to hear. That's a good many, and I'm sure there are more that you haven't been able to mention. Not to be presumptive but to be clear: you're not sharing physical space with either entities from the postsecondary realm or the public school system in terms of utilizing facilities?

Mrs. MacKay: Just to try and be clear with that, we do have through Advanced Education, actually, an on-site project with Bow Valley College for our ESL students where their instructors actually attend our St. Anne Academic Centre. They get to know the students, and it's to help with transition. Then our instructors will also attend there.

In addition to that, we have with SAIT, once again, a pharmacy tech program that's delivered in our high schools. Sometimes our students would take part of that course with SAIT, and that's with an agreement between those two entities of Alberta Education and Advanced Education.

Mr. Dallas: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Quest: I'm just wondering – and this is a very broad question, but I don't have any kids in high school now, so you have to excuse me for not knowing – at the high school level, a grade 11 student, what are the significant differences nowadays in the curriculum? What is different in that grade 11 student's day in the separate system in Calgary and in the public system in Calgary?

Dr. Miller: Although that's a very broad question, it's a question that we ask ourselves every day. A big part of what we do and who we are is making sure that every part of every day in a Catholic school is different than it would be in a public school because our approach to teaching any subject has a permeation of our gospel values. How we deal with things in particular classes would be different in a Catholic school than in a public school, not only how you deal with curriculum but how you interact and how you deal with issues that come up. How you respond to situations is different in a Catholic school because the gospel values are permeated throughout, not only in what we teach but in how we respond. One of the things that I say when I'm talking to students is: when you graduate from one of our schools, we're not only caring about what you know; we care about what you become. So it's an integrated approach.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Mason, please, followed by Ms Woo-Paw.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much. This is probably a sort of touchy question. We have two parallel systems of public education in Alberta and across most of the country. The question that arises in my mind is: what steps could we take to share resources or facilities in a way that does not impact the special character of Catholic education? Are there opportunities to reduce duplication in some way without in any way jeopardizing that aspect?

Dr. Miller: Well, I'll start with this one by saying that if you look at a city like Calgary, we work very closely with our Calgary public board counterparts on a variety of initiatives. As chief superintendent I sit on broad-range committees with the superintendent of the public board. We're always looking at solutions in terms of what we can do together, but how they unfold at the school level is different in the public board and in our board.

There are certainly things we can share. Right now we're working on several initiatives together. With Chief Hanson, our police chief, we're working on strategies that both districts can implement together to support students during the critical hours. We're working through the children's initiative at some of those programs that can be put in place for at-risk kids. They can be put in place in both districts. We can work together. The aboriginal pride program is another example. We both work with that through United Way, but how we integrate it and how we implement it in our specific districts is different because of the perspective that we bring to the table.

There are lots of opportunities to share now, like in transportation

and in other things that we already do. I don't know if anybody else would like to comment on any of that as well. I know that all of the superintendents work with their counterparts in the public board. But when you look at shared space, everybody has too much space in the same area and not enough space in the same area. St. Albert the Great is a good example. It's not as if we could solve our St. Albert the Great problem by sharing a facility with Calgary public. We're desperate for schools in an area that's exploding with little ones, and nobody has schools there, so it's not as if there's waste going on.

For us we have very few classrooms that are sitting empty. We look at classrooms that we have empty to put extra programs in, like for preschool and for ESL and for all the different supports that we need. We don't even have enough classrooms to put in those things in any of our schools. So it's not that we have extra space that somebody else could be sharing. I think we do a pretty good job at sharing as best we can.

Mr. Mason: For my supplemental: well, what about in the new areas? I assume that in the new areas where schools are desperately needed, they are desperately needed in both systems.

Dr. Miller: Yes.

Mr. Mason: So is there an opportunity when planning new facilities to find ways to share some of those facilities?

