



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
First Session

Standing Committee
on
Public Accounts

Education
Calgary Board of Education
Edmonton Public School Board

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**Legislative Assembly of Alberta
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First Session**

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

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Standing Committee on Public Accounts

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Andre Corbould, Deputy Minister

Brad Smith, Acting Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategic Services and Governance

Jeff Willan, Executive Director, Capital Planning

Calgary Board of Education

Brad Grundy, Superintendent, Finance/Technology Services, Chief Financial Officer, and Corporate Treasurer

Edmonton Public School Board

Darrel Robertson, Superintendent

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, February 11, 2020

[Mr. Gotfried in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Good afternoon, everyone. I'd like to call this meeting of the Public Accounts Committee to order and welcome everyone in attendance.

My name is Richard Gotfried, MLA for Calgary-Fish Creek and the acting chair of this committee. I'm regularly the deputy chair. I would ask that the members, staff, and guests joining the committee at the table introduce themselves for the record. Actually, we don't have any members on the phone today, so if I can go to my immediate right and begin introductions, please.

Mr. Stephan: Jason Stephan, Red Deer-South.

Ms Rosin: Miranda Rosin, Banff-Kananaskis.

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

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Jeremy Nixon, Calgary-Klein.

Mr. Turton: Searle Turton, Spruce Grove-Stony Plain.

Mr. Walker: Jordan Walker, MLA, Sherwood Park.

Mr. Guthrie: Peter Guthrie, Airdrie-Cochrane.

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

Mr. Grundy: Brad Grundy, chief financial officer and corporate treasurer for the Calgary board of education.

Mr. Smith: Brad Smith, acting assistant deputy minister of strategic services and governance, Alberta Education.

Mr. Corbould: Andre Corbould, Deputy Minister of Education.

Mr. Willan: Jeff Willan, executive director, capital planning sector, Alberta Education.

Mr. Robertson: Darrel Robertson, superintendent, Edmonton public schools.

Mr. Driesen: Rob Driesen, Assistant Auditor General.

Mr. Wylie: Doug Wylie, Auditor General.

Ms Hoffman: Sarah Hoffman, Edmonton-Glenora.

Mr. Feehan: Richard Feehan, Edmonton-Rutherford.

Ms Renaud: Marie Renaud, St. Albert.

Mr. Dach: Lorne Dach, MLA, Edmonton-McClung.

Dr. Massolin: Good afternoon. Philip Massolin, clerk of committees and research services.

Mr. Roth: Good afternoon. Aaron Roth, committee clerk.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you. Just a note for the record that we have no substitutions today, and all members are attending.

A few housekeeping items to address before we turn to the business at hand. Please note that the microphones are operated by *Hansard*. Please set your cellphones and other devices to silent for the duration of this meeting. Committee proceedings are live streamed on the Internet and broadcast on Alberta Assembly TV.

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First, for the approval of the agenda, I'd like to note that there is an addition to the agenda information provided to us under the approval of the agenda. I'd like to note that the November 2019 report of the Auditor General will also be included under Recommended Documents.

Are there any other changes or additions to the agenda?

Seeing none, would a member like to move that the agenda for the February 11, 2020, afternoon meeting of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts be approved as distributed? Member Rowswell. All in favour? Any opposed? Thank you. The motion is carried.

I would like to welcome our guests from the Ministry of Education, the Edmonton public school board, and the Calgary board of education, who are here to address the office of the Auditor General's outstanding recommendations as well as the ministry annual report for 2018-2019 and, as just noted, the November 2019 report of the Auditor General.

I invite officials from Education, the Edmonton public school board, and the Calgary board of education to provide opening remarks not exceeding 10 minutes. Just as a reminder, this is 10 minutes in total for opening remarks for everyone at the table, so I'd like to invite you to be mindful of that.

Over to the ministry, to the deputy minister, please.

Mr. Corbould: Thank you, Chair. Good afternoon. It's a pleasure to be here on the eighth day of my job as Deputy Minister of Education. I'll be speaking on behalf of those at the table for opening remarks. Today I'll provide a brief overview of education-related items in the 2018-19 annual report as well as updates on outstanding Auditor General recommendations.

I'll begin with a few financial highlights from the annual report. In the 2018-19 fiscal year the consolidated expenses for school authorities in the Department of Education were \$8.223 billion. School-expended amounts from reserve spending, infrastructure maintenance, and other funds totalled an additional \$377 million, and this is an increase of 3.9 per cent, or \$318.5 million, over the previous fiscal year.

Payments to accredited private schools rose to \$286.3 million, an increase of \$14 million, or 5.1 per cent, over the previous fiscal year. Total expenses for instruction in public, separate, francophone, and charter schools were \$6.4 billion. This includes teachers' salaries, benefits, pension contributions, and services and supplies. This represents an increase of \$289.2 million, or 4.7 per cent, over the previous fiscal year.

As the annual report lays out, Education strived to achieve five outcomes from the business plan. The first outcome is that "Alberta's students are successful." Strategies to meet this outcome included developing curriculum, developing and implementing assessments, and expanding the school nutrition program.

The second outcome is that "Alberta's education system supports First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students' success." Several strategies supported this goal. One of these was to ensure all students, teachers, and school leaders learn about indigenous perspective and experiences, treaties and agreements, and the history and legacy of residential schools.

Our third outcome is that "Alberta's education system respects diversity and promotes inclusion." Strategies to support this outcome included implementing the inclusive education framework.

Our fourth outcome is that "Alberta has excellent teachers, and school and school authority leaders." Strategies to support this goal included leading the implementation of the professional practice standards for teachers and school leaders.

Our fifth outcome is that “Alberta’s education system is well governed and managed.” Strategies to support this outcome included ensuring that our legislation, regulations, policies were aligned with government direction and planning and building modern school facilities to support student learning.

These are just a few examples of achieving those outcomes. In the annual report you will find detailed discussion and analysis of the results for the outcomes, and you’ll also find achievement results for the department’s performance measures.

Moving on, I would provide updates on some outstanding Auditor General items. In March 2015 the Auditor General made three recommendations regarding the Northland school division. While the three recommendations are still outstanding, significant progress is being made. The Auditor General recommended that the department exercise oversight of the Northland school division by ensuring that

- the division develops and executes [a recommended] operational plan to improve student attendance
- the operational plan identifies the resources needed and how results will be measured, reported and analyzed.

Progress has been made towards meeting the recommendation to exercise additional oversight over the Northland school division. Northland has developed an updated operational plan for the 2019-20 school year. Alberta Education continues to oversee and monitor Northland’s efforts to address student achievement and success, including the provision of regular and comprehensive feedback to the Northland division.

In April 2016 the Auditor General provided nine recommendations to Education and to Infrastructure aimed at improving the province’s school-building program. Significant work has been undertaken to address these nine recommendations. The first recommendation was for Education to improve its oversight of the school-building program by

- ... [clarifying] the roles and responsibilities of each department and establishing supporting policies and procedures [and]
- developing clear decision-making authorities for the program.

Fifteen out of 31 implementation plan action items associated with this recommendation are either complete or pending final review. Actions to clarify the roles and responsibilities of each department are largely complete, including an MOU between Education and Infrastructure.

The second recommendation was to improve project approvals for new schools and modernizations by

- implementing a gated approval process [and]
- identifying the approval gates, required deliverables and responsibilities for completion of the deliverables.

We’ve created a gated approvals process that consists of 10 distinct phases, from initial data gathering to approval for construction funding. The gated approval process provides a means to assess the viability of proposed capital projects and to rank competing projects based on evaluation criteria. It also assists in the selection of projects to be included in the capital planning process and helps to address project risks through mitigation strategies. This gated approval process was developed for the 2018 planning cycle and was further refined for the 2019 and 2020 planning cycles. Through the implementation of the gated process Education has improved planning and review processes prior to approvals for new schools and modernizations.

The third recommendation was to improve systems to manage and control school capital projects. We’re

- agreeing on project expectations promptly with school jurisdictions and Infrastructure ... [and]
- developing and implementing change-management policies and procedures.

Six out of the 11 implementation plan action items associated with this recommendation are either complete or pending final review. Actions related to setting project expectations and implementing change-management policies and procedures are largely complete, and work completed to date includes the strengthening of grant agreements for projects managed by school jurisdictions and the development of a memorandum of understanding for projects managed by Infrastructure.

The fourth and fifth recommendations were for Education and Infrastructure to improve planning processes by

- identifying who must review and approve project planning deliverables and formally communicate these approvals to school jurisdictions ... [and]
- basing oversight of projects managed by school jurisdictions on risk.

Both implementation plan action items associated with these recommendations are either complete or pending final review. These changes have been communicated to school jurisdictions. The plans to address project oversight have been implemented. Education and Infrastructure have developed a tool that is being used to assess the level of oversight required. The actions to address who must identify, review, and approve project planning deliverables and communicate approvals are complete.

Recommendation 6 was to define and report on key performance indicators of the school-building program. This work is well under way. Actions related to the definition of reporting key performance indicators are ongoing. Infrastructure has developed and implemented a new centralized database for reporting project information.

1:40

The seventh recommendation was for Education and Infrastructure to improve reporting on the school-building program by

- defining reporting requirements, including measures to assess project performance [and]
- using a common reporting system that specifies where information will be retained, who will update it and how it will be updated.

Sixteen of the 29 implementation plan action items associated with this recommendation are either complete or pending final review. Infrastructure has developed and implemented a reporting manual that formally documents processes and procedures. Education completed the development of the first of the school capital project systems as well as the initial policies and processes to manage capital project reviews for Education’s ’20-23 capital plan recommendations.

Through recommendation 8 Education was to improve its cash-flow forecasting systems and ensure capital funding requests are supported by assumptions tied to project progress.

Four out of the six implementation plan action items associated with this recommendation are either complete or pending final review. Actions related to improvement of project program forecasting are ongoing.

The Auditor General’s ninth and final recommendation was that Treasury Board adjust the Department of Education’s funding request. Education

should submit its revised school-building program plan to the Treasury Board for approval. The revised plan should align with the approved funding and should clearly identify the impact on project progress.

Two of the action items on this are complete and pending final review. Actions related to the communication of impacts caused by Treasury Board changes to funding are largely complete.

That concludes the recommendations for the school-building program.

The Auditor General made three other recommendations to the department in other areas. These recommendations are now fully implemented. Two of these recommendations concerned our auditing process for financial statements, and the third was related to the discontinued class size initiative. We have indicated to the Auditor General that we are ready for a follow-up audit on these items.

That concludes our opening remarks and my update on the annual report and recommendations from the Auditor General. At this time we're happy to take any questions that come our way.

The Deputy Chair: Great. Thank you to the deputy minister, with appreciation for your very thorough review of the outstanding recommendations.

