

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Title: **Thursday, May 7, 1987 8:00 p.m.**

Date: 87/05/07

[The Committee of Supply met at 8 p.m.]

head: **COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY**

[Mr. Gogo in the Chair]

MR. CHAIRMAN: The Committee of Supply will please come to order.

Members of the committee, before we proceed, would the members agree to reverting to introduction of special guests?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I'll call then on the hon. Minister of Social Services.

head: **INTRODUCTION OF SPECIAL GUESTS**

MRS. OSTERMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a privilege for me once again tonight, as I have had the good fortune of doing in other years, to introduce a very special group of young people. They are 43 young people who are involved with the Forum for Young Albertans. Before I mention who is with them, I'd just like to make a couple of comments.

Mr. Chairman, over the last number of years I've had the good fortune to be associated with this group and be very, very keen as the young people are when they come and are involved for the course of the week that they're up here, to see how enthusiastic all of our young people are in knowing about various kinds of governments. They've been involved in activities all week in Edmonton in local government and, of course, the provincial government. As well, I think it's fair to say that they've had the odd little bit of fun.

I gather that this is a very well-behaved, studious young group of people. I can vouch for that to some degree because on Monday night I had the opportunity to speak to them, answer some questions, and get into a fair amount of discussion. Mr. Chairman, I think that I stand on pretty firm ground when I say that if these young people are a sample of the Alberta youngsters that are coming through our school system, we will yet be in good hands and they may be able to fix up some of the mistakes that we've made over time.

So, Mr. Chairman, I'd just like to introduce some of the people who are responsible for the program. First of all -- and I'd like them to stand and stay standing until I'm done the introductions -- Linda Ciurysek, the executive director; Cameron Laux, director; Kathy Skocdopole, counselor.

MRS. BETKOWSKI: They're not standing.

MRS. OSTERMAN: Would you like to stand please so that you can be recognized. Thank you.

I also asked for Kathy. Where are you, Kathy? Kathy is there. Interestingly enough, I find a little note here which is pretty terrific; Kathy has been Miss Teen Red Deer. So not only do we have a lot of brains, but we also have beauty.

Linda Myshak is with them and she's a counselor. Sandy Kravos is a counselor, and Jason Rohrik is a counselor. There is a total of six staff, and as most of you will know, the group

started on May 3 and have almost a full week. We look forward to hearing from them in the future about government and their full participation. I have a feeling that since a number of them were sitting on the floor of the Legislature today, they may have inked their names in the desk here somewhere and be back. Would you all rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Hon. Member for Edmonton Mill Woods.

MR. GIBEAULT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm very happy this evening to introduce a couple of very special people, to me: the colleagues and friends of mine that worked at Central Alberta Media Services when I was there from 1978 until the last election. There are 11 staff members there: Jan Dunn is the manager and Cathy Soos is the assistant manager and the other nine members of the staff. I would ask if they would rise and please receive the warm welcome of the House.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Perhaps, hon. members, before we get under way an explanation to our visitors may be in order as to what we are doing in this highest court in the province of Alberta called the Assembly.

We're in what's known as the Committee of Supply. We have within our government system -- our young Albertans would know this very well. Under our democratic system governments are elected. Then a Premier, which is the leader of the party winning the most seats, determines the cabinet. The cabinet takes a special oath to Her Majesty the Queen, represented by the Hon. Helen Hunley. Then only members of that Executive Council, or cabinet, are authorized under the democratic system to spend money in the province of Alberta.

Each minister then -- and there are 25 -- comes before this Assembly of all members and presents their budget for the coming year. In this case, the hon. minister is attempting to get authority to spend almost \$1.3 billion under the Department of Education. Members of the House then have the authority of accepting it, rejecting it, and amending it, including reducing the minister's salary to a dollar, if they so wish. It's never happened in the history of Alberta, but one never knows. It's a very exciting time because it's democracy in action.

I would now, before we proceed, call on . . . I'm sorry; the hon. Member for Edmonton Avonmore would like to introduce a guest, if that's appropriate.

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MS LAING: Mr. Chairman, I would like to introduce two people to you and through you to the members of this Assembly. I would like to introduce Mr. Ted Paszek, who is a trustee on the Sherwood school board and is here to hear the estimates debate tonight. And I would like to also introduce my mother, Mrs. Jean Sprado, who taught me to love and value education and is a student at the university this week.

Would they please rise and receive the . . .

head: **COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY**
(continued)

Department of Education

MR. CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of the Department of Education, the Hon. Nancy Betkowski, is presenting her esti-

mates tonight, and it's conventional and traditional that the hon. minister make some introductory remarks.

The hon. Minister of Education, please.

MRS. BETKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I, too, would like to welcome the Forum for Young Albertans here tonight. I don't know whose timing it was -- and probably I would attribute the timing to their organizers -- to bring them into the Assembly during a time when we're talking about estimates about something of which they have a good deal of knowledge and probably can teach all of us something about the education system. So I welcome them here tonight. I had a few moments to speak to them this evening in the cafeteria before coming into the Assembly.

Mr. Chairman, I don't know if you were trying to make a suggestion here tonight about my salary and my estimates, but believe me, if I go down, a lot of people will come with me.

I'm very pleased today to table the 1987-88 estimates of the Department of Education, and I would like to set a certain context for the opening remarks this evening by highlighting some of the key elements of the budget estimates, many of which were included in my January 9 budget announcement to school boards and to all Albertans.

This whole process of developing the '87-88 estimates started out in about September 1986, for me at least, and in fact I thought at that point towards tonight and towards standing and defending my estimates in this Assembly. I recognized the problem that we faced as a province with having our primary revenue source from natural resources fall by about one-third of what had been anticipated in the previous year. That very difficult circumstance caused us to have a deficit created of about one-third of our expenditure base. It was a very big challenge, and as Minister of Education my first reaction to the very difficult challenges ahead of us all as a government was to react by saying, "No, Education cannot be reduced." But I am also a responsible legislator in this Assembly, Mr. Chairman, and I'm not willing to mortgage the future of the kids who are in the system right now and therefore had to balance those two very important parameters as I faced a very important challenge.

The problem is that we were spending more than we could afford. In the education system, both in the basic and the postsecondary system, we spend about 25 percent of the province's budget. It's clearly indicative of the priority that we place as a government on education and an indicator as well of the resources that we are willing to commit as a province to support one of the most fundamental purposes that a society can fulfill, and that is the education of its young people. So I realized that given the problem, Education certainly and clearly had to be part of the solution.

The challenge then was to determine how to proceed given that difficult parameter. I looked at the budget of the Department of Education, which is about \$1.3 billion. Clearly, in terms of responding to restraint, I could have gone into that budget and said, "I will reduce every single grant given out by the Department of Education," which make up about 97 percent of my budget estimates. I could have reduced them all in the same amount. In other words, minus three could have gone off every single grant. But I have a problem with that, Mr. Chairman, and it's the same problem I have with a government which looks at all of its spending priorities when it's about to make some reductions. And the problem is that to reduce everything by the same amount implies that everything is of equal importance. I simply don't believe that to be the case. In fact, I do

believe there are some things that we do which are more important than other things, and that theme goes into the Department of Education as well.

It was important, therefore, to establish some principles from which the decisions could be made. As I have said since my maiden speech in this Assembly, my first focus as Minister of Education will always be on the student. That focus continues through to the developing of budgetary priorities, because once I had identified that it was the student and the direct access of students to basic education in the classroom, then the priorities became clearer.

As a result of setting up those priorities then and to recognize the financial situation of school boards, the decisions I made through our government, which were confirmed in the budget address on March 20, were the following. First of all, the equity grant would increase by \$3 million. That is the only portion of my budget, Mr. Chairman, which increases as a result of a decision with respect to the issue of equity as opposed to a volume increase. Secondly, special education, the education that we have been leaders in in North America in terms of developing programs for special learning needs of young people. Those grants, again unique, would be maintained at the same level in '87-88 over '86-87. As well, I would put aside within that funding special education funding to be allotted to school boards with higher than the average number of severely handicapped children.

Other major grants to school boards, which were the most directly impacting on young people, would be reduced by the 3 percent. And that includes the transportation grants, the grants for early childhood services, grants for vocational education, private schools, extension programs including adult basic education, and the provincial portion of language grants. A number of grants as well were cut by more than 3 percent. The current education opportunities fund grant would be reduced to \$4 million. Funding for community schools would still permit \$37,000 approximately over and above what other schools would be receiving in the province. Finally, some programs were suspended, including some teacher in-service grants to school boards, and some research projects initiated by school boards would be suspended entirely.

What about my own department? I made it very clear to school trustees when I spoke to them in early December that I would not ask school boards to do more than I was prepared to do myself. Seated in the members' gallery this evening, Mr. Chairman, are some people who helped me in my task. I thank them publicly here tonight for their support in working through a very difficult challenge but also a very rewarding one.

I think we've all come to the conclusion within the Department of Education and throughout the province, I would say, that fiscal restraint has created an opportunity for this province to deal with some things that we have not been dealing with in the past. I thank those people in the gallery under the effective leadership of Reno Bosetti, my deputy minister, for being able to tell me when they thought I was perhaps not going the right way in my decision, and I thank them for their grace in accepting from me when I thought exactly the same of them. As well, I would like to recognize my executive assistant, Darrell Osbaldeston, who is a constant source of support and strength and good humour in my office.

In the same way that I asked school boards to look at creative ways of solving the challenge of fiscal restraint, I felt the same was incumbent upon the department. I don't think we simply go in and reduce the size of an operation by lopping off a

certain portion of it and expecting to deliver the same quality of service as a result. I think it's very important that you go in, that you identify priorities, that you move certain functions within the department around in order to ensure that you are making the most efficient and effective use of the resources you have.