Dr. Miller: Well, interestingly enough, one of the P3s that we just did the unveiling for is going to see a public school and a Catholic school sharing the same grounds, and eventually there will be recreational facilities that both groups will access. I think that can be what it looks like when the best happens.

Mrs. Belcourt: I think we have to keep in mind that, you know, we do teach the same curriculum, but our schools should be able to demonstrate some of our religious icons, and we want our sacred spaces for our students. I think, too, that there is a difference in kind of attitude because if you're teaching something and there's a teachable moment besides teaching the curriculum, you can impose some of the Catholic beliefs, and I think that's very important.

Mr. Barbero: Just to add on the sharing of facilities, not necessarily with another district, we have our Bishop O'Byrne high school, which is in the south end of the city, which is on the same site, using the same spaces with the city of Calgary public library, the YMCA, and South Fish Creek community centre. There are four different units together in this large complex, and the high school is just one of the larger complex, which has benefits for the community back in using the physical space of the high school and for our students that use the facilities; for example, the Calgary public library, the YMCA with swimming pools, hockey arenas, et cetera. That has really been a large community project for us that we're sharing a footprint with other community needs. That high school, basically, operates from 6 in the morning until midnight seven days a week in conjunction with the community, so it brings added value to the community. Not necessarily another school, though, but at one time Calgary public had two classrooms in that facility for their evening courses and also for preschool.

2:30

Mr. Strother: You also mentioned the outlying areas and having schools that would facilitate both Calgary public and separate students. We have three examples right now of new schools that have opened in new areas: St. Albert the Great we mentioned

already; St. Basil, which is in the northwest, which just opened; and St. Joan of Arc, which opened last year. All three of those schools will be at capacity within two or three years of opening. So just in terms of the students from Calgary separate that we are opening schools for, they're absolutely full to the gunwales almost immediately.

Mr. Barbero: Just additionally, with the space we have currently. Again, with the class size initiative that's there demanding space district-wide, whether you're inner-city or outer core, we have 21 spaces that are available out of the entire district, and that, too, goes back to the philosophy of our core modular. As I mentioned earlier, we have 600-plus portables, which has really allowed us to meet the needs, and we have a high utilization rate because the issue of core modular construction is to be able to expand and contract a school so that you never are left with a white elephant of a large plant sitting there idle when a community grows out. We take our portables off, and that core facility always meets the needs of the community. We've got schools that are 40 years old that have grown out, shrunk, and now grown out again because generations have changed and new, younger families are coming back to those communities. We've made very good use of the spaces we've had.

Dr. Miller: Just two final points on the sharing. A good example of curriculum sharing is the physical education programs in Calgary where the public board and the Catholic board work together. Physical education coaches work together, the coaches' association, to provide all kinds of activities for all students. That's a very good example of that.

Another point that I wanted to make is that our parents really like having choice. In Alberta they've really gotten used to the idea of having choice, and they know what they want. As Chair Belcourt pointed out, it's very important to the parents who choose to send their children to Catholic schools that they are distinctive. As MLA Dave Quest mentioned earlier, how would I know they're different? That's what our parents ask when they come in: how would I know it's different? They want to see that, and that's what they're looking for when they go to a Catholic school. That element of choice is important to our parents.

Mr. Mason: Thank you.

The Chair: Ms Woo-Paw, please, followed by Mr. Benito.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd just like to first make a comment and then a question. I'd like to recognize that in your report and your plan you have a much more extensive consideration of issues of cultural diversity, and I see that you also address issues of diversity under your goal to promote excellence in learner outcomes as far as preparing for employment. You actually promote the benefit of second language learning. You talk about the value of languages for employment. I see that you're actually in the process of developing a model of cultural competency for your system. I'm very pleased to see that, and I wish you success.

I also see that you have invested a lot of your time and energy to develop and enhance your involvement in relationships and partnerships in the community. I applaud you for that. I also see that you are going to develop multilingual materials for parents. I think that's great to break down the communication barrier.