The Auditor General is ceding his time back to the committee.

Ladies and gentlemen, our time allotment format for questions from committee members has been revised for today's two-hour meeting. The first rotation will be 15 minutes each for Official Opposition and government members. Our second, third, and fourth rotations will be 10 minutes each for the Official Opposition and then the government members. The final rotation provides for three-minute time slots for opposition committee members, followed by government members. This rotation provides members the opportunity to read questions into the record for follow-up answers by the ministry.

I will now open up the floor to questions from members, beginning with the opposition side. Member Hoffman.

Ms Hoffman: Yeah. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I want to begin by thanking all of the presenters here at the table for their attendance and for helping us delve into the '18-19 financials as well as the annual report and the recommendations of the Auditor General as they relate. I have a number of questions that I imagine will be too detailed for today to have a verbal response. If you have one, that's great; if not, I'm very happy to receive written responses with regard to these.

I'll start by asking – I'm hoping that we can have a breakdown, for each of the two jurisdictions that are here today, of what percentage of your total budget is invested in staff.

Mr. Corbould: We'll go to Edmonton first.

Mr. Robertson: Thanks, Mr. Chair. In terms of Edmonton public schools our staffing is at close to 77 per cent.

Mr. Corbould: And Calgary?

Mr. Grundy: Through the chair, the same. At the Calgary board of education approximately 77 per cent of total expenditures are salaries and benefits.

Ms Hoffman: Great. Maybe we'll ask the department the same question.

Mr. Corbould: In terms of staffing in the department?

Ms Hoffman: Yeah.

Mr. Corbould: Yeah. I'm pretty sure we're at about 97 per cent in terms of staffing. We don't have that many vacancies.

Do you have an exact number, Brad?

Ms Hoffman: Sorry. Just maybe to clarify, in terms of your total costs of operations, how much of that is staff?

Mr. Smith: Oh, of staff?

Ms Hoffman: Yeah, of the pie chart.

Mr. Smith: Our FTEs in Education are 513 for the current year, and that represents at least 60 to 70 per cent of our total expenditures.

Ms Hoffman: Then I'm hoping for a further breakdown for the two jurisdictions here. If there could be a breakdown of that 77 per cent that's allocated towards staffing, what percentage of that would be teachers, administrative, maintenance, support staff, custodial – for allied health, is there a portion? – some of the other staff groups? That would be great so that we have an idea of the pie chart of resources that you have. We know 77 per cent is staff. Of that, can we have that further broken down for us, please, Mr. Chair?

Mr. Corbould: Yeah. Chair, we can undertake to deliver on that.

Ms Hoffman: Okay. Then I guess that, for the two jurisdictions as well, in terms of some of the grants that were in place in 2018, I'm hoping to have some breakdown of how that was used to help support student success, so the classroom improvement fund, the class size initiative, and then, of course, the fee reduction piece as well. How did you invest that money in a way that ensured you could achieve your mandate around student success?

Mr. Corbould: Chair, if we could go to Calgary first, please?

Mr. Grundy: Sure. Through the chair, at the Calgary board of education the class size funding, which was approximately \$54 million, plus or minus depending on the year, was flowed out through something we call our resource allocation method, or school budget process, to schools that had students in kindergarten through grade 3. We used those dollars to augment the regular allocation to those schools and help bring class sizes down on average.

With regard to the classroom improvement fund, we had allocated those funds out to our schools on a pro rata basis. Generally speaking, schools will use every dollar they receive to buy staff. This classroom improvement fund was used for those purposes. In fact, we had an initiative which was staff over stuff to try and make sure that we were focusing the dollars in both certificated and noncertificated staffing in the classroom.

Then with regard to An Act to Reduce School Fees, funding was approximately \$18 million; \$10 million of that was used to reduce fees paid by all families in the Calgary board of education, students K to grade 12, and approximately \$8 million was used to provide additional services under the transportation portfolio given the rules that came into place with An Act to Reduce School Fees.

Mr. Corbould: Chair, if Edmonton public could comment as well?

Mr. Robertson: Thanks very much, Mr. Chair. With the class size funding, Edmonton public schools received approximately \$46 million, and one hundred per cent of these funds were pushed out to our schools. We use what's called a site-based decision-making model in Edmonton public. The philosophy behind that is that we push the resources closest to the people that are making the decisions to impact children. That classroom size funding was included in the school budgets. In our schools approximately, on average, 95 per cent of the money they receive from the district to operate for the year is spent on staffing. The majority of that was to deal with complex classrooms, reduce class sizes, and so on and so forth. Again, spent on people.

The classroom improvement fund at Edmonton public schools received approximately \$10.8 million. Same story here: again, the

majority of our budget in schools is spent on staffing, so they utilize those dollars to help ensure that children get what they need to be successful by way of services and supports.

In terms of the grants, the transportation grant, we received a little over \$5 million. We actually were operating in a transportation deficit this year. With a decision to not include that grant, we are further in a deficit position in transportation, so we'll be doing consultation this year with our families on a go-forward basis to reset school fees. We are looking at every opportunity that we can see to provide more efficient and effective transportation in the city of Edmonton. The city is growing. We're the fastest growing jurisdiction in the province, and certainly outside of the Anthony Henday our space pressures necessitate increasing bus services, so this is a conversation we need to have with our families. In terms of the other portion of that grant, those dollars were utilized to offset the fee reduction that parents received through Bill 1.

Thank you.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you.

If I could go a little bit deeper, so in terms of both jurisdictions, it sounds like either through an RAM or through site-based decision-making, the resources go to the administrators working closest to the children. They set their targets and their staffing levels. I appreciate that it was done a little bit differently, K to 3 being the class size focus in Calgary and overall K to 12 being a priority, potentially, in Edmonton public. How did you measure the impact of that investment? I know it's hard when you don't have a control group that has the larger class sizes and then now you have one with the smaller class sizes, but how do we measure the success of focusing those resources in the ways that you did, and are we still measuring that as we move forward so we can do some comparators?

1:50

Mr. Corbould: Would you like to start, Edmonton?

Mr. Robertson: Sure. Thanks very much. Just a small correction, Mr. Chair. Edmonton public also pushed out those resources from K to 3 to impact class sizes at division 1.

In terms of measuring the impact of those dollars, we have a few things that we look at. First of all, our trustees conduct an annual results review with approximately 33 per cent of our schools per year. They're on a three-year cycle. Our ward trustees would go to a results review typically in the month of November, and those are also public meetings where questions can be asked around things like class sizes, impacts of interventions on the learning of children, and so on and so forth.

So when we look at how it is that those dollars were utilized, we do of course track and we'll continue to track class sizes in our jurisdiction. That's a conversation that our trustees recently had with respect to a decision to move forward with the tracking of that. But probably the biggest measure of the efficacy of, you know, those dollars and how they are expended is in our academic achievement results. We're on a growth trend in Edmonton public schools, and probably the largest measure of that would be high school completion, which is not just the work of our high schools; it's the work of our entire K to 12 system. We have moved and continually see improvements in high school completion in Edmonton public. We're sitting at currently 83 per cent over five years of access to high school.

We have comprehensive reading interventions, numeracy interventions in our class. Those dollars help support all of those interventions that kids very much need. We track things like grade level of reading in our jurisdiction. We have created an instrument and shared it with several jurisdictions in the province called the

math intervention/programming instrument. That's where we're looking at those basic skills that kids need to be successful at the next grade level in math. It's not a norm-referenced tool; it's something that our teachers created. That gives us a quick look at those children that require interventions right away.

Those are some of the things that we look at in terms of the efficacy of our system and how we're investing our dollars to ensure that kids get what they need to be successful. Thank you.

Mr. Corbould: Calgary.

Mr. Grundy: Through the chair, a similar broad story to our Edmonton colleagues. I think that objectively we look at the class size in K to 3 against the provincial guidelines to make sure that we're seeing some improvement there. Oftentimes we don't make the target or the guideline, but we do our best.

Similarly, we evaluate the success of students across the spectrum. We, too, report to our board annually on our results to report, which is academic success. That then translates into a review at grade 6 and grade 9 for our provincial achievement tests and also the diploma exams to make sure that our students continue to track.

We also believe fundamentally that the education research is clear, that that investment made in the early years pays dividends down the road, so while we can maybe accommodate larger class sizes in some of the higher grades, we want to make sure that to the extent possible we're keeping the class sizes smaller in the early years.

Mr. Corbould: If I could, Chair, just to add to where that hits with the province in terms of the department, we work with these school authorities and other education stakeholders to improve education based on those results by updating curriculum, developing new assessment tools to support personalized learning, evaluating student achievement against standards, providing funding to authorities. In addition to basic per-student funding, school authorities receive additional funding for targeted initiatives such as First Nations, Métis, and Inuit education and English as a second language.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you.

Time check, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Three minutes and 45 seconds.

Ms Hoffman: Great.

With that in mind, under the funding formula that was in place in 2018-19, what worked well, in your mind, and what would be a priority for you to see preserved to the two jurisdictions who are here today?

Mr. Corbould: Edmonton first?

Mr. Robertson: Sure. Thanks very much for the question, Mr. Chair. In taking a look at what has been working in our jurisdiction, one of the things that's fundamentally important is consistency for our kids. When we look at the creation of interventions, be they reading, mathematics, whatever the case, and the supports that we deliver in schools, whether that be, you know, basic mental health supports – anxiety is a huge issue in our classrooms across the district – we need some predictability around maintaining those interventions that we know are impactful and we know are making a difference for children.

When we see swings in, for example, funding – right now in our jurisdiction we are doing some consultation with our staff across the district in preparing for this year's budget, and we are talking

about those things that are a priority to us and ensuring that we're doing everything we can to keep those supports in place for kids. I tell our principals all the time: "Kids are coming in September. We're going to open the doors. We're going to care for them. We're going to love them. We need to be ready for that." So that conversation is happening now, even in anticipation of a budget coming forward.

Thank you.

Mr. Corbould: Calgary.

Mr. Grundy: Through the chair, I would once again reiterate many of the same concepts. I think that flexibility is important and was important. The ability of the local jurisdiction to make the best decisions in support of the students in the jurisdiction is important to us. Consistency and predictability: our ability to plan can get hindered by financial decisions that come after the start of the school year, so information before the start of the school year is always appreciated. There are – it's an unfortunate reality – incremental costs associated with enrolment growth, so a funding formula that provides some mechanism to address or recognize the cost of growth is appreciated.

At the Calgary board of education approximately one-quarter of our students are English language learners, about 30,000 students, so mechanisms that allow us the flexibility to address that. We have approximately 13,000 students in bilingual programs. Once again, the ability and flexibility to address those needs is important. Almost 5,000 students in the Calgary board of education are self-identified indigenous students. Once again, flexibility is important when we're addressing those students. We have about 21,000 students who have some form of identified special need. Flexibility is fundamental in any framework.