So in that context then within my own department, I moved from four divisions down to three, and all the functions that we were formerly performing will continue to be performed but may be performed in a different way or in a different part of that department. I would like to recognize, in noting that reorganization, that three assistant deputy ministers of Education, who have provided a wealth of knowledge and support to the education in this province for the past 20 years, will be taking early retirement: Drs. Fenske, Odynak, and Hrabí have been leaders in the Department of Education for many, many years. I thank them for their very, very valuable contribution. I thank them for all the work and support they've given me since taking over the portfolio one short year ago, and I wish them every success in their future endeavours.

Within my own department budget then the total budget will be reduced by about \$56 million, a decrease of 10 percent over the 1986-87 estimates. To accomplish this reduction, 70 man-years will be reduced. I also want to highlight the fact that \$1.8 million out of my votes 1 and 3, which are basically the administration votes in the department, were transferred into the grants to school boards, or vote 2, which is also a commendation to the effective work of the department people. In my own office my budget will be reduced by close to 22 percent, and the discretionary grants which I approve will be reduced by close to 34 percent.

Capital funding has slowed down a bit in terms of the dollars that are available, and clearly how we spend those dollars again has to be where we see the greatest need. I think the priority that we're trying to use through the School Building Board is to address the emergent capital needs, the modernizations and renovations of schools, and finally, as a third and last priority, the building of new schools in the province, given that we have in place about 600,000 spaces for students and only 435,000 students. Those schools may well not be exactly where we'd like them to be, but certainly we have to be very careful to ensure that we are not overbuilding.

I recognize as well the very important job-creation potential that is provided through the school capital budget, creating jobs for architects, engineers, and tradesmen in the province. It was in that vein that we continued and have kept in place about \$68 million in capital support to school boards for capital purposes, which is about the same value as we actually spent in 1986. The impact, I should note, in terms of the reduced capital will not be felt in my budgetary estimates this year, because as most hon. members will know, there is a lag effect in terms of approving the capital dollars in one year, but the actual spending of those dollars is not done until about two or three years later, when the actual capital project is in place and the support in terms of provincial and local can be identified.

Finally, the school foundation levy was approved at an increased level by an order in council yesterday, that there would be a 5.4 percent increase in the rate applied to commercial industrial property across the province, raising the rate to 15.4 percent.

AN HON. MEMBER: Mills.

MRS. BETKOWSKI: Mills. Excuse me; 15.4 mills, not percent.

Finally, in terms of the overall votes for the Department of Education, these again reflect the theme that the student is the most important part of our education system. Vote 2 of my department, which is the grants which flow to school boards, is decreased by 1.5 percent. Vote 3, which is the portion which has some direct dollars flowing to students at the School for the Deaf and the Alberta Correspondence School, is reduced by 8.9 percent. Vote 1, which is departmental support services and has no direct impact on student programs, is reduced by 13.6 percent, creating an overall reduction in the voted estimates of 1.9 percent.

I would like to make a few remarks, Mr. Chairman, about the consultation process which I believe is fundamental to the education system in this province. Within the education system we have partners, all of whom are involved in education. Within that group I would include certainly the major stakeholder groups like the School Trustees' Association and the Alberta Teachers' Association, but as well it includes school boards; it includes parents; it even includes students. I discussed the challenge which was ahead of us as an education system with all of those groups in the November/December time frame, when so many important decisions were being made. As a result of those discussions, I came to the conclusion that one of the most important things we could do in terms of the Education budget was to delay the implementation of the reduction in grants to September 1. That decision, and it is reflected of course in the grants announcements and in the Provincial Treasurer's budget speech, gives us three indications in terms of what are our priorities. Certainly the priority of education: it costs dollars to delay that implementation date, and it was because of that cost that we had to make a very important decision, but it speaks to the priority that we give to education.

The second indicator is that it says that we listen. We listen to what the delivery mechanisms are of the education system in this province. We listened and we heard and we delayed that implementation date. Finally, and perhaps most important to the student in the classroom, was that it was the least disruptive mechanism we could put in place to ensure that classrooms remained intact. I'm sure none of us wants to imagine the effect of having put a minus 3 percent on April 1 and seeing school classrooms disrupted in a major way, teachers and trustees and parents all concerned because this change had taken place mid-way through the school year.

As well, school boards, as a result of this consultation process, asked that there be as much flexibility left with school boards in dealing with restraint as is possible. In other words, please leave us as much of the school foundation program grant which flows to school boards basically unconditionally as much as possible and reduce more the earmarked grants for special programs. That would give school boards and school trustees who are elected to do the job of delivering the system as much flexibility as they could possibly have.

Their third message was to leave as much in equity in the budget as was possible. Equity is provided to recognize that some school boards have less fiscal capacity than another. And perhaps the best way to describe that is to think of a large school board like the city of Edmonton public school board, which is funded about 60 percent by the province and about 40 percent by local tax base, as compared to another school board, for example. Lac La Biche school board, which is about 85 percent funded by the province and 15 percent funded by local tax base.

We can imagine clearly that it is far more difficult to take minus three off 85 percent of one's budget than it is to take minus three off 60 percent of one's budget. Therefore, there is an equity to try and smooth that difficulty and that differing fiscal capacity.

Finally, the consultation process does not end there. We continue to work with school boards. We have developed seminars that have been held over the past several months to work with school boards to ensure that they are taking maximum advantage of what we've learned by traveling the province and working with other school boards on how to creatively look at the challenge which fiscal restraint gives to us.

Mr. Chairman, in contrast to some of the estimates of other departments that my fellow ministers have been addressing throughout these important committee meetings, the overall reduction to the departments other than those of Education, health, and Social Services is in the order of minus 16 percent. I think that's a clear indication of describing those priorities in an overall government context, because the very important service areas, which also happen to be the largest proportion of spending in terms of the provincial budget, were reduced to a far greater degree than those important people services were. I think it speaks to the fairness with which this government has approached the whole issue of fiscal restraint.

I'm confident that in Education we are in a very good position to respond to the reductions in funding. I'm not saying for one moment, nor have I said at all, that the decisions that school boards will have to make are easy ones. I know well that the difficult choices they have made and will continue to make as they plan their budgets and programs in September will continue. But in Alberta we are fortunate because we have a strong education system to serve a base. We are fortunate because we have thoughtful and capable trustees. We are fortunate to have had a strong base of funding in the past so that we have excellent programs, facilities, and equipment. We're fortunate to have dedicated, talented, caring teachers. We have the youngest, most highly educated teaching force in this country. As I've noted earlier, we are fortunate to have the tremendous support of parents and community members from across this province.

I want to say how pleased I have been with the reasonable, fair, and open way in which school boards have dealt with the issue of fiscal restraint. Without exception, school boards have taken a very thorough and a careful look at the full range of their services and looked for ways of reducing expenditures that would have the least negative impact on instruction in the classrooms. They've undertaken extensive consultation with teachers, parents, and support staff and with community members as well before decisions were made about budget reductions for September.

Before I end my remarks and begin to respond to the many questions I know will be on the floor this evening, I'd like to make a few final remarks about what I see as the challenge and the opportunity that fiscal restraint provides. I don't mean that in any callous nor flippant way, but I strongly believe that the current period of fiscal restraint provides us with an opportunity to look carefully at what we're doing in education and to rethink and re-establish our priorities. Over the past 10 years we've been fortunate to have been in a financial situation that allowed us to spend considerable resources on education. As a result, we've added new dimensions, new programs, and new expectations. We've rarely stopped to assess whether those additions have had a positive impact on what schools should be all about, the whole primary purpose of education, and that is to ensure

that students learn. In the upcoming year it will be important and in some cases essential for us to re-examine what are and what should be our priorities in education, what things we think are essential because they contribute directly to student learning, what things are nice to have but not essential, and how we can best use our current expertise, programs, and facilities to improve student learning.

I think we have to be more creative, to use necessity as the father of invention, and to have a very creative response to fiscal restraint. We've got some examples of that in the Department of Education, Mr. Chairman. We're approaching problems from a very objective point of view, trying to decide if just because we've done it that way for a long time, it necessarily means it's the best way. I will be speaking a little bit more on that in my remarks this evening. I believe the kind of discussion needs to occur not only at the provincial level but in every single community across this province. I believe the result will be a clearer set of expectations of what our schools should be doing and an understanding of what our priorities must be, as well as a clear focus on doing everything we can to improve students' opportunities to learn in our classrooms.

I look forward to your comments and your suggestions.

MS LAING: Mr. Chairman, I rise to speak tonight on the debate on the estimates for the Minister of Education and her department. The minister knows the importance that Albertans place on education. It has been a priority throughout our history, and many people have made many sacrifices so their children could receive the highest quality of education possible, even during the Depression years. There have been times in our history, during the 1930s and '40s, that Alberta has been at the forefront of education in Canada and, indeed, on this continent.

In addition, our commitment to education has been demonstrated by local involvement in the governance of education through school boards and through local initiatives in curriculum development. Perhaps the most recent development in education in Alberta that demonstrates our commitment to education through financial support, local initiative, and a vision that models the best that education can and should be has been our community schools.

Unfortunately, Mr. Chairman, under the trusteeship of this government all of that is changing. In 1970, 35 percent of the provincial government was allocated to education. In 1986 only 12.5 percent of the provincial budget goes to this department. In 1970, 85 percent of total education costs were paid by the provincial government. In 1986 the provincial government picked up only 64 percent. This is in spite of the fact that education is a collective responsibility. The education of children should be protected from variations in economic circumstances, be it at the individual or family level, at the district level, or at the provincial level due to fluctuations or downturns in the economy. Education is a societal good. Educated people benefit all of society, and undereducated people cost all of society in many ways.

For many years Alberta has boasted the highest education spending in Canada. That era, Mr. Chairman, has come to an end. While Alberta cuts its education budget by 3 percent, which with an inflation rate of 4 percent translates into a real decrease of 7 percent, Ontario and Manitoba are increasing theirs by over 6 percent. From a point of view of spending per capita, we used to lead the country. After the cuts in this budget we now rank fourth behind Ontario, Quebec, and Manitoba. In terms of spending per pupil, we used to rank third behind

Manitoba and Quebec. After the cuts in this budget we rank fourth behind Ontario, Quebec, and Manitoba. From the perspective of the percentage of personal income spent on education, we only ever ranked eighth in this province. Relative to the percentage of the gross domestic product spent on education, we ranked 10th.