Now, a lot of the school system surveys, probably 99 per cent if not 100 per cent, in the province of Alberta are done in English only, perhaps French somewhere. Of course, that would be a major

barrier for possibly up to 20 per cent of our parents to participate in our school system. Now, you have identified in your report that the Coalition for Equal Access to Education is one of your community collaborators. You're probably aware that they have recently conducted an extensive survey of four school systems in the province of Alberta on multicultural education and English as a Second Language. I'm just wondering: how receptive would your school system be to incorporating, potentially, some of the material from the data from that study into the future reporting from your district?

Dr. Miller: First of all, I'd like to thank you for your kind comments. It reinforces our philosophy.

We're always asking the question: what else can we do? I think a good answer to "What else can we do?" is certainly that we're always watching for new data, new ideas, new material in order to better serve the diversity of our community. When you look at a community like Calgary, if you really want to meet the needs of the little ones, then you really have to be responsive to them and their culture, and you have to embrace them. That's one of the things we celebrate in our community of caring, which we're so proud of in our district. I've been to a hundred schools in the last year, and I never come out of a school that I don't feel so proud of how the children celebrate the diversity. I've gone into a classroom where children said good morning to me in 26 languages, and they were celebrating that: listen to him, to how many languages he speaks. I just think that, you know, you don't see that on an accountability pillar sometimes, but it certainly speaks to the success of meeting the needs of our community.

Ms Woo-Paw: So my question is whether your board is open to incorporating.

Dr. Miller: We're certainly open.

Ms Woo-Paw: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Benito, please, followed by Mr. Chase.

Mr. Benito: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Good afternoon. I'm Roman Catholic, and I was so happy when I arrived here in 1982 from the Philippines that I could enrol my kids in a Roman Catholic separate school district. I always feel that this system is the best, as far as I'm concerned.

Right now one of the things that's happening in Alberta is that 75 per cent of Filipinos coming to Canada are arriving in Alberta. I'm just wondering: do you see any emerging issues? When these foreign workers arrive in this province, most of them have children that they bring to work here as foreign workers. Do you see any emerging issues in this?

The second question: are we treating them the same as everybody else? A follow-up on that question: is there a possibility for a Filipino bilingual language program?

Dr. Miller: Funny you should mention that.

Superintendent MacKay, I'd like you to come up and talk a little bit about that program, that we're very proud of. We have a large Filipino community in Calgary, in Calgary Catholic, and we're very proud of our Filipino community and of what they bring to our schools. Just as I responded to MLA Woo-Paw, we are always asking: what else can we do? Judy's going to speak about something that we've done that's come to us as a response.

Mrs. MacKay: I guess to answer all three questions, absolutely we are very welcoming to all of our immigrant populations. We have a reception centre that is specifically set up to meet their needs when they come to the district, help with the documentation, connect them with our parishes, and that's very important to us as well as populations come in. They work through the reception centre. We have a deacon that the diocese provides to us, and he's able to link the Filipino families right directly to their parishes.

In addition to that, I think what our chief superintendent is referring to is that we have started at one of our high schools a Filipino language course. It's just in its infancy, but it had a great deal of interest from our high school students, and as a result we are really seeing that as a strong program for our future, reflecting again the demographics of our district.

Mr. Benito: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Chase, please, followed by Mr. Vandermeer.

Mr. Chase: Yes. Thank you. Two of the most important recommendations made by the Learning Commission back in 2001 were the reduction of class sizes and, secondly, the implementation of optional full-day kindergarten and junior kindergarten half days. I'm wondering what funding you have received from the province in terms of the full-day and junior kindergarten programs and, if that funding hasn't been sufficient, what you have done to provide the young children with that very important base start.