Mr. Corbould: I would just add, Chair, from the department's perspective, that we have been directed to make sure that in terms of keeping good things going, it is keeping that funding in the classroom focused on students.

Ms Hoffman: In terms of the '18-19 fiscal year what was the variance between the June budget and the September 30 actuals? If you could reply in writing, I'd be happy with that. I think that suits the whole being able to anticipate, being able to predict, and we know that this year there was great variance between the June submissions and the September 30 actuals. So I'd appreciate if we could have a follow-up on that in writing.

One more that I will touch on . . . [A timer sounded]

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: You'll have to save that for the next rotation.

I'd like to begin the rotation of the government side with Member Rowswell.

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you. This has to do with page 167 in the annual report under Ministry Support Services. It states there that in the minister's office the budget was \$769,000 and the actual amount spent was \$1,423,000, which is about \$654,000 over budget, which seems fairly significant.

So you're only eight days on the job, you said? Can you help us out with what happened there?

Mr. Corbould: Yeah. Member, Chair, regarding that, there was a change in government which resulted in some staff moving out and others moving in, which resulted in a \$167,000 vacation payout for employees who worked in the previous minister's office. The previous minister had a different number of FTEs working in that

office, which was a difference in salary and benefits to the tune of \$487,000. That was what the difference was on that page.

Mr. Rowswell: Okay. So kind of a severance-related type of thing.

Mr. Corbould: Severance related and a different number of staff in the two ministers' offices.

Mr. Rowswell: Okay. Good. Staying on page 167, the overall budget appears to be out by about \$2.3 million. Is that similar? Is that a severance component, or was it . . .

Mr. Corbould: Chair, Member, to answer that question, like I mentioned before, \$654,000 was part of that \$2.3 million. The greatest portion of the total amount was to pay for high school transcripts. There had been a previous agreement that a different government department, Advanced Education, was doing that, and they were no longer able to do that, so mid-year Education had to be responsible for that expense. This led to an approximately \$1 million deficit in that area for Education. Another significant portion was a \$578,000 deficit, but that was a deficit related to a budget transfer for IMT services at Service Alberta, so there's an equal credit there in Service Alberta for that amount.

2:00

Mr. Rowswell: Okay. That happened partway through the year, so there was no way of forecasting it?

Mr. Corbould: Yeah. That was part of the ERP program and transferring those IT resources.

Mr. Rowswell: Okay. Very good. Thank you.

Carry on, Member Rosin.

Ms Rosin: Awesome. Well, thank you so much for being here today. My questions will be focused around the provincial achievement tests. On page 23 of your annual report for the language arts it appears as though for the last three years for which we have data, the percentage of children in our system achieving excellent results has declined year after year. I'm wondering if you can explain this decline and how your department is hoping to intend to reverse this concerning downward trend.

Mr. Corbould: Yes, Member, Chair. We are focused on excellent outcomes, and the provincial achievement test results provide us with valuable information to get that. The results show that we need to dig a little deeper and strengthen the system to improve outcomes for students. It's important to note that the results on provincial assessments fluctuate from year to year, so the best practice for the sector is to look at a five-year trend. That's why the department releases five years of data at a time when publishing provincial results. The most recently released results will include information from the 2018-2019 school year. They show there is room for improvement. They show English language arts scores flattening compared to previous years, so we hope that is a halting of the pattern of decline, but still falling short of the target, so we'll work hard to improve that with the school boards.

Ms Rosin: Thank you. Looking back at the last three years of trends, then, have you identified any changes in the teaching methods or anything that you believe could be a direct cause of that downward trend in language arts?

Mr. Corbould: I think the results do show that there's, again, room for improvement. I think the addition of – sorry. That's regarding math. With respect to arts, yeah, I don't have anything specific.

I will just see if Kim Brockhoff, ED of curriculum division, would like to add anything on that. Kim?

Ms Brockhoff: Sure. I can do that.

Mr. Corbould: Okay. Please.

Ms Brockhoff: So was the question related to English language arts? Is that what you're – yeah. Certainly . . .

The Deputy Chair: Please identify yourself at the microphone prior to speaking. Thank you.

Ms Brockhoff: Thank you. I'm Kim Brockhoff from curriculum division at Alberta Education, and I'm happy to answer that question. Certainly, part of our curriculum development process is looking at ways to strengthen that curriculum. That curriculum is a number of years old, so we're working with teachers from across the province to update that curriculum and focus on modernizing that curriculum as well to be more engaging for students.

Ms Rosin: Thank you. I do have one more question kind of in this vein, so you might need to stick around. You might have the answer, actually. I know you touched on math there briefly. My next question actually is about the math results as well. On page 28 we have the results for the test scores in mathematics, and again it looks as though year after year our students are not performing as well as they used to in math. The percentage of students not only achieving excellent scores but actually even just acceptable scores is at a five-year low. I'm just wondering again if you can explain this negative trend in math scores as well and if any changes to curriculum or teaching practices have been identified that could be possibly improved.

Mr. Corbould: Thank you, Member, Chair. The original declines in mathematics were somewhat expected as both grades 6 and 9 provincial achievement tests added a noncalculator question in recent years, which resulted in lower scores across the board. The addition of these noncalculator sections was part of a larger effort to address issues with mathematics in Alberta. Alongside the changed PATs and diploma exams was a math bursary to enhance teachers' confidence and skill in teaching mathematics, and as school authorities have adjusted their focus to address the adjustments to provincial assessments in math, we have seen scores start to recover. We do expect that they will move in that direction.

As Kim Brockhoff had mentioned, this was another area of the Curriculum Advisory Panel's review. Of course, that's being consulted on right now publicly, and we'll have recommendations going to the minister and a plan following that.

Ms Rosin: Perfect. Thank you.

With that, I'm not sure how much time I have, but I will cede to Mr. Walker.

Mr. Walker: Well, thank you so much.

Mr. Chair, how much time do I have?

The Deputy Chair: You have eight minutes.

Mr. Walker: Eight minutes. Okay.

Well, thank you all so much for being here to discuss this very important topic of education, and thank you for all you do in service in that area.

I'm going to focus on First Nations achievement and then move to the quality of K through 12 education. To begin, on page 82 it has results analysis for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students in

mathematics. By the department's own data the results for acceptable and excellence are at five-year lows. Can the department explain this trend, and what measures are being taken to address it? Thanks.

Mr. Corbould: The department certainly recognizes, first and foremost, the importance of supporting First Nations, Métis, and Inuit student success, which is why we've included a new set of competencies focused on the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit education in the updated teaching and leadership quality standards that came into effect September 1, 2019. We think, one, that will help. These competencies lay out our expectations that teachers, principals, and superintendents are prepared to use foundational knowledge about First Nations, Métis, and Inuit cultures, history, and experiences to help students succeed. I think that's the remedy.

I don't know if the chair could defer to Calgary, if you'd like to comment or not, or Edmonton on that as well from your perspective.

Mr. Grundy: Through the chair, I think at the Calgary board of education we acknowledge that our results for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students are not where they need to be. Over the last at least couple of years there have been a number of initiatives launched to try and bend the curve on those results, including the implementation of what we call graduation coaches, individuals who work in our high schools with self-identified indigenous students to ensure that they get where they need to be and they have the supports that they need to be successful in our system. We've also implemented an indigenous learning centre, where we can bring together various individuals from the indigenous community and provide, perhaps, a more culturally receptive education experience. Those are a number of the things that we're doing.

At a base level, though, I think it's about the personalization of learning for individual students to make sure that their unique learning needs are being addressed across the system.

Mr. Corbould: Would Edmonton like to comment as well?

Mr. Robertson: Thank you. Through you, Mr. Chair, we acknowledge that we have a lot of work to do in this area. In terms of mathematics achievement – but this applies to all achievement levels for our First Nations children – we have utilized the OECD report, which includes six recommendations. This report was, I believe, commissioned by the government. It provides some very practical strategies that we can look at in our division. All 213 of our schools utilize that framework to develop a plan in each of their schools to address the achievement gap for their children. This is, again, about interventions for children, and it doesn't matter if, you know, we're talking about our First Nations children or any children. These practices are actually very impactful for our kids.

We have identified a lead teacher in each one of our schools to help with the implementation of the new teaching quality standard that has elements of, obviously, First Nations, Métis, and Inuit education in that standard.

We also are working with our leaders in the implementation of the leadership quality standard in the province. You know, it's the creation of those welcoming, safe environments with good pedagogical rigour in our classrooms and making sure that we're following up: that kids are in school, they're attending, and that we're ensuring that they're getting what they need to be successful.

We are working on a pilot right now with graduation coaches in one of our high schools, and I'm very much looking forward to the outcomes of that. These graduation coaches are following up. They're building relationships with families. When kids aren't in school, you know, they're contacting families, they're doing home visits, they're doing everything that they possibly can to ensure that

those kids have a shot at being successful. I would expect our results to increase. We have some good strategy, but we will continue to be diligent in our efforts.

Mr. Walker: Well, I'm really glad to hear all the supports that you guys are putting in place for First Nations students, and I'm particularly struck by the Calgary board of education's, positively speaking, comment regarding bringing in elders and community people from First Nations communities. I know in my public school area of Elk Island Public schools that sort of bringing in elders to expose all students, including First Nations students, to that culture has had a really positive effect. I think for so long, for generations, the curriculum has been Eurocentric, and I think now we can broaden the perspective, realize the strength of our diversity, so I'm very happy to hear that.

2:10

I'm going to move now on to the quality of K through 12 education. On page 145 of the annual report it states the results analysis for overall satisfaction with K to 12 education. There is a high degree of satisfaction with the school system. What I did notice is that the general public seems less satisfied than teachers, parents, and students. Can the department explain any reasons why the public satisfaction trails other stakeholder groups by quite a large margin?

Mr. Corbould: Thank you, Member, Chair. The public respondent group is sampled by a representative of all of Alberta's population, so it very well could include family members of K to 12 students and K to 12 students themselves or employees of school boards, but it can also have greater respondents that have little to no or no interaction in the K to 12 system or may be further apart from it and have less understanding, perhaps. I think the variety of respondents means their perception may be more widely varied and more widely based on their vantage point or their late experience with K to 12. I think it's just a bigger group that is looking at it, who are, you know, day-to-day involved, perhaps, so they're hearing different things. That's my assessment.

Mr. Walker: Yeah. Thank you. I appreciate that.

Then just to finish off further: how does the government objectively measure success in the K to 12 system?

Mr. Corbould: We certainly have a responsibility to invest in the system and lead to the outcomes that I mentioned in my opening remarks, and we do that through an accountability framework for school authorities, which is based around a three-year planning, reporting cycle aligned with government direction. At the core of the framework is an accountability pillar, which gives school authorities and schools consistent ways to measure success and assess progress using a set of 16 measures. These include everything from provincial achievement tests to diploma exams, measuring outcomes in terms of pass rates and dropout rates.