Cuts in education funding impact on the educational opportunities available to all Alberta children. I want to address just some of the ways that these cuts will impact on the children of this province and on their parents. I will look at the meaning of the cuts in special needs grants and the impact of the capping of equity funding grants. I will address the program development cut of 12 percent and the impact of the implementation of the new health and personal development curriculum, secondary education, and the career and life management curriculum, and the lack of financial support for these initiatives, as well as the special specific effects that cuts will have on special education, teacher layoffs, and reduced opportunities for new teachers. Parents will pay more in terms of increased taxes, specific user fees, including textbook rentals in the face of 40 percent increases in the cost of texts, and general user fees that sound very, very much like tuition fees.

First, however, I wish to compliment the minister on her reduced spending in vote 1. The minister has kept her promise to cut administrative costs in her office so that they are now on a par with those of other departments. At least the minister is consistent. This is in sharp contrast to, for example, the Minister of Agriculture, who increased this type of spending while slashing the department by 40 percent.

Mr. Chairman, the minister has repeatedly stated that she is protecting special education and that she has a commitment to detection of learning disabilities in children early in their school careers. In fact, the increase of 1.8 percent in vote 2 for this item is less than the rate of inflation. In addition, the guide to school grants schedules: school boards have been told that there is a decrease in per pupil grants of 3.7 percent for special education programs.

I welcome the \$8,500 per severely handicapped pupil if they number in excess of .5 percent of all resident pupils, but what are the criteria and what is the definition of severely handicapped? I would also note that learning disabled children do not come to school with LD tattooed on their foreheads, and therefore teachers must interpret soft signs of learning disabilities before referrals for assessments are made. Budget cuts in other areas make this increasingly problematic as class sizes increase and teachers have less opportunity to know each child and his or her uniqueness.

In addition to the specific cut in per pupil grants for special education, there is a 22.6 percent reduction in vote 2 in special needs grants. I am unclear as to the distinction between special education and education in terms of special needs, and I ask for clarification. In any case, this reduction cannot but place a huge increase in financial responsibility on local boards, taxpayers, and parents.

In addition, the educational opportunities funding for other than native or aboriginal curriculum has been ended. The elimination of this funding means the loss of 1,000 jobs, including teachers, teachers' aides, and other social service related jobs. The EOF in elementary and junior high schools funded such programs as remedial math, remedial reading, and English as a Second Language, as well as providing matching grants for the purchase of computers. In this time of focus on the number of adults who are not functionally literate and in view of the fact

that the ability to read is the foundation for most school learning, these cuts clearly penalize our most vulnerable children. They are also fiscally unwise. If we and they are very lucky, we will see these children later in our adult education centres. Unfortunately, it is more likely that we will see them later on on our unemployment rolls, in our food bank lines, in our jails, and in our mental institutions.

In some jurisdictions much of the EOF funds were spent on remedial reading programs for aboriginal children. Funding for native education programs, although deserving in praise, do not address these needs. They are focused, and rightly so, on other needs of our aboriginal people. I therefore have to ask: what is the net impact on native education of the new program allocations?

In addition, maintaining funds to English as a Second Language programs is essential if we're going to facilitate the integration of peoples coming from far away into our society. Also, through this loss of funding, local boards and schools are denied support in developing new ideas and programs which in the past have been creative endeavours to use local expertise and resources to meet the unique needs of specific localities.

In vote 3 we see a 15 percent reduction in curriculum development. Perhaps in view of the new curricula now ready to be implemented into Alberta schools, we should welcome the opportunity to make this reduction. Developing new curricula is certainly a costly process. However, I do not see any financial backing to boards to implement these new curricula. This is the case for the career and life management curriculum for grade 11, the health and personal development curriculum for junior high, and the new secondary education initiative which holds grade 7 to be a transition year. I would like to focus for a minute on this topic. When inflation is taken into account, there is a nearly 13 percent decrease for program delivery. I am hearing loud and clear from trustees that these new core subjects place a great burden on resources, not only in terms of materials and textbook costs but in terms of in-servicing.

The junior high health and personal development curriculum mandated into Alberta schools this fall and the introduction on a voluntary basis of the career and life management program calls on knowledge, skills, and attitudes that many teachers simply cannot now be expected to have. While it may be true that the curriculum may be excellent for these programs, they deal with very sensitive subject matters and are process- rather than content-oriented. There is much more to education than providing good course material. Teachers need in-depth in-service training, and there must be a selection process in place. In-service videos may be cheaper than resource people, but they are not sufficient. They will only act as a catalyst to the discussion and skill development that must follow. Orientation sessions for administrators are not enough. After school or one-day in-service sessions are not enough. In order to address in a meaningful way the problems for which these courses were established, teachers need to be given the opportunity to develop skills to facilitate questioning, exploration of feelings, attitudes, and values, and also to solve real problems.

I would like to address just one example here: suicide prevention. Teachers need an ability to facilitate discussions of this issue in a sensitive manner so that the suicidal child can address his or her own thoughts and feelings and not be silenced by an authoritarian or insensitive teacher. And what of the teachers' attitudes? There is a common misperception that suicidal behaviour is only a way to get attention in a negative way. Yet those of us who have worked with suicidal people

know that it is a way of drawing attention to their pain, their despair, their hopelessness, their belief that they and the world would be better off if they were dead. And how does one talk down someone who is suicidal? Some people tell suicidal children, "You shouldn't feel that way." Unfortunately, it is precisely this lack of understanding which may prompt the person to take this drastic action.

What other effects will these new curricula have? They are meant to address career choices and involve giving tests measuring interests and aptitudes. However, teachers are not trained to give and interpret standardized psychological tests. These courses also address issues of living with oneself and with one's family and in the world, issues that require teachers to have assistance developing expertise. I call on the Minister of Education to institute a comprehensive, intensive in-service program and a selection and evaluation program for all teachers who will teach these courses. Nothing less will do. The minister has instituted cuts to these vital in-service programs precisely when they need to be expanded.

In addition, the funding for evaluating both new programs and teachers has been reduced. This makes absolutely no sense when these new programs are being introduced. At the same time, there is an increase in student evaluation of 4.7 percent for achievement exams, I assume. I ask the minister, who doubtlessly was casting around for ways to reduce her budget on the orders of the Provincial Treasurer and her government: what purpose do achievement exams serve at the grades 3 and 6 levels? Teachers are forced to spend valuable time simply teaching children how to do examinations. A great deal of time is spent just trying to ensure that they are able to place their answers in the appropriate space on the answer sheet. This time would be much better spent truly educating children. One might well ask: just what do these marks mean? Do they mean that a child is well rested and in top form or tired and out of sorts, that the child is learning disabled or retarded, that the child is extremely nervous and anxious, that the child was beaten the night before or saw his or her mother beaten, that the child is coming down with measles or chicken pox? I say that achievement exams for these very young children are a waste of time. There are much better ways of determining if students are learning. The money could be much better spent truly educating the children or in diagnosing the nature of the difficulties they are experiencing.

The 50 percent cut in funding to community schools cannot be justified. These schools are recognized internationally. There has been a provincewide outcry by students, parents, teachers, and community groups against these cuts. These schools present education as a lifelong, life-enhancing process relevant to the very human needs in each particular community. They provide an opportunity for the community to contribute to and benefit from the school through seven days a week, 52 weeks a year accessibility and through use of community resources to breathe life into the curriculum. They are democratic and empowering, and I find it unconscionable that their funding has been cut in half. If any move is shortsighted, this one most certainly is. We gear programs to special needs, to needs other than book learning, indeed to education for living, as does the new health curriculum. To cut this funding is simply unconscionable.

In my final few remarks I'd like to address another serious problem, that of rural education. Although the equity funding budget increased overall by 8 percent, a ceiling on grants was imposed this year. As a result, school boards that most need

these grants, those whose grants are more than 50 percent greater than the 1984 levels, will be hurt most. For some districts -- and I'm thinking now of the districts in the Peace block -- this funding has in the past formed a substantial portion of their budget. It now is a great deal less than they were expecting. Rural boards are hit especially hard by these cuts, especially since the local tax bases have been undermined by the agricultural crisis. While transportation costs are up, transportation grants are down. While distance education is promoted as an alternative, the Correspondence School budget has been cut by 5 percent and regional film centres are being phased out. I hear daily of school closures, especially in rural areas, of children as young as five or six facing three or four hour a day bus rides. This cannot help but result in a diminished capacity to learn, to early school dropouts, to the disruption of family life, and to further erosion of the rural way of life.

I note a 3 percent cut in funding to French language education. Does this mean that the province has been supplementing federal funding for these programs or that some federal funds will be diverted into the general revenue? In any event, how can the minister justify these cuts in view of her stated commitment to Francophone and French language education?

I also wish to question the department's commitment to mainstreaming special needs children. As these children move into regular schools or classrooms, there is a requirement for resource room teachers, teachers' aides, and special equipment. Yet funding cuts mean a reduction in all of these areas.

In addition, I have been petitioned by some parents from the School for the Deaf regarding the phasing out of that school. There is no consensus on the best educational opportunities for these children, who too often parents and educators want to normalize. Last night I heard Anne Burrows, a blind artist, give praise to the doctor who had the courage to say that she was a blind child so that she no longer had to try to live as a seeing child. The point, I believe, is well taken.

Many other issues need to be addressed: the laying off of teachers, the lack of job opportunities for this year's 1,800 graduates and 900 interns. These teachers cost Alberta taxpayers between \$35,000 and \$40,000 to educate, and it disturbs me deeply to see them flock to job fairs to get jobs outside of this province and to take their expertise, their skill, and their presence away from our province. I believe the lack of opportunity for them is a cause for shame.