2:40

Dr. Miller: We strongly support full-day kindergarten for children who need it. Not every child needs full-day kindergarten, but where it's needed, it's needed, and it makes a difference in terms of the long-term results of our students. We have implemented full-day kindergarten in 28 of our schools now, and we have documented the success of the programs where we've implemented that full-day kindergarten. We've documented the success of the children who were involved in that program, and based on the success of the children in those schools prior to having a full-day kindergarten, we know that in terms of value for dollar it's certainly there when it's in a community where it's needed or when it's with children who are really needing it.

We also this year took advantage of the opportunities that the government provided for putting in place preschool programs for our ESL students. We did that where space was available, but again we were limited there in terms of the number of programs we could put in place because we didn't have the space to accommodate them. Where we've done it, we've really noticed that it makes a difference in terms of dollars.

Mr. Deausy: We're not funded any differently for full-day kindergarten versus half-day kindergarten, nor are we funded for junior kindergarten, with the exception of the ESL program. The ESL preschool program, as Dr. Miller said, we've put into select schools where we had empty space, and it has been an overwhelming success. It has been a wonderful program. On more than one occasion I've heard veteran teachers and administrators in our district say that it's the best thing they've done in 30 years, this ESL preschool program. For us it's a matter of trying to free up more space to do it.

As far as additional funding for full-day kindergarten and additional funding for junior kindergarten, with the exception of ESL we're not funded any differently.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Then my follow-up question. In order to get funding for coded students with special needs, you first have to diagnose them, and that diagnosis has been difficult with the lack of psychologists and psychometrists. Do you have a number of children on a list waiting for testing so that they can receive that coded funding? How are you doing in that area?

Dr. Miller: If I could ask Superintendent MacKay to speak to that question. At this time we don't have a waiting list, but I would ask Superintendent MacKay to speak to our process, though.

Mr. Chase: Thank you.

Mrs. MacKay: Yes. Actually, we have a number of psychologists and a lead psychologist on staff. We employ 15 FTE psychologists plus our lead, plus we have consultants who support in the area of behaviour as well as consultants around the blind and visually impaired. They are really the resource that the school uses. From time to time, however, often towards the end of the year we will find that we're slightly behind, and at that point we do use some of our funding to support with supplementing psychologists, who help us with the coding so that there is no wait time, and we've been able to reduce that. Five or six years ago that was an issue, but because we have really built our capacity, we do manage to make sure that there is a very limited wait time and turnaround for that.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Vandermeer, please.

Mr. Vandermeer: Yes. I would like to just follow up on Dave Quest's comment on whether you see a difference between public and Catholic. I want to let you know that I visit a lot of schools in my constituency and, yes, I do notice a difference. I just want to let you know that I've been very impressed with your presentation today. Thank you for coming.

Dr. Miller: Thank you very much.

Mr. Vandermeer: That's it.

The Chair: Thank you very much. I appreciate that.

Mr. Chase.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I'll go to lowering class size initiatives. Way back in 1980 Kratzmann recommended 20 to 1 sort of across the board. How successful have you been in terms of reducing your class sizes? I've heard a number of wonderful comments, and I'm sure that when the longitudinal studies are done, your dropout rates, which are great at this point, are going to be even further reduced because of the initiatives, but can you give us a sense of how you've been able to bring down the class size? Also, to what extent do aides versus teachers play into that formula of reducing class size?

Mr. Strother: We've been very successful in reducing our class sizes. I know that our parents are very happy with the results that we've had and the influx of teachers that has been given to us. This year we've received 277.5 FTEs. We've put them into schools, as I mentioned earlier, in a very systemic way, where we look at the site base and we look at district need. We look at every classroom in terms of the needs of the class, the numbers of the kids, the

diversity of the children. All of those things go into the pot as we go forward.