Then, again, maybe the boards of education might like to comment from their perspective on how this accountability framework works. Maybe we can start with Calgary.

Mr. Grundy: Through the chair, there is a robust range of accountability mechanisms built into the K to 12 education system. That includes the day-to-day formative assessment that goes on in the classroom, the summative assessment that goes on at report carding times throughout the year. There are provincial achievement tests. There are diploma exams. The accountability pillar mechanism that the province of Alberta stewards on behalf of the public education system in the province, I think, also works well

to bring in the voice and perspective of a range of stakeholders and provide that information back to school jurisdictions. Within the Calgary board of education all that information then gets sort of filtered through what we call school development plans. Those school development plans are the educators looking at their student population and identifying what the existing or emerging needs are and making modifications as necessary.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you. We'll have to continue that in the next rotation.

We'd like to move to an opposition rotation. I'll continue with Member Hoffman.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much. It was touched on, graduation coaches in CBE, and I think they're called success coaches in Edmonton public. I'm wondering if both jurisdictions can talk about the importance of those noncertified staff. I'm assuming they aren't certified – if they are, happy to have it clarified – or that they don't have teachers' certificates. If you can talk about them, school resource officers – if they have another name in Calgary, that's great, too – mental health therapists, sort of the work of those nonteacher certified staff members in the school and how it relates to success and how you fund and measure the benefit of that investment.

Mr. Corbould: Shall we start with Edmonton this time, Chair?

Mr. Robertson: Thanks very much, Mr. Chair. I guess I'll start with our graduation coaches. As I had mentioned, we are running a pilot in one of our high schools where we have hired two graduation coaches, and we are trying to keep the ratio of those coaches at a reasonable workload level. They oversee 75 children of First Nations descent in the high school, and they're endeavouring to build relationships with the families, the caregivers as well as the kids. We will measure the efficacy of that through some of the traditional means like the dropout rate, achievement in their courses, high school completion, attendance. Those will all be measures of the efficacy of that initiative. That's a fairly new initiative in our jurisdiction.

Mr. Chair, the question also addressed some of our other staff that work as part of our team in our schools, so I'll speak to our school resource officer program. We do have school resource officers in all of our community high schools, and basically that's a cost-sharing initiative with the Edmonton Police Service. School resource officers are not necessarily there just to enforce the law. They're there to build relationships with kids and participate in the learning community. We find that as relationships are built with youth, especially some of our at-risk youth, they become more engaged in the school community. Anecdotally, I was a former high school principal myself, and I saw those relationships flourish and those kids become connected and begin to experience success in school. There are many facets to the school resource officer program, including presentations at parent council meetings and learning how to safely navigate the Internet and some of the social media platforms that kids have access to. So they are very valued members of our teams.

The question also addressed success coaches, mental health therapists. Our success coaches are more of a universal strategy around that feeling of belonging and mental health and wellness in our schools. Success coaches typically work with a family centre who they would do some training with. Basically, success coaches come from a number of disciplines, usually in the human services discipline, and they work for a period of time as a success coach building those relationships with kids. Very much, you know, what I was talking about in terms of the benefits of that relationship-

building with kids, they can be a proactive, universal strategy, reaching out to kids who may be at risk of maybe stopping attending, maybe not completing their work in school, whatever the case. There's that one-on-one, that personal follow-up, that we find is incredibly beneficial.

Mental health therapists I would move to sort of a tier. If you think of interventions as a pyramid of sorts, at the base of that pyramid are the universal strategies of proactive things that are successful in the classroom. In terms of mental health, that could be success coaches; it could be teachers, you know, recognizing positive attendance, connecting with families, all those sorts of things. When we move to the middle of that pyramid, the tier 2, that's where some of our folks from Alberta Health Services or in the case where mental health therapists are employed in the school, they can intervene from more of a clinical perspective, an intervention kind of perspective.

They are absolutely valued supports. I find that, you know, schools have the potential to be mediating structures for a lot of things in our communities, but access to Alberta Health Services in our schools is actually really important for many of our families, especially in neighbourhoods that have lower levels of income.

I'll give you an example. Over at Britannia we actually have a medical clinic that's set up right on-site so that if the school notices that a child, let's say, has a rash that hasn't been looked at by a physician, it is seamless for us, working with parents, to get that child in right away. Normally, you know, maybe that child doesn't see a physician for whatever that ailment is.

When you think about the mental health services – this is my own personal opinion, but I've heard this from parents as well – it's very complex to navigate the system to find the supports that are needed on a just-in-time basis for your child. When we have those supports structured in our schools, it makes the system a lot easier for our families to navigate and to get that proactive support that children need so that we don't end up in a crisis situation.

Mental health therapists, success coaches: those are a couple of examples of some of the supports that we've endeavoured to provide in our schools over the past number of years.

Ms Hoffman: If it's possible, Mr. Chair, just before Mr. Grundy responds, because these 10-minute segments go so fast, if both of you could provide a summary of what some of those folks are and how many you have in your jurisdiction, I'm sure that my colleagues and I would find that very helpful. I'm thinking specifically about the '18-19 fiscal, if it's possible to draw any trends about past years. But I would love to have some of that quantitative data to go along with the qualitative response you just provided. Thank you very much.

2:20

Mr. Grundy: Through the chair, I would basically reiterate what you heard from Edmonton public. I think we have sort of similar systems and supports across the Calgary board of education. Our graduation coaches have been certificated teachers. One of the biggest challenges we find is the transition between elementary and middle junior and between middle junior and high school, so if we can have grad coaches in place to support students through that transition from middle junior to high school, that's important. We're currently looking at other mechanisms to ensure that we have individuals in middle junior who are helping students transition from elementary to middle junior.

We do have resource officers in all of our schools. That, too, is a partnership with the Calgary Police Service. We have a range of other services and supports, including psychologists, to do that educational assessment. As my colleague indicated, there are other

individuals through regional collaborative service delivery arrangements where we work with Alberta Health Services and other social services providers to bring in their expertise to support the students.

I think I mentioned that we have about 30,000 students who are English language learners, and I think it's important to recognize that when we talk about English language learners, by and large, those aren't, say, a student from France who's coming to Canada and going to be learning English. In many cases in the Calgary board of education and, I'm sure, in Edmonton public these are individuals coming from war-torn jurisdictions who may not have been in school for a number of years, so the nature of the supports that those students need to receive to come up to grade level and then continue to be successful in the system are important. Because of that, we have occupational therapists, speech-language therapists that work in our schools each and every day. Most of our schools have some form of educational assistant, who's there to support the certificated teacher in the delivery of the curriculum.

I'll leave it there.

Mr. Corbould: If I could, Chair and Member, just add another important validation to this. This past weekend Minister LaGrange and I were attending the Minister's Youth Council on education, which is 40 kids in high school across the province. They spent quite a bit of time in their discussion with the minister outlining the importance of, you know, supports for new Canadians, children of veterans and service members who are dealing with PTSD in the household, mental health therapist assistants, success coaches, counsellors, and especially trying to prepare and make that transition through graduation. That was a testament from the students themselves about how important these services are.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you.

In this exchange if I could just ask, because we've heard a lot of discussion about the downtown building for CBE: at the time the lease was signed, who was the Minister of Education? We were?

Mr. Grundy: Through the chair, I'm a recent immigrant to Alberta. I came in 2012. I believe that deal was concluded sometime in 2006. I don't know who the exact minister was. I believe it was a Progressive Conservative government at that time.

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Chair, was there any back and forth between the board and the government of the day prior to signing the lease? Was this something that was floated, and was there agreement given that it impacts the 2018-19 fiscal year?

Mr. Grundy: Through the chair, my understanding is that under the then School Act there are requirements for ministerial approval related to both borrowing and the construction of nonschool buildings in school jurisdictions. The Calgary board of education did receive appropriate ministerial approval for that deal before it proceeded.

Ms Hoffman: If that could be tabled through the committee, I'd find that helpful, Mr. Chair.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: All right. Thank you.

We'd like to have an introduction of MLA Toor before we proceed, please.

Mr. Toor: Devinder Toor, Calgary-Falconridge.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, MLA Toor.

We are now moving to a government rotation and Member Walker, please.

Mr. Walker: Yeah. Thank you so much, Chair. Just finishing up on my last question, we had heard from the Calgary board of education, and I think it's only fair that we hear from the Edmonton board of education. You know, it's always a balancing act, Edmonton and Calgary. It's great to see you both here. When you walk out the door, one wears a Flames jersey, and one wears an Oilers jersey. I want to be fair and balanced. Would you like me to repeat the question?

Mr. Robertson: Please.

Mr. Walker: Yeah. Sure. Talking further about the quality of K through 12 education, how does the government objectively measure success in the K to 12 system?

Mr. Robertson: Thanks very much, Mr. Chair. I don't really want to repeat what's already been provided, so I'll talk a little bit about that we are one of the jurisdictions in the province participating in the pilot, you know, around the accountability framework. I believe that the Ministry of Education is looking forward to moving out of the pilot phase at some point in time, but basically in essence what this allows us to do is to take our strategic plan as a jurisdiction and report directly the measures that we feel are significant.

We have three priorities in our strategic plan. Obviously, one is related to student achievement, one is related to safe and caring and quality learning environments, and the other one is related to parent engagement. We use a mixture of survey data. We do a district feedback survey annually, and we have over 11,000 people that participate in that survey. We identify typically a grade level that's not impacted by the traditional surveys that are done in the province, and we also have a number of parents and staff that participate in that survey. That gives us some good insight into satisfaction levels in a number of areas from parental perspective, community perspective as well as staff and students. Our principals and our central decision units use that data on an annual basis to look at the efficacy of the supports and services that we're providing. That is all wrapped up in our annual education results report, which is introduced at public board as well as posted on our website.

I've talked about trustee results reviews in the past. We conduct those on an annual basis, and those meetings are also open to the public. We have something called catchment conversations. Basically, if you think of our high schools and feeder junior highs and feeder elementary schools, they all form a catchment. Our catchments work in collaboration with each other around some identified goals to improve their results, and the catchment conversations are very much a discussion of those results and that data that we're using to look at the impact of our work. Pretty much every two weeks in Edmonton public we have a strategic plan update. There's one today, actually, at our board meeting, that I'm unfortunately missing, on literacy. So this talks about our journey in literacy and how our kids are doing in terms of grade level and what interventions are being impactful. Those documents are also available publicly for all to see as our board meeting is public to attend as well.

Our board endeavours to be transparent in all that we do. I think effective communication is at the core of accountability. That is, I guess, the framework which we proceed from. Even making decisions around infrastructure involved community consultation for Edmonton public schools. One of our cornerstone values is collaboration.