Mr. Chairman, the cuts in education funding will result in layoffs of teachers and reduction in needed support staff; larger classes and split classrooms, reducing teacher/student control; reduction or elimination of special programs such as speech therapy and counseling so that teachers face demands beyond their expertise and experience and children face alone increasingly difficult and troubled times. There is a loss of in-service training, which acts as a period of rejuvenation of teachers, so there will be an increased possibility of burnout of teachers and of losing our best teachers from the profession. There are unrepaired and unbuilt schools, and school closures result in long bus rides and diminished quality of family life.

Mr. Chairman, education is preparation for life. It is a responsibility held collectively. Yet the minister has repeatedly stated that the delivery of quality education and the setting of the budget and how [boards] deal with the complexity of their own budget is a matter for boards to decide, although she will consult with them as to how to deal with the reduced funding. School boards do not need a consultation service. They need adequate funding. Education is a collective responsibility, and

an adequate support base is the direct responsibility of this minister and this government. What we see and hear is much passing of the buck from provincial government and this minister to local boards, to local schools, and to parents.

But while there is much passing of responsibility, there is increasing reduction in power and control. There is no control in terms of the level of funding from the province's collective tax base, and there is diminishing control of curriculum development and implementation. More and more local people are being told what to do and are being given less and less with which to do it. We can put many things on hold -- bridges, buildings, roads -- but not our peoples, not our students, not our children. We owe them an opportunity to be prepared to take their place in society and to rebuild our society and to create a new society. The money saved now will be spent many times over as we seek to rebuild and pay for lost opportunities, lost expertise and skill, and the lost and less than whole lives. We must commit ourselves to provincial funding at the 85 percent level. We must commit ourselves to the elimination of user fees that can only create a two-tiered system of education. We must support local initiatives and curriculum development and implementation, while maintaining a basic curriculum that ensures that all children receive an education that provides them with knowledge, skill, and human understanding.

In conclusion, education is a uniquely human endeavour. It prepares us to take our place in society, and it opens us to the wonder of life itself. Education is not a frill. It enters into our very human being with our capacity to reflect on what is and to imagine what can be and what ought to be, and to act in accord with our dream, our vision, our hope for a better, more humane world.

Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Hon. Member for Calgary Foothills.

MRS. KOPER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It is a real pleasure to rise tonight to speak on the budget of the Department of Education. I wish to congratulate the minister on the tack she has taken in this very difficult economic period here in Alberta. I feel that in all of her remarks and all of her conduct over the past year, she has made it amply clear that her priority is, as stated tonight, on what happens in the classroom for the child, for children. So my congratulations to the minister on that.

As a teacher, principal, superintendent in Calgary and as a member of this government, I feel I have experienced a great deal in Alberta education and have come to know this system of education here in Alberta. In fact, it was one of the motivating factors that first made me, 25 years ago, decide that I needed to become more involved in politics.

The schools in this province, Mr. Chairman, I think are something of which we as members of this Legislature can be very proud. The minister mentioned the kind of teachers that are out there, the teaching staff that is the best-trained, youngest, very ambitious. It never ceases to amaze me how much the ones I have worked with can accomplish and how much they care about what it is happening to children. I also would like to commend the minister on the programs that have been initiated and encouraged to develop the skill of the principal as the chief administrator of the school and to encourage principals to take a greater role in evaluation and responsibility for what is really happening in the school.

I also feel very strongly, Mr. Chairman, that the decentralization that has been encouraged, the empowerment by the minister

of the local authorities to make the decisions in education, is very important, and in this I disagree with the previous speaker. I feel that people in the situation, that are closest to what is happening, are in the best position to be making the judgments, and therefore I wish to commend the minister on this system. The trustees generally elected are responsive if they hear from people, if they talk to people, and I feel that local trustees make some very good decisions.

I also wish to point out that there are hundreds and hundreds of volunteers that work in the educational system. We couldn't put a price on those man-hours that contribute to the education of our children. I think that in our remarks very often we overlook this, and I feel we should not. The whole idea of getting our schools to all be community schools, so that community is involved in all of our schools, I think must remain a dominant thrust of this government.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to focus on five issues and ask the minister a few questions in connection with all of them. The first one is the special education grants. I, too, was questioning votes 2.2.2 and 2.2.3, wondering if the minister would please explain the difference in those grants and why there is such a drastic drop in the one level of grants. In Calgary the learning centre provides a very valuable service to our community in that there were five bodies that united together to provide very specialized help in learning disability. I'm not speaking of handicaps at this point but of the learning disabled. I think this service is extremely important, and I realize that the department has moved into providing help to teachers in determining learning disability through some special diagnostic tests. I would appreciate it if the minister would briefly comment on the distribution of these tests, whether or not the learning centre could play any sort of a role in ensuring that this skill is taught to teachers so that learning disabilities can be detected earlier, more quickly, and perhaps remediated and money saved for the government. I wondered if any work has been done on that. I would also appreciate the minister's comment on vote 3.2.3 on the response centres in Edmonton and Calgary. I would appreciate finding out what these response centres are, the kind of clientele that they are receiving, and just how they fit into the special education grants. Is there any overlap there that can be accommodated within the department?

Moving on to another point, it goes back again to the ability of local schools to create schools that are responsive to the needs of parents in the community. Again, I guess the example we think of is community schools immediately, Madam Minister, and I feel we are truly fortunate that we have kept 50 percent of the funding for those schools. I remain very grateful for that. As a former principal of a community school, I know that we could in some way manage on that. I also have in my riding two schools that qualify fully as community schools that do not receive one cent from this government in order to support their activities. So I feel this is very closely connected to the development of the early childhood services program, which basically has as its tenets the kind of importance, I guess, of involving the community, the parents with the very first experiences of the child at school.

In this regard, I would inquire of the minister: early childhood services was originally created to serve children between birth and age five, and I wonder how the minister is coping with this original mandate and whether there are moneys being spent in handicapped conditions between the ages of zero and five or indeed any children in the department. And what is the extent of the interdepartmental co-operation with handicapped chil-

dren's services? Is there any duplication in that area?

The third point I would like to ask of the minister is in regard to the curriculum development under vote 3. Madam Minister, through the Chairman, the secondary school program revisions are very comprehensive and in depth, yet when I recall reading the original mandate, many of the problems in the secondary school program review could be regarded as attitude and perhaps a change in the way the program was being delivered. One of the very important parts of their findings was the gap between the elementary school and the junior high school. This is very difficult. Indeed tonight when we spoke to a group of students in the Forum for Young Albertans, this was mentioned by the small group I was with as being quite a traumatic experience, to have to move from where you were the top dog, so to speak, at the elementary school to where you were at the bottom of the heap in junior high school. This was recognized in the secondary school program as a very traumatic transition. While I don't feel that perhaps it comes into a budgetary consideration, Mr. Chairman, I feel that it is a problem that must be addressed by the minister, and I wonder if there was any budgetary consideration for that and if there was a thrust in the department that is looking at this problem. The adjustment in junior high school is something that I think is recognized throughout.

The fourth item I would like to mention is a great interest of mine, and that's distance education. I've visited the Correspondence School at Barrhead, and I recall very vividly the arguments why it shouldn't be put in Barrhead and the difficulties that were predicted would happen if it was moved to Barrhead. I see, Madam Minister, immense potential in distance education with the Correspondence School, and I am inquiring whether there are any dollars in the budget here to increase the distance education and whether the evaluation of the present services offered through Barrhead indicates that this should be the central spot -- all deference to the Member for Barrhead -- and whether or not there is any co-operation with the Canadian Centre for Learning Systems in developing this kind of outreach program where we meet the far-flung needs of people across this province.

My last question, Mr. Chairman, is on the vote on teacher certification. It has long been my feeling that the teaching profession in Alberta has come of age, that teachers should have their own professional Act that does take into account far more than the professional Act at this point in time. I notice one vote here that is \$1.1 million, and I wonder if the professional legislation would mean that it would be the responsibility of the profession to cany this on. So with the advances that have been made in evaluating teachers, helping them in their growth and development, with the development of skills or principles in order to do this in a very constructive way, I feel we have come a long distance, and I do hope the development of the Teaching Profession Act will come very soon and help us in every way to improve the education offered to students.

So with those questions, Mr. Chairman, I wish to again thank the minister for her very . . . Oh, one more. I wonder if the minister would please comment on the Alberta school board partnership in local employment programs, as mentioned in the budget speech, and whether or not there is any chance that this would possibly offer to young teachers to be employed in some way in the classroom.

With those questions, Mr. Chairman, I would appreciate the response.

MRS. BETKOWSKI: Mr. Chairman, I wanted to get caught up,

following up on the important remarks made by both the Member for Edmonton Avonmore and the Member for Calgary Foothills, and to thank them both for their comments.

First off, I think it's important to correct what is a misguided interpretation of support for education in this province, and that is that over the past several years the proportion of the provincial budget spent on education has fallen away and therefore support for education has done the same. In fact, the support for education has not fallen away and has increased beyond inflation and beyond enrollment to the point where quality in the system has been enhanced once those two factors have been factored out. So to say that support for education by the provincial government has been eroded over the past 10 years is totally false.

Secondly, I think it's important to put the expenditure base of the province in its appropriate context, and that is that the school population which the Department of Education serves in basic education has remained virtually constant over the past 10 years. In contrast, the Alberta population has risen by about 25 percent. So one would know that the continuing operation of that school system and the enhancement of that school system would not need as many dollars to serve it as would that increase of 25 percent in the population of Albertans for such things as health services, social services, and other important people services. I just wanted to put that context on the record, because the Edmonton Avonmore member was in fact not correct in her interpretation of the facts.

The important question of special education raised by both the Member for Calgary Foothills and Edmonton Avonmore. I think the best way to explain the difference between special assistance to school boards, special education, and special pupil needs is to turn to page 50 of the element details book, to note that special assistance to school boards includes equity as well as the two special education programs, as well as general education grants. Special education grants have been increased by 1.8 percent, and some of that is a volume increase, as the Member for Edmonton Avonmore noted. As well, as I highlighted in my opening remarks, the value of support for special education year over year has been constant.