Our principals organize their schools, we take in their organization, and we analyze every single class as we go through this organization process. We find if there are better ways to organize, whether that's using split classes or combined grades to make some of the classes lower to work at some of the different levels. We know that the research is very clear that the K to 3 is the strongest place to have these smaller classes. We're working very hard at moving those numbers even lower. There certainly is an issue in trying to be balanced throughout a school. If you're a K to 9 or even a K to 12 school, it's very difficult to have very small classes in certain areas and large classes in other areas. We try to be very fair with that. Again, it's looking at the bigger, global picture of it.

In response to the idea of having aides versus teachers, we would always rather have teachers in our classrooms. There is great support that is given by our teacher aides as we go through the process, but certainly to have a certified teacher in front of children to us is a far bigger benefit.

Mr. Chase: My supplemental has to do with the inclusion model, which is very much part of the Catholic faith as well. How successful have you been in terms of providing that support for students with a variety of special needs within the regular classroom? If you could comment on how those children are supported.

Dr. Miller: I feel very comfortable talking about this because I've been with the district just two years, not even two years yet, a year and a half, and during that year and a half I have visited a hundred schools and spoken to every child in every classroom. During that time I've been amazed at the level of integration and the success of integration. It's just wonderful to go into a classroom and see that every child is recognized. You know, you can see the face of God in every child in every classroom, and every child can see it. They celebrate distinctiveness. They celebrate their differences. I think it's working very well.

Now, parents have very specific feelings about what they want for their child. That dialogue between the parents and the staff in the schools has been very successful in our district. I think our staffs do a good job at talking to parents and finding out what it is they need. We certainly have a variety of placements in our district. Although inclusion is what we want to happen most of the time, it's not always the answer. We do have specialized placements for children who need it and for children whose parents feel that that's the best placement, and we work together on coming up with that.

I think we've done a good job at getting to a place where we work as a staff with our parents and with the child and find out the best placement and then put in supports that are required to meet the needs of the children. When you're meeting the needs of children, every one is different. I think we do a good job at responding to the individual needs and saying, "In this case, what do we do?" and "What's best for this little one?" It certainly can't be a one-size-fits-all approach.

Mr. Chase: Thank you.

2:50

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I have a question at this time, please. It's around high school completion rates. When we look at the annual report for 2007-08 from Alberta Education, we can see that the completion rate, on their performance measure 1 on page 40, for the 2006-07 year is 79.5 per cent. Our research indicates that you were a lot better than that; your five-year rate is over 85 per cent. When we not only compare your

rate to Alberta Education's five-year rate but we look at other school jurisdictions, you're doing a lot better than most. Could you explain to us, please, what resources you use to improve your high school completion rate?

Dr. Miller: I will ask Superintendent MacKay to come up to speak to this more specifically, but I really believe that the approach of one size doesn't fit all is key to our success: looking at different children in different schools and recognizing that depending on the situation and on the context you have to respond differently. In every school and in every class and with every child and with every family you have to look at it and say: what do we need in order to make this child successful?

I think one of the reasons our success rate is so high is that for that final 20 per cent of students who are so often disengaged – and those are the ones who are not completing in many districts – we have specific strategies in place for that 20 per cent. For us those are our lost sheep, and we will not walk away from them. We never give up on the lost sheep. We keep bringing them back and saying: what else can we do for them?

We were just talking about this for something else we're doing, so I'll let Judy talk about it because she gets very excited when she talks about it. I do think it's critical to the success of a district to focus on those children who are becoming disengaged, and I think that's what we're doing well.

Mrs. MacKay: Some specifics. I think we also believe that high school completion actually begins in kindergarten, so we have really put a number of resources in our elementary schools that are additional to the classroom teachers specifically to help with the diversity that they find, to work with the staff around programming, to identify very early students who may be at risk of either not performing very well or of becoming disengaged. We have what we call resource-support teachers who are attached to the school who work to analyze the data that we're seeing, look at the populations, link families up as well, so a lot of supports on that basis.