Thank you.

Mr. Walker: Thank you so much, and thank you, all, for your time. That was very thorough and informative.

Chair, I cede my time now to my colleague.

The Deputy Chair: Okay. Moving to Member Nixon, I believe.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Toor.

The Deputy Chair: Member Toor.

Mr. Toor: Well, thank you, Chair, and thank you very much for being here. It's been reported that some of the school boards have had large surpluses. Can the department tell us what area school boards, particularly the largest ones like the Calgary board of education and the Edmonton public board, had surpluses in the fiscal year 2018-2019? Could the department speak to the size of any surpluses that some boards had and how that might impact the budgeting practices in the future?

Mr. Corbould: Right. Member, Chair, as of August 31, 2019, the total adjusted accumulated surplus from operations reported by all boards was \$363 million, which represents 4.5 per cent of operating expenses. This was a 3.8 per cent decrease from the previous year of \$378 million, which was 4.7 per cent of total operating expenses. Capital reserves as of August 31, 2019, were \$195 million, which was a decrease of \$30 million, or 13.4 per cent, from the prior year. In their latest fall budgets, submitted January 6, 2020, boards are projecting the accumulated surplus from operations to decrease in 2020 by 56 per cent to \$160 million, which represents 3.7 per cent of total annual expenses. So we're certainly seeing a use of those reserves. I would just offer – I don't know if the Calgary board would like to comment on their particular circumstance.

Mr. Grundy: Through the chair to the member, for the year ending August 31, 2019, so acknowledging that our year-end is different than the government's year-end that we're speaking of, for the 2018-19 year the Calgary board of education had an operating deficit of \$3.478 million. On the same date our operating reserves were \$2.9 million, and capital reserves were \$15.8 million.

2:30

Mr. Corbould: Then if Edmonton would like to comment as well?

Mr. Robertson: Thanks very much for the question. In terms of our accumulated surplus in operations, I hope it's okay if I go back a few years to explain and contextualize some things. Sorry. If I'm too long-winded, just give me the signal, and I'll just stop. When I started in this role seven years ago, we had what I would call a structural debt. Site-based decision-making, again, means that we push money out to our schools to organize for operation. We had more money pushed out to our schools than we had cash on hand to cover, so if schools spent everything in a year, we would actually be in a deficit position in our jurisdiction. We actually made some changes at that time, and through the work of the board we limited the percentage of a school budget that they can carry forward in surplus. We limited it to 3 per cent of their budget.

We also introduced something called an equity fund. It doesn't matter what formula you use to distribute money to schools; their context in a different given year is going to be different. Some may have more money than they need, and some may not have enough money. The equity fund is something that our board of trustees established where anything in excess of that 3 per cent that schools are allowed to carry forward goes towards the equity fund. In addition, our trustees do an annual allocation to the equity fund. Let's say that we have a child that requires specialized supports that comes into our school in October. We welcome them. If we have to hire staff, there's a pressure release there for us. The trend with that fund is to be more and more used in emergent kinds of situations.

We have, through careful spending and making every dollar count, been fortunate to have an accumulated surplus in operations over the last number of years. I have prepared and submitted a plan to the province each year on how we are going to invest those dollars. We have looked at improving our buildings. For some of the things that schools could never get to in a site-based model – if they needed to paint a classroom, if they needed to change some rugs, buy some furniture, whatever the case – we invested to raise that bar of equity in our division.

We've also invested very heavily in professional development for our staff. I think it's no surprise to anyone that our classrooms are more complex, so I'll just add a little bit to what was said by our colleague at CBE. We would have close to 25,000 English language learners in our classrooms in a population of 105,000; we would also have approximately 8,000 children that require specialized supports and services and 11,000 children that are First Nations, Métis, and Inuit. That doesn't mean that they need additional supports and services; they just self-identify as they register in our jurisdiction. All this is to say that we have taken those dollars and we have made careful investments over the years.

As everyone is aware, we did not get a budget last year. We received one in October, and we were forced to make some assumptions in planning for the year. Our assumptions were, actually, a reduction in funding – so the elimination of the classroom improvement fund we were right on – and some other things, and that left us short to the tune of \$34.4 million, that we had already pushed out to our schools. Rather than causing havoc and having . . .

The Deputy Chair: Sorry to interrupt, but we'll have to move that to either a written response or to the next rotation.

We'd like to move across to the opposition for another 10-minute rotation, please.

Ms Hoffman: Yeah. I'll just start by asking Mr. Robertson to finish that sentence or two.

Mr. Robertson: Really quickly. Sorry.

Rather than reopening our school budgets and having our schools have to make staffing decisions in the middle of the year, which is incredibly disruptive, we took the remainder of our surplus and we invested it into this year to ensure that we had some time to think through how we're going to organize for the coming year. So our surplus will be depleted.

The Deputy Chair: I'd maybe just caution you to limit your comments to the '18-19 year, please.

Mr. Robertson: Oh. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Yeah.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you. I'd like to follow up with some questions, but just one point before we leave what you were just talking about now. The actual reduction to the Edmonton public school board was actually \$54.4 million. Is that correct? Then I realize that there was a one-time \$20 million backup fund. Is that correct in terms of the numbers?

Mr. Robertson: Mr. Chair, the difference between our assumptions, which were \$34.4 million, is the number that we've been utilizing. If we take all of the dollars together, I would want to just confirm what those are. Our actual to actual was a \$9 million difference, but we had to make assumptions to plan for this year, so I will confirm that.

Mr. Feehan: Okay. Thank you. I just wanted to know that.

I'd actually like to ask some questions – I'll start with the ministry itself – around the curriculum regarding First Nations and Métis and Inuit students. Now, I understand that there was a new curriculum review process that was initiated somewhere in 2015-2016, of that nature. Can you tell me – and this is backup for the questions about the current year, of course: was there specific direction given by the ministry to the curriculum review regarding the inclusion of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit knowledge?

Mr. Corbould: Sorry. Member, you're going back to '15-16?

Mr. Feehan: Well, to when it was initiated, the original review that was initiated around that time, 2015-16.

Mr. Corbould: Okay. I don't have any information on the '15-16 curriculum direction, that point.

Mr. Feehan: Okay. Perhaps someone in the ministry can send any correspondence they have regarding direction from the department to the curriculum review committee regarding the inclusion of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit information, knowledge, and traditions to us after the fact.

Of course, I'm only asking that to give myself some context for the question. Right now, with the recent review that occurred in the last year, that we are speaking about today, can you tell me: has there been a specific direction to the curriculum review committee to include indigenous perspectives, histories, and traditions in every single grade from kindergarten to grade 12 in the current curriculum review?

Mr. Corbould: Member, Chair, I believe there has. Alberta Education worked closely with stakeholders to develop new and updated professional practice standards. We have been instructing and working with everyone in the system to ensure that system leaders, supporting teachers, students are learning about First Nation, Métis, and Inuit perspectives and experiences and the history and legacy of residential schools and treaties and for the creation of a proper delivery of professional learning opportunities for educators.

Mr. Feehan: Does that mean there will be specific curriculum content, FNMI content, in each single grade from kindergarten to grade 12?

Mr. Corbould: Well, I think it's a little premature on the new curriculum review to determine the final answers, but certainly in the advice and in the . . .

Mr. Feehan: I'm asking about the direction given by the department.

The Deputy Chair: Guests and members, can we limit our comments to '18-19 and to the matters at hand, please? Thank you.

Mr. Feehan: I did. That was asked: was it done this year? Did you give direction to the curriculum review to do that?

Mr. Corbould: Yes.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you.

I would now like to go to the school boards and ask them about the FNMI money that is given to the schools, and I want to know a little bit about a couple of different things. First of all, given that it seems to be that there was some direction to include FNMI knowledge and traditions in every school grade, can you tell me what your school board has done to ensure that teachers have the

knowledge necessary to implement any curriculum that may come out of that curriculum review? I ask that of the school boards, please.

Mr. Corbould: Could we start with Calgary, please?

Mr. Grundy: Sure. Through the chair, at the Calgary board of education there are a range of mechanisms in place to ensure that our education staff have the necessary knowledge, skills, and competencies to deliver indigenous ways of knowing into the curriculum. We have an Indigenous Education Team, that deploys out to schools where there might be a priority need. As you can appreciate, the number of indigenous students in schools varies from very few to quite a lot.

We also implemented, as I think I mentioned, our indigenous learning centre, a place where there's much more focus on indigenous ways of knowing in the delivery of the curriculum. There are also professional development opportunities for what we call learning leaders. These are individuals in schools, educators, who have been given additional tasks, and they connect with our indigenous learning team to bring that sort of expertise and perspective back to the school and then build that out into the teaching and learning in the schools.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you.

Mr. Robertson, same question.

2:40

Mr. Robertson: Thanks, Mr. Chair. In addition, we would be very similar to the CBE. We do have an indigenous unit that provides supports throughout our jurisdiction, consultant support. They put on several professional development sessions. We've been preparing for the curriculum for some time, including First Nations, Métis, and Inuit ways of knowing, connecting with elders. We have an advisory council that we consult with, and we also have an annual honouring celebration of our graduates, that welcomes the community in to celebrate the achievements of our students. In addition, we have several professional development opportunities for staff that are organized through a series through the year as well as summer institutes where teachers come in during their summer break to access some quality professional development.

Mr. Feehan: Great. Thank you very much. I really appreciate that.

Mr. Corbould: If I could, Member, Chair, just tie that to outcome 2 in the business plan, which directs everybody to do that. It is a government outcome directed in the business plan.

Mr. Feehan: Great. Thank you. I appreciate that.

I also know that there are specific dollars given to school boards for FNMI, and I'm wondering if the school boards can tell me: are those dollars specifically related to particular children who have been designated as FNMI, and are they designated to actually help the child that has been identified as such, or are they used as general dollars? So if I have 45 students in the school that are identified as FNMI, do I use it globally, or do I specifically design those dollars to apply to the child who's been identified with that designation?

Mr. Corbould: Member, Chair, if I could just start with the direction that the department provides and then let the two boards answer. They do receive differential funding for every provincially funded First Nation, Métis, and Inuit student who self-identifies on school registration forms. A lot of the monies allocated to provincial school authorities are to assist with program and instructional supports to improve FNMI students' success and to support aboriginal education of all students. It's also allocated to support

enhanced opportunities for FNMI students, including programs to support First Nations students on-reserve. These opportunities are intended to enhance, not replace, any federal government funding as well.

Mr. Feehan: Can I just ask, from your interpretation of that, if instructional supports means that it's specifically designated for the benefit of the child that's been identified as opposed to, let's say, having a powwow day at the school or general . . .