Now, the member raised an important point, and that is that the general per-pupil support for special education has fallen by the 3 percent by moving it from \$166 down to \$161. That is correct. However, what was not happening in the past, despite the unprecedented high support for special education in the province of Alberta, was that there were young people in the system with severe physical/mental handicaps who were basically falling through the system. In other words, the system would accommodate those special needs to a point, but the severely handicapped children were not getting their fair share of those special education dollars. Therefore, a special pool was created out of that pool of special education for use in high incidence areas like Edmonton, Wetaskiwin, Calgary, and other centres to create a pool of funds specifically for those high incidence or "magnet" centres as they call themselves. But as I say, that is an enrichment over what was the case last year, and it is reflected in the fact that it's a constant level grant year over year.

In the special pupil needs grants, the reduction of 22 percent. Special needs grants include things like vocational education grants, extension grants, and EOF. It was the reduction in the educational opportunities fund as the primary reason for the 22 percent decrease in special needs. Because as I said in my opening remarks, the vocational and the extension grant programs

were preserved at the least amount of reduction, which was 3 percent.

As well in EOF, I think it's important to note that the educational opportunities fund was scheduled to be dispensed of as of June 1987. My budget announcement in January 1987 is consistent with that. There were two components to EOF: one was the enrichment portion for elementary, the second was the remedial portion. The proportionate share of those was about \$10 million on the former and about \$5 million on the latter. By announcing the native education project on March 25 in this Assembly, I have effectively redirected those remedial funds into the native education project. In fact, contrary to what the Edmonton Avonmore member said, they are far more directed at student needs than was the case in the past. Because we have defined the native education policy, and in order to access those dollars, other than the dollars that simply flow because native kids are in the system, one has to be developing curriculum which is in keeping with that policy. I would argue that in fact those dollars are far more directed at the special needs of native kids than was the case in the past.

Vote 3, on curriculum development. The members for Edmonton Avonmore and Calgary Foothills have raised the question of curriculum development, but both took very different points of view on it. There is a point of view that during times of fiscal restraint all curriculum development should stop. I fundamentally disagree with that statement, and I disagree because in fact I think curricula should be developed constantly and assessed constantly to ensure that it is meeting a student's need in the best possible way. Curriculum development is a function that must go on despite a reduction overall in the funding. I think it's fundamental to the quality in the system.

[Mr. Musgreave in the Chair]

There is, however, a very legitimate question raised by the Member for Calgary Foothills, and that is the scheduling of that curriculum development, specifically directed at the secondary education review. Many school boards have spoken to me and said that they felt (a) there should be a moratorium, which I have ruled out, and (b) there might be a delay in the implementation schedule; in other words, what we had planned to do in perhaps three years in the secondary curriculum could perhaps be spread over five years. Then there are those who say, like one school board who wrote me in the past few days -- I won't name the school board because I haven't told them I'm going to quote from their letter, but I just want to read something into the record and that is:

Curriculum development must be a dynamic process so students receive current knowledge about their changing society. Delaying this proposed change in the secondary curriculum will be detrimental to our students.

And another board said:

We feel that the direction of the review is based on sound educational principles and will, without a doubt, result in better educational programs for children.

So I think it's very important to note how important curriculum development is, and I would hope and I will do everything possible to ensure that it continues to move through the system.

The Member for Edmonton Avonmore is right that a videotape does not replace a teacher, and I don't think technology does, but certainly technology can be used in innovative and creative ways to enhance the role of teachers in our system. In fact, in-servicing with teachers can be accomplished in a far

more efficient way, in part by making better use of the technology we now have developed throughout this province. I'm not saying it replaces the people contact, but it certainly can aid in it, and I am not going to close my eyes to the potential of some important advancements we can make in those areas.

Suicide prevention. It has been a matter we've discussed frequently in question period, and it deserves discussion. I think it is a very important issue. It is something which troubles all of us: to think of a young person taking her or his life because there wasn't a purpose to living. I do believe, however, that the very best suicide prevention is the development of positive and realistic self-images in young people. That is certainly a goal of our secondary curriculum, and certainly the work we are doing with the department of community health in developing guidelines for teachers, which will be available to them from the department in terms of sensitizing those teachers to the needs of those students, is something which wasn't noted by the Member for Edmonton Avonmore.

As well, we've heard of the Edmonton school board's pilot project which they're now working on to address this important issue. I think we have to use as many innovative ways as we can. I really, truly believe that the health and personal life skills curriculum is working to have young people address the problem with their peer group of what suicide prevention is and what fear of suicide is.

I would like to just mention in that regard that we are learning a good deal about how students learn in our system. We learned a good deal from the Alberta alcoholism and drug abuse program on teen-age drinking and drug abuse. We could have said simply, "Don't drink, don't take drugs," but it was a very different context in which that program was addressed, and we now have results from that program showing that in fact those usages have gone down. I commend both the Member for Lethbridge West, the former chairman, and the current chairman, the Member for Banff-Cochrane, for showing us that young people do in fact talk about these things, and if we can get them talking about the things and the problems they face together, we're far more effective in addressing the problem.

Edmonton Avonmore also asked about why achievement exams and in fact said that they were a waste of time and we should be spending more time on diagnosing young people who may have learning difficulties. I do not know how one truly diagnoses a problem without testing to see how a student has learned or acquired a piece of knowledge or whether there is in fact a deficiency in that student. To say there should be no evaluation of students to me is to strike at the very heart of what has been absent from our education system for far too long. The whole evaluation of students, of teachers, of systems is something that has to go on constantly in order that we can ensure that students are learning. I do not believe and I do not share the view of the Member for Edmonton Avonmore that ensuring that children learn is a waste of time.

Equity funding. The member is correct that there has been a delay in bringing the equity funding up to the level which we had hoped would be the case at this point. However, in the equity funding vote are some dollars with respect to contingency funding. They will not be spread about the province on the same formula as the equity dollars. But certainly we are looking at those school boards who, because of their differing access into the various grant programs, are suffering an extraordinary amount as a result of reduction as compared to another board. That contingency funding will flow only when there's been a complete budgetary review of that school board's budget, but I

think it's an important point to highlight for the Member for Edmonton Avonmore.

Both members spoke to the need for distance education and for rural education. I spoke in my opening remarks about some of the innovative ways in which we are trying to deal with restraint instead of simply covering our eyes and saying, "It's all going to go away and we can afford to spend more than we're bringing in." I think the creativity required is what is the challenge and what creates the opportunities.

With respect to distance learning, the Alberta Correspondence School in Barrhead is ideally located as a distance-learning centre. We've certainly looked at the Correspondence School as simply a school which uses the post system to send out information and educational course work to students. However, because of the important technology links which we have now built into virtually every school system in the province, we have a tremendous opportunity to use the Correspondence School more as a distance-learning centre than simply a centre which mails out courses to kids.

One of the examples and one of the pilot projects we will be undertaking this year -- and it was really in response to some very important work done by the Alberta home and school association in their rural education report -- is to work with perhaps a single teacher in a school who may be teaching many multi-grades of students. It's obviously very difficult for that teacher to be able to do all of the marking and the preparatory work that is so necessary for the teacher in the classroom. However, if that teacher can have access to a distance-learning centre where she or he can have assistance with marking through the technology system, I think we can learn a bit about how to deliver education more effectively in the remote areas of this province. The pilot project is an exciting one and one I'm looking forward to very, very much.

The Member for Edmonton Avonmore said she heard daily of school closures in this province. I'd like her to let me know where those are, because I haven't heard of them, certainly not on a daily basis.

As well, to link busing to failure to learn is inappropriate, particularly when we consider that the Governor General's award winner about two years ago was a young lady who spent about three hours on a bus traveling in and out of Hinton, Alberta. She said she in fact won that Governor General's award "because I get all my work done when I'm on the bus." So to link it to failure to learn is an inappropriate link in my view.

French language education -- a vitally important part of Albertans' interest in being strong and vital Canadian citizens. We've seen a tripling of the number of students enrolled in French immersion, bilingual, and Francophone programs in this province over the past 10 years, and our support for those grant programs has risen accordingly. Some would argue with the position I took in my budget, which was to protect the second-language grant areas to give them the same status in the hierarchy of which I spoke in terms of priorities as other programs like basic education grants, adult education, vocational education. In fact, I think the second-language programs in the province are very, very important, and it was for that reason that I preserved that high level of commitment by the province.

Just a second. I'll just make a few more remarks, if I may. On the School for the Deaf, just a comment that I consider the kids at the Alberta School for the Deaf to be my students because they don't have an elected school board; they're directly under the responsibility of the Minister of Education. And my commitment to that school is a very strong one. I think the Al-

berta School for the Deaf has been an exemplary model of how important we view special education in this province. It was really one of the first facilities. It does open up the whole debate, however, of having young people with handicaps in the mainstream system and having young people within a special facility. I don't think one or the other is a complete answer. It's obviously going to be a balance between both, and I have assured and will continue to assure those parents who are using the very important services of the Alberta School for the Deaf that we will continue to address the needs of their children.

The Member for Calgary Foothills -- I think that does it. The Calgary learning centre is indeed contributing very importantly to research and to addressing the needs of learning-disabled children in the province. I met with the board earlier this year and have subsequently been in touch with them with respect to their funding for '87-88 and was able to preserve as high a level of funding as possible. There was, I believe, a 3 percent reduction off their main institutional grant, but preserved the research capabilities as well. So I think the learning centre will be able, with that support from the province, to continue in its important work. In terms of its role and its co-ordination with the response centre, I very much see the two working together. The response centre will be a co-ordinating mechanism, and I think we've seen the need for that kind of mechanism within the Calgary context over the last little while, given the number of institutions that are delivering services within a special education community. I hope, despite the reduction of support for the response centres, that that co-ordinating function can continue.