Dr. Miller was talking about a number of resources. We have been working with many community agencies as well to actually initiate programs that are intended very much for that last 20 per cent or the last 15 per cent that we do not see finishing. One of those is our off-campus program where we offer opportunities for students to really engage in very meaningful, purposeful work that will keep them engaged. We've just initiated a program working with the Boys and Girls Club, the United Way, and the CBE in the Calgary area to look at students who are completely disengaged from the family and from the community so that we can reach out to those that are actually homeless.

Really utilizing the outreach component of the Alberta Education funding that we do have as well as looking at many programs for students with mental health issues in order to, once again, keep them engaged and working very closely with students in high school who may look at attendance issues or involvement with drugs and gangs, to try and bring them back as well: they're all tied very much to our guidance and counselling program as well as to our family support liaison workers that we have and other groups like Catholic Family Service. We also rely on their family-school liaison. It's a real wraparound kind of an approach, and it's student by student, looking very much at the data that we get from Alberta Education and then moving forward.

Dr. Miller: In summary, it's that we're teaching children, not programs. You know, when the focus is on the child as opposed to just delivering a program, it really is more responsive.

The Chair: Okay. Could you tell us how many guidance counsellors you have, please?

Mrs. MacKay: We would have 69. We actually have guidance counsellors at junior high and high school. This year as a result of a pilot project we're doing, what we've done is we have given the straight elementary schools around the junior high area access to support from the guidance counsellor, again with the idea of very early intervention.

The Chair: Thank you very much.
To conclude our questioning, Mr. Chase.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Mr. Chair, you stole one of my questions, and it had to do with the staffing. I find it absolutely amazing that you are able to have 15 full-time psychologists. Obviously, that's a large part of making sure that the children fit into the various places they need to fit. I'm wondering about the full-time librarians. I'm wondering whether you have what used to be called LAC, learning assistance teachers, and if you could comment as part of your retention strategy on the vibrancy of your options programs, your fine arts, phys ed, and so on.

Dr. Miller: There are a lot of questions there. I'm going to start with the last one because I'd like Superintendent MacKay to comment on the first part of your question.

The last part of your question. One of the things we're very proud of in our district is that we have fine arts schools, and we have a variety of options for parents. I mentioned earlier in one of my comments that parents in the Calgary area really want to have choice when they look at what it is that best meets the needs of their child, and we do, too. We want to look at kids and say: what would be the opportunity for that child to best blossom? For many of our children it is in the arts. We have been able to not only have very strong arts programs in all of our schools – we had an arts profile last night, actually, at our district office – but we also have schools that focus on the arts.

I just wanted Judy to comment on the assistants.

Mrs. MacKay: Well, now, certainly what we have in our schools

are library assistants, and they work in the library anywhere from 20 hours to 25 hours to 35 hours on the basis of the size of the school and certainly support. We also have a consultant who is a teacher librarian who works with the administration and school-based staff to make sure that they're well up and that they can really support the curricular components of the library program.

Mr. Chase: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

That concludes our questions. Chair Belcourt and Dr. Miller, I would like on behalf of the committee to express our gratitude to you for your presentation to us this afternoon. It was impressive. I would also like to express our gratitude for your co-operation with Dr. Massolin and the research team in providing us with information prior to your arrival today. On behalf of the committee I wish you all the best as you provide outstanding school services to Calgary's Catholic community and those who are interested in attending your schools. Again, thank you very much, and have a safe trip back to Calgary.

Dr. Miller: Thank you very much.

The Chair: You're free to just leave. We have a couple of other quick items on our agenda.

The chair would like to apologize, Madam Belcourt. There's not a shortage of water in Edmonton, and it was an oversight if you didn't have any.

Mrs. Belcourt: That's all right. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Item 7 on our agenda: is there any other business? No?

Motion to adjourn? Moved by Mr. Quest. All those in favour? Thank you very much.

We will meet tomorrow morning at 10 o'clock here with ATB Financial, and there will be a briefing update. Thank you.

[The committee adjourned at 2:59 p.m.]