Mr. Corbould: I would say specific to the needs identified, which is why I think it's linked to those who self-identify in the school registration form. I would also say that there's also a greater direction for everyone in the system to consider FNMI, but, you know, the specific dollars are focused on indigenous education.

Mr. Feehan: Yeah. I'm just wondering about these specific dollars. Of course, I support the broader objectives.

Mr. Corbould: Edmonton, would you like to . . .

Mr. Robertson: Thanks very much for the question, Mr. Chair. When I think about the goals of truth and reconciliation, it's about a broader context. It's about providing opportunities for our students across the division to learn about indigenous culture and experience some of those traditions and opportunities so that we can build relationships and that we can make sure that all folks are feeling welcome and comfortable in our schools. Certainly, for children that require specialized supports, those dollars are utilized, but not all First Nations children require specialized supports, so we are very carefully investing those dollars to ensure that the kids are successful.

The Deputy Chair: Great. Thank you to the member.

Moving back to the government side, MLA Nixon, please.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the members for being here. Congratulations on the new role, as well, for the deputy minister. I think that jumping from Ag and Forestry straight into Education is pretty impressive. Good to have you.

Actually, something that came up a little earlier sparked my interest in regard to complex students and just seeing this rise in complex students. Certainly, that's something I've heard from the trustees and teachers and parents within my constituency. I'm just trying to figure out how much money is being dedicated towards that and kind of what the breakdown of that is. Specifically heading down the path of new Canadians or refugees, we've heard talk about second language barriers. I know that there's federal funding that's designated towards supporting new Canadians and language training and all that in schools. I'm wondering if you can kind of break down what that formula looks like and where the gaps are in regard to funding.

Mr. Corbould: Are you happy to start off, Edmonton?

Mr. Robertson: I'll start.

Mr. Corbould: Okay. That would be great.

Mr. Robertson: Thanks very much. I'll begin with federal funding. When we welcomed – Edmonton probably not unlike Calgary – thousands of refugee children in just a few years ago, our board wrote a letter to the federal government asking for some funding to offset some of the costs that we incurred. In the middle of the year you can appreciate that budgets don't change, so, you know, we rolled up our sleeves, and we worked with our partners. The federal

government was not forthcoming with additional dollars to help with refugee children, and I'm not aware of any federal grants for English language learners. I think our money comes from the provincial government, unless you guys received money from the feds.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Yeah. Certainly, I'm new at this as well so am just trying to figure out where the money comes from. I thought there was federal support. So it's just for new Canadians but not for new language learners, which would be part of the new Canadian formula program, I imagine.

Mr. Grundy: If I may, through the chair, there is no federal funding that flows to school jurisdictions for English language learners or refugee students. There is a small allocation that comes from the federal government for certain FNMI individuals, depending upon whether they're on- or off-reserve and where they get their education services. I believe the province has a program with the federal government that flows certain funds for bilingual French programming. But having said all that, about 94 per cent of total board funding comes from Alberta Education, and the remainder would be fees and grants and donations from individuals.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Our school districts or Education are taking on the burden of that cost. Are you guys able to break down what that cost is in regard to your school districts or overall?

Mr. Corbould: We can certainly undertake to get that to you, Member. There are essentially three streams. There's one for FNMI, there's one for English as a second language, and there is a refugee stream. We can undertake to get that to you, unless, Brad, you have it readily available.

Mr. Smith: No.

Mr. Corbould: We'll get it to you.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: That would be great, very helpful information, I think, to have.

On the same thread, in regard to what we heard earlier about mental health therapists, certainly I've heard this in my community concerning increasing mental health concerns at schools. I think I heard mentioned earlier about the need to access Alberta Health Services and partner with AHS in regard to providing these supports and services, so, again, a breakdown on kind of what the costs are for Education in regard to helping meet these needs within our programs.

Then kind of building on that: what has been done to reach out and partner with Alberta Health Services? What's been done to reach out and partner with not-for-profits or NGOs that do this type of work within our community? For example, I know that within my community the Alex health bus does visit a number of your high schools, so I'd be interested to know a little bit more about that.

Mr. Corbould: If I could, Chair, Member, in terms of the funding of that, it doesn't come through Education. Mental health capacity building in schools is an initiative solely funded by Alberta Health and AHS. I do know that they have a \$10 million operationalized grant through AHS, and in May 2018 AHS and Health provided an additional grant funding of \$5 million annually to expand the initiative for mental health services. While the funding all comes from Health and AHS, we do work collaboratively between the two departments, and of course the school boards work with their local health representatives at AHS to make sure that gets to the right place.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Okay. Sounds good. So there would be no additional costs on Education, then?

Mr. Corbould: Well, not additional costs to Education because the funding all goes through Health. It's considered primarily a Health matter, but it's recognized to be a health matter in the schools, and the funding comes through Health.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Okay. Perfect. Thank you very much.

Referencing page 20 of the annual report, it states that the classroom improvement fund was set to expire in August 2019, as I understand. I was wondering what the plan was in regard to that program. Was it planned to expire entirely in August 2019, or were there other plans for that?

Mr. Corbould: Chair, Member, I'm going to ask Brad Smith to talk about that.

Mr. Smith: Yes. In Budget '18, Member, through the chair, that program was listed in our funding manual, the '18-19 funding manual for school authorities, as expiring on August 31, 2019. That's correct.

2:50

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Can you give me an update on the current status of that fund, then, or is it . . .

Mr. Smith: In Budget '19 the allocation, the \$77 million related to support that grant, remained in the Education budget and was repurposed in Budget '19 to support normal growth in the province.

The Deputy Chair: Again, just a reminder to the member to limit your comments to the '18-19 budget year, please.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Oh, for sure. Thank you.

I'm wondering a little bit about that fund. I know that in the report – and going back to kind of the complex student needs – it was encouraged to consider new supports for students with complex needs. Can you talk a little bit more about how you achieved that or used that money to that end?

Mr. Corbould: I think if I could defer to the boards in terms of how they used that money that got to them.

Calgary, would you like to start?

Mr. Grundy: Sure. Through the chair, at the Calgary board of education the lion's share of funding received from Alberta Education is flexible. That means subject to local decision-making around how best to deploy it. Within our school jurisdiction we have the resource allocation method that I referenced previously. In there there are a number of indicators that we look to from school populations that then allocate resources based on the level of complexity that those indicators suggest. We might look at socioeconomic status indicators. We might look at the educational, behavioural, social qualitative characteristics of the various students, and money then flows to the schools that house those students proportionately.

It's then up to the school-based staff, the principal and the educators in the system, to look at their student population and figure out the best way to staff and resource the needs for those specific students. I should be clear, though. Like, there is nothing in the Alberta Education funding framework that flows dollars for a specific student. It flows dollars to a jurisdiction. The jurisdictions then allocate to schools, and schools make the decisions on how best to support the student population, including individuals that

might have some unique learning needs. That's kind of how that process works.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Through the chair, just a quick follow-up: is there any way to, then, kind of summarize if that did end up meeting certain complex needs within the classroom or kind of consolidate that data?

Mr. Grundy: Within our resource allocation method there would be a bit – I'm grossly simplifying here, but there is a general allocation for each student, and then based on those qualitative characteristics of those student populations, we flow additional dollars. If the question is, "Could we show you what portion of a school's budget was flowed for regular versus the other factors?" yes. If you're looking at what the actual costs are, that gets more complicated because, as you can appreciate, in a classroom the percentage of a teacher and educational assistant's time devoted to an individual student – we don't track that.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: That makes sense.

Mr. Corbould: Can we go to Edmonton, please?

Mr. Robertson: Sure. Just in addition to some of the comments from CBE – I've talked about site-based decision-making and pushing the money onto schools already, so I won't go into that – we also have an inclusive learning team that is dedicated to provide supports to our catchments. Those are some of those wraparound supports like psychologists, speech-language pathologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists. Our schools have one point of contact should they need additional supports. They can call on their inclusive learning team, and they can receive support in the school, in the classroom, with whatever the challenge is.

If your former question is related to the efficacy of the expenditure of those dollars on student success, we would have to look into this individual child's individual program plan. Not all of those goals are necessarily related just to academics. There are social and emotional goals, you know, et cetera, that would be in there, so it would be very difficult to quantify in terms of the entire organization.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: No. I can appreciate that.

Going to my next question here, I noticed that in the back of the annual report the financials . . . [A timer sounded]

In 10 minutes.

The Deputy Chair: We'll do a final 10-minute rotation for the opposition members, please. Member Renaud.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm going to focus some questions around the outcome "Alberta's education system respects diversity and promotes inclusion" and build a little bit on the conversation that just happened. Your comments earlier were great. Consistency of intervention is key for student success, certainly key for students with disabilities. In changing classrooms, where there are sort of more complex needs – more students, more autistic students, or whatever their needs might be, growing class sizes – would you say, looking back to the annual report that we're talking about here, that there were sufficient supports for students with disabilities in either of these school boards?

Mr. Corbould: Can we start with Edmonton, please? Thank you.

Mr. Robertson: We have a duty in the act to accommodate to a reasonable level, and I have confidence that we have accommodated all of our students in the district to a reasonable level. Could we always aspire to do better? Sure.

Mr. Corbould: Would Calgary like to comment as well?

Mr. Grundy: I would just reiterate that same comment. I think we provide the services that we're required to provide to the extent that we can, and we would always aspire to do more. The challenge is to figure out how to do that within the resources we have available to us.

Ms Renaud: It's a big challenge to continuously have to do more with less.

I just wanted to link back to one of the – I can't recall who said this, but, you know, how important it is to collaborate with other ministries to support students and actually to support families and communities. That is really important. One of those ministries being Community and Social Services or Children's Services, we know there are additional pressures, whether cost pressures on programs like family resource centres, parent link, all of these programs that are preparing children to enter school. For children with disabilities, those are specialized supports, perhaps speech and language, occupational therapy through FSCD, which is a program in the Ministry of Community and Social Services. I imagine these cuts will impact sort of your comments. Do you have sufficient supports in the schools to work with students to ensure that they're included in classrooms? I mean, already things are stretched pretty thin. I'm wondering if you can comment on that going forward.

Mr. Corbould: Perhaps, Member, Chair, if I could just start by saying that in the short time I've been in the department, I've seen an amazing level of collaboration with the departments that you mentioned; myself, the DMs of Community and Social Services and Children's Services have already been on the phone several times sort of collaborating around all these things . . .

Ms Renaud: If I could – sorry to interrupt. I just don't have much time. My question is – I'll give you an example. Family resource centres: people are reapplying for services. There is 25 per cent less funding available, so clearly some communities are going to lose supports. My question is, I guess, to the large school boards. Do you worry that, you know, our reliance on these really natural collaborations is going to impact the quality of inclusive education in Alberta?