The Teaching Profession Act. I agree with the hon. member that it is important to build in a professional with a bargaining function within the teaching profession in Alberta. I believe we can make some progress in that regard. I certainly think all of the people involved in it are committed towards a new Teaching Profession Act, and I look forward to seeing that progress through the next little while. Obviously the first priority I have right now legislatively is the School Act. But certainly the Teaching Profession Act is an important legislative priority in terms of my term.

ECS. Just a comment that the funding for early childhood services starts at two and a half for handicapped children and four and a half for non-handicapped children, which one could perhaps argue is inconsistent. But I think it recognizes that the sooner we can get little people with handicaps into a learning environment, the more they will be effectively served by the system, once they access it at age six.

The gap between grades 6 and 7 -- I recall it well, and I think that one of the important things with the secondary curriculum was to recognize grade 7 as a transitional year and to know that it's a year and an age level when young people are experiencing a lot of changes in their lives. I'm hopeful, frankly, that the health and personal life skills curriculum in grades 7 to 9 will be able to address some of that special need in a way that hasn't been able to be done before. As you know, the health curriculum in grade 7 was last revised, I believe, in 1964. I think we've learned a lot about some of the things -- I've spoken in terms of the AADAC program -- to bring more of an awareness to young people at that very, very important age.

I do want to speak about community schools briefly, if I may. I have said in this Assembly that I am a strong supporter of community schools, which was why I wanted to preserve extraordinary funding to those schools over and above what every other school gets in this province. I am, however, concerned about the funding formula for community schools; certainly the

environment within school and community is enhanced by the community school concept. I'm not convinced, however, that the educational environment is enhanced, and I think we could do some important review of that as a main function of schools, which is to ensure that students learn.

The report and evaluation of community schools by Dr. Ann Harvey has made some very important recommendations, one of which is that the funding mechanism is not working because we are not sharing those funds equitably around the province, particularly for those schools of which the Member for Calgary Foothills spoke, which are running full community school programs without a cent of funding. One of the recommendations in that report is to fund a community school for a couple of years on a start-up basis and then let that school out on its own. That's one way of looking at it. I think over the next little while I want to talk to community schools -- to continue to talk to them -- to talk to the community education association, which I have met with on a couple of occasions, and try and address the best way to use those dollars in the current fiscal environment.

And finally, I would speak to the point about the impression left by the Member for Edmonton Avonmore, that the whole system of education is falling apart in this province. When we look at the average support for a student, which is about \$4,400 in Alberta, taking 3 percent off of that is about \$132. I'm simply not convinced that the quality of education in this province was based on those 132 dollars, and I would close my remarks by saying that education is not simply a matter of dollars and cents.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary Buffalo.

MR. CHUMIR: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This has been a difficult year for education, in light of the budget cuts, and on behalf of we the assembled multitude of the Liberal Party, I would like to express my concern not just for the cuts in isolation but for the sign of reduced commitment to education by the government. The effect that we are seeing is a lowering of the quality of education, an imperiling of programs, and losses of jobs of teachers and other related jobs in schools.

We view this with alarm, Mr. Chairman. We view education as an investment in our most important and valuable resource, our people, and the impact of cuts which affect the quality of our education system will be paid for in future by not only the individual students who are impacted but by our community and society at large.

The concern which I have is compounded by the realization that there is a promise for further cuts of an uncertain magnitude to deal with the remaining \$1.9 billion deficit, and I would like to ask the minister if she might comment on what she foresees as the next move in this financial chess game relating to spending on education. Will there be further cuts, the effect of which will be very certainly not merely to harm but to decimate a great deal of our education system?

I would also like to ask about the minister's position with respect to the suddenly discovered \$110 million of lottery funds. This is a surplus of lottery funds above and beyond the standing and worthwhile commitments to cultural, ethnic, sporting, and voluntary groups, which I might note the Liberal Party very strongly supports and will continue to support. But these are surplus funds. We are in difficult times in this province. Programs are being badly affected, and it certainly would be interesting to this House to hear the minister's response as to what

the prospect is for some of these funds to be used to improve the quality of education and relieve some of the hardship being caused by the budget cuts. Has the minister made some representations to her colleagues to get some of these lottery funds for the Education department in order to save programs, help keep jobs, and otherwise?

It would be remiss of me not to acknowledge that in fact there has been some direct benefit to the world of education from lottery funds to date. I certainly can't -- and I see the minister will anticipate my comment -- I can't help but note the munificent treatment from the lottery funding of students who were provided with \$100 per student last year in order to go to Expo in British Columbia and export tourist jobs from the province. [interjection] I note an hon. member here talking about how wonderful the program was. I note that the minister has stated in this House how frankly she has been equally unimpressed by the priority that expenditure represented.

I would like to go on to comment on some issues, some of which have been raised before, and on which we have heard the response of the minister, but I have some comments to make on these. I would also like to ask a number of specific questions about programs being affected by the cuts. I, too, am concerned by the community school cuts of 50 percent. I'm somewhat surprised to hear the minister indicate that she is concerned about the quality of education in those schools, or perhaps more appropriately or more fairly it might be that she perhaps said she didn't see an improvement in the quality of education from that funding. And I must admit that I am surprised, because there seems to be almost universal acclaim and approval with respect to this program from happy parents, happy teachers, and happy students. It's so rare to find such a universal confluence of such happiness that I find it strange to hear this tone of negativity being imposed into the equation here.

Now, I must state that I consider these schools to be one of the finest innovative programs in this province, not merely in education but in any field. One might state that that is damning the program by faint praise in light of the few programs of progressiveness in other fields in this province, Mr. Chairman. But I have become in fact a very great fan of the community school concept, not only for what it does to education but for the manner in which it integrates schools with the surrounding communities, develops a sense of neighbourhood, takes schooling and students out of the school into the neighbourhood, and brings the neighbourhood indeed into community schools.

It has been a particularly valuable vehicle in lower socioeconomic areas, and I have had a great deal of communication with and have visited some of the schools in these areas. My own neighbourhood school and my grade 9 alma mater, Connaught community school, Victoria, Colonel Walker, and Bridgeland community schools are others in this lower socioeconomic area category, which perform services beyond that of an educational function and provide services to ethnic groups in terms of language assistance, assistance to single-parent families, employment counseling, and other services to surrounding areas. These are models, as the previous speaker has noted, of what all schools should aspire to be, and I'm distressed to see signs of a lack of confidence in this type of education.

I must admit that I've had some curiosity as to whether the problem in terms of the cut in funding was not as a result of the failure to co-ordinate the efforts and benefits between the departments of manpower, Culture, Advanced Education, and Education itself. Perhaps the comments of the minister with

respect to her concern about the failure to improve education indicate that my hunch is for nought, but perhaps I might express the concern as follows: the community schools provide benefits not only in an educational field but in respect of these other areas that I mention. The benefits come to a number of areas and groups; the funding is unfortunately all within the Education portfolio. And I was wondering whether or not that factor and the failure of all of the funding to directly benefit the Education portfolio might have been behind the rather deep, deep cut beyond the proportion allocated to most programs for community schools.

So I would appreciate if the minister might comment as to whether better co-ordination between her department and these other departments would serve to beef up the funding for community schools, or whether they are to give up all hope in that regard and perhaps have to look elsewhere for comfort.

I'm particularly concerned, however, with respect to the future of these schools. As someone who is committed to that concept of schooling, not only for what it brings to education but to the neighbourhood, I'd very much appreciate her views as to where she sees us going. Is this going to be a growth area, or are we going to withdraw to the point of eliminating these programs in this noble experiment altogether?

I'd like to move on to comment on the area of learning disabilities and perhaps just confirm my understanding of the minister's explanation and previous perception of the funding situation as follows: that the grants with respect to the per capita grants with respect to learning disabilities have been cut 3 percent across the board. However, the amount of that cut, that 3 percent cut, has then been reallocated to schools in those areas which have higher percentages of these special learning difficulties. So 3 percent is cut across the board, but that lump sum amount put together is allocated to certain specific areas so that the global sum remains the same.

I saw first glazed eyes, and then I thought I saw a nod. Was it the nod or glazed eyes?

MRS. BETKOWSKI: Both.

MR. CHUMIR: Both? Anyway, one of the positive developments in education over the past 10 years has been the evolution of our understanding of and our provision of programs for students with learning disabilities. It is a personal tragedy in many instances to have a learning disability, certainly a learning disability which is not diagnosed and not treated, or either. It's a tragedy of lost education and careers for individuals, and it's ultimately a serious problem for the whole community, arising out of the ensuing illiteracy of individuals with learning disabilities. The costs to the community arise from breaches of the law and ultimate imprisonment of frustrated individuals, enhanced unemployment, accidents by those who can't read instructions, and costs to our economy of inefficiency from those who are unable to communicate adequately.

While we've improved our education and understanding of learning disabilities over the last 10 years, we still have a long way to go. I've heard of far too many problems in our school systems. I've heard stories and complaints of long, long delays in assessing students who have been identified as having problems: delays of six and eight months before they have been assessed, and ultimately inadequate resources and even longer delays in remedying the problems which are assessed.

I find it unfortunate that instead of moving forward we seem to have moved backward in many ways as a result of the recent

budget. Firstly, we have cuts in rural areas as a result of the general 3 percent per capita cut. These areas have been the subject of complaint by a number of parents. I believe I've written the minister about the concerns of the parents in the municipal district of Rocky View. These are areas which had serious problems before the budget cuts, and even though they may not have the high percentage of students with those difficulties which are attracted to rural areas, they nevertheless have higher costs per student because of the inefficiency of the lower numbers of students, and I'm concerned about the effect of the cuts in those areas.

In urban areas the amounts provided for these areas remain similar as a result of the special makeup funding for areas which have higher percentages of problem students, but because of the impact of the overall cuts generally many boards have been forced to cut other staff. I believe the members of numerous school boards have made known to the minister that they perceive and experience cuts not just of 3 percent but more along the lines of 8 or 9 percent: the 3 percent per capita cuts, the cuts to community schools, the EOF programs, the in-servicing, and other areas constituting approximately another 2 percent, and topped up by the inexorable 3 to 4 percent from inflation. As a result, some boards -- and I have in mind the Calgary public board -- have cut resource teachers, psychologists, and other specialists which impact most heavily on the learning disabled and handicapped children.