Mr. Corbould: Calgary, would you like to start?

Mr. Grundy: Through the chair, I would say that matching the range of services that are necessary to support our community within available resources is the challenge that we face all the time. I haven't yet seen anybody from that jurisdiction that had no worries about the financial constraints. I think it goes to the quality of the partnership and the quality of the conversations that happen between the various partners to ensure that we're working together to the extent possible and getting as much sort of bang for the buck, if you will, out of that relationship in support of students and their learning.

Mr. Corbould: Edmonton, would you like to further comment?

Mr. Robertson: Thanks, Mr. Chair. If you look historically at the mapping data of the developmental milestones of children in the city of Edmonton, we have a significant number of children coming to school that aren't developmentally ready in order to be successful. This is where the efficacy of our early education programming, which is a partnership with many of our service providers in the community, comes into play. We know, we have clear evidence that the early interventions that we provide to

children make a significant impact on their readiness for grade 1, and when they come to us ready for grade 1, they experience success. We have that data.

Thank you.

Ms Renaud: Just to follow up, I guess an opinion: do you anticipate, like, the loss of really intense, inclusive, or preparation supports for children? Do you anticipate things like seclusion rooms becoming more readily available strategies where there are too many kids, where there are not enough supports, and that that becomes a strategy, a go-to strategy, as opposed to a more staff-intensive or wraparound support situation? Just from the school boards, that would be great.

The Deputy Chair: Can we just caution the member that we are supposed to be dealing with the issues at hand, not policy? So maybe if we could just make sure.

Ms Renaud: Yeah. I'm actually talking about one of the outcomes in the annual report.

The Deputy Chair: Maybe a reference would be helpful. Thank you.

Ms Renaud: Yeah.

Mr. Corbould: Could we just talk about which outcome, Member, please?

Ms Renaud: The outcome: "Alberta's education system respects diversity and promotes inclusion."

Mr. Corbould: Right. And the question regarding that is . . .

3:00

Ms Renaud: Let me rephrase that. I think we've had a lot of discussions around seclusion rooms. Is there a plan to reduce the reliance on this as an educational tool to promote inclusion? Is that reflected in the business plan? Are there plans to address this going forward to reduce the incidence of relying on a tool like this?

Mr. Corbould: I'm sorry. I'm just trying to understand how that's relating to the . . .

Ms Renaud: Inclusion?

Mr. Corbould: Well, no. To the '18-19 . . .

Ms Renaud: The outcome is to promote inclusion, and I would suggest that the use of isolation rooms or segregation rooms – and I'm not talking about sensory rooms but isolation or segregation rooms – is the opposite of inclusion. So my question is: is there a concern that larger classrooms, fewer staff in those classrooms, less preparation for children and families will result in more of a reliance on something like that?

Mr. Corbould: I'll just start by saying that I don't believe so. I believe, first and foremost, that they're about providing safety in the schools for other students and for teachers.

Then I would go to Edmonton first perhaps.

Mr. Robertson: Sure. Thanks very much for the question, Mr. Chair. Seclusion rooms really are not an educational tool; they're a response to crisis. In our jurisdiction in response to the great work by the ministry around the guidelines that have been provided for school jurisdictions across the province, we spent a good deal of last year in anticipation that, you know, something may be coming

around the creation of a regulation that establishes training standards for our staff, that establishes infrastructure for how these rooms are used and clarifying that these rooms are only to be used in response to crisis. Yes, we have lots of challenges with inclusion, but the seclusion rooms are not a tool that we'll be using to successfully implement inclusive learning practices in our system.

Ms Renaud: Are the instances of use of these rooms available for the public, or is there some oversight to determine if there's a correlation between use and, say, outcome measures? Is there a public reporting of the incidence of usage in different school boards, different schools?

Mr. Corbould: Member, Chair, I would say that there certainly are standards in terms of their use. There are certainly protocols in terms of the rooms, and . . .

Ms Renaud: I understand that, but is there a number?

Mr. Corbould: I'm trying to answer the first part of the question, which is: is there a standard? Yes, there is, and it's in an MO that was released.

Then in terms of information on those standards, do you know, Jeff?

Mr. Willan: It's available online.

Mr. Corbould: It is available online as they report it.

Ms Renaud: There's a place. Okay. Excellent.

Mr. Corbould: The numbers of use, yes.

Ms Renaud: Just one more question for you. If there were additional staff supports in the classrooms, whether it was the aides, whether it was smaller classrooms even, would you make a correlation between a reduced frequency and the use of rooms like that, like a seclusion room or an isolation room? To the school boards, just a general question.

Mr. Robertson: Thanks very much for the question. There is no observable correlation between ratios of staff to children that require specialized supports. It's very much dependent on the child. We work in partnership with parents to establish a behaviour support plan for children that we feel may become dysregulated on occasion, and parents also have the choice of whether or not a seclusion room is to be used in the event of a crisis. If that's not the case, if they don't support that, then we work on an alternative to the use of the seclusion room in the event of a crisis. It's that close partnership with family. Of course, we're working to build the skill set of our educational assistants and teachers in our classrooms, you know, I guess to ground our work in trauma-informed practice and ensure that we're recognizing the signs and we're diffusing situations before they become a crisis. But on occasion things happen, and we need to be prepared to keep people safe, including the child.

Mr. Corbould: Chair, I would like to correct something I said if possible. I had said that the MO and standards are online. The use and reporting are not yet online. Part of the concern is the low use. We're a little concerned that if we reported the low usages we're seeing, it would be hard to keep confidentiality, so we're working on that, but we have not publicly reported yet on the use since the MO has been issued.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

We'll move to a final 10-minute rotation of the government side. Mr. Barnes.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Good afternoon, everyone. I want to talk for a second about capital projects. Can the department please tell us how many school capital projects are under way currently and how many of these were started in the 2018-2019 year that we're here for?

Mr. Corbould: Yes. Member, Chair, this number, obviously, changes month to month. For example, since the '18-19 annual report was released, Budget 2019 has been announced, which included more, but there are currently 77 school capital projects under way.

Mr. Barnes: Okay. Thank you. Are any of these 77 projects delayed, and if so, why are they delayed?

Mr. Corbould: Member, Chair, of the 77 school capital projects under way there are 10 that are delayed for various reasons. Some of the causes include weather or unknown pre-existing site and building issues, some changes to project scopes of work. Individual project schedules are confirmed only after all planning activities have been completed and the contractor is formally engaged. You know, we work with these complex projects, but 10 of the 77 are delayed. In each of those delayed school projects we're working on mitigation measures, and those are the ones that I focus on more as a deputy, as does Infrastructure, than, say, the other 67 that are on time.

Mr. Barnes: Okay. Thank you.

Can you talk for a minute or two about your priority list? How do you determine the priority of what schools are going to be built?

Mr. Corbould: Yes. Member, Chair, I would start by saying occupational health and safety is always the number one priority. The safety of teachers, staff, and students in the schools certainly pushes projects into the number one category. That is first and foremost. After that there's building condition, enrolment pressures, functionality in programming, legal requirements, community renewal, and efficiency solutions. Those are essentially the eight categories that drive priorities and the priority list that changes as required. So if a new occupational health and safety matter emerges, it can potentially raise a project much higher up the list or perhaps some renewal or maintenance or capital renewal just to make sure it's safe because we'll close it before, you know, it's an unsafe place to be.

Mr. Barnes: Okay. Thank you.

I want to switch gears to the carbon tax for a sec. Can the department please tell us how much the school boards paid in carbon tax in 2018-2019?

Mr. Corbould: Beginning January 1, 2017, the carbon tax was introduced at \$20 a tonne and then rose to \$30 a tonne on January 1, 2018. I'm just trying to make sure I isolate the answer to '18-19. The total combined cost of the carbon tax for the '18 and 2019 calendar years was estimated at between \$19 and \$30 million for school boards.

Maybe we could just see if the Calgary board of education or Edmonton would like to further comment on their part of that fee.

Mr. Grundy: Yes, please. Through the chair, I would probably want to respond in writing on that. I don't have that number etched in my brain. I'm thinking it was somewhere around \$3 million, but I would want to confirm that in writing.

Mr. Corbould: Edmonton, would you like to comment on that?

Mr. Robertson: Well, if the CFO from CBE can't answer it, I'm guessing I may not have it. It was in the neighbourhood of \$2 million, but we can respond in writing.

Mr. Barnes: What's the average annual cost of running a school? Three million would be a large part of an annual budget, wouldn't it?

Mr. Corbould: Calgary, would you like to take that?

Mr. Grundy: Through the chair, that's a kind of complex question. When you say the annual cost of operating a school, I'm assuming you mean outside of staffing. So if you do that, I think the biggest component of the carbon tax for the Calgary board of education was actually the cost of fuel purchased by our transportation service provider for the yellow school buses. After that, it would be natural gas to heat and electricity to light. I don't have a good answer for you in terms of at a school level what would be the component. It's probably not that significant. If my math is anywhere near correct: \$3 million, 246 schools, so you can kind of do the math. It's probably not a big component of an annual operating cost for a particular school, but it is \$3 million for the system.

Mr. Corbould: Would Edmonton like to comment as well?

Mr. Robertson: Nothing further to Brad's comments.

Mr. Corbould: No? Okay. Good. Thanks.

Mr. Barnes: That's fine. Thank you all very much. I'd like to pass the rest of the time to MLA Turton.

Mr. Turton: Yes. Thank you very much.

Now, Mr. Chair, how much time do I have left?

The Deputy Chair: Five minutes.

Mr. Turton: Okay. Perfect.

A couple of quick questions just to kind of go off one of the points that MLA Barnes was talking about, transportation costs. Can the department tell us how much was allocated for transportation for the school boards last year? Also, I'd like to know if that amount increased or, additionally, how that funding is provided to each school board.

3:10

Mr. Corbould: Yes. Member, Chair, transportation funding is allocated on a per-student basis according to the urban population and/or rural student density of the board. Co-operative transportation funding is also available for school boards who enter into shared transportation agreements with their neighbouring jurisdictions. Transportation funding provided in '18-19 was \$290.7 million, and under Budget '19 transportation funding increased by \$3.3 million from the year before to \$294 million.

Mr. Turton: Okay. I guess the second question I have is actually regarding class size initiatives. One of the outstanding recommendations was related to the class size initiative. Flaws were found in the monitoring and reporting of this program. Can the department explain how the grant operated and how it was utilized in 2018 and '19?

Mr. Corbould: The class size initiative had been in place for 15 years with over \$3.4 billion being allocated through the small class size funding grant to schools, jurisdictions to reduce class sizes. It was a per-student grant responsive to enrolment growth. Small class size funding in addition to the base instruction rates formed part of

the base instruction funding, and it was primarily used to hire teachers. The small class size funding for the 2018-19 fiscal year was \$289.8 million, and a review of the class size funding showed that while funding had been directed towards the classroom, it wasn't achieving the results of actually reducing the class size to the desired results.