To add to the difficulty, the children's hospital is cutting back slightly, although not to the degree anticipated initially. But it is cutting back as well, and it was well behind in its capacity to handle the load from students with these learning problems. Add to this the cut in budgeting to the response centres which are intended to service and co-ordinate these types of programs, a cut of some 10 percent from \$12.191 million to \$10.934 million.

I would like to also ring into this equation the issue of the learning centre in Calgary, which has already been commented on and which I have visited. I've attended a meeting of the board, and a number of volunteers and parents have found this to be a marvelous partnership indeed of parents, of experts, of school boards, of the children's hospital. It's an innovative group, and it's at the cutting edge of dealing with many of these learning problems.

I had understood that the cuts had been somewhat in excess of what the minister had advised. Perhaps the minister might just clarify once again what the magnitude of the cuts is and whether or not there was an initial cut which has since been altered. Perhaps my original perception of a rather deep cut from the department is a misunderstanding. At any rate, I am delighted -- and this is comparatively delighted only -- to note that the cut was only a 3 percent cut and that the research base was maintained intact. But I would appreciate confirmation of that, because any move to significantly cut the program at the learning centre -- I know that some of the other partners are considering, or have implemented, significant cuts -- would be shortsighted and would cripple a valuable program which needs to be strengthened and beefed up if we are to progress in dealing with the very important problem of learning disabilities and illiteracy.

I would like to ask the minister, on a global basis with respect to those preceding comments relating to learning disabilities, what the provincial government's intention is with respect to the future of these programs and funding of these programs. Does the minister consider this type of program to be

of high priority? Are we going to see funding cut further during the next round of budget cuts? Just what are we going to do in general?

I have been asked whether I would accept a brief question for clarification of your comments. I think if I were to ask a wise counselor, the counselor would probably suggest: say no. However, I'm not going to ask that counselor. Certainly I would accept a brief question.

MR. STEVENS: Mr. Chairman, to the Member for Calgary Buffalo. I believe he said earlier in his remarks some comments about Rocky View school division, that the division or the board was concerned about the reductions. I wonder if he would clarify it. Did he say the Rocky View school board, or parents?

MR. CHUMIR: Parents.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you.

MR. CHUMIR: The parents in the Rocky View district. I've received correspondence from quite a number of concerned parents who have communicated with the minister, and I've communicated with the minister as well.

How is my time, Mr. Chairman?

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: You've got nine minutes.

MR. CHUMIR: I would like to also ask the minister about the effect on local school boards of the five cents per litre gasoline tax which was included in the budget. This has a tremendous impact on school busing programs, I believe in the range of \$400,000 alone for the Calgary public board. This is on top of reduced transportation grants. It would seem to me to be an ideal case for exemption from the tax. I'm wondering whether the minister has in fact argued or suggested to her beloved colleague the Provincial Treasurer that there should be an exemption, or why should this tax be passed on to school boards.

There is a special case I would also like to ask the minister about. She has been made well familiar with the case of the daughter of a Mr. Stan Nykiel, who has written her quite extensively and has approached me about problems of his daughter who was mentally handicapped, a slow learner, and upon reaching 18 years of age found that there was no longer a program for her in the Calgary public school. The school board then proposed a program, but pursuant only to payment of significant fees. As a result of this situation, Mr. Nykiel has approached me, and I know the minister, and has expressed great concern about the paucity of programs for young people in this situation, those who are slow learners and have some handicap but could benefit to some degree from additional education. We found that there were some programs. Mount Royal College, I believe, had a very limited program, but certainly inadequate numbers of places. He ultimately was able to get his daughter into the Calgary separate board, where I believe he's quite happy, but he continues concerned as a citizen about the impact on other students and the availability of these programs. I wonder whether the minister might comment on where we are going with respect to that type of student.

I'd also like to ask the minister about the issue of school user fees. This is a matter which I've raised in the House by way of question several times in recent weeks. It is one of the hallmarks of public education that each child is to have equal access and an equal opportunity for an education, regardless of

their financial capability. That's why we established public schools and, basically, free public schools. There's been a trend over the last number of years in this province for some school boards, and in particular the Calgary public board, to place greater reliance on user fees. These often take the form of provision for use of materials that are consumed in programs and other related types of costs, but they can certainly mount up.

The recent concern has been raised by the announced decision of the Calgary public board to charge a \$25-per-month lunchroom fee for students in the bilingual program in that city, and I believe there were 2,000 students. This was a fee of \$250 a year per student, and this was a discriminatory fee. It was discriminatory in relation to other programs, and those who lived in areas where there were French schools incurred no fees. Those who were unfortunate to live in different neighbourhoods were requested to pay a fee. Yet the school programs in the schools were paid for by public funds, and accordingly it became the lottery of where one lived determined whether or not one would pay the fee. And of course this was a particular problem for lower income groups, and I've heard about lower income groups in which there were three children that would have to pay \$750 per year. Now, I understand they have had dealings with the school board on this and there is a proposal to change the plan. But I see this as a program which would in fact, if implemented, clearly limit access to a program on the basis of whether or not the individual student or the family had the funds available, and I find that to be totally unacceptable.

There are other plans with a \$25 resource fee in the public school board in Calgary which was going to be a part of the school budget, I might emphasize to the minister the result of which is that in schools in lower income areas which would collect lower percentages of fees, perhaps only 70 percent of them would have a lower school budget than those higher socioeconomic areas which would collect almost all of the fee. I've brought this to the attention of the school board and understand that they are reviewing that matter as well.

However, my concern is that this is a fundamental issue. It's the issue of equality of access. It's something that should be reviewed by senior government. I don't find it acceptable to hear suggestions that we have local autonomy, because there are some aspects of provincial policy that have to be established by the senior government. And if equal access to our schools is not one of those areas, I don't know what is.

Home and school association, Mme Minister; very important to have parent input. What is the grant to the home and school association? Is it still 30 percent? Are there any plans to increase and help this valuable organization?

English as a Second Language. Immigrant groups are the hardest hit in times of economic difficulty. Language is the number one priority. The programs to date have been inadequate, and we're finding greater cuts. What are the minister's concrete plans to meet needs in this area?

In terms of AIDS education, does the minister's department have a plan to formalize education programs with respect to AIDS across the province, or is this going to be left to local school boards?

The northeast Calgary high school. I understand the minister's position is that if the Calgary school board sets it as a priority, it will be considered. What does this mean? Does this mean if it gets on the priority list, it will be funded? If so, how high on the priority list must it be? As number one priority or as number two priority? Could perhaps the minister advise if she is aware how this position squares with any positions of the pre-

vious minister?

And the hook has arrived.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Ponoka-Rimbey.

MR. JONSON: Yes, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to start out my few remarks by returning to the minister and stating that I'd like to compliment her on a job well done to this point in time during very difficult and challenging times, and particularly focus on the effort that she's made to keep avenues of communication open with the stakeholder groups, the major stakeholder groups in education. But also, I know she makes every effort to meet with individuals and the smaller, but perhaps in some ways just as important, groups in education.

I'd also by way of introductory remarks like to comment on doctors Fenske, Odynak, and Hrabi, who are retiring from departmental service. I know the minister has already paid tribute to their work over the years, but having had the opportunity to work with them rather closely on different things over the years, I certainly appreciate the contribution that they've made to education in the province, not just in the department but in many years of service in the classroom and as administrators before that. And I wish them well, whether they are going on to different challenges in the area of education or just going fishing. In either case, I wish them every success.

I'd like to comment on the reduction that the educational system has faced in funding and pose a couple of questions. I think that the 3 percent reduction in funding has been difficult to cope with, but the educational system is responding to that and, I think, responding rather well. I would offer the comment, Mr. Chairman, that it's important to the health of the education system in the province that if at all possible, this be the only year of such a dramatic cut and that if at all possible, funding stabilize and hopefully increase in the future.

I have two questions with regard to the general matter of funding, however. First of all, I wonder what the financial capability of school boards is, in the information available to the minister. It would be my guess that there are considerable moneys in the way of surpluses available to education in this province from school boards. I wonder what those amounts might be, how widespread this sort of situation is, and to what degree school boards are making a commitment to utilize some of that money in this difficult time.

Secondly, in her introductory remarks, Mr. Chairman, the minister referred to the importance of communication and consultation. And I wonder if her department has given any encouragement to school boards to work with their staffs -- be we talking about the professional or the support staff -- in arriving at some of the hard decisions that have to be made as far as arriving at these cuts are concerned. I hope that that is taking place, because quite often the people working on the front line can come up with innovative and practical ways to reduce expenditure and avoid some of the measures which affect students and staff that are dealing directly with students to a lesser degree.

On the matter of special education, Mr. Chairman, I commend the minister for coming in with a budget that has no overall reduction in that regard. I think we have to sometimes sit back and reflect upon some of the programs that we have. The commitment that this government has to special education is second to none in this country. It is something that is greatly admired and looked at, examined, and sought for the informa-

tion and the results that have been achieved in it. Certainly, we can never do enough, however. If one is a parent with a learning disabled child, we always want to see that system having a top priority and being improved; that is, that part of the system which deals with special education.

[Mr. Gogo in the Chair]

I'd like to also commend the minister for that aspect of special education funding which will allow a certain amount of money to be kept in reserve for its application to school boards which find themselves having a higher than average number of special-needs students to provide services to. And I wonder if the minister would perhaps elaborate a little bit more on the criteria and the method by which that pool of funds will be allocated to school boards in that type of need.

I would just like, Mr. Chairman, to make a side comment with respect to the response centres. This is a new initiative in the province, I know, and I think the jury is still out to some degree on their future and their effectiveness. But as someone still involved in the schools of the province, I have had occasion to use their services on two occasions, and I've found it to be an effective means of getting the expert assistance that one requires in certain circumstances.