Mr. Turton: Do you have an opinion or can you give any additional information about why it wasn't meeting the objectives, you know, about why the program was initially laid out?

Mr. Corbould: I think I would like to actually defer to the boards, perhaps, and see if they can give you some more close to the class size answers. Calgary, could you start?

Mr. Grundy: Yes. Through the chair, the class size funding was a significant amount that came to each jurisdiction, as we discussed. I think both jurisdictions invested those dollars directly in schools where students were in K to 3. I think the challenge with maintaining class size in a system where there are innumerable other sources of cost increase is part of the complexity.

If you'll stay with me, in year 1 you invest some dollars to bring class size down. Those dollars flow to schools. Schools buy staff; class sizes drop. In the following year you can have grid movement for staff. You can have nondiscretionary increases. You can have inflationary cost pressures. If the class size funding stays relatively constant while the overall cost of operating your system goes up, it becomes harder and harder to get the same amount of benefit even though the dollars continue to flow to schools. They have to manage the remainder of their budget and manage all those other costs, and at the system level the same thing. I think that's, from my perspective, the primary driver of why even though there was class size funding, class sizes started to creep up because the cost of public education was increasing.

Mr. Corbould: Edmonton, would you like to comment further?

Mr. Robertson: I guess just a little addition to that. Class sizes only tell part of the story as well. Each of our classes, we've talked a little bit about classroom complexity and ensuring that we're accommodating kids effectively. We overspend annually in our inclusive learning dollars that we receive as a jurisdiction because the growth in our children with complex needs is outpacing the growth in the district more than double. Our schools are responding to very complex situations and needs in inclusive classrooms, and they're utilizing every dollar they get, including what was the classroom size funding, to ensure that we're keeping class sizes reasonable. Also, the complexity of the classroom that our teachers are navigating: it needs to be staffed appropriately.

Mr. Turton: Okay. Thank you very much for the answer.
I defer the rest of my time to MLA Guthrie.

Mr. Guthrie: Okay. I guess kind of a quick one here. Can the department explain the process of collecting revenues from the perspective of property tax, and then how much is collected through property taxes?

Mr. Corbould: Okay. Thank you, Member, Chair. The education property tax . . .

The Deputy Chair: I regret to interrupt, but you might have to respond to that one in writing as well.

Now we're moving to the final three-minute rotation, which allows members the opportunity to read questions into the record

for follow up by the ministry. We will begin with the three-minute rotation on the opposition side. Member Dach.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Chair. My questions relate to the construction of schools and renovation projects; 2018-19 saw a number of those projects under way. I want each of the school board representatives as well as the DM to respond individually, in writing, to this question. In 2018-19 how many new schools or major renovations were under way in their respective jurisdictions?

Also, of course, '18-19 did not end the backlog of school projects that were needed. What was the list of 2018-19 backlogged new school construction requests as well as major renovations that were not fulfilled, that remain outstanding?

Finally, I want to know from each jurisdiction in particular and from the deputy minister how many of these major projects in '18-19, school constructions and renovations, were P3 projects, and what, in their views, were the ongoing difficulties that P3 projects presented to them, what challenges they may have had commonly with P3 projects that they had under way during this fiscal period?

Mr. Corbould: Member, Chair, could I just confirm: could you just define backlog? I mean, we have priorities.

The Deputy Chair: Sorry. You'll have to clarify that later. This is just a straight read-in here.

Member Hoffman.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much. I want to acknowledge the increases in math scores in the fiscal year that we're here to review, so I'm hoping that the two jurisdictions here as well as the department can write a summary as to what strategies were used to support increased achievement and success that students saw in math scores.

The second one is around affordability for families in your districts. What were some of the strategies you used to identify ways to help affordability for individual families? What were those strategies, and how did you measure success?

The next one is around sites that have shared transportation. I know that there are a number of individual schools that have this. How many schools across Alberta have shared transportation initiatives between multiple jurisdictions, and how do we measure ride-time impacts as well as financial impacts for both parents and district?

Then the last one I want to touch on is enrolment growth in 2018-19. If enrolment had not been funded in '18-19, what would have been the funding shortfall for your jurisdictions?

Thank you.

Mr. Feehan: I'd like to ask the school boards and the department whether or not they can provide me with any information about the relative influence of family socioeconomic status and English language learning factors on test outcomes such as provincial achievement tests as compared to school teaching strategies or curriculum design.

The Deputy Chair: All right. Are there any other questions?
Would you like to clarify . . .

Ms Hoffman: I'll take the last 15 seconds.

The Deputy Chair: Go ahead.

Ms Hoffman: Yeah. Sorry. Pages 160 and 161 of the Ed annual report list overall operating actuals in '18-19 as \$8.6 billion.
Thanks.

The Deputy Chair: Well said.

Now we're moving to a three-minute rotation on the government side, beginning now.

Mr. Guthrie: Is it me again?

The Deputy Chair: Yes.

Mr. Guthrie: Okay. Continuing from that last question, given that our education spending at \$8.25 billion is higher than property taxes collected, can the department explain how the difference is made up for spending versus revenue?

Next question. The ministry is tens of millions over budget for each of the past five years. In fact, the yearly overages are, if my numbers are right, around \$230 million, \$68 million, \$250 million, and then \$302 million the year before that. What do you attribute these overages to, and what is the largest expense category making up those overages? The second part of that would be: what practices could be put in place to provide assurances that budgets are met?

The last one. The ATA president recently stated in relation to its member wages: "Combined with other settlements, this arbitration means general salary increases since 2012 have been 0, 0, 0, 2, 0, 0, 0, and 0. That is 7 zeroes in the last 8 years." It is my understanding that compensation has continued to rise year over year, so could you provide the details of compensation increases over the last five years as an overall figure and as a percentage of budget? Additionally, can you explain how the grid system works with respect to pay increases and how that impacts budgets in Education?

The Deputy Chair: Are there any other members with questions from the government?

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Year after year we see the CBE with unexpected shortfalls of tens of millions of dollars. Can the department or the CBE speak to budgeting practices within the CBE and what is being done to ensure that taxpayers' funds are being spent in a responsible manner?

3:20

The Deputy Chair: Are there any other questions?

Hearing none, I'd like to thank the officials from Education, the Edmonton public school board, and the Calgary board of education for attending today and responding to the committee members' questions. We do ask that any outstanding questions be responded to in writing within 30 days and forwarded to the committee clerk.

Ladies and gentlemen, we now have some committee business to attend to here. If you'd like to stay, you're welcome to, but we will be moving on to some committee business at this time. Thank you very much for joining us today and for your diligent attention and answers. Thank you.

Hon. members, we're just going to wait for a document to be put up on the screen here for us. The subcommittee on committee business has put forward recommendations for inviting ministries, agencies, boards, and commissions to appear before the committee during the 2020 spring session. The proposed schedule was posted to the committee's internal website on February 10, 2020. I would now like to open the floor to a discussion on this proposed schedule, noting again that this was discussed at the subcommittee level and brought forward for your approval. Is there any discussion? Why don't we wait until we get it up on the screen here?

You will note that the dates are reflected as TBD given the fact that we are uncertain as to the exact dates of the Public Accounts Committee meetings during the spring session.

Just to clarify, on the day of the Speech from the Throne the committee will not be meeting, so that would not be at the front end

of this schedule here. If indeed we do move forward with the budget process immediately, we would then, obviously, have a revised calendar, which we would adhere to. This is really more the order that we will address these ministries. Some of these were pre-existing and in our calendar. Of course, the dates have now become less certain, and we added three additional ministries as recommended by the Auditor General. You will note that we have two more to fill in terms of our spring schedule, so that will have to be addressed early on in our meetings to ensure that we do have a full slate of ministries to address at that time.

I would like to open it up for discussion. Member Hoffman.

Ms Hoffman: Yeah. Thank you very much. Just to clarify, given that with the Speech from the Throne members will be heading into estimates, essentially this won't begin until after the budget is passed. Is that . . .

The Deputy Chair: That's correct.

Ms Hoffman: Okay. Thank you very much.

My question, I guess, would be with regard to ABCs that relate to some of the ministries that don't have identified agencies, boards, or commissions coming with them. Is that something we could discuss possibly at a future meeting, what some appropriate ABCs might be that relate to the ministries that don't have any identified?

The Deputy Chair: I would suggest: why don't you put that through the chair? Then we will probably be scheduling before we get into this process to – I mean, this would be approving this, but in terms of when we have the calendarized dates in place, would it be fair for us to address that in terms of some additional ABCs that could be approved for addition?

The clerk is identifying that we should identify at this time the ABCs that we want to include.

Ms Hoffman: Would it be possible, then, to refer this to tomorrow's meeting?

The Deputy Chair: Yes.

Ms Hoffman: If there's agreement from members.

The Deputy Chair: Yes. If that's fine, why don't we, through your chair or for my members through myself – if you have any agencies, boards, or commissions that you would like to see added on, why don't we make sure that those are added onto a draft that we can present tomorrow? If everybody is amenable to that, we will add 10 minutes onto the . . .

Ms Hoffman: Perhaps there won't be any. I would just like the opportunity to consider it.

The Deputy Chair: There may not be, but I think that that's fair because we typically, again, have the agencies, boards, and commissions eligible to attend and join us. Obviously, we don't want them all showing up, but we can do selected ones, I think, for each one, and we can approve that at this committee tomorrow.

The chair has suggested that we continue discussions here in case there are any issues with the order . . .

Ms Phillips: For the six.

The Deputy Chair: . . . for the six that we have before us here today so that our discussion tomorrow can be more limited to: do we add any ABCs onboard with them?

Ms Hoffman: I will start that by saying that I support these six.

The Deputy Chair: That's great news.

Is there any other discussion at this point in time, noting that we'll have ample opportunity tomorrow to bring forward any other concerns?

Hearing none, I'm hearing that we have general agreement for this list in this order. We will defer to a final decision and vote tomorrow on approving this with any ABCs added as appropriate. That's great. So we don't need a motion today.

Is there any other business for discussion today?

Seeing none, the date of the next committee meeting will be tomorrow, Wednesday, February 12, 2020, at 9:30 a.m. with Treasury Board and Finance, Alberta Gaming, Liquor and Cannabis,

the Alberta Investment Management Corporation, and ATB. There'll be a premeeting briefing for members at 9 a.m.

I will call for a motion to adjourn. Would a member move that the meeting be adjourned?

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: So moved.

The Deputy Chair: Member Nixon. All in favour? Any opposed? Carried.

Thank you, members. We'll see you tomorrow morning at 9.

[The committee adjourned at 3:27 p.m.]