Mr. Chairman, I'd like to comment on this whole area of curriculum change and the financial implications that are involved. Certainly, arising out of this secondary education review and the consequent adoption of the policy, there is a tremendous amount to be done in the whole area of curriculum change. But as I travel across the province, I find it curious that in speech after speech and comment after comment made at seminars and conventions and so forth, people talk about all the money that has been spent on these massive curriculum changes arising from the secondary education review or all the money that is being spent this year by school boards on these changes. And the fact of the matter is that to this point in time there has not been any need to spend money on these particular curriculum changes. And in the year ahead, at least, the amount of money that would have to be committed by a school board to implement what's on the drawing boards would be very modest indeed. The amount of curriculum change taking place in our schools is probably at a more modest level than it has been for some years.

Certainly, the career and life management course will be on stream this fall, and I think the department has made every effort to provide adequate in-service in that area and also to provide materials, at least basic materials, which are reasonable in cost. The junior high school health curriculum is the other area of major curriculum change at this particular point in time.

There is a great deal on the drawing board, as someone previously mentioned, and I would like to say to the minister, Mr. Chairman, that I agree that it will be very, very important that adequate funds be found to provide adequate in-service to teachers so that those changes can be effectively introduced. And perhaps, given the times that we are in, the time line for the introduction of those changes has to be carefully looked at and perhaps lengthened over what was originally anticipated.

I would like, Mr. Chairman, to just make one suggestion to the minister with respect to these curriculum changes -- and it has financial implications in vote 3 of the budget -- and that is that I hope the people who are actually working on the implementation of these curriculum and program changes are not making the task more complex and consequently more expensive than needs to be. And certainly, I think we always have to

go back to the original policies that were approved by the government and be sure that we are zeroing in on what was intended and not, because there is curriculum change occurring in the area, branching off in all sorts of directions with perhaps four streams of science at the high school level when there is absolutely no reason for it.

The other comment I would like to make with respect to the secondary education policy in particular is that I hope, Mr. Chairman, that the fact that in that policy the support services to the system were given as much priority as curriculum changes is not lost sight of. There were major parts of that policy with respect to guidance services, library services, and distance education which were just as important to the overall thrust of that policy as were the specific changes in curriculum. And I would hope that in the priorities that have to be set on future funding, that could be kept in mind.

One item that arises out of the secondary education policy, and it has been referred to on at least two occasions this evening, is the whole area of distance education. And I would just like to pose a question to the minister that perhaps has not already been asked, and that is: what is being done to co-ordinate the many and very diverse efforts and activities that are occurring in the province right now with respect to distance education, be it distance education for two blocks or 200 miles? Because really, it amounts to the same sort of model for educating children. I note that we have ACCESS that has part of this area, or at least has the capability to help in this area. We have the Calgary computer learning centre -- perhaps I do not have the tide right -- that is dealing with computer based instruction that has a role to play here, I think. We have the Correspondence School, certainly, which you would think would be the centre of this whole activity. We have Athabasca University, and I know that that is in the area of advanced education, but they probably have the most expertise at this point in time in the whole area of distance education. So I would repeat the question, Mr. Chairman: what interdepartmental effort is being made to bring co-ordination to this whole area of developing quality distance education in this province?

The plight of the community schools has been reflected upon quite a bit this evening, Mr. Chairman, and I would certainly recognize that they have been well accepted in this province. But I would emphasize that there are many, many other schools in this province that are providing many of the same services with no special funding, and I'm not just referring to the sharing of services for rental purposes.

I would like to put a plug in for something which I think was as important as the funding to community schools, and it has gone completely from your budget, and that is the internship program. I think that from the point of the betterment of quality teaching in this province and the matter of employment for teachers, this was a very, very good program. I know it was a program which was set up for a time certain, which is two years. I understand that there is some evaluation taking place of that program, and I would ask the minister to comment on any knowledge she has of what the judgment or the outcome of that evaluation will be. And I certainly would state that I hope that at the earliest possible time the internship program will be reinstituted in this province, because it's a very good one and a very important one for education, in my opinion.

I'd like to commend the minister for the maintenance of the level of funding which has been possible for school modernization and the building quality restoration program. As with many things in this budget, we seem to skip by the fact that we

have a program here that is a leadership type of program, a program that is in the forefront of this country in terms of recognizing the need to modernize and to upgrade our school facilities. We have certainly some of the most excellent, some of the finest, school buildings and associated facilities in all of Canada. I would ask, however, Mr. Chairman, if the minister could elaborate on the criteria that will be used for allocating these capital funds. Has there been any substantial change from that of previous years, and if so what would these changes be?

I'd conclude my remarks, Mr. Chairman, with just one area of questions. I know that we are talking about the Education budget, but this is a good time, I think, to ask a couple of questions which apply both to the Education and the Advanced Education budgets. One of the needs in the province is that of there being closer liaison, I believe, between Education and our institutions of advanced education with respect to entrance requirements into the various faculties, and I wonder if any progress is being made, if there's any activity provided for in this budget which will lead to more uniformity, a closer link between the programs at the schools, the advice that they give to their students, and the postsecondary institutions.

In that same area I also wonder if there is any provision for working with Advanced Education and the institutions of advanced education on better career guidance, better projections as to what the needs will be in terms of the job market in the future. It bothers me a great deal that at this particular time, when we know something about the job market, where there are opportunities and where there are surpluses -- and I could use an illustration here, Mr. Chairman. We have in this province right now job vacancies in the area of physiotherapy and occupational therapy which are not able to be filled by Albertans. This need has been identified for two or three years in the past, and the capacity of our universities has not really been significantly expanded in that area. Yet on the other hand, we are continuing to take in people in some of the other faculties, notably some of the areas of education at this point in time, who cannot possibly hope to find jobs even in good times, excellent economic times, in the years ahead. So I would hope that there could be some attention, and I wonder if there's any activity in that area, to this need for co-ordination in terms of identifying for our graduates the areas of occupational need.

I'd like to conclude, Mr. Chairman, by saying that I think the government is maintaining a high priority in education. I hope we can stabilize the funding and hopefully increase it in the next couple of years because it's certainly an important area of activity if we're going to improve the social, cultural, religious, and economic life of this province.

Thank you.

MRS. BETKOWSKI: Mr. Chairman, I wanted to just comment on a few points that were made. First of all, to thank the Member for Calgary Buffalo for his insightful remarks and his very deep interest in public education in the province. I won't repeat my remarks on the important discussions with respect to community schools except to say that the community school program has taught us a lot about the integration of home, school, and community. I think it's something -- the challenge now is to apply some of that learning to programs, to developing the whole School Act. There are things that we can learn as we look to the future of education. I'm hopeful that we will have dollars in the future for some form of the program, but my earlier remarks spoke to what I think is an inequity in the current funding system, and I think that has to be addressed in the over-

all context.

On the special education remarks, which all of us in this Assembly who have spoken this evening and in fact probably virtually all members are interested in, I think one of the most important initiatives we've undertaken in this past year has been the development of the diagnostic reading program. We are all concerned about those who are older in the school system who may have left the school system and who may have gone through that system not having detected a learning disability. I think one of the primary areas where one can pick up on a learning disability is in the reading courses. The diagnostic reading program will catch those deficiencies, hopefully, at the grade 3 level, in order that a child doesn't get to grade 10 before that is determined. I think that a very important part of looking at special education is to ensure that we catch those deficiencies as early as possible, and I appreciate the member's support for those initiatives.

The gasoline tax was something that hadn't been raised in the Assembly this evening, and the member has requested that school boards be exempt from that 5 percent increase in the tax. I would simply note that all Albertans share, and I believe feel they should share, in the important budgetary measures we are taking in order to ensure that the high quality of education in the province lasts into the future. The gasoline tax is one method by which revenues can be raised. I would note that the maximum budgetary impact of about one-fifth of 1 percent on school board expenditures is the impact of that tax; as well, to note that many school boards have converted their school buses to propane, which is not subject to the tax.

The Nykiel student: I would like to get more information and respond in a fuller way to the member than I can in this environment.

The member finally asked about the next move in a chess game, as he described it: what is the future of education funding in this province? Certainly its priority for government will continue and will always continue, I would argue. I wish I had a crystal ball to tell the hon. member where the revenues from this province will be in one year's time. But I will note that delaying the implementation of the school board reduction to September 1 will mean that there is an annualized reduction in the next fiscal year which will have an impact on that next fiscal budget. I think that's an important one to highlight, along with the comments from the Member for Ponoka-Rimbey, in that we hope that those dollars will be maintained in future years. I appreciate the representations by both members.

I would quote to the hon. Member for Calgary Buffalo the words of his own leader, the Member for Westlock-Sturgeon, on March 6 in this Assembly when he said, and I am paraphrasing: "It's not the dollars we spend; it's how we spend them." I couldn't agree with him more.

The Member for Ponoka-Rimbey. I just wanted to touch on a few of the issues he raised and first of all to commend him for the help he has given me in my portfolio as Minister of Education in his very close familiarity with the system. I appreciate his guidance, as well, as the chairman of the Education caucus, and I am delighted that he was given an opportunity to speak this evening. He's made some very excellent representations, as he always does and told me -- and I take very seriously his view -- that we don't need four streams in science. I will look at that and also to endorse very strongly his view that the secondary education review addressed service changes as well as curriculum changes and that they are both very important to the system.

Mr. Chairman, in view of the hour I will close off with those remarks.

MR. M. MOORE: Mr. Chairman, I move that the committee rise, report progress, and beg leave to sit again.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

MR. GOGO: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions, reports progress thereon, and requests leave to sit again.

MR. SPEAKER: Having heard the report and the request for leave to sit again, does the Assembly agree?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no.

AN HON. MEMBER: No.

MR. SPEAKER: The motion carries.

[At 10:28 p.m. the House adjourned to Friday at 10 a.m.]